

NATIONAL EDUCATION PRIORITIES: THE DISTANCE TO MILESTONE 9

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ABSTRACT

The Scottish Executive has published a collection of desired policy destinations with designated indicators of progress which set out its ambitions for social justice. Milestone 9, in *Social Justice: a Scotland where everyone matters*, aspires to bring the attainment of the poorest-performing 20% closer to the attainment of all pupils in compulsory education. In the context of Scotland's National Priorities in education, this paper¹ focuses on the lowest attaining 20% of pupils in Scotland's compulsory education sector. The historical and political context of the National Priorities is discussed in conjunction with the challenges of Milestone 9. The main sections of this paper draw on empirical data: to describe more fully Scotland's young people who fall within the bottom quintile and to widen its conceptual frame to include social, economic and spatial constituents; and, through a small interview study, to illuminate how the high-level policy intention of Milestone 9 is mediated into practice. The final section of the paper addresses the implications of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced ways of constructing the poorest performing quintile and places these in the context of contemporary research into absolute and relative social mobility in Scotland.

MILESTONE 9 IN PERSPECTIVE

Part of the specification for the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) funding issued in the summer of 2002 by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) and the (then) Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (now the Scottish Funding Council {SFC}) was that the research to be funded should have particular relevance to the National Priorities for School Education and to the issues facing the lowest performing 20% of school pupils. This specification reflected the concern of the newly formed Scottish Executive to place social justice at the heart of government (Scottish Executive, 2002). This Social Justice report committed the Executive to 10 targets to be attained by 2020 with 29 'milestones'² as interim measures of progress to be reported on annually. Seven of these milestones refer directly to education. The target populations for the milestones are either universal (eg. 12: No one has to sleep rough) or they are defined by personal characteristics (eg. 23: Reducing the fear of crime among older people) or by social condition (eg. 1: Reducing the proportion of our children living in workless households).

Milestone 9 stands out from the other 28 in that the target population is defined in terms of social differentiation – the standing of one group relative to other groups:

Bringing the poorest-performing 20% of pupils, in terms of Standard Grade achievement, closer to the performance of all pupils. (Scottish Executive, 2002:11)

In a later publication SEED emphasise the priority it accords to this:

More pupils are gaining 5 or more qualifications at standard grade at credit or equivalent – up 9% since 1999, and fewer pupils are leaving with no qualifications. However, the performance of the lowest attaining 20% of pupils has remained static over recent years and turning this around is the single biggest challenge facing our education system. (Scottish Executive,

2006)

While the seemingly anomalous categorization of a group in terms of social differentiation could be ignored as simply that, an anomaly, it triggered twin thoughts. First, 20%, one in five, was that not the figure given by the Warnock Report in 1978 as those requiring special educational provision at some stage of their school career (Department of Education and Science, 1978)? This itself triggered a methodological memory of the opening passages of Raymond Williams's brilliant book *The Country and the City* (Williams, 1975).

In *A Problem of Perspective* Williams recounts, sitting at the edge of the Fens, reading how the old rural way of life had died in the years following the First World War – 'a way of life that has come down to us from the days of Virgil has suddenly ended' (Williams, 1975:18). That awoke a memory for him of another book locating the demise of Old England in the years before the First World War. 'But then what seemed like an escalator began to move' (Williams, 1975:18) and Williams finds himself back in Eden with an ever present mourning of the loss of the traditional country way of life handed down from time immemorial 'just back, we can see, over the last hill' (Williams, 1975:18). Williams then devotes himself to a scholarly unpicking of the ideological work which the seeming historical constant (the loss of a Golden Age of rural stability) performed at each particular moment.

Are we on a similar escalator with the lowest performing 20%? Warnock's one in five, has resonances with the 24% of pupils not presented for O Grade examination as found by the Dunning Report on Assessment for All (Scottish Education Department, 1977a). The Committee

would not want to suggest that such pupils should be presented, since under present examination arrangements this would be profitless and self defeating. However we suggest that the absence of a target, which in a national examination of whatever form would provide, makes it harder for teachers to interest and motivate the pupils concerned. (Scottish Education Department, 1977a:20)

Dunning's 24% tallies with the '20% or so at the lower end of the ability range who remain uncommitted to SC' which the Munn Report on the structure of the secondary school curriculum had found in 1976 (Scottish Education Department, 1976). This it attributed to courses 'unsuited to their needs and beyond their abilities' contributing to 'indiscipline and truancy, boredom and alienation' (Scottish Education Department, 1976:12).

This itself has resonances with the contemporaneous Pack Report on Truancy and Indiscipline in School in Scotland (HMSO, 1977b) which threw its hands up at trying to quantify indiscipline. Truancy was a different matter: the Report cites 'spot checks' in Glasgow school made by the Scottish Association for the Study of Delinquency as showing the real rate of truancy of 25% rather than the official rate of 10%. The Report concludes

That the problem of truancy is very considerable is quite clear from the fact that ... a quarter both of boys and girls in S4 were, at some time during the six weeks of the survey, absent from school without adequate explanation. (HMSO, 1977b:23)

The Pack Report traces this incidence of truancy back at least to the First World War and the origins of the compulsory education system. In this paper we can stay on the escalator no longer.

What can this genealogy of the ever problematic '20%' in the comprehensive era tell us about current formulations? In Warnock, Munn and Dunning the issues facing the 20% are a complex mix of personal characteristics (notably ability and

needs, as unproblematic categories), institutional failings (curriculum and assessment systems unsuited to these personal characteristics) resulting in reactions to schooling (indiscipline, truancy, boredom alienation treated as simple dysfunctions). In Pack wider social issues are added to this mix.

