



Department *of* Education

# The Effects Of The Selective System Of Secondary Education In Northern Ireland

## MAIN REPORT





September 2000

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to selection

1.1.1 Prior to the Second World War most pupils in Northern Ireland received their education in elementary schools. A small number of places were available in grammar schools that provided access to higher education and the professions. A very small number of highly competitive scholarships were available, but most pupils who entered grammar school did so as fee-payers. The establishment of free and compulsory post-primary education was one of the key social reforms that followed the War[2]. This was to be achieved through the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales and the 1947 Education Act for Northern Ireland. Throughout the 1930s there had been much discussion on the value of extending the period of

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1 *The research on which this paper is based was funded by the Department of Education but any views or conclusions in the paper are the responsibility of the authors. The detailed evidence is published in a series of research papers which arose from an extensive body of fieldwork in schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland. A full list of all the research papers (SEL1 to SEL9) is available in Annex 1 to this report. The sources for themes in the present paper are footnoted references to the research papers as listed in Annex 1. A full list of the Project Team is available in Annex 2. The entire body of research is available only because of the ready cooperation we received from the Department of Education and a large number of schools and individuals. The schools which provided us access and information, the principals, teachers and pupils we interviewed, and the pupils who completed our questionnaires were all guaranteed anonymity. Within the confines of that commitment we would like to acknowledge our gratitude towards all of these organisations and individuals. In addition, we are grateful for comments on early versions of our analysis presented at a series of seminars organised by the Department of Education for educational interests in Northern Ireland.*

2 *Timms, N (1996) The Five Giants: a biography of the welfare state. London: Fontana*

compulsory education. A key part of the discussion focused on the institutional arrangements that should be adopted. By the time the proposal had reached the House of Commons a consensus on this had been achieved[3]. The new arrangements would be that pupils would attend primary schools up to age 11 years. At this point a selective procedure would be used to identify those pupils best suited to the distinctive curricula provided by grammar schools and technical colleges[4]. The remaining pupils, who would constitute a majority of each cohort, would attend secondary modern schools. In practice the technical element of the tripartite arrangement failed to develop and a bipartite system of grammar and secondary schools emerged.

1.1.2 The same path was taken in Northern Ireland albeit with the significant difference that the schools were divided into parallel systems, whose enrolment reflected the religious divisions in society, each with grammar and secondary schools[5]. As in Britain, the school-age programmes in the technical colleges failed to develop to any meaningful level and a bipartite system emerged[6]. In this period the main purpose of grammar schools was to provide pupils with an academic curriculum, to encourage them to stay in school beyond the school leaving age and to provide a route to

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3 *It is interesting to note that while the debate over selective versus comprehensive arrangements had been largely settled before the Bill was debated, during the debates it was made clear that the selective decision at 11 years was not seen as immutable, but that some flexibility and pupil movement was expected over the next couple of years. The decision at 11 years, in other words, was intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive (see Barber, M, 1994, The Making of the 1944 Education Act, London: Cassell).*

4 *A discussion of education testing and the debates in Britain on various forms of post-primary organisation can be found in Gallagher, AM (2000) Grouping Pupils by Ability: a discussion paper, in Gallagher, AM and Smith, A (Eds) Educational and legal aspects of selection in schools, Belfast/Coleraine: Queen's University/University of Ulster.*

5 *In this paper the following definitions of schools apply. Primary schools cater for pupils from Year 1 to Year 7, or ages 4 to 11 years. Post-primary schools include all those taking pupils from Year 8 to Year 12 or Year 14. Grammar schools, all of which take pupils from Year 8 to Year 14, are permitted to select pupils on the basis of academic ability. Most secondary schools take pupils from Year 8 to Year 12, but a minority takes pupils up to Year 14. If more pupils apply to enter a secondary school than there are places available then the school selects from among the applicants on the basis of previously published criteria. However, secondary schools are not permitted to include academic factors among these criteria. Due to particular circumstances, two secondary schools have received permission from the Department of Education to use an academic criterion, that is Transfer Test results, to select a proportion of their Year 8 intake.*

6 *In 1949/50 there were 21,500 pupils in grammar schools, 6,000 in secondary schools and 4,500 in technical schools. By 1969/70 there were 45,000 pupils in grammar schools, 81,000 in secondary schools and less than 1,000 in technical schools (source: Ministry of Education statistical reports).*

higher education. By contrast, pupils in secondary schools were not encouraged to take public examinations and were not expected to stay beyond the school leaving age[7]. As the post-war economic boom developed, the main role of secondary schools was to develop work disciplines and basic skills so that young people would be able to enter industry. Any specific employment skills and training would be provided through apprenticeships. In addition, the curriculum offered to boys and girls reflected prevalent expectations of future career and domestic choices.

1.1.3 In the 1960s opposition to the selective system developed in Britain and a formal shift towards comprehensive arrangements was initiated by the first of Harold Wilson's Labour governments. The stated reason for this shift was on the grounds of equity and fairness[8]. The devolved parliament in Northern Ireland chose not to follow this path, even though the evidence on the impact of the system in Northern Ireland was similar to the pattern emerging in Britain[9]. The Labour government was moving Northern Ireland towards non-selective arrangements between 1976 to 1979, but this was halted when the Conservative government was elected in 1979.

1.1.4 Although some more research evidence on the outworking of the selective arrangements was produced over succeeding years, most notably through the Transfer Procedure Project run by the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research[10], the Conservative government was unwilling to contemplate wholesale changes to the system: the prevailing policy was that local proposals for change would be considered through the development proposal process. During this period there was major change in the system as a consequence of the 1989 Education Reform Order. This introduced elements of a competitive market to schooling, including parental choice, a statutory curriculum and greater mechanisms for accountability. In addition, the system of open enrolment allowed schools to enrol pupils up to an agreed enrolment capacity.

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7 *As late as 1970/71 more than 85 per cent of leavers from secondary schools had less than the equivalent of one O Level.*

8 *A similar trend can be seen in a number of European countries at the same time and towards the same end – this is discussed in SEL9.1.*

9 *Gallagher, AM (2000) Grouping Pupils by Ability: a discussion paper, in Gallagher, AM and Smith, A (Eds) Educational and legal aspects of selection in schools, Belfast/Coleraine: Queen's University/University of Ulster.*

10 *Gallagher, AM (2000) Grouping Pupils by Ability: a discussion paper, in Gallagher, AM and Smith, A (Eds) Educational and legal aspects of selection in schools, Belfast/Coleraine: Queen's University/University of Ulster.*

1.1.5 The issue of selection re-emerged on the political agenda following the 1997 election of the Labour government. Tony Worthington, Minister with responsibility for Education, decided that any debate on the future of the selective system in Northern Ireland should be informed by detailed and impartial evidence. In consequence, the Department of Education commissioned two research studies. One of these focused on the delayed selection system operated in the Craigavon area as this provided the main systemic alternative to selection at 11 years[11]. The second study was more wide ranging and focused on the consequences of selection at 11 years. The present paper provides the conclusions and issues to emerge from this study.

## 1.2 Background to the project

1.2.1 The project was organised around a number of distinctive strands. These included the impact of selection and open enrolment on pupils, teachers, and primary and post-primary schools. In addition, a strand of the research was to consider the wider impact of selection and open enrolment on the perceptions of education by members of society. Each strand was to focus on a number of key questions. During the project the Department requested that a further strand be included to examine comparative evidence on policy and practice in other jurisdictions, both in order to contextualise some of the issues that emerged in Northern Ireland and to provide some evidence on the consequences of alternative systems[12].

1.2.2 The research commission was awarded to a consortium including academics from Queen's University, the University of Ulster and Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges, and the private sector company BDO Stoy Hayward[13]. A series of research papers was produced by the project team for the Department of Education[14]. The present paper represents the main findings and conclusions from the study.

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11 *Alexander, J, Daly, P, Gallagher, A, Gray, C and Sutherland, A (1998) An evaluation of the Craigavon two-tier system. Research Report No. 12. Bangor: Department of Education for Northern Ireland.*

12 *The Terms of reference for the Project can be found in Annex 3.*

13 *See Annex 2 for a list of the individuals who contributed to the project.*

14 *See annex 1 for a list of papers.*

## 1.3 Outline of the paper

1.3.1 As indicated above, the original research specification identified a series of strands for the research. This paper is organised around these strands and the key questions identified for each. The lessons emerging from the comparative research are incorporated into the discussion where relevant, and are discussed more fully towards the end of the paper. The rest of this paper is organised into a number of sections which discuss the research evidence as it related to the effects of selection and open enrolment on pupils, teachers, secondary schools, grammar schools, all post-primary schools, primary schools and society. This is followed by a discussion on comparative evidence. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main conclusions and issues to emerge from the project as a whole.

1.3.2 The purpose of the research is to provide an informed basis for discussion on the future of the selective system in Northern Ireland. In large part this is based on a consideration of the effects of the system at present. The main focus of the research is on differentiation that arises as a consequence of selection, and not differentiation due to gender or religion. The paper concludes with a consideration of evidence from other systems and offers some comments on their relative strengths and weaknesses. It is not the purpose of this paper to make specific recommendations on future arrangements. That is a task for the wider society and the elected politicians.

# 2 The impact of selection and open enrolment on pupils

## 2.1 Outline

2.1.1 For this strand of the project we were asked to examine evidence on four key areas. The first of these concerned the patterns of achievement at GCSE for pupils and how this was mediated by selection. The second issue concerned the GCSE achievement of pupils of similar measured ability in grammar and secondary schools. The remaining two areas were to examine evidence on the impact of selection on pupils' post-school destinations and the impact on their motivation and attitudes.

## 2.2 Achievement at GCSE

2.2.1 It is possible to measure academic achievement on a number of criteria. This research focused on GCSE results using school-level and pupil-level data. On the basis of fieldwork for the project it is clear that most schools focus on the proportion of Year 12 pupils who pass five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C as their main criterion of performance. This is the key measure published in School Performance Tables and used by the Department of Education for school targets. We have therefore used this as the performance criterion for school-level data.

2.2.2 Over a long period of time the overall achievement levels of pupils at age 16 years have been steadily improving, with evidence of a slightly faster rate of increase among girls as compared with boys[15]. Thus, for example, in 1967/68 23 per cent of boys and 22 per cent of girls left school with five or more GCE 'O' Levels. By 1997/98 the equivalent GCSE figures for boys and girls were 49 per cent and 64 per cent respectively. Although countries vary in the way they measure educational achievement, most industrialised countries show a pattern of a faster rate of improvement in the achievement of girls, as compared with boys, on all measures apart from vocational education[16].

