26 JANUARY SEMINAR: "SETTING THE SCENE"

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My task is to sketch the social and political context within which these studies have been conducted over the last half-century. It is a period which has seen major changes in the social and economic structure and in health and education policies and practices.

Before launching on what must be the briefest of sketches, let me warn of the artificiality of generalising about 'Britain'. We will do better if we distinguish the regimes in Scotland and in Northern Ireland from those in England and Wales. The financial and economic structures of Northern Ireland continued to have colonial dimensions. Three central decades, from the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, were marked by sectarian strife and the renewal of the 'dirty war'. And it was only at the end of the 1990s that selective secondary schooling and the continuance of the 11+ examination began seriously to be called into question.

Scotland presents a very sharp contrast. Its educational structures had been distinctive throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries[1] and patterns of mobility were more 'open' and less 'structured' than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.[2] Around Godfrey Thomson and the Scottish Council for Research into Education a cluster of research workers and specialists had already begun to form in the decade immediately preceding the Second World War. The Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947 were THE pioneer large-scale studies. I do hope it is going to be possible to hear from Ian Deary not only about conceptual and measurement issues relating to cognitive capital but also about the ways in which the group he leads has built on these surveys and developed longitudinal studies from their base line. I am going also myself to make brief reference to the work that he and Martin Lawn are doing to explore the extent and importance of this Scottish cluster of expertise.[3] This apart, I'm going today to confine my sketch to England and Wales; although since devolution Wales begins to diverge from England more and more.

The period immediately following 1945 had an uncommon unity among children in England and Wales: food rationing, which had been in existence since the beginning of the War, did not finally disappear till 1954.[4] Meanwhile the 1944 Education Act had made it a duty of LEAS to provide school milk and meals. In nutritional terms, the society came closer to offering a level playing field to its young than it had ever before – or has since. If we broaden the discussion to look more generally at inequalities of income, there is a gentle but persistent decline in such inequality, which had begun to show itself as early as the beginning of the 1920s, until the end of the 1970s. Thereafter the pattern changes and inequality increases again through the 1980s and into the

[1] G. Sutherland, 'Education' in F.M.L. Thompson ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950,* 3 vols, Cambridge 1990, iii.
[2] Keith Hope, *As Others See Us. Schooling and Social Mobility in Scotland and the United States*, Cambridge 1984.
[3] Ian J. Deary, Michelle D. Taylor, Carole L. Heart, Valerie Wilson, George Davey Smith, David Blane, John M. Starr, 'Intergenerational social mobility and mid-life status attainment: Influences of childhood intelligence, childhood social factors, and education' , *Intelligence* 33 (2005), pp.455-472; Ian J. Deary, Martin Lawn and David J. Bartholomew , ' "Conversations" between Charles Spearman, Godfrey Thomson and Edward L. Thorndike: The International Examinations Inquiry meetings 1931-38', unpublished paper, referred to by permisssion..
[4] Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good. Britain in the Fifties*, London 2006, pp.9-11.

1990s.[5] To sharpen the focus once more to look at the experience of children, governments since 1997 have succeeded only in flattening the trend. The Institute for Fiscal Studies' 2006 survey showed 3.6M still children living in families taking home less than 60% of average income – the official poverty line.[6] In this respect Britain comes fifth from bottom in Europe.

Over the century as a whole the structures of social class, and thus the parameters for any measurement of mobility, have been affected by the absolute shrinkage of occupations requring manual labour and the expansion of white-collar employment and the so-called 'service class'. As Halsey has commented, while the social structure at the beginning of the twentieth century was pyramidal in shape, by its last quarter it looked much more like a light-bulb.[7] From mid-century far more women also work, for far more of their adult life. By 2000 69% of working age women are in employment – only 10% less than the proportion for men of working age. Far more of these women are working part-time – 43%, compared to 8% of the men. [8] However, a small proportion of women have found their way into high-status occupations, opening up a widening gap between themselves and their sisters on the periphery of the labour market.[9] The emergence of this group also complicates the measurement of social mobility, which for so long has been the trajectory between father's occupation and husband's occupation.[10]

Such major socio-economic shifts form the backdrop against which health and education policies and practice must be set. The creation of the NHS in 1948 could be said to contribute to more equal experience for both children and adults. For children, however, a groundwork had already been laid by the School Medical Service, first created in 1908. And there were many health professionals working with children, including the then Chief Medical Officer, Henry Yellowlees, who lamented the dissolution of this service, with its particular expertise, in 1974.[11] The interface between paediatric and adult health care services remains a difficult one in which to find oneself as either patient or parent.