If we address our 'poorest performing 20%' from such a perspective then two crucial shifts are highlighted: first, while previous twenty percents have, in principle, been susceptible to remediation by educational interventions (special needs can be met; the curriculum can be made more relevant, assessment more sensitive; truancy and indiscipline can be addressed through school and social work practices etc) a poorest performing 20% in national examinations will (unless all pupils perform equally) always be with us. Secondly, the criteria for identifying the '20%' has narrowed from the broad social and educational terms of Munn, Dunning and Pack solely to comparative levels of attainment in public examinations.

In this paper we begin to explore the significance of this shift in discourse, first, by analyzing the context of devolution and the concomitant restructuring of the Scottish state around a New Labour package of social justice and economic efficiency. Secondly, we analyse the data which constitute the poorest performing 20%. Thirdly, we argue that a transmission model of policy designed to address the issues facing the poorest performing 20% flowing through local authorities to practice is inadequate. We report on a small number of interviews with policy makers, local authority official and headteachers about their understandings of Milestone 9 and the implications this has for their practice. Finally, we conclude the paper by returning to the shifts in discourse represented by the discourse of 'the poorest performing 20%' in order to discuss its identification by examination performance and the implications of its relative definition for social justice in Scotland.

MILESTONE 9 AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SCOTTISH STATE

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 was the first legislation on education passed by the newly devolved Scottish Parliament. The Act is a markedly contemporary piece of legislation encapsulating how the new devolved State understands its task in directing the national system of compulsory education in Scotland (Scottish Parliament, 2000). What the Act does not say is as significant as what it elucidates; there is no lofty vision or grand rationale for Scotland's national system at the threshold of the new devolved order to be found in its text. Rather, the Act is concerned with the task of establishing detailed mechanisms of steering and performance review that will characterise the relation of the central and local State in education.

It is the form of this set of mechanisms that correspond to what Osborne and Gaebler (1992) term 'entrepreneurial government'. This internationalised 'reinvention' of government, set against the conditions of the new capitalism,³ is premised on a shift towards localized responsibility in combination with the centralized setting of objectives and the measurement of outcomes; or in terms of Osborne and Gaebler's chosen metaphors, the movement from 'rowing' to 'steering.' The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act legislates for what could be described as a *mélange* of direction setting arrangements; most pronounced in the establishment of 'National Priorities in Education'⁴ to give 'strategic direction' to school education by setting 'educational objectives.' It is noteworthy that this formal extension of central government's prerogative drew little resistance; instead attention quickly focused on to what form the first set of priorities would take (Jeyes, 2003). After a phase of consultation and legislative scrutiny, set against the backdrop of the heady days of the new devolved settlement, Scotland's first National Priorities in Education were established as being⁵:

- To raise standards of educational attainment for all in schools, especially in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and to achieve better levels in

national measures of achievement including examination results.

- To support and develop the skills of teachers, the self discipline of pupils and to enhance school environments so that they are conducive to teaching and learning.
- To promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages.
- To work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.
- To equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society and to encourage creativity and ambition.

All of the priorities above are described by SEED as having 'equal status,' but it is difficult to envisage what, in practice, this means with such a disparate set of priorities, often in tension with each other. Local authorities, schools and teachers are set the task of ensuring high attainment in a liberal curriculum while simultaneously providing the freedom to encourage creativity; of encouraging individual ambition and collective concern; of fostering citizenship and social responsibility in a popular culture characterised by consumerist behaviours and growing individualism. Almost in isolation from the influence of culture and society, schools are being required to form the character of Scotland's young people as a strategic objective. Furthermore internally the priorities are not necessarily consistent and coherent. The second priority, for example, suggests some sort of equivalence between teachers' 'skills', the 'self discipline' of pupils and good physical environments for teaching and learning; bound together by the idea of a 'framework for learning.'

Direction from the centre has long been a feature of the Scottish system (Humes, 1986) but in the National Priorities there is a new intensification of control – a legislative extension of the centre's reach in daily practices of the school, classroom and the individual pupil. If we place Milestone 9 against the National Priorities then two features of this emerging settlement are highlighted: first, education is equated with public certification, differential success with comparative standing in aggregate tables; secondly, the old established Grand Narrative that gaining educational qualifications provide personal economic rewards, increased economic efficiency and enhanced social justice is reaffirmed.

The idea that 'what gets measured gets done' is a truism among proponents of performance measurement. Fundamental to understanding the anatomy of the National Priorities as a steering mechanism is the evolving and complex undergrid of performance measures and quality indicators attached to each priority: the 'performativity' discourse where the ideal worker is driven by a passion for excellence as stipulated in externally set targets, indicators and evaluations (Ball, 2003).

It is in the designation and implementation of this policy framework that the meaning of Scotland's National Priorities can be found. This undergrid reveals, at its starkest, the current settlement over the question of what the State at the centre requires from the local State in ordering the education system. A progress report published in 2003, for instance, listed 47 such measures and indicators (SEED 2004), this included: measures of literacy and numeracy attainment in the primary sector; national examination results in the secondary sector; teachers' participation in continuing professional development (CPD); school attendance; participation in schemes such as buddying and mentoring; outcomes for looked after children;

uptake of free school meals and support for special educational needs (SEN) and disabled pupils. It is noteworthy that in a recent report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe), on the 'delivery' of the National Priorities, a clear concern was expressed over what was termed as 'weaknesses' in the current measures and indicators being used to determine progress (see HMIe, 2006a). This suggests that the extension of central surveillance into the micro-politics of schooling has some way yet to run.