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15 *SEL2.1*

16 *Gallagher, AM (1997) Educational achievement and gender: a review of research evidence on the apparent underachievement of boys. Research Report No.6. Bangor: Department of Education for Northern Ireland.*

2.2.3 There is a clear difference in the achievement levels of grammar and secondary schools, with the average levels of achievement being higher among grammar schools. Thus, in 1997/98 the proportion of Year 12 pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, on average, in grammar schools was 95 per cent, while the figure for secondary schools was 31 per cent[17]. While the achievement level of grammar schools is uniformly high, the pattern among secondary schools displays a high degree of variability. Thus, in the same year, for the five or more GCSE criteria the interquartile range for grammar schools was 5 per cent, while the figure for secondary schools was 18 per cent[18]. The achievement levels of secondary schools are related to, but not wholly explained by, social disadvantage. The publication of examination results, along with the policy of open enrolment and parental choice, was intended to create an educational market for pupils. However, the overall pattern shows that there is little evidence that school intakes have risen or fallen in line with the achievement levels of schools as would be expected if such a 'market' was in operation[19]. Clearly schools do feel varying levels of pressure and many, if not all, seek to raise achievement levels, but the 'market forces' that operate among schools are only partly encompassed by a relationship between enrolment and attainment.

2.2.4 Analysis of pupil-level data shows strong evidence of a 'grammar school' effect, that is, that a pupil's achievement at age 16 appears to be related more to gaining entry to a grammar school than to any other factor, including Transfer Grade (see 2.3.2 below).

## 2.3 Achievement at GCSE as mediated by ability

2.3.1 The pupil-level data were collected from 1,784 Year 12 pupils in a sample of 8 grammar and 17 secondary schools. Analysis of pupil data for Transfer Grade showed that practically all A grade pupils were in grammar schools while practically all D grade or not entered pupils were in secondary schools. In addition, the majority of B grade pupils were in grammar schools while the majority of C grade pupils were in secondary schools.

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17 *The measure of average used here is the median, that is, half of the schools of that type had a figure above the average, and half had a figure below the average.*

18 *Calculated from School Performance Tables. The interquartile range is the difference between schools at the 25th and 75th percentiles. Thus, the interquartile range encompasses the schools which reside on either side of the median or average school.*

19 *SEL2.1*

Thus, the extent to which there is overlap in measured ability levels among pupils in both school types is limited. This pattern among the sample schools reflects the typical pattern of schools generally, even though there are a number of grammar schools where most of the intake is not composed of A grade pupils[20].

2.3.2 Taking account of the point above, the analysis suggests that the difference in GCSE performance (as measured by total GCSE points score[21]) is largely explained by a 'grammar school' effect. That is, other things being equal, the most important factor for a pupil in achieving a high GCSE score is achieving a place in a grammar school. To put it another way, if we compare two pupils, one of whom is in a grammar school and one of whom is in a secondary school, and who are similar in every other respect, including Transfer Grade, then the grammar pupil will achieve a significantly higher GCSE performance. The analysis suggests that being in a grammar school adds almost 16 GCSE points, equivalent to three GCSEs at grade C, to a pupil's achievement at 16 years[22].

2.3.3 An examination of the intake characteristics of schools shows that the achievement of high Transfer grades is the most important factor in gaining entry to a grammar school[23], so caution should be exercised in attempting to distinguish between the effect of Transfer Test grade and school type. That said, this analysis suggests that achieving a grammar place makes a difference for a pupil's later performance and results in a qualification gain. The evidence collected throughout the project suggests that this 'grammar effect' is explained by a combination of the clear academic mission of the schools, high expectations for academic success on the part of teachers and the learning environment created by a pupil peer group which is selected on academic grounds. Pupils entering grammar schools are more likely to come from socially advantaged backgrounds, as compared with pupils entering secondary schools, and this may provide them with additional parental support and encouragement. In addition, 'success' in the Transfer Procedure is popularly understood as gaining a grammar school place, a point which highlights the different status accorded to

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20 *SEL2.1*

21 *A grade A* is worth 8 points, a grade A is worth 7 points, a grade B is worth 6 points, et cetera.*

22 *SEL3.1*

23 *SEL4.2*

grammar and secondary schools (see 2.5.1, 2.5.3, 3.3.3, 3.3.5, 3.3.6 below) and may lead to more active parental engagement with grammar schools. Both factors also will contribute to the academic success of the grammar schools.

## 2.4 Selection and post-school destinations

2.4.1 Analysis of questionnaire data collected from Year 12 pupils highlighted a clear difference between grammar and secondary schools in their post-16 destinations. While almost all the grammar pupils returned to school to study A Levels, there was a much wider range of routes followed by secondary school pupils. The most common route for pupils was to enter further education[24].

2.4.2 The conclusion above confirmed an emergent pattern from interviews with Year 12 pupils. Among groups of pupils in grammar schools there was virtual unanimity that they planned to return to their school after their GCSEs in order to take A Levels. Furthermore, the vast majority of these pupils were planning to enter higher education. By contrast, among pupils in secondary schools a wider range of options was under consideration. Many expressed a desire to leave school either to seek employment, enter employment training, attend another school or to enter further education. A minority aspired to entering higher education[25].

## 2.5 Selection and pupil motivation and social attitudes

2.5.1 Staff in secondary schools reflected the view that their schools were seen as having lower status than grammar schools. This was seen also as shaping the views of pupils and parents on secondary schools and the Transfer Procedure. In consequence they feel that many of the pupils arriving in secondary schools do so with a sense of failure and a key priority for the schools is to seek to re-establish a sense of self-worth. The schools reported numerous ways in which this task was approached. Most of the effort seemed to be directed at the new intake of Year 8 pupils. More generally, pastoral care issues seemed to be given a higher priority in secondary schools in comparison with grammar schools[26].

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24 *SEL3.2*

25 *SEL4.10*

26 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4, SEL4.5, SEL4.6, SEL4.7, SEL4.8, SEL4.11*

2.5.2 Attitudinal data were collected from Year 12 pupils in a sample of grammar and secondary schools, and from a sample of schools in Scotland[27]. The data for Northern Ireland pupils suggested that there were few differences in the attitudes held by grammar and secondary pupils across the range of measures included on the questionnaire, although there was some marginal suggestion that secondary pupils found their schools to provide a slightly more supportive environment[28]. A comparison between pupil data for Northern Ireland and Scotland showed little evidence of any differences – any that were found suggested that the pupils in Northern Ireland were slightly more positive about their schools[29]. Overall the attitudinal measures indicated that pupils tend to focus on their own school, as opposed to comparing it constantly with others, and tend to view their own school in fairly positive terms.

2.5.3 However, interviews with Year 8 and Year 12 pupils in grammar and secondary schools showed a clear awareness among the pupils that the school types were different. Often the differences were couched in terms that reflected a different level of social standing and position for the schools. More particularly, the pupils were aware of the more favourable social status accorded to grammar schools, even though secondary pupils were generally well-disposed to their own schools. Many pupils suggested that they had lost contacts with friends from primary school as a consequence of following different paths post-Transfer, but it was only among the secondary pupils that there was any sense of resentment that former friends now saw themselves as somehow or other better than them[30].

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27 *A questionnaire developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research was used. This questionnaire includes a series of measures that tapped positive and negative attitudes towards school, pupils' sense of social integration, status and success, and attitudes to teachers and to the perceived relevance of the curriculum.*

28 *SEL4.1*

29 *SEL9.2*

30 *SEL4.9, SEL4.10*

# 3 Teachers

## 3.1 Outline

3.1.1 For this part of the project we were asked to focus on two main questions. The first of these related to teachers' perceptions and expectations of pupils, while the second concerned their own sense of motivation and performance. In both cases we were asked to examine the extent to which these perceptions were mediated by selection.

## 3.2 Perceptions and expectations of pupils

3.2.1 Interviews with teachers in primary, secondary and grammar schools elicited distinctive patterns of response in each school type. For this reason the conclusions for each are considered separately.

3.2.2 Among primary school teachers there was a clear sense that the final years of primary school are organised around the Transfer Procedure. From the middle of Year 6 onwards an increasing amount of time is devoted to test preparation and pupils are categorised in teachers' minds in relation to their test status. The two main bases for categorising pupils appears to be whether they will be entered for the tests or not, and whether they are likely to 'pass', that is, achieve a grade which will gain entry to a grammar school, or not.

3.2.3 The evidence suggested that teachers had modest or low expectations of pupils who are not entered for the Transfer tests. At times differentiated tasks were identified for these pupils, but often it appeared that the main objective was to find ways to keep them busy. There was some suggestion that teachers devoted less consistent attention to the educational needs of these pupils.

3.2.4 By contrast, teacher expectations of those pupils who are 'expected to do well' (that is, achieve a grade which will gain entry to a grammar school) are high and the main priority appears to be in ensuring they are given work which is appropriately challenging.

3.2.5 Teachers reported particular dilemmas with pupils who were entered for the Transfer Tests but who were not expected to achieve one of the higher grades. The main dilemma revolved around the extra time and attention

required by these pupils, and the need to maintain a positive relationship with their parents[31].

3.2.6 Other evidence highlighted the centrality of the Transfer Procedure in the final years of primary school and the importance of Transfer Test results to the standing of a school in its local community[32]. Parental pressures were emphasised also by the importance attached by schools to preparation for the tests and on the extent to which parents were prepared to pay for out-of-school coaching for the tests[33].

3.2.7 The issues for teachers in secondary and grammar schools were somewhat different and reflected the position of the schools in relation to the selective system.

3.2.8 Teachers in secondary schools spoke of their schools as providing a 'fresh start' both in terms of teaching in key areas such as mathematics and science, and in terms of the task of rebuilding their pupils' self-confidence. This was further reflected in a widespread belief among secondary teachers that their pupils felt worse off as a consequence of going through the Transfer Procedure and that the schools therefore had to provide a supportive environment[34].