The period immediately following the end of the Second World War saw LEAs working to develop plans for 'secondary education for all', as required by the 1944 Education Act. Several gave some consideration to the common school option; but in the end, all but one, Anglesey, opted for selection at 11+. Some expansion of provision had already been begun by some authorities after 1936, in preparation for the raising of the school leaving age to 15, on 1 September 1939- in the event, postponed till after the War. A much larger expansion got under way in the late 40s and early 50s; and for many this has been seen as the golden age of school building.[12] However the expansion of the elite track, selective secondary schools, most often known as grammar schools, proved

[5] Charles Feinstein, 'The Equalizing of Wealth in Britain since the Second World War' and Stephen P. Jenkins, ' Recent Trends in the UK Income Distribution: What Happened and Why?', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (Spring 1996) 'Inequality'.
[6] IFS, *Poverty and Inequality in Britain 2006*.
[7] A.H Halsey, *Change in Britain* 4th edn Oxford 1995, ch.2, commentary on table 2.1.
[8] Kathleen Gales and P.H. Marks, 'Twentieth century Trends in the work of women in England and Wales', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, series A 1974; EOC, *Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain 2001*
[9] Shirley Dex, Heather Joshi, Susan Macran, ' A Widening Gulf Among Britain's Mothers', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 1996 'Inequality'.
[10] Anthony Heath and Clive Payne, *Twentieth Century Trends in Social Mobility in Britain,* Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends, Working Paper No.70 (June 1999).
[11] HMSO, *The School Health Service 1908-1974*, 1975, pp.1-3.
[12] Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture. The Role of School Building in Post-War England* New Haven and London 1987.

insufficient to keep pace with the post-war baby boom. The supply of children grew even faster than the supply of grammar school places. And the cohort born 1943-52 were to find their chances of getting to grammar schools less good than those of the cohort born 1933-42 had been.[13] The challenge to selection at 11+ gathered pace through the 1950s; and in 1965 Circular 10/65 invited LEAs to re-consider. Ironically, many of the schemes for comprehensive schools developed in response to this did not take their final form till 1970-74, when Margaret Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education. And it was Thatcher and the Heath Government which raised the school-leaving age to 16, in 1972. Selection never disappeared entirely, however. Over 150 selective grammar schools remained and remain, the largest cluster in Kent, which has retained grammar schools and secondary modern schools throughout the period. In addition, the last decade of the twentieth century has seen a return to selection at 11+. The 1988 Education Act allowed the creation of grant-maintained schools, now 'foundation' schools. Voluntary-aided denominational schools, in which the Governing Body controls admissions, have begun to expand; and 25 city academies have been created, each of which has a separate agreement with central government on its admissions policy.[14]

For almost the first three quarters of the twentieth century, entry at age 11+ to the elite track of a selective secondary school was *the* crucial gateway to upward mobility and to access to those expanding 'service class' occupations. Entry to the even more elite track of higher education was confined to so few during this period that it mattered less. In 1938 fewer than 2% of the 18+ age group entered university; by 1961 this proportion had crept up to just over 4%. In the last quarter of the century, however, the picture began to change and the crucial gateway to shift away from 11+ towards the ages of 16-19. The spread of comprehensive schools made some contribution to this, as did the raising of the school-leaving age to 16. More was contributed, however, by shifts in policies towards and provision of higher education. In the late fifites and through the sixties existing universities began to expand and new universities were founded. Anthony Crosland, the Secretary of State who had promulgated Circular 10/65, also attempted to diversify the provision of higher education, encouraging the creation of polytechnics, intended to offer a larger component of practical and applied work and with a closer relationship to the local and regional communities within which they were situated. Less often noticed was the parallel policy of expanding and raising the status of reacher training colleges. By 1970 not quite 14% of the relevant age group were in some form of higher education, although only about 7% in universities. The second half of the seventies and the eighties were lean times for the older universities, as despite pressure to expand numbers, budgets were cut and unit costs forced down. The other institutions of higher education suffered relatively less because – and this undoubtedly was one of their attractions – they were cheaper. In 1992 the formal position was transformed at a stroke by the re-designation of almost all polytechics as universities. By 1994 John Major's Conservative government could boast that 30% of the age group was in higher education; and it is the declared objective of the current government to achieve entry to higher education for 50% of the age group. It is not quite 'higher education for all'. But just as the secondary schools developed in the years after 1944 did not enjoy parity of esteem one with another, however loudly 'secondary education for all' was proclaimed, so it would be difficult now in 2007 to contend that universities enjoy parity of esteem. And analysis of the student bodies show that students from social classes D and E, and part-time and mature students, are heavily clustered in post-1992 institutions.[15]