It is, however, on the second element of the emerging settlement, the Grand Narrative of personal progress, economic efficiency and social justice that we now focus our attention.

Equality as opportunity and the need for social cohesion are central ideas in the articulation of the Third Way politics of Blair (1998) and Giddens (1998). In this 'modernised' social democracy work and employment, followed by education and preparation for work, are understood as the key integrative mechanisms for buttressing social cohesion. The evolution of New Labour is a much analysed phenomenon with a range of accounts vying to explain the essence of the New Labour project and its antecedents but these have focused on the manifestations of New Labour south of the border. Paterson argues that:

While Scottishness is much stronger north of the border than comparable national identities in other parts of the UK, it has a pervasive effect, colouring virtually all aspects of social and political life (Paterson, 2003:120)

There is thus a parallel narrative to be developed, one that is less visible and has not been subjected to such sustained investigation; this involves the operationalisation of the New Labour project in Scotland and its relation to New Labour at Westminster. A full exploration of this relation is outside the bounds of this paper but the difference in political context is an important marker in understanding the policy climate, language and posture of New Labour in Scotland (see Doherty and McMahan forthcoming). In the political context of Scotland, and in relation to civic Scotland, a policy ambition that links education, equality and opportunity, in the context of social justice, sits comfortably with national sentiments.

If the discourse of 'measures and indicators' has enabled a tightening of central control of the education system how then is the poorest performing 20% identified by these?

THE POOREST PERFORMING QUINTILE

Milestone 9 is set in terms of bringing the attainment of the poorest-performing 20% of pupils closer to the attainment of all pupils in compulsory education. This is defined using the difference between the average tariff scores⁶ for the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils and all S4 pupils; the difference between the average tariff scores of the lowest attaining 20% and the remaining 80% is also used as a measure. Closing the attainment gap, as measured through tariff scores at the end of compulsory schooling, has formed the centrepiece of the Scottish Executive's policy around education and equality. This measure is incorporated in the National Priorities reporting framework, and reappears in the Executive's policy for addressing social exclusion under targets for closing the opportunity gap (Scottish Executive, 2004a). Notably this focus has been reinforced, reflecting its prominence in the current climate, in the Executive's spending review for the period 2005-8 through a specific target set for the education system in terms of increasing 'the average tariff score of the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils by 5% by March 2008' (Scottish Executive, 2004b).

In pursuing Milestone 9, SEED has initiated an ongoing analysis⁷ focused on the composition of the bottom 20% or quintile. This work provides an insight into the make-up and characteristics of the bottom quintile at the national level.

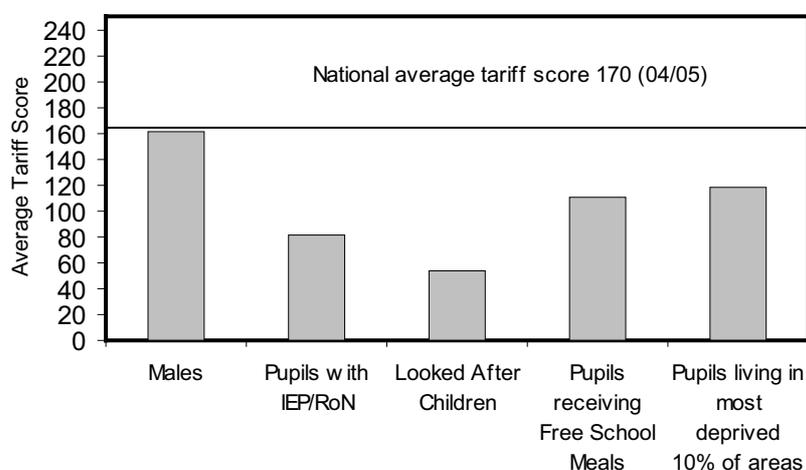


Figure I: Average Tariff Scores by Category 2004/5

Figure I above illustrates the average tariff scores for some of the groups of pupils which can be identified within the bottom 20% data. The picture that emerges suggests that pupils in Scotland's national education system are more likely to be in the bottom 20% if they are male; are recorded as having an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or Record of Needs⁸; and in particular if they are registered to take free meals; or live in an area with high levels of deprivation; or are being looked-after by a local authority (see also HMIe, 2006b). Such category-based concentrations of pupils, characterised by increased levels of low attainment, have been identified in other studies, (Garner and Raudenbush, 1991; Croxford, 1999; Biggard, 2000 and Tinklin, 2003). This national snapshot from the bottom 20% is useful in providing a broad working description and in alerting policy makers to some of the factors associated with low attainment but in order to provide an accurate profile of the bottom 20%, it is necessary to take account of the pattern of its distribution among Scotland's local authorities.

In Table 1 below data on the actual share of the bottom quintile, on the expected share (on a random hypothesis) and on the ranking on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) are given for five local authorities.

Local Authority	% of Bottom Quintile	% of National Cohort of S4	Deprivation Ranking ⁹
Glasgow City	15	9	28.5
North Lanarkshire	8	7	10.2
Midlothian	2	2	0.3
East Renfrewshire	1	2	0.6
Argyll & Bute	1	2	0.8

These show a variation in the share of the bottom 20% present in each local authority and in the proportion of this group in relation to the authority's share of the total cohort (varying in line with SIMD ranking from almost double the expected share to half the expected share). This pattern of regional variation has very significant implications for individual local authorities and for the planning and funding of interventions aimed at closing the attainment gap. In moving from the regional to describe the local, more complexity is added by taking account of the pattern of within-authority distribution. We are unaware of any nationally available data but Figure II below illustrates the distribution of pupils who fall within the national bottom quintile across the secondary schools of one, well placed, local authority.