3.2.9 By contrast, grammar teachers felt that their pupils had achieved significant success by gaining places in their schools and there was an expectation that these pupils should be capable of, and aspire towards, high achievement in the future. In most cases it was clear that this expectation by teachers was fulfilled. The grammar teachers did, however, talk about two types of pupils who fell outside this pattern. The first group comprised pupils who appeared to think that gaining a place in a grammar school was, in itself, sufficient success and who coasted from this point on: such pupils were described as being particularly difficult to motivate. The second group comprised those pupils whose performance in grammar school belied their Transfer Grade status. In general the teachers attributed this to the pupils rather than the school, and suggested that this minority of pupils may have been over-coached while at primary school and hence over-performed on the Transfer Tests[35].

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31 *SEL6.1*

32 *SEL5.1 and SEL6.1*

33 *SEL7.1*

34 *SEL4.5, SEL4.6, SEL4.7, SEL4.8, SEL4.11, SEL6.1*

35 *SEL4.5, SEL4.6, SEL4.7, SEL4.8, SEL4.11, SEL6.1*

## 3.3 Motivation and performance of teachers

3.3.1 Accounts from primary school teachers on the impact of selection on them can be categorised under three themes. First, they say they are under intense pressure for 'good' Transfer results, that is, a high proportion of pupils obtaining grades that will gain entry to grammar schools. This pressure appears to be felt most keenly in places where the local secondary schools are not seen to provide positive options or in middle-class areas where a high proportion of young people generally achieve places in grammar schools.

3.3.2 Second, primary teachers say they feel obliged to focus on a narrow range of curriculum topics in order to prepare pupils for the Transfer Tests, while recognising that the overt purpose of the tests is to select a minority of pupils for grammar schools. Some teachers say that they try to 'make up' for the narrow curriculum by providing a wider range of experience to Year 7 pupils in the period following the Tests.

3.3.3 Third, there is some evidence that a group of primary teachers operate as Transfer specialists in that they concentrate on Key Stage 2 pupils and claim a particular expertise or experience in test preparation. A small number of primary teachers said they were highly motivated by teaching for the Transfer Tests due to the tangible nature of the outcomes and the status accorded to high 'pass' rates[36].

3.3.4 Most secondary and grammar teachers say that they feel under pressure. In large part this is due to the wave of reforms and initiatives that are focused on schools, and the additional layers of accountability and scrutiny with which all schools have been faced in the last decade or so. Beyond this, however, there were marked differences in the accounts provided by secondary and grammar teachers.

3.3.5 Secondary teachers felt that they were expected to fulfill a number of different objectives in their schools due to the wide range of ability among their pupils. One consequence is that their talk about education emphasises the creation of a supportive and caring environment, and highlights the importance of a wide range of teaching abilities and skills. However, there was a barely disguised resentment at what they felt was a lack of acknowledgement among the wider public on the challenges and

36 *SEL5.1, SEL6.1*

difficulties they faced. Secondary teachers feel that the status of schools is largely influenced by academic performance and that they are judged in comparison with grammar schools on this academic criterion.

3.3.6 Secondary teachers also described some dilemmas they faced both professionally and as individuals. At a professional level many acknowledged that they did not live in the communities served by their schools and that there was a gap in their experience as members of a middle-class profession, as compared with the working-class life of many of their pupils and their parents. As individuals, secondary teachers were generally not supportive of the retention of selection, but often felt guilty because they sent their own children to grammar schools. Related to this, however, some secondary teachers felt that this provided them with insight into the type of teaching provided in grammar schools and this served mainly to reinforce their sense of resentment at the differential status accorded to the two school types.

3.3.7 Grammar school teachers felt that they have a clearly defined set of tasks, largely based on the achievement of high academic results among their pupils. Furthermore, they recognised, and expressed pride in, the fact that their schools achieve high results and welcomed the status this accords to them and their schools. That said, some grammar teachers did suggest that, at times, they felt pressure to achieve high standards. While some expressed a degree of sympathy with the challenges faced by secondary teachers, in general grammar teachers felt that their schools provided an environment that was more conducive to high standards and within which they preferred to work. Some of the grammar teachers expressed concern about the unfairness of the Transfer Procedure, but others were more concerned about whether they could adapt if there was a move towards non-selective arrangements[37].

37 SEL6.1

# 4 The impact of selection and open enrolment on secondary schools

## 4.1 Outline

4.1.1 The series of questions we were asked to address in relation to the impact of selection and open enrolment on post-primary schools was divided into three categories. One set of questions focused specifically on secondary schools, another set focused on grammar schools, while a third set of questions was relevant to both school types. This part of the report considers the issues that were specifically directed towards secondary schools.

4.1.2 We were asked to focus on three key areas as they related to the effect of selection and open enrolment on secondary schools. The first concerned enrolment trends for secondary schools and the impact of having fewer high achieving pupils in the intake. Related to this was the request to examine the changes in the ability intakes to secondary schools and the way this is reflected in school performance patterns. The second main area concerned the extent to which the performance of secondary schools reflected the quality of their intakes. The third main area concerned the ways in which secondary schools try to restore the self-confidence and motivation of pupils at Key Stage 3; the evidence on this has been considered earlier (sections 2.5 and 3.2).

## 4.2 Enrolment trends and changes to intake

4.2.1 Following the implementation of open enrolment schools were required to accept pupils up to their admissions number. The only exception was that grammar schools could refuse a place to a pupil if it was felt that the pupil would not benefit from the academic curriculum provided by the school. In fact grammar schools almost always accepted pupils up to their admissions numbers. This resulted in an increase in the proportion of pupils overall who transferred to grammar schools. Thus, 29 per cent of pupils transferring in 1984 went to grammar schools, but in 1994 this figure had increased to 35 per cent. During the 1990s the relative proportions transferring to grammar and secondary schools stabilised as the total number of pupils in each transferring cohort remained stable. If, as expected, the size of the cohort decreases in future years then it is likely that the proportion entering grammar schools will increase once more[38].

38 *SEL2.1, SEL4.2*

4.2.2 An additional factor was the decision to open two new Catholic grammar schools during the 1990s to meet a shortfall in grammar places in the Catholic schools sector[39].

4.2.3 A further factor, which was mentioned by some secondary staff, concerned changes in the admissions criteria for schools that disallowed the use of preference order as a criterion. This change was made to ensure that Transfer Test grade was the predominant factor influencing school placement, rather than preference order. However, secondary school teachers believed this had the effect of helping grammar schools and reducing still further the number of pupils with higher Transfer Test grades who entered the secondary schools.

4.2.4 As a consequence of these factors, and their uneven incidence in different areas, the ease of access to a grammar place can vary considerably across different parts of Northern Ireland.

4.2.5 Secondary schools report two effects from open enrolment. The first effect was the decrease in the proportion of pupils transferring into secondary schools in Year 8 (from 71 per cent in 1984 to 65 per cent in 1994), although the effects of this varied across schools. Some secondary schools maintained their intake number, while others experienced high instability in intake numbers. The second effect was that the ability profile of their intakes decreased as fewer pupils with high Transfer Grades entered secondary schools. The effect of these, either singly or in combination, was to produce a less stable context within which secondary schools were operating. This increased the challenges they faced and added to the difficulties they say the selective system had already created for them[40] (see 4.2.1 to 4.2.4).

4.2.6 The evidence on the academic gains made by pupils in grammar schools has been mentioned earlier (see 2.2.4). The corollary of this appears to be that the selective arrangements create a longer tail of low achieving schools. Table 4.1 compares the profile of school achievement in 1998 for 227 grammar and secondary schools in Northern Ireland with 156 comprehensive schools in England and Wales and 416 comprehensive

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39 *Gallagher, AM, Cormack, RJ and Osborne, RD (1994) Religion, equity and education in Northern Ireland. British Educational Research Journal, 20(5), 507-518.*

40 *SEL4.2, SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

schools in Scotland[41]. The data are also illustrated on Figure 4.1. The Table and Figure show the proportion of schools that fall within a number of GCSE/SCE bands, each of which relates to the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. It can be seen that Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of schools at either end of the distribution, unlike the pattern in either England/Wales or, even more so, Scotland. This differentiated pattern in Northern Ireland, with a consequent over-representation of low-achieving schools, may be the inevitable consequence of a selective system. Any school system is likely to contain some low achieving schools, but this evidence suggests that a selective system may produce more of these schools[42].

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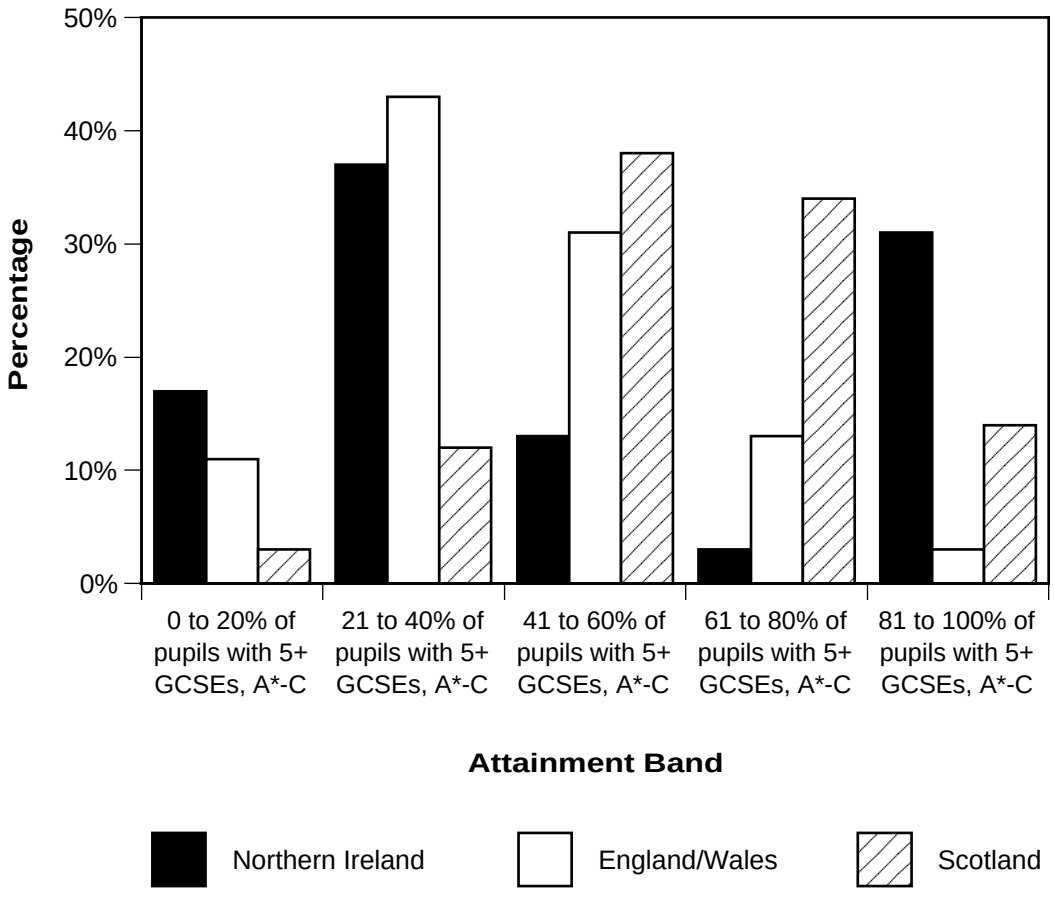
41 *The data for Northern Ireland include all grammar and secondary schools. The data for England and Wales comprise comprehensive schools drawn from a DfEE sample which were deemed to be representative of the system as a whole for the purpose of a value-added study. The full sample comprised 200 schools and included grammar, secondary and special schools, as well as comprehensive schools. The data used in the present paper deal with the 156 comprehensive schools in the DfEE sample. The Scottish data are derived from published School Performance Tables, but the distribution of schools in these grade categories were calculated by the Department of Education in Scotland for this report. The equivalent attainment level is the proportion of pupils achieving five or more SCE Standard Grades at grades 1 to 3.*