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[13] Michael Sanderson, *Educational Opportunity and Social Change* London 1987, pp.45-7; A.H. Halsey, A.F. Heath and J. M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations. Family Class and Education in Modern Britain*, Oxford 1980.
[14] *The Guardian* Thursday March 16, 2006 p.13. In Voluntary controlled schools LEAs set the admissions policies.
[15] *Oxford Review of Education* (1993), 'Access to Higher Education', special issue .

The second half of the twentieth century has thus seen major changes in the economic and social structure of the society and major shifts in policies and practices in both health and education. By 2004 one pound in eight of all public spending was going to education, over 5% of GDP, exceeded only by spending on health.[16] The cohort studies which are our central theme in this series of seminars have been used to elucidate a number of aspects of these developments. In the secondary literature which underpins my hurried sketch, they are cited again and again. But if we want to take a long view – which we do – they function more often like a kaleidoscope, the patterns rearranged at each shake. Institutional, economic and social-structural contexts have all changed in significant ways since 1945; and we need to be conscious of these changes as we try to establish and elucidate long-term trends.

One final *caveat* should be offered – in a presentation which I know bristles with them. While specialist work on the measurement of performance has continued to develop in sophistication, understanding and perceptions of this among the public at large and among policy-makers has remained remarkably crude and almost static. Alison Wolf has, in splendidly polemical fashion, drawn attention to the crudity of most policy-makers' notions of the relationship between education and economic growth.[17] A similar polemic might be developed about policy-makers' understanding work on the structures of the mind, cognitive skills and cognitive attainments. Let me illustrate this with two snapshots, one from the 1930s, the other from the end of the 1980s. The 1930s snapshot comes from the discussions of the International Examinations Inquiry meetings, which were, exceptionally, recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. Ian Deary, Martin Lawn and David Bartholomew have analysed these in an as yet unpublished paper; and I am most grateful to them for permission to make reference to it now.[18] Centre stage are Spearman, Godfrey Thomson and E.L. Thorndike and they describe them as giving a 'psychometric master-class', both exploring their own thinking about the processes involved, how far they differ from each other. Thomson in particular reflects on policy implications, of particular interest to a mixed international audience of practitioners. The sophistication is immense - and there is a yawning gulf between this and the use of and powers attributed to group verbal reasoning tests in that decade and in the two decades following.[19]

My 1980s snapshot – or perhaps it is a rather jerky bit of newsreel – concerns the fortunes of TEGAT, the report of the Task Group headed by Paul Black, on Assessment and Testing, commissioned by Kenneth Baker, as Secretary of State for Education, and submitted in December 1987. Baker and Thatcher, as you will remember, had determined not only on the institution of a national curriculum but also of national testing. Black and his group had made a deliberate decision to try to respond in as sophisticated a fashion as possible, perhaps 'to educate our masters'. At the time, the late and much – missed Desmond Nuttall suggested that this was a mis-conceived strategy. Dealing with an administration that took the view that anyone who had been to school knew about education, he argued that the Group might have done better to go for minimalism, for a handful of very simple tests, which politicians could recognise. As English - if not Welsh or Scottish - primary and secondary schools still cope with the hybrid outcomes of the TEGAT report, who is to say that Nuttall was wrong?

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[16] Paul Johnson, 'Education Policy in England' , *Oxford Review of Economic Policy (*Summer 2004) 'Education' , p.173.

[17] Alison Wolf, *Does Education Matter? Myths about Education and Economic Growth,* London 2002; *ibid*. 'Education and Economic Performance: Simplistic Theories and their Policy Consequences' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (Summer 2004) 'Education'.

[18] Dear, Lawn and Bartholomew, ' "Conversations" between Charles Spearman, Godfrey Thomson and Edward L. Thorndike'

[19] For the period up to 1940 see my *Ability, Merit and Measurement. Mental Testing and English Education 1880-1940*, Oxford 1984; for the post-war period see the work of Deborah Thom.