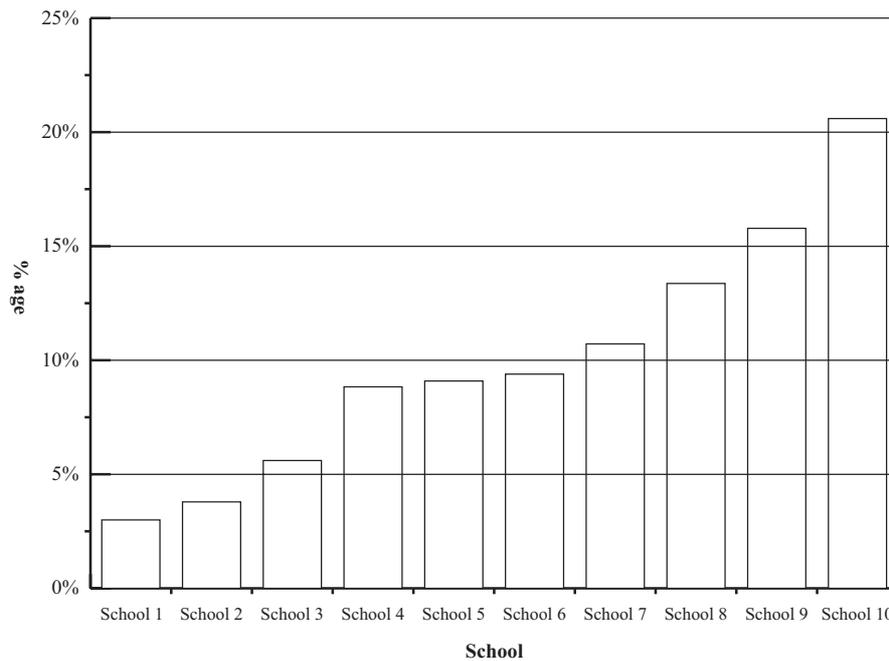


Figure II: Analysis of the distribution of pupils within the national bottom 20% across schools in one Scottish Local Authority

In contributing to a national effort to close the attainment gap, the magnitude of the task facing school 10 or 9 is clearly of a different order from that facing school 1 or 2. There is evidence to suggest that high concentrations of pupils with low attainment within a particular school produce a 'contextual effect' that in turn makes the raising of attainment all the more difficult (McPherson and Willms, 1987).

In order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the characteristics of the bottom quintile a geographical dimension needs to be integrated within descriptive measures. Attempts to take this dimension into account have been undertaken by HMIe who have developed a range of benchmarking indicators that take account of measures of deprivation to provide a yardstick for measuring school performance across Scotland and examples of best practice against a set of schools in similar contexts. However, this work, unlike in England, is at an early stage and the construction of comparators is relatively unsophisticated. In particular, this work is not orientated towards exploring or explaining the unequal spatial distribution of the bottom quintile across Scotland and within individual education authorities.

The concept of residential segregation in relation to education outcomes has been a staple of the analysis of 'urban' education since the 1930s Chicago School (the

effects of sparsity of population on education have not similarly been elaborated). For example, Herbert (2004) argues that within cities there are de facto separate residential areas which are the product of social class segregation.

In the social geography of the city, this mosaic of residential areas with its visible symbols of power and prestige on the one hand and disadvantage and poverty on the other offers evidence of segregation and discrimination as key social, economic and political process. (Herbert, 2004:393)

By including a spatial dimension, we can move toward a more fully contextualised understanding of school performance and attempts to raise attainment. The development of complex statistical models has enabled the isolation of an independent neighbourhood effect on educational outcomes. For example, Garner and Raudenbush (1991) studied one Scottish education authority and found that, having controlled for pupil, family and school characteristics, there was a significant negative effect of neighbourhood deprivation on educational outcomes. Willms (1986), in a complementary study of Scottish school leavers, found that there were substantial effects from the mean socioeconomic status of a school on examination performance, the strongest of these being a positive effect from higher proportions of high social class pupils.

Addressing this spatial dimension allows the issue of how to raise attainment to be widened beyond the school and education/children services departments. It opens up a range of possibilities concerned with the need to engage with local communities in order to take account of issues that impact on raising educational outcomes for those young people in the bottom quintile. Questions on the distribution of resources and funding are clearly foregrounded in any policy discussion in relation to social justice and social geography.

One clear illustration of policy that takes account of geographical distribution is the Scottish Executive's Community Regeneration Fund. This fund (£318 million over 3 years) replaces the Social Inclusion Partnership and Better Neighbourhood Services funds and is to be managed by Communities Scotland¹⁰. The focus of this policy initiative is on the neighbourhoods in each local authority area that fall within the national 15 % of most deprived neighbourhoods as identified through the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Local planning partnerships, in order to receive funding, must produce regeneration outcome agreements. Significant among the five national priorities for community development is priority four; 'raising educational attainment.' In addressing this priority more than £33 million of the fund is to be spent on education by 2008. This is a noteworthy policy development in relation to the geography of the bottom quintile and potentially provides an additional thrust in support of young people who live in some of Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods. Of particular interest will be the practices and approaches that are devised and tested in attempting to lift attainment. How this policy comes to be operationalised across local authorities, and the evaluation of its outcomes, offers an area worthy of further research effort in the near future.

In reviewing the mechanisms used to define the poorest performing 20%, we have argued that the data used show, unsurprisingly, that these poor educational outcomes are highly socially structured with particular groups 'at risk' and a linear relationship with spatially distributed deprivation. These distributions are compounded by independent multiplier effects from neighbourhood deprivation and the concentration of poor performance in particular schools.