42 *Over recent years there has been a variety of initiatives aimed at raising the standards of low achieving schools. These have included a Raising School Standards Initiative in Belfast, a Raising School Standards Initiative across Northern Ireland and the Special Support Programme within the School Improvement Programme. Despite all these initiatives, the achievement patterns of a small group of schools have remained low and additional special action has been directed towards them (see, for example, ETI, 2000, Report on Main Findings of the Raising School Standards Initiative (RSSI): 1995-1998, Bangor: The Education and Training Inspectorate).*

## Table 4.1: Percentage of schools by GCSE band and area

| 5+ GCSE grades A*-C, or equivalent, Band | Northern Ireland schools (N = 227 grammar & secondary schools) | England/Wales schools (N = 156 comprehensive) | Scotland schools (N = 416 comprehensive) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 to 20% of pupils | 17% | 11% | 3% |
| 21 to 40% of pupils | 37% | 43% | 12% |
| 41 to 60% of pupils | 13% | 31% | 38% |
| 61 to 80% of pupils | 3% | 13% | 34% |
| 81 to 100% of pupils | 31% | 3% | 14% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

## Figure 4.1: Distribution of schools by attainment band (5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C or 5+ SCEs at grades 1-3) and by area



4.2.7 This pattern is further illustrated from Northern Ireland school performance data for secondary schools[43]. In 1992/93 the average secondary school had 24 per cent of Year 12 pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. By 1998/99 the average figure had risen to 33 per cent. In 1992/93 there were 66 secondary schools where 20 per cent or less of Year 12 pupils passed five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. By 1998/99 nine of these schools had ceased to operate, largely due to mergers. Of the remaining 57 schools, 29 still had 20 per cent or less of their Year 12 pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. It should be noted that in 1998/99 the average proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) was 33 per cent for all secondary schools, whereas the FSM figure was 37 per cent for the 57 1992/93 low-achieving schools that were still open, and 49 per cent for the 29 schools that still showed low achievement in 1998/99. Our research in Scotland suggested that some social differentiation will occur in a comprehensive system[44], but the selective arrangements in Northern Ireland appear to create particular difficulties for some schools by combining social differentiation with ability differentiation.

4.2.8 There was some evidence that secondary schools engaged in more active marketing of their schools than in the past in order to attract pupils. Most of the schools operated some form of ability grouping of pupils, and most indicated that these were developed in order to maximise the academic achievement of the highest ability pupils while meeting the needs of all pupils. All of the secondary schools used school examinations in order to monitor pupil performance and a minority have developed innovative school-based systems that are designed to ensure consistency of practice across a school[45].

4.2.9 Overarching all the discussion on this theme was the impact of the School Performance Tables in that they focused attention on a specific set of indicators of the worth of schools. In general, secondary school teachers felt that they were disadvantaged in the use of this comparison with grammar schools[46].

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43 *The data in this paragraph are all derived from Department of Education School Performance Tables.*

44 *SEL9.2.*

45 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

46 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

## 4.3 Secondary school performance and intake quality

4.3.1 The link between the nature of the intake to secondary schools and their performance at 16 was examined in two ways. The first was based on school-level data where the Year 8 intake profile of schools was compared with their Year 12 results as mediated by various social variables including social disadvantage and gender[47]. The second method involved analysis of pupil-level data collected from a sample of grammar and secondary schools[48].

4.3.2 The analysis of school-level data suggested that, for Maintained and Integrated schools, and the sole Irish Medium school, the most important factor influencing performance at 16 was the level of social disadvantage (as measured by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals). Thereafter the next most important factors were gender and ability of intake (as measured by the proportion of the intake with A, B or C grades in the Transfer Tests). For Controlled secondary schools the most important factor was also social disadvantage, followed by the proportion of the intake with Transfer grade D. All other factors being equal, Controlled secondary schools tended to achieve slightly lower performance at 16 in comparison with other secondary schools[49].

4.3.3 The purpose of the analysis of pupil-level data was more concerned with the relative patterns of performance in secondary and grammar schools. Nevertheless, the analysis did point to the link between various social variables and performance at 16. These included gender and social background. Girls tend to gain higher GCSE achievement than boys, pupils with fathers in higher occupational groups gain higher achievement in comparison with pupils whose fathers are in lower occupational groups, while pupils who are entitled to free school meals have lower achievement levels than those who do not have this entitlement. In addition, Transfer Test grade had an influence on outcomes at 16 years. One of the main conclusions of this analysis was that the difference in intake characteristics of the grammar and secondary schools was insufficient to explain all of the difference in their patterns of performance at 16, thereby pointing to a 'grammar school' effect[50].

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47 *SEL2.1*

48 *SEL3.1*

49 *SEL2.1*

50 *SEL3.1*

# 5 The impact of selection and open enrolment on grammar schools

## 5.1 Outline

5.1.1 We were asked to focus on three issues that were specific to grammar schools. The first of these concerned the extent to which the performance of grammar schools reflected the nature of the intake to the schools. The second and third areas focused on the changing circumstances for grammar schools caused by open enrolment. This included a consideration of how grammar schools had changed their curriculum provision to take account of the wider range of ability among pupils who entered the schools. The final area concerned the strategies used by grammar schools to support the performance of lower achieving pupils. Both areas arose from the increased proportion of pupils entering grammar schools as a consequence of open enrolment and demographic change.

## 5.2 Grammar school performance and intake quality

5.2.1 As above (4.3), this issue can be examined using school-level or pupil-level data. Analysis based on school level data suggested that performance at 16 for grammar schools is related to the proportion of entrants with Transfer grade A. An additional significant factor is provided by gender. It is difficult to estimate the impact of religion on grammar school performance because the social characteristics of Catholic and other grammar schools, as measured by the proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals, are so different[51].

5.2.2 We have noted above (4.3.3) the conclusions of the analysis of pupil-level data which suggested that the most significant feature was a strong 'grammar school' effect irrespective of the differing intake characteristics of grammar and secondary schools[52].

## 5.3 Grammar school curriculum provision

5.3.1 Some of the consequences of open enrolment for secondary schools have been noted earlier (section 4.2). Clearly open enrolment resulted in changes to the intake of grammar schools also. This can be illustrated by comparing data for 1981 and 1997[53]. In 1981 a total of 28,057 pupils

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51 *SEL2.1, SEL4.2*

52 *SEL3.1*

53 *The data for 1981 are available in Wilson, J (1986) Transfer and the Structure of Secondary Education, Belfast: NICER, and the 1997 data were provided by the Department of Education.*

transferred from primary to post-primary schools, of whom 28 per cent transferred to grammar schools. In 1997 a total of 26,109 pupils transferred from primary to post-primary schools, of whom 35 per cent transferred to grammar schools. In 1981 the top 30 per cent of the transfer cohort was awarded A or M grades on the Transfer Tests, whereas in 1997 the top 30 per cent was awarded A or B1 grades. Of the pupils transferring to grammar schools in 1981, 680 (9 per cent) were outside this top group, while in 1997, 1,305 (14 per cent) were outside this top group of pupils. Thus, the proportion of pupils with lower Transfer Test grades transferring to grammar schools has increased due to open enrolment.

5.3.2 However, although there is evidence that the numbers and profile of pupils entering grammar school have changed as a consequence of open enrolment, there is little evidence that this had caused a significant rethinking of the curriculum provision in the schools. To the extent that we were told about change in grammar schools it was described as largely incremental. A few grammar schools had adopted qualifications other than GCSEs and A Levels, but this was geared towards post-16 provision and the retention of these pupils (see 5.4.1 below)[54].

## 5.4 Grammar schools and lower achieving pupils

5.4.1 There was little evidence that grammar schools had altered their approach in order to target the needs of lower ability pupils. In fact, the predominant message was that the academic mission of grammar schools had been and remained largely intact despite systemic changes over the past decade. There was evidence that some grammar schools had adopted GNVQ for post-16 provision and a minority of schools permitted some pupils to take a slightly lower number of GCSEs[55]. In addition, some of the schools operated special revision regimes in Year 12. However, most of these initiatives appeared to be geared specifically towards Year 12 pupils. They did not appear to reflect a broadening of the mission or operation of grammar schools from Year 8 upwards[56].

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54 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

55 *In our case study grammar schools 82 per cent of Year 12 pupils had taken ten or eleven GCSE subjects. Nine per cent took less than ten GCSEs and a further nine per cent took more than eleven GCSEs. This contrasts with the pattern for secondary schools where 55 per cent of pupils took eight or nine GCSEs, a third took less than eight GCSEs and eleven per cent took more than nine GCSEs.*

56 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4. Although this was the pattern in the case study grammar schools, it also appears to be more generally true. Thus, the 1998/99 School Performance Tables suggest that 38 per cent of grammar schools (28 out of 73) enter their Year 12 pupils for qualifications in addition to GCSEs. However, 13 of these schools enter less than ten per cent of their pupils, nine schools enter ten or more, but less than 30 per cent of their pupils, and only six schools enter 30 per cent or more of their Year 12 pupils for other qualifications. Only six grammar schools enter post-16 pupils for GNVQ Advanced courses.*

# 6 The impact of selection and open enrolment on all post-primary schools

## 6.1 Outline

6.1.1 In addition to the specific issues examined in the previous two sections, we were asked to consider the evidence on a number of issues which were pertinent to all post-primary schools. These fell into three main areas. The first concerned the extent to which schools provided different pathways to meet the needs of different groups of pupils and, more particularly, the way in which schools made provision for the vocational and pastoral needs of pupils as well as their academic needs. The second issue concerned the extent to which pupils transferred between grammar and secondary schools, and vice-versa. The third and final area concerned the size of the school system in Northern Ireland. Specifically we were asked to examine the number of schools that would be needed if there was a move towards a non-selective system.

## 6.2 Meeting the differing needs of pupils

6.2.1 The evidence from interviews in schools suggested that grammar and secondary schools had responded differently to the environment created by open enrolment. The main difference lay in the extent to which the schools felt themselves to be negatively affected by systemic change over the past ten years. The situation found in grammar schools has been noted earlier (5.4.1).

6.2.2 In secondary schools the pattern was quite different, largely because these schools felt that they had always been disadvantaged in the selective system and changes over the past decade had only made their position more difficult. There was more evidence that secondary schools had tried to innovate in areas such as ability grouping, pupil monitoring or special needs. Overarching all this was a concern that while the schools were trying to meet a series of different targets simultaneously, the only ones that mattered in the eyes of the public were academic criteria. There was a clear sense that many in the secondary schools feel the system constrains them to the extent that, while they are under constant pressure to improve their performance, the context within which they are required to work gets steadily more difficult.

6.2.3 Most schools indicated that they kept the examinations and qualifications they offered to pupils under review. Changes were occasionally made

although these usually involved changes in the type of GCSEs offered, that is from different examination boards, rather than alternative qualifications per se. Some grammar schools had developed GNVQs for post-16 pupils, but greater attention to the potential use of alternative qualifications seemed to be evident in secondary schools. However, any changes of this kind were somewhat constrained because of the prominence of the School Performance Table criterion of the proportion of Year 12 pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C[57].

## 6.3 Transfer between grammar and secondary schools

6.3.1 The evidence suggests that the extent of movement between schools in Years 9 to 11 comprises less than five per cent of pupils[58]. Furthermore, most of the pupil movement that does occur is within sectors (that is, grammar to grammar, or secondary to secondary) rather than between school types.

6.3.2 The impact of pupil movement appears to be more significant than the extent of movement, particularly for secondary schools. Although there are relatively few pupils who move from grammar to secondary schools, they were described as having a disproportionate impact on the time of secondary schools and sometimes appear to pose discipline problems. By contrast, some of those we interviewed in secondary schools were aggrieved that grammar schools 'poached' (sic) some of their best pupils, even though this may have been in the best academic interests of the individuals concerned. The net effect of both elements was to reinforce a perception among many in secondary schools that they had to pick up the pieces when pupils were 'failed' by the selective system, while grammar schools claimed the plaudits from any successes in the system[59].

## 6.4 Schools in a non-selective system

6.4.1 Northern Ireland has a large proportion of small post-primary schools. A number of factors contribute to this including the rural nature of much of the territory, the range of school management types, the relatively large

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57 *SEL2.1, SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

58 *In the years for which we have data approximately 3,500 Year 9 to Year 11 pupils moved between schools and, of these, about 2,000 moved within school types, that is, grammar to grammar, or secondary to secondary.*

59 *SEL4.2, SEL4.3, SEL4.4*

proportion of single-sex schools and the operation of grammar and secondary schools. If it was decided to move towards a non-selective system then it is likely that fewer post-primary schools would be needed. As part of the project we were asked to model this scenario and to estimate the number of schools that would be required.

6.4.2 An examination of primary and post-primary school numbers and the intake capacity of existing schools suggested that the total of 238 post-primary schools could be reduced to 178 in a non-selective system. Approximately 20 schools could be closed. In addition, 80 schools could be merged in various combinations to produce 40 schools. All of these estimates are based on the retention of current management type and single-sex options in all areas.

6.4.3 These figures should be seen as estimates only, but they provide an illustration of the degree of change that could emerge over a period of years if a decision was taken to move towards a non-selective system. While this would give significant savings in the total running and capital costs of the school system, it would also lead to a period of significant disruption in schools[60]. Evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that in such a system the average enrolment of schools would be higher and more of the intake would be drawn from local areas[61].

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60 *SEL2.2*

61 *SEL9.2. Data published in the Northern Ireland School Performance Table (Department of Education, 2000) and School Examination Results (Scottish Executive, 1999) illustrates the difference. In Scotland 54 per cent of comprehensive schools had more than 800 pupils compared with 42 per cent of secondary and grammar schools in Northern Ireland. While 25 per cent of schools in Northern Ireland had enrolments of 400 pupils or less, this was so for only 14 per cent of schools in Scotland. It should also be noted that Scottish schools comprise six year groups whereas many Northern Ireland schools comprise seven year groups.*

# 7 The impact of selection on primary schools

## 7.1 Outline

7.1.1 Although some evidence has been considered above on the impact of selection on pupils in primary schools, the research specification included three more focused questions regarding the impact of the system on these schools. The first of these concerned any evidence to support an issue raised in Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) reports that selection had narrowed the Key Stage 2 curriculum. The second question asked for an assessment of the extent and nature of in-school and out-of-school coaching for the Transfer Tests. The third question asked us to examine if there was any evidence that the intake to primary schools was influenced by the schools' Transfer Test performance.

## 7.2 Selection and the Key Stage 2 curriculum

7.2.1 The ETI has identified a concern that the curriculum provided in the upper stages of primary school is unduly influenced by the Transfer Procedure. The main concern is that teaching styles and strategies are narrowly geared towards test preparation and that, in consequence, pupils are not receiving the broad and balanced experience envisaged by the statutory curriculum.

7.2.2 We have already seen some evidence on this above where primary teachers reflected a set of concerns on the impact of selection that are coincident with those of the ETI (see 3.2.2 to 3.2.6, and 3.3.2 and 3.3.3). Additional evidence confirmed the intense pressure felt by primary schools to gear Year 6 and the first term of Year 7 towards the Transfer Tests, even though the outcome of the Procedure will be to identify a minority of pupils[62].

7.2.3 Interviews with secondary and grammar school Heads of Department for English, mathematics and science also confirmed the concerns expressed by the ETI. In particular, most of the post-primary teachers felt that primary schools 'taught to the test' and provided pupils with a narrow coverage of the curriculum areas, although this was probably exacerbated by the large number of feeder primary schools, particularly for grammar schools. The

62 *SEL2.1, SEL5.1, SEL6.1*

consequences of this varied across the subject areas, but the net effect was that many post-primary teachers felt that they almost had to start again in these areas in order to ensure that all pupils had acquired a common core of knowledge[63]. It should be noted that there was at least as much, if not more, concern at the narrowing of the primary curriculum when verbal reasoning-type Tests were used for selection and this was one of the key reasons for the change to the current curriculum-based tests.

7.2.4 Many of the post-primary teachers expressed concern at the quality and accuracy of the information that transferred with individual pupils from primary school. Although this was often attributed to the Transfer System, it is clear that similar complaints are made in other systems. In Scotland, for example, interviews with post-primary teachers showed some concern at the quality of the information that transferred from some primary schools. However, in part because of the smaller number of official feeder primary schools and the assumption of a close link between designated primary and post-primary schools in Scotland, there did appear to be much closer curriculum coordination in that jurisdiction[64].

## 7.3 Coaching for the tests

7.3.1 A postal survey of primary schools in Northern Ireland suggested that practically all schools spend time preparing pupils for the Transfer Tests. The survey also suggests that many parents pay for out-of-school coaching for their children. In some areas primary principals estimate that a majority of parents pay for out-of-school coaching, although there is a high degree of reticence among schools in discussing this issue. In general primary principals believe that within-school preparation for the Transfer Tests is useful and valuable, but they do not feel that out-of-school coaching is of educational benefit to children.

7.3.2 Our evidence suggests that parents pay up to £15 per coaching session. Interviews with parents suggested that they are prepared to buy this extra support on the basis that it increases their children's chances of obtaining a high grade and hence entry to a grammar school. In addition, this evidence suggests that parents from socially disadvantaged areas are less likely to pay for coaching because of the cost and because they expect local primary schools to provide adequate preparation[65].

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63 *SEL4.5, SEL4.6, SEL4.7*

64 *SEL9.2*

65 *SEL7.1*

7.3.3 Interviews with primary school teachers tended to confirm these findings. In addition, some of the teachers expressed concern that any unfairness in the Transfer Procedure might be compounded by the fact that not all parents are able to afford out-of-school coaching. There is some evidence that some schools try to compensate for this by providing additional support for test preparation, including after-school classes or summer schools[66].

7.3.4 Interviews with teachers in grammar and secondary schools suggests a widespread perception that the Transfer grades achieved by a minority of pupils did not accurately reflect their ability. In most cases this was attributed to the effects of coaching. Furthermore, this was seen as a problem as these pupils were found to be struggling either in grammar schools or the higher streams of secondary schools once this additional out-of-school support had been removed[67].

## 7.4 Primary school intakes and Transfer Test results

7.4.1 Since primary schools tend to draw their pupils from their immediate locale we were asked to investigate whether there was any evidence that the intake to schools was related to the Transfer Test performance. This was examined by comparing the Transfer Test profile of primary schools with the subsequent Year 1 intake number. However, there was no evidence of a simple relationship between Test performance and intake number, that is, there was no direct relationship such that a primary school increased its intake of pupils as a consequence of high Transfer Grade results[68].

7.4.2 Despite this, qualitative evidence collected through interviews with teachers and others suggested that the reputation of primary schools is often largely based on a school's Transfer Test performance, or at least the local perception of a school's performance.

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66 *SEL6.1*

67 *SEL4.3, SEL4.4, SEL4.5, SEL4.6, SEL4.7, SEL4.8. Note also that most of the secondary schools we studied for the project used some form of ability grouping of pupils based either on Transfer Grade or other forms of evidence.*

68 *SEL2.1*

# 8 Society's view of the education system and the impact of selection

## 8.1 Outline

8.1.1 We have considered the impact of the Transfer Procedure on primary, secondary and grammar schools and have discussed evidence on the perceptions of principals, teachers and pupils. The research specification also required an examination of evidence on the perception of members of the wider society, and especially a number of key groups. These included parents, young people above the age of compulsory education, employers, and training and third-level providers.