As with many fields of educational (and social) policy operationalising initiatives aimed at raising attainments tend to assume a 'transmission' model of central policy flowing into local authority policy flowing into school and community policies flowing into practice. This weakness is often shared by the 'discourse analytic' adopted above assuming that the logic of control in particular discourses unfolds

unproblematically. In order to offer a more complex and nuanced analysis, we report now of interviews with ‘street level’ professionals in order to understand their practices with the poorest performing 20%.

MILESTONE 9: VIEWS FROM THE ROAD

As we suggested above (following Ball) the ‘ideal performativity worker’ internalises outcome measurement as their professional identity. Reality is different from the ideal. In analysing a cognate Scottish Executive initiative to combat poverty through education (the New Community Schools) Nixon, Walker and Baron (2002a; 2002b) argue that such a transmission model is misleading. In particular they hold that the ‘mediation’ of policy in the different layers of the State creates spaces for practice which may be quite different from those intended and that the nature and use of those spaces is contested and non-determined. For example, they suggest that the ‘same’ New Community School policy could generate a more intrusive and authoritarian welfare system or it could create new ‘resources of hope’ in which more democratic relations between professional, parents and pupils could be developed.

In order to begin to explore how the journey to Milestone 9 was actually being undertaken, three officers from different local authorities (LA) and two headteachers (one primary and one secondary) were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured with set questions being identified for the interviewer to explore but included opportunities for the interviewees to introduce additional items or to offer further points of view. The questions explored their understanding of recent SEED documents and in particular the focus of raising the attainment of the bottom quintile of pupils as measured at the end of S4. Data were also gathered from two interviews with SEED policy officers and analysts.

The current importance of Milestone 9 in the policy climate within SEED was underlined by its policy officers. They reported that this significance has been communicated to responsible senior officers within local authorities, and that SEED was taking an active interest in progress within each authority. Allied to monitoring progress, SEED has been giving attention to the nature of local strategies and interventions being developed in attempting to reduce the attainment gap. Looking recently across a selection of some 13 local authorities its officers have noted a diverse range of activity, including: virtual courses; tracking and monitoring; skills toward employment; the use of curriculum flexibility, including Skillsforce, ASDAN, City and Guilds, European Computer Driving Licence, Community Sports Leader, Duke of Edinburgh and St John’s Ambulance Awards; the development of a local authority diploma; research focused on the lowest attaining 20%; new posts focused on the bottom 20%; and the targeting individuals on a multi-agency basis. With policy models of ‘what works’ and ‘best practice’ the ground is being laid for future central guidance of implementation measures.

In the response of the LA officers, there was a recognition that the lowest performing 20% of pupils needed to be given a sense of achievement and should not be excluded from the curriculum. They made reference to seeing how the Curriculum for Excellence programme might be utilised to improve the prospects for the bottom quintile and were keen to support and understand the needs of the pupils who were likely to become part of the NEET¹¹ group. In the three LAs, it was not clear how the actual progress of the bottom 20% was being tracked; either centrally or within schools. Notably the LA respondents recognised that in some schools there were differences over the exact definition of the bottom quintile.

There are ongoing discussions with head teachers. There is confusion over the definition, is it all the population, bottom 20% in a particular school?
(LA Officer)

...other headteachers were less clear and she had heard some other headteachers construe the bottom 20% as referring the bottom 20% within their own school despite some having very favourable catchment areas. In these schools there was more supportive input from parents and these schools' perceptions of under-achievement differed widely from the context found at her school. (Headteacher)

Such 'confusion' runs counter to the social justice elements of the Grand Narrative as effective intervention for the poorest performing 20% defined at school level would add to the multiplier effects referred to above.

Despite the differences of understanding by some schools, the LAs, through their link or quality improvement officers, had knowledge of the relative performance of schools and were increasingly making use of statistical data to inform their judgements. The LAs claimed to have structures to support schools and provided training for them on the use of data. They noted that not all schools were using the available data to highlight and track the progress of particular groups of pupils. This was particularly the case where there was confusion about definitions. However in the LAs where the interviews took place, there were no formal procedures to track attainment or identify, as a specific group, the bottom quintile of pupils.

The two headteachers separately reported the view that if the overall quality of teaching and learning improved for all pupils then this would inevitably impact on the bottom 20%. One headteacher had arranged a training day, and there had been the opportunity to discuss the meaning of the term and to plan how to address the needs of the bottom quintile.

The primary headteacher pointed out that 36% of the pupils in her school could be defined as falling within the bottom 20% nationally. She was very clear as to its definition but noted that the use of the term 20% had been somewhat detrimental in her context. While resources had been targeted to her school, these were insufficient if more affluent schools were used as a comparator. The secondary headteacher also expressed concerns regarding the arbitrary identification of a bottom 20%. She felt that within this group of pupils there were many varied and complex needs. She noted that in terms of progress there would always be a bottom 20% and its use to direct policy was a 'strange label'.

In terms of measuring progress, there were clear differences in approach. The secondary school claimed it had the capacity to identify and measure the progress of the bottom 20% but that it had decided not to go down that route. In the secondary school, due to its particular needs, these issues had not been raised at staff meetings but had been at departmental level. In contrast, the primary school was able to track pupils individually and used these data to identify the pupils most in need. The primary headteacher said she had involved her staff in the debate. Responsibility for tracking attainment did not rest with any individual member of staff in either school and, even in the primary school where tracking of individual pupils took place, this was not done electronically.