8.1.2 Attention was focused on three particular issues. First, to what extent are the attitudes to education of young people and adults affected by the existence of the selective system? Second, why do some parents choose not to enter their children for the Transfer Tests? And third, does an individual's Transfer grade affect the way they are perceived by parents, employers, and tertiary and training providers?

## 8.2 The effects of selection on attitudes to the education system

8.2.1 Evidence was collected through questionnaire surveys, interviews and focus groups with young people and adults in a variety of settings. The most striking feature of the results was that views of Transfer appeared to be fairly evenly divided between those with positive and those with negative memories of the experience. This appeared to be linked to success or failure in obtaining a 'pass' grade. That said, a majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the post-primary school they attended, whether it was a grammar or secondary school.

8.2.2 Parents' attitudes to the education system in Northern Ireland appeared to be largely explained by their own educational experience. Thus, parents who had attended grammar schools tended to view the system positively, while those who had not attended grammar schools tended to be less positive[69].

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69 *SEL8.1*

8.2.3 During the data collection phase of the project it was noteworthy that in many secondary schools principals were keen that we were introduced to teachers who had 'failed' the Transfer Tests. In general these teachers suggested to us that their experience called into question the accuracy of the Transfer Tests as a measure of future potential.

## 8.3 Parents opting not to enter their children for the Transfer Tests

8.3.1 In recent years a little more than a third of each Year 7 cohort did not enter the Transfer Tests. This includes pupils who automatically transfer from primary to post-primary school either in the few areas that operate comprehensive post-primary schools or in the delayed selection system operated in the Craigavon area. There remains a significant number of pupils whose parents choose to opt out from the tests and not seek a place in a grammar school[70].

8.3.2 Evidence from surveys and interviews with parents suggests that those who choose to opt their children out of the Transfer Tests do so because they do not think they will achieve a high enough grade to obtain a grammar place, or because they have already decided to seek a place for their child in a secondary school. In many cases the parents reported that their decision was informed by advice from their child's teacher[71].

8.3.3 Analysis of the Transfer grade profile of primary schools suggests that there is a significant minority of schools where an above average proportion of pupils are awarded a D grade and a below average proportion of pupils opt out of the Transfer Tests. Given that the ostensible purpose of the Tests is to identify the minority of pupils who would benefit from the academic curriculum provided by grammar schools, this pattern suggests that many of these pupils are probably taking the Transfer Tests unnecessarily[72].

8.3.4 There are a number of possible explanations for the pattern identified above. It may be that teachers in these schools are loathe to advise

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70 *Normally pupils with statements of special needs do not take the Transfer Tests; their post-primary school is determined through a review of their statement which may result in a grammar school placement.*

71 *SEL8.1*

72 *SEL2.1*

parents not to enter their children for the Tests, or that the parents are unwilling to take this advice. Another possibility is that the parents believe the experience may be of benefit to their children regardless of the outcome, or perhaps teachers feel that the pupils will suffer no disadvantage as the Tests are based on the statutory curriculum in any case[73].

## 8.4 The effect of selection on the perception of individuals

8.4.1 Evidence was gathered through surveys, one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews with parents, employers, and training and third-level education providers. Our main interest was in gaining some insight into the views of these key social groups on the education system generally, and on their perception of individuals who emerged from this system. In particular, we were asked to examine whether there was any enduring consequence arising from an individual's Transfer status.

8.4.2 A number of themes emerged from the evidence. The first was that most people valued the good academic results achieved by grammar schools. There was a widespread view that any changes to the education system should try to maintain the high academic standards achieved by the grammar schools. For some, initiatives to tackle underachievement and low achievement were more important than an overhaul of the selective system. While some suggested that the difference between grammar and secondary schools had diminished as a consequence of education reforms, others decried what they perceived to be the diminished status of vocational education due to the pressure for academic results.

8.4.3 However, alongside the praise for high standards in the system generally, and for grammar schools in particular, there was a concern at the perceived unfairness created by dividing young people at such an early stage and on the basis of two written tests. Views on the Tests themselves were mixed: the majority felt they put undue pressure on young children, especially because they were high stakes tests, while a minority felt that the competitive context of the tests would provide a positive experience for young people.

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73 *SEL6.1, SEL8.1*

8.4.4 Employers and other providers expressed a consensus view that their judgements of individuals were not affected by those individuals' Transfer status. Employers and others were more interested in subsequent achievements and qualifications gained throughout an educational career.

8.4.5 Throughout the interviews with parents, young people, employers and others, a striking feature was the way in which discussions on the Transfer Procedure, and perceptions of education more generally, revolved around the twin notions of 'winners and losers'. Winners were seen as those who had 'passed' the Transfer Tests and obtained places in grammar schools, whereas 'losers' were those who had 'failed' the Tests and not obtained places in grammar schools. This would seem to provide confirmation of a general theme emerging from the interviews in schools that highlighted the different status accorded to grammar and secondary schools[74].

[74] SEL8.1

# 9 Comparative patterns of policy and practice

## 9.1 Outline

9.1.1 Much of the evidence discussed above relates to the consequences of the selective system of schools operated in Northern Ireland in the context of open enrolment and wider education reforms. In order to inform discussion on these issues, the Department of Education extended the original remit of the project to include a consideration of evidence from other jurisdictions. Three main areas of evidence were explored.

9.1.2 The first comprised literature-based research on policy and practice across a range of countries. This was designed to identify the main approaches to school organisation and to discuss evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of these systems.

9.1.3 The second element comprised fieldwork carried out in comprehensive schools in Scotland. These schools were all located in the same geographical area in order that the inter-relationships between the schools could be examined alongside a consideration of within-school policy and practice. In addition, the issues explored in the Scottish schools were comparable to data collected in a sample of grammar and secondary schools in Northern Ireland, all of which were located in the same geographical area. Thus, the Scottish evidence provides an examination both of comprehensive schools and a comparative study of two similar areas with different forms of school organisation.

9.1.4 The third element was based on a postal survey of academically selective schools in England and Wales. The purpose of this was to examine different procedures for identifying and selecting pupils for grammar schools.

## 9.2 Review of comparative evidence on school organisation[75]

9.2.1 An examination of educational structures in a range of countries suggests that they can be categorised under three models. The first model comprises systems with separate schools at the post-primary level (for example, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands). In most cases the age of transfer from primary to post-primary school is at age 11 years, although

75 *SEL9.1*

there is a little variation. The second model comprises systems with common primary and lower secondary schools (for example, Italy, France). Pupils in these systems are separated into different types of schools for upper secondary education. This can begin at any point from age 14 years upwards and, in some countries, is beyond the compulsory period of education. The third model comprises common primary and post-primary school (for example, most Scandinavian countries).

9.2.2 Although the selective system in Northern Ireland shares some of the characteristics of systems that use separate post-primary schools, there are important differences. First, most European systems that use separate post-primary schools place a high priority on parental choice. This suggests that the separate schools available to parents and pupils have more equal status than is the case in Northern Ireland.

9.2.3 Second, the separate systems contain school types that have distinctive missions, including different curriculums and qualifications, albeit with links between different school types. In many cases the main difference lies between schools which offer an academic curriculum geared towards higher education, and technical or vocational systems that are geared towards either technical universities or colleges, or employment. In addition, these systems often combine employment, training and part-time education for pupils who have left formal schooling. It is important to note that many of these systems reflect long-standing historical practice that helps to explain the closer parity of esteem accorded to academic and vocational routes[76].

9.2.4 It has been noted above that most of the separate systems contain schools with distinctive missions. Normally this extends to the post-school destinations from each of the school types. Thus, for example, in most of these systems pupils who wish to enter university must go through the academic school. However, another distinctive feature of these separate systems is the provision of pathways between school types in order to provide flexible routes for pupils. This flexibility operates to move pupils between school types. Thus, for example, although pupils can normally

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76 *See Muller, W and Shavit, Y (1998) The institutional embeddedness of the stratification process: a comparative study of qualifications and occupations in thirteen countries. In Shavit, Y and Muller, W (Eds) From school to work: a comparative study of educational qualifications and occupational destinations. Oxford: Clarendon Press. This is also discussed in SEL9.1.*

only gain entry to university through the academic schools, pupils in technical or vocational schools can transfer to the academic schools and seek entry to university in that way. This contrasts with Northern Ireland where a significant number of secondary pupils go directly to university.

9.2.5 A further difference is that in many of these other school systems pupils are required to achieve a minimum level of performance before they are permitted to advance to the next level. Although the level of retention varies across countries, in some cases it can involve as much as a quarter of a cohort. In systems with different types of schools, such as Germany or the Netherlands, pupils in the academic schools who do not achieve the set level of performance are required either to repeat a year or to transfer to a different school type. But this practice of not automatically 'promoting' pupils has also become a hot political issue in comprehensive systems, such as the United States[77].

9.2.6 The main advantage for systems using common schools is that they maintain options and opportunities for all pupils for a longer period, and they provide pupils with an opportunity to meet with a wider range of peers during their school years. The main advantage of systems with separate vocational schools is that they enhance the probability of pupils from these schools gaining skilled employment. The system used in Northern Ireland does not feature either advantage due to the separation of pupils into different school types, while not offering distinctive vocational schools for pupils who do not attend academic schools.

9.2.7 Over the past two decades there has been a gradual shift in OECD countries towards more comprehensive school systems. In large part this was motivated by a concern to provide greater equality of opportunity, although the evidence suggests that this has only been achieved to a limited degree. Indeed, comparative analysis suggests that the different systems are now moving closer together in pursuit of higher standards and school improvement. Thus, in some systems with common lower secondary schools, such as Italy, a higher degree of differentiation has been introduced. By contrast, in separate systems, such as Germany or the Netherlands, the first and second years of post-primary education are being designated as orientation years and the degree of curriculum differentiation across school types is being diminished.