In both schools a range of national policy initiatives and publications were highlighted as being influential. In the secondary school the headteacher made specific mention of Ambitious and Excellent Schools and the primary school was committed to responding to A Curriculum for Excellence and Assessment is for Learning. The secondary headteacher noted that specific initiatives to support pupils who fell within the 20% band could be expensive to implement though she believed that their success should be measured in broader terms. For example, in one initiative which had given some of those pupils special provision outside the mainstream classroom, success should be measured not just in terms of how well the supported pupils were doing but also in terms of the progress of the other pupils in their classroom who were learning in less disrupted environments. The debate, for both schools, centred on

teaching, learning and achievement, little mention was made of involving the wider community or of working more closely with other professionals.

The data gathered during this project would indicate that Milestone 9 ranks highly within the policy concerns of SEED and that, in turn, this focus has been communicated to principal officers within the Education Authorities or Children's Services Departments. Objectives focused on the bottom quintile now figure prominently in the planning and improvement agendas being developed by authorities and schools across the country. Practice at the level of the school is still at an emergent stage with approaches to identifying and providing additional support for the bottom quintile subject to local interpretations and local educational and political contingencies. This reflects on the one hand a need for clarity in identifying young people in the bottom quintile, and the much more complex and challenging task of designing interventions, curricula and support arrangements in differing contexts to attempt to raise attainment.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion we return to what we described earlier as two crucial shifts in discourse in the movement from the Warnock-Munn-Dunning-Pack moment to that of the 'poorest performing 20%': first, we discuss the issues raised by the inevitability of such a population if it is defined by its relative performance in public examinations and consider the advantages of an absolute definition of performance; secondly, we discuss such issues in the light of recent work on absolute and relative social mobility in Scotland.

Milestone 9 would seem to have resulted in a valuable indicator through its capacity to focus the education system on the constituency of young people who are characterised by low attainment. While the articulation of a performance indicator that compares the attainment of the bottom 20% of young people to national levels of attainment has supported this policy goal, it is hampered by the norm-referenced nature of the measurement. This has contributed to confusion at local authority and school level which in turn appears to be an impediment to the development of strategies to tackle the attainment gap. There are three major scenarios in which the attainment gap will close: the bottom 20% rises while scores remain static at the upper end; the upper end falls against a steady bottom 20%; attainment of the bottom quintile increases at a faster rate than pupils in the upper deciles. SEED's own analysis would suggest that attainment in relation to the bottom 20% has hit a plateau and may even have dipped. However, increases in the gap are more likely to be accounted for by gains at the upper end, the non-recording of certain forms of attainment at the bottom, or some combination of both.

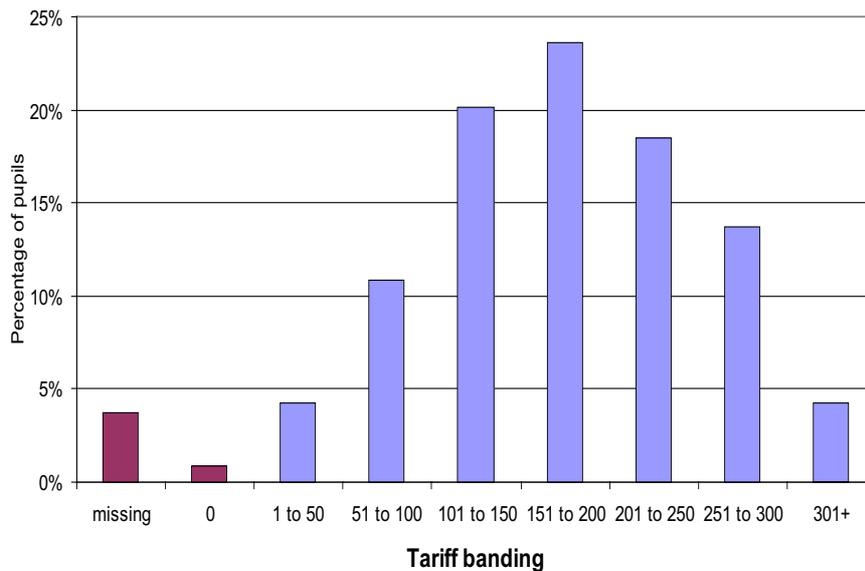
As a bottom 20% will always exist in any norm referenced distribution, policy framed to support a rise in the level of attainment in relation to a fixed benchmark may prove be more suitable. This suggests that moving to a criterion-based measure may provide a more useful and operationally adept measure of progress in supporting a policy ambition to extend opportunity through school education. This would have the benefit of setting a fixed benchmark that would move attention from a notionally moving, and perhaps potentially confusing, 'bottom 20%' to concentrate on the number of young people present nationally, and in each local authority area or school, who fall below a national education tariff benchmark at the end of the fourth year of secondary education.

The level at which such a benchmark is established would be an important factor in how fit for purpose it would prove to be in extending opportunity. Conceivably such a national benchmark would attempt to set a minimum exit level of attainment (broadly defined to embrace elements of achievement) including elements of basic literacy, numeracy and basic skills that would provide entry to routine employment or entry level training. The current work being undertaken around curriculum flexibility,

together with a new willingness to attempt to recognise the wider achievements of pupils, is reflected in developments being undertaken within the Curriculum for Excellence reform (Scottish Executive, 2004c). The present policy climate reflects an aspiration to recognise a much broader range of learning experiences, activities and awards; both outwith school and spanning the boundary between school and other environments. When taken together with the existence of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SQCF), such developments make the establishment of a minimum national education tariff benchmark more likely to produce coherence, flexibility and recognition.