[77] *SEL9.1*

9.2.8 Social differentiation between post-primary schools is common with almost all systems. In systems with separate schools, pupils from socially advantaged backgrounds tend to predominate in academic schools. Similarly, in systems with common schools, the enrolment of schools tends to reflect the social status of the areas in which they are based. Furthermore, the introduction of parental choice tends to widen social differentiation between schools. The only approach that appears to limit social differentiation between post-primary schools, is where the allocation of pupils to schools is based on a lottery system. However, this option appears only to be viable in urban settings with relatively large numbers of schools.

## 9.3 Comprehensive schools in Scotland[78]

9.3.1 Scotland uses a common school system where most pupils automatically transfer from primary school to their local comprehensive school. From 1982 parents were permitted to choose an alternative to the designated school. Although only a minority of parents exercises this choice, the net effect is to widen status differences between schools[79].

9.3.2 There are much closer links and curriculum coordination between primary and post-primary schools in Scotland than Northern Ireland. Local authorities provide resource support to school clusters and teachers spend time in both types of school. The right of parents to choose a school weakens these links as school clusters, and hence links, only include a comprehensive school and its designated feeder primary schools.

9.3.3 The pattern of performance among schools in Scotland is different in comparison with Northern Ireland. Whereas the performance profile in Northern Ireland varies widely across schools, the pattern in Scotland is for wide variation within schools (see also Table 4.2 above). Thus, although

78 *SEL9.2*

79 *Willms, JD and Echols, F (1997) Alert and inert clients: the Scottish experience of parental choice in schools. In Cohn, E (Ed) Market approaches to education: vouchers and school choice. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.*

the schools in both areas display a similar pattern of social differentiation, the schools in Scotland are more internally diverse in terms of the ability of pupils[80].

9.3.4 There is less variation in the number of examination subjects offered to pupils in Scottish schools. By contrast, in Northern Ireland, pupils in grammar schools typically take a significantly higher number of examination subjects in comparison with pupils in secondary schools. A direct comparison of pupil performance in Northern Ireland and Scotland is not possible on the basis of the data available to the present study. However, the evidence suggests that the most academically able pupils will have greater opportunity to achieve a higher number of examination passes in Northern Ireland than in Scotland. The corollary of this is that less able pupils in Scotland are likely to take more examination subjects than their peers in Northern Ireland[81].

9.3.5 Scottish comprehensive schools try to avoid rigid streaming systems and normally operate mixed-ability classes in the junior years. The preferred method for ability grouping is through setting for individual subjects. Normally, setting occurs for only a small minority of subjects in the first three years, is used where pupil numbers permit in the next two years, and becomes common practice for the post-compulsory years.

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80 *Examination of DfEE data in 156 comprehensive schools (see 4.2.4) suggests a slightly different pattern of social differentiation among schools in England/Wales in comparison with Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) for grammar and secondary schools in 1997/98 was 26 per cent, whereas the FSM for England/Wales was 17 per cent. However, the variation among the schools in Northern Ireland was greater. Thus, half of the Northern Ireland schools had FSM figures between 13 and 39 per cent, an interquartile range of 26. By contrast, half of the England/Wales schools had FSM figures between 8 and 28, an interquartile range of 20.*

81 *Research carried out by David Jesson comparing school-level performance in selective and comprehensive areas in England suggested that the overall level of performance was higher in comprehensive areas. The analysis is based on the rate of improvement of the schools between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (Jesson, D, 1999, Do grammar schools get better results? paper presented at a seminar organised by the Campaign for State Education, Westminster Central Hall, London. Available at: www.mandolin.demon.co.uk/case/jess.html). It should be noted that the analysis is criticised on the basis that the Key Stage 3 results of the grammar schools were so high that it was difficult to demonstrate improvement at Key Stage 4. Later research indicated that specialist, but not academically selective, schools in England outperformed comprehensive schools at Key Stage 4 despite having similar profiles at Key Stage 3. In this research the specialist schools had 52 per cent of pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, as compared with 41 per cent of pupils in comprehensive schools (Jesson, D, 2000, Value added in specialist schools 1999, Technology Colleges Trust; Taylor, C (Ed), 2000, Educational outcomes for specialist schools for the year 1999, Technology Colleges Trust. Both papers are available at: www.tctrust.org.uk/index.htm).*

9.3.6 One consequence of operating schools that are diverse in terms of the ability of pupils is that the average enrolment of schools is higher in comparison with schools in Northern Ireland. Higher enrolments are needed also to operate setting systems (see 6.4.3 above).

9.3.7 Although there is a small independent sector in Scotland, the evidence suggests that the Scottish comprehensive system receives wide support and there is little or no pressure for a return to a system with schools that are differentiated on the grounds of ability.

## 9.4 Academic selection in England[82]

9.4.1 Although most areas of England use a form of comprehensive education, a minority of academically selective schools continues to operate. Most of these schools have been academically selective for many years. While the Local Education Authorities (LEA) are responsible for decisions on school admissions, in a minority of cases the LEAs devolve this responsibility to the individual schools.

9.4.2 Almost all of the schools use two or more tests as part of the selection procedure. Normally the selective tests are verbal reasoning and/or non-verbal reasoning tests, and in some cases a further test of English or numeracy is also used. In most cases the test scores are the most important, but not the only, element involved in the admissions process.

9.4.3 Most LEAs identify a cut-off point or test score. Any pupils who achieve at or above this level are deemed suitable for an academic grammar school and are entitled to a school place. Most LEAs also identify a border-zone category of scores. Pupils who achieve scores in this region have their cases reviewed by an LEA-organised panel which decides whether or not each pupil should be entitled to a grammar place. In arriving at this decision the panels normally take into account the pupil's work in primary school and/or reports from the primary principal.

82 *SEL9.3*

# 10 Issues and conclusions

## 10.1 Outline

10.1.1 The purpose of this research is to inform discussions on the school system in Northern Ireland. On the basis of the analysis and discussion presented in the research papers and in the present report, it is possible to identify a number of models for the future. In addition a number of general issues have emerged which provide key questions for any form of school organisation. This final part of the paper discusses these models and issues.

10.1.2 There appear to be perhaps five main models for the future organisation of schools in Northern Ireland. The first of these is a system of delayed selection as currently operated in the Craigavon area of Northern Ireland. The second model is to establish a system of all-through comprehensive schools, as currently operates in Scotland. The third model is to use common primary and lower secondary schools, followed by differentiated upper secondary schools, as currently operate in a number of European countries including France and Italy. The fourth model is a system of differentiated post-primary schools with distinctive academic and vocational/technical routes. The fifth model is the status quo, that is selection at age 11 years and a system of grammar and secondary schools.

10.1.3 A major feature of this Project has been the discussion of comparative evidence. In section 10.2 of this paper we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of models other than the status quo. However, the main focus of this study has been to examine evidence on the consequences of the current arrangements in Northern Ireland. In section 10.3 of this paper we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this model.

## 10.2 Strengths and weaknesses in comprehensive or delayed selection systems

10.2.1 As noted above, alternative models of school organisation to the selective arrangements operated in Northern Ireland include (a) delayed selection, as operated in the Craigavon area of Northern Ireland, (b) all-through comprehensive schools, (c) common primary and lower secondary schools, followed by differentiated upper secondary schools, and (d) differentiated post-primary schools with distinctive academic and vocational/technical routes.

10.2.2 The Craigavon system was examined in a research study carried out for the Department of Education and published in 1998[83]. That study concluded that the system was popular in the area in which it operated and that a higher proportion of pupils appeared to achieve places in grammar schools, in comparison with other parts of Northern Ireland. It was evident that the primary schools in the system had been relieved of the constraints imposed by the Transfer Tests, although whether they had taken full benefit from the opportunity this provided was a little in doubt. The evidence available for that study suggested that the pupils who were not selected at age 14 years were not as well served by the system, particularly those in the controlled sector. The report noted that the Education and Library Board had taken steps to address this issue. However, the overall conclusion was that, on the basis of the evidence then available, the delayed selection arrangements did not provide a better alternative to the 11+ arrangements operating throughout the rest of Northern Ireland[84].

10.2.3 The main strength of all-through comprehensive systems, or systems which operate common lower secondary schools, lies in the flexibility they provide for pupils. In particular, they maintain opportunities and choices for a longer period in a pupil's educational career. A further strength of these systems is that the schools provide diverse pupil bodies from which some social benefits may be derived. However, this diversity is more likely to be based on ability rather than social background.

10.2.4 The main weakness of all-through comprehensive systems is that they limit the achievements of pupils of the highest levels of ability. If these schools practise rigid streaming among pupils on the basis of academic ability, then the potential social benefits arising from diversity, as identified above, are reduced. If the school enrolment is based on catchment areas

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83 *Alexander, J, Daly, P, Gallagher, A, Gray, C and Sutherland, A (1998) An evaluation of the Craigavon Two-Tier system, Research Report No.12, Bangor: Department of Education*

84 *It should be noted that comprehensive systems involving either middle-schools (for 8 to 12 year olds or 9 to 13 year old), or which delayed selection to age 14 years, were popular in some English LEAS, particularly those that switched to comprehensive education in the 1970s. One of the reasons for this was that these arrangements allowed for the redesignation of existing school buildings and required minimal new capital developments. A second reason was that most former grammar schools became senior high schools and retained an essentially academic purpose. This type of arrangement, in other words, required the least extent of change among the grammar schools. For discussion on this see Kerchkhoff, AC, Fogelman, K, Crook, D and Reeder, D (1996) Going comprehensive in England and Wales: a study of uneven change. London: Woburn Press.*

or parents are not permitted to express a preference for a school, the social composition will reflect the social status of residential areas. However, unlike grammar schools, which draw pupils from very wide geographical areas, these common schools will provide the possibility of closer links between schools and local communities.

10.2.5 It should be noted also that all-through comprehensive systems need to address potential transition issues that arise from the requirement of pupils to move from one school type to another. If parental choice exists then some mechanism for dealing with the allocation of pupils to post-primary schools will always be needed. In particular, some procedure for selecting and allocating pupils will be needed for schools that have more applicants for places than there are places available.

10.2.6 The main strength of differentiated systems that are used in places other than Northern Ireland is that they provide distinctive routes for pupils. More particularly, these distinctive routes are differentiated in terms of academic, technical and/or vocational dimensions, and usually provide different curriculums, qualifications and post-school destinations. In addition, most incorporate some element of flexibility and allow for pupil movement between all routes.