The establishment of a minimum national education tariff benchmark would also be reinforced by the creation of a review mechanism designed to re-evaluate periodically or recalibrate the benchmark, so that it remained effective and continued to articulate with entry to routine employment or access to entry level training. Additionally, in recognising and taking account of broader achievement and attainment, a national set of protocols could be established. Such a system would allow any of the broader learning experiences discussed above to be articulated within the SQCF making the recording of learning achievements outside of national qualifications more consistent. A minimum national education tariff benchmark if understood by local authorities and school managers as encompassing broad learning experiences would potentially remove some of the confusion surrounding a national bottom 20% and its relation to local authority areas and individual schools. This would at least mitigate some of

Distribution of tariff scores gained by S4 pupils: 2004/05



the tendencies to increased central control outlined above.

Figure III: Distribution of Tariff Scores gained by S4 Pupils 2004/05

Setting aside questions of confusion around the composition of the bottom 20%, under the present indicator, schools may be inclined to concentrate on pupils in those attainment bands at the upper end of the bottom quintile in order to have the greatest effect on performance indicators. It could be argued that this is one example of an unintended and potentially negative outcome arising from the performance framework within which schools now operate. Figure III above illustrates the national

distribution pattern, a pattern replicated in many local authorities. Concentrating on those pupils with likely scores of 81 to 101 would drive up an authority's performance on this measure. Policy makers would be advised to consider a range of additional benchmarks or other measures so as to discourage strategic compliance. The place of pupils who are supported through Individual Education Programmes (IEP) needs to be carefully considered. It may be the case that their needs are better served by the setting of individual learning goals as part of the IEP process rather than by their progress being measured by a national benchmarking exercise.

Having argued for an emphasis on absolute levels of performance as more likely to benefit the poorest performing 20% we now conclude with a cautionary tale about the Grand Narrative of combining personal advancement through education with economic efficiency and social justice. Increasing absolute levels of performance for the lowest group should in this Grand Narrative lead to personal mobility and an upskilling of the economy. Such hypotheses have been extensively and subtly tested by Paterson and Iannelli in a recently completed ESRC research project (2005). This research suggested that Scotland was a good test of the impact which comprehensive education had on social mobility as, in Scotland, this organisation of schooling was implemented thoroughly and accompanied by changes in curriculum and assessment.

Analysing four birth cohorts (1937–1976) the research calculated rates of absolute and relative social mobility. Absolute social mobility is a function of the changing class structure and the authors found that:

There remains a great deal of absolute social mobility, and upward mobility clearly predominates over downward. Among adults of working age in 2001, two thirds had been socially mobile from their childhood, and more than two thirds of that mobility had been in an upward direction. (Paterson & Iannelli, 2005:4)

This is attributable to the shift from an economy dominated by heavy industries to one dominated by the service sector: the middle class is bigger; the working smaller. Rising educational attainments have oiled the wheels of this transition but there has been little impact on relative social mobility – ‘the association between origin and destination has barely changed for fifty years’ (Paterson & Iannelli, 2005:4). However, much the poorest performing 20% increased their educational attainments since the Second World War though their chances of upward mobility relative to the upward mobility of other groups in the Scottish society have remained static.

With absolute mobility perhaps reaching its limits (as the change to a service economy nears completion) one possible outcome is for Scotland to move to a thoroughgoing meritocratic system of both education and labour-market allocation. This, however, would necessitate high levels of downward mobility and

As middle-class families seek to prevent their children from falling down the social ladder, there might be political pressure to differentiate attainment at the top end, an example of which would be differentiating between the status of particular higher education institutions, perhaps by charging differential fees: the best labour market rewards might then go to graduates from the highest-status universities populated by the most middle-class students. In such circumstances, social fluidity would at best remain unchanged and could start to worsen for the first time in at least half a century. (Paterson & Iannelli, 2005:7)

If such a meritocratic system was to emerge then the poorest performing 20% would be a random group of Scottish pupils rather than the current (sadly predictable) subsets. Demonstrably, reforms to the education system have not increased the life chances of these groups and the political pressures anticipated by Paterson and

Iannelli are ever present. If ameliorating their position is 'the single biggest challenge facing our education system' (Scottish Executive 2006) then the education system needs urgently to seek policy allies because, as Paterson and Iannelli (2005:6) conclude

if policy is relevant it has been Swedish kinds of redistributive social democracy, or perhaps policy on a social market of the type found in France and the Netherlands: these are countries where social fluidity has grown, unlike in any of the countries of Britain.

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NOTES

1. This paper draws upon an analysis of documents; semi-structured interviews with key informants in SEED and in Local Authorities; the analysis of empirical data; and the proceeding of an AERS seminar in June 2006 at the University of Edinburgh.
2.
 - 1) Reducing the proportion of our children living in workless households.
 - 2) Reducing the proportion of our children living in low income households.
 - 3) Increasing the proportions of our children who attain the appropriate levels in reading, writing and maths by the end of Primary 2 and Primary 7.
 - 4) All of our children will have access to quality care and early learning before entering school.
 - 5) Improving the well-being of our young children through reductions in the proportion of women smoking during pregnancy, the percentage of low birth-weight babies, dental decay among 5 year olds, and by increasing the proportion of women breastfeeding.
 - 6) Reducing the number of households, and particularly families with children, living in temporary accommodation.
 - 7) Halving the proportion of 16–19 year olds who are not in education, training or employment.
 - 8) All our young people leaving local authority care will have achieved at least English and Maths Standard Grades and have access to appropriate housing options.
 - 9) Bringing the poorest-performing 20% of pupils, in terms of Standard Grade achievement, closer to the performance of all pupils.
 - 10) Reducing by a third the days lost every year through exclusion from school and truancy.
 - 11) Improving the health of young people through reductions in smoking by 12–15 year olds, teenage pregnancies among 13–15 year olds and the rate of suicides among young people.
 - 12) No-one has to sleep rough.
 - 13) Reducing the proportion of unemployed working age people.
 - 14) Reducing the proportion of working age people with low incomes.
 - 15) Increasing the employment rates of groups, such as lone parents and ethnic minorities that are relatively disadvantaged in the labour market.
 - 16) Increasing the proportion of students from under represented, disadvantaged groups and areas in higher education compared with the overall student population in higher education.
 - 17) Increasing the proportion of people with learning disabilities able to live at home or in a 'homely' environment.
 - 18) Improving the health of families by reducing smoking, alcohol misuse, poor diet and mortality rates from coronary heart disease.
 - 19) Reducing the proportion of older people with low incomes.
 - 20) Increasing the proportion of working age people contributing to a non-state pension.
 - 21) Increasing the proportion of older people able to live independently by doubling the proportion of older people receiving respite care at home and increasing home care opportunities.
 - 22) Increasing the number of older people taking exercise and reducing the rates of mortality from coronary heart disease and the prevalence of respiratory disease.
 - 23) Reducing the fear of crime among older people.
 - 24) Reducing the gap in unemployment rates between the worst areas and the average rate for Scotland.
 - 25) Reducing the incidence of drugs misuse in general and of injections and sharing of needles in

- particular.
- 26) Reducing crime rates in disadvantaged areas.
 - 27) Increasing the quality and variety of homes in our most disadvantaged communities.
 - 28) Increasing the number of people from all communities taking part in voluntary activities.
 - 29) Accelerating the number of households in disadvantaged areas with access to the Internet.
3. The 'new capitalism', www.cddc.vt.edu/host/Inc/papers/fair_inc.htm following Fairclough, is a descriptive term that attempts to express the restructured and rescaled form of capitalism that has emerged following the crisis of its post-war structure based around industrial Fordism and internal markets. It reflects the new modes of accumulation that have evolved around the triumph of neoliberal economic rationality with its axiom of free trade, and belief in comparative advantage, the deregulation of global finance, growth of computing power, communications technology, and transportation. This global set of conditions, and their implications, is expressed in the associated literature using such synonyms and descriptions as globalization, economic globalization, late capitalism, the information economy, the knowledge-driven economy, the network economy, the learning economy, and the enterprise culture.
 4. National Priorities in Education
 - 1) From time to time the Scottish Ministers, after consulting the education authorities and giving such persons as appear to the Scottish Ministers to have an interest in the matter an opportunity to make their views known (a) shall define, by order made by statutory instrument, priorities in educational objectives for school education provided for Scotland; and (b) may define and publish measures of performance in respect of the priorities; and the priorities which for the time being are the most recently so defined shall be known as the "national priorities in education". Scottish, P. (2000). Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
 5. Scottish Statutory Instrument 2000 No. 443. The Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order 2000. It is perhaps worth noting that there is no time set for the review of the priorities, the prerogative to initiate change being the providence of the Education Minister and Cabinet. This would require progress through a consultation process, scrutiny within Holyrood, and the approval of a new statutory instrument by parliament.
 6. This tariff score was devised by Quality, Standards and Audit Division in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools and utilises the existing UCAS tariff score. The National Priority website explains the tariff score as a score that is extrapolated from the UCAS tariff score: it is also known as the unified points score. Every award attained by each pupil is converted to a tariff score. These scores are then summed up and an average across all pupils is calculated. The indicator measures the difference between the average tariff scores of the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils and the overall average tariff scores of all S4 pupils. Pupils who do not attain any examination results at Standard Grade in S4 are included, with zero tariff scores. The indicator has been further amended to take account of the introduction of Higher Still to include Access and Intermediate qualifications. See www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/social/sjaip-11.asp

In terms of calculating the data there are a number of issues. Firstly, it can be argued that the tariff score approach produces a non-linear effect in relation to the distribution of tariff points. i.e. it favours awards at the higher end of the SG banding. If one pupil improves attainment in one subject from SG Band 2 to SG Band 1, the tariff increases by 10. If one pupil improves attainment in three subjects from SG band 6 to SG Band 5, the tariff increases by 9. In other words there is a built in disparity in the approach used.

Secondly, there are issues about identifying the bottom 20% The methodological approach adopted by the SEED although on the face of it attempted to create a level playing field for all authorities across Scotland does not take into account the issues around pupil movement between the time of the pupil census annual in mid September and the calculation of the bottom 20% in the following August. The reasons why pupils fall into this category vary enormously. For example pupils left Scotland, had minimal attendance at a new school and were not presented for exams. In the two authorities studied the net loss of pupils was 1% and 3%, nationally 3.7% of pupils were given a zero tariff score because they were on roll in September census but did not present for an exam. There is the suggestion that pupil movement in S4 largely occurs within the low attaining pupils. Therefore, there are issues about the fluidity of the cohorts and what number is used as the denominator.
 7. This section draws on unpublished data collected by SEED for the academic session 2004–5.
 8. The opening of Records of Needs is being phased out following the introduction in November 2005 of the Additional Support for Learning Act.
 9. Based on the LA share of the most deprived 20%. See the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2006: General Report Table 1.4: National share of data zones in the most deprived 5, 10, 15 and 20% in the overall SIMD 2004 and SIMD 2006, by local authority area.
 10. See www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk
 11. The NEET group is an acronym used by SEED as shorthand for those young people who are not in

employment, education or training after compulsory schooling. This section draws on unpublished data collected by SEED for the academic session 2004–5.

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