10.2.7 Almost any system that involves formal differentiation, whether this is within school or between schools, leads to a situation where pupils from socially advantaged backgrounds are more likely to cluster in the academic routes. In most of the European differentiated systems, however, parental choice plays a significant role in post-primary allocations. This implies that the different routes have more equal status than is the case in Northern Ireland. The only procedure which seems to avoid this problem is one based on a lottery or random allocation. The other main approach is to accept that there will be some social differentiation, but to adopt a principle that all pupils should benefit in tangible ways from whichever route they are allocated to. In most of the European systems that provide distinctive vocational or technical schools this benefit lies in a higher probability of obtaining skilled employment.

10.2.8 This highlights a further point that if parental choice is to be meaningful then options between different types of schools should be ‘worth having’ to the extent that the available alternatives offer some discernible benefit to pupils.

## 10.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the selective system in Northern Ireland

10.3.1 There are a number of significant strengths in the current selective system in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the most significant of these is the high academic standards achieved by many grammar schools. Beyond measured levels of achievement, many of the grammar schools provide an ethos of academic and intellectual excellence. This helps to explain why so many parents aspire to send their children to these schools and why so many associated with grammar schools, whether as parents, pupils or teachers, value the experience, opportunity and academic attainment the schools provide.

10.3.2 A potential strength of the system is that secondary schools provide a supportive environment for pupils who may not succeed in grammar schools due to the very high academic demands they place on pupils. The secondary schools require pupils to take fewer GCSE examination subjects in comparison with pupils in grammar schools. Secondary schools tend to have fewer feeder primary schools and to draw their enrolment from more localised areas. This may provide opportunities to strengthen the links between local communities and these schools.

10.3.3 Some primary school teachers welcome the challenge provided by preparing pupils for the Transfer Tests. A minority of post-primary teachers believe that the addition of science to the primary school curriculum and its inclusion in the Transfer Tests has benefited the teaching of this subject at Key Stage 3.

10.3.4 However, alongside these actual and potential benefits from the selective system, there are a number of significant weaknesses. There is a backwash effect on the primary schools arising from the Tests. In particular, they have a disproportionate impact on teaching and learning in Key Stage 2. Primary teachers feel obliged to focus attention narrowly on the requirements of the test largely because of the perceived importance of 'passing'. Notwithstanding the official language around the Transfer Tests, most people discuss them in terms of 'passing' and 'failing' and many primary teachers feel they are judged in the public mind on the basis of a school's Transfer Test performance.

10.3.5 The focused teaching and learning arising from test preparation does not provide primary school pupils with the full entitlement of the common curriculum[85]. The curriculum areas that are tested are taught in a way which is primarily geared to enhance test performance, not curriculum understanding. Other areas of the curriculum are neglected during the period of test preparation.

10.3.6 Many parents feel obliged to pay for out-of-school coaching and many primary principals do not believe that this adds to the educational experience of young people. In addition, not all parents can afford to pay the cost of out-of-school coaching. It appears that the extent of coaching has increased since attainment tests were introduced as the selective instrument.

10.3.7 There are weaknesses in the links between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. While some weaknesses are likely to occur over any transition, regardless of the post-primary system, the weaknesses are exacerbated as a consequence of the selective system.

10.3.8 Teachers in secondary and grammar schools believe that a minority of pupils achieves Transfer Test grades that over-estimate their actual ability. Despite this, however, the main complaint about the Transfer Tests is that they are unfair and place undue pressure on young children, rather than that they are fundamentally inaccurate. This concern is shared by teachers, employers and society more generally.

10.3.9 Secondary schools are accorded a lesser status than grammar schools in the eyes of most people. Teachers in secondary schools are aware of this difference in status and many believe this judgement is unfair and inappropriate. More generally, there is a marked difference in the way teachers in grammar and secondary schools talk about education and educational priorities.

10.3.10 Teachers in secondary schools also indicate that have to rebuild the self-confidence and esteem of many pupils who arrive in their schools feeling a sense of failure. In consequence, secondary schools make pastoral care a key priority.

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85 *For further evidence on this see Harland, J, Kinder, K, Ashworth, M, Montgomery, A, Moor, H and Wilkin, A (1999) Real Curriculum: at the end of Key Stage 2. Report 1 from the Northern Ireland Curriculum Cohort Survey. Slough: NFER; and Harland, J, Ashworth, M, Bower, R, Hogarth, S, Montgomery, A and Moor, H (1999) Real Curriculum: at the end of Key Stage 3. Report 2 from the Northern Ireland Curriculum Cohort Survey. Slough: NFER.*

10.3.11 We noted above the high academic standards achieved by grammar schools. The corollary of this is that a selective system appears to produce a longer tail of low-achieving schools. Almost all school systems involve some degree of social differentiation between schools. Furthermore, no school system has emerged to solve the problem of low-achieving schools. However, a selective system produces a disproportionate number of schools which combine low ability and social disadvantage in their enrolments, thereby compounding the educational disadvantages of both factors.

10.3.12 The original purpose of the Transfer Tests was to identify pupils who were able to cope with the academic curriculum provided by grammar schools. In areas of England that retain grammar schools the Tests continue to be used for this purpose. In Northern Ireland, however, the Tests are used to rank order pupils in order that grammar schools can select those with higher grades over those with lower grades[86]. No Transfer grade entitles a pupil automatically to a place in any school and the admissions process has generated a level of litigation. Partly in response to this the grading schedule for the Tests has been altered, although the current arrangement appears to claim a degree of precision which the Tests do not possess[87].

10.3.13 For many years pupils who attended secondary schools were not encouraged to take public examinations[88]. More recently a significant proportion of pupils in secondary schools have achieved five or more

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86 *A dilemma arises from the fact that the 1989 Education Reform Order was closely modeled on the 1988 Education Reform Act which had been designed with a comprehensive school system in mind. It may have been the intention that the 'traditional' role of grammar and secondary schools would evolve after 1989, with some secondary schools taking on an increasingly academic role. In practice, as the present research has demonstrated, the relative standing of a school is still largely determined by where it is located in the selective system. In any case, other aspirations of the reforms were not achieved: a booklet issued to parents by the Department of Education to explain the Education Reform Order said that the Transfer Tests would be abolished as soon as new assessment arrangements were in place. From that point, it was suggested, decisions on post-primary school would be taken by parents in consultation with primary school teachers.*

87 *See the discussion on the literature on testing in Gallagher, AM (2000) Grouping Pupils by Ability: a discussion paper, in Gallagher, AM and Smith, A (Eds) Educational and legal aspects of selection in schools, Belfast/Coleraine: Queen's University/University of Ulster, and the research evidence provided by Gardner, J and Cowan, P (2000) Testing the Test: a study of the reliability and validity of the Northern Ireland Transfer Procedure test in enabling the selection of pupils for grammar school places, Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.*

88 *We noted in 1.1.2 above that in 1970/71 more than 85 per cent of leavers from secondary schools failed to achieve the equivalent of one O Level pass.*

GCSE passes at grades A*-C, and some have gone on to take A levels and enter higher education. The advantage of this is that a pupil's Transfer Test status does not completely close off academic opportunities, although this pattern seems to run counter to the original rationale for the grammar/secondary divide. In addition, the current performance patterns may imply that a higher proportion of pupils should have the opportunity to experience a grammar school education.

10.3.14 The mission and purpose of grammar schools are clearly defined in academic terms. By contrast, secondary schools are required to meet a wide range of objectives simultaneously, but are judged largely by society on academic criteria that cast grammar schools in a more positive light. This may mean that some secondary schools place undue emphasis on academic objectives in order to be seen to compete with grammar schools. More generally it enhances the problem of relative status for secondary schools in the eyes of the public, despite the claim by secondary teachers that they offer a stronger educational environment for their pupils. Notwithstanding these claims, for an individual pupil, achieving a grammar school place matters in academic terms and does lead to measurable gains in qualifications.

## 10.4 Conclusion

10.4.1 High academic standards are important and schools are encouraged to increase the performance of their pupils. For individual pupils, qualifications open the way to further educational opportunities and enhance employment prospects. However, the desirable objectives for an education system encompass a wider range of social, educational and economic outcomes. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the ways in which children develop and learn and to create conditions that allow all pupils to maximise their potential. A debate that simply revolves around school structures may unduly narrow the terms of the discussion, encourage the inaccurate view that significant problems are easily solved and lose sight of the broader purposes of education. The starting-point for discussion ought to be the social, educational and economic objectives young people should achieve from their educational experience. Then the education structure that seems best placed to provide these ends can be determined.

# SELECTION PROJECT: Schedule of papers

The present paper is based on data that were analysed in a series of research papers by members of the Project Team. This annex contains a list of all the research papers prepared for the project. All of these papers are published alongside the Main Report.

## SEL1: Background papers prepared by the project team

SEL1.1: Overview paper (T Gallagher and A Smith)

This paper outlines the background to the project. It also describes the strategy adopted for data collection and includes details of the methodology used across the project.

## SEL2: Papers that provide analysis of school-level quantitative data

SEL2.1: Statistical patterns in schools (T Gallagher)

This paper analyses aggregate school-level data on enrolments, intake and social profiles, and school performance patterns. The paper considers trends over time. The paper is based on the analysis of publicly available datasets and additional data provided by the Department of Education.

SEL2.2: Schools in a non-selective system (T Gallagher, P McKeown and E McKeown)

Northern Ireland has a large number of post-primary schools with relatively low enrolments due to religious, gender and ability differentiation. If a decision is made to move towards a non-selective system then fewer schools would be needed. This paper analyses pupil numbers and capacity in primary and post-primary schools in order to estimate the extent of change that could occur in a move towards non-selective arrangements.

## SEL3: Papers that provide analysis of pupil-level quantitative data

SEL3.1: The pattern of performance at GCSE (I Shuttleworth and P Daly)

This paper analyses the patterns of GCSE performance of 1,784 pupils in grammar and secondary schools in Northern Ireland. The paper discusses the factors that influence performance at age 16.

SEL3.2: After post-compulsory education: first destinations of Northern Ireland Year 12 pupils in 1999 (P Daly and I Shuttleworth)

This paper analyses the post-16 destinations of 1,259 pupils from grammar and secondary schools. The factors that influence destinations are discussed.

## SEL4: Papers based on quantitative and qualitative data collected in a sample of grammar and secondary schools

SEL4.1: Attitudes to education (T Gallagher and E McKeown)

This paper analyses questionnaire data from 2,130 pupils measuring their attitudes to school. Attitudes to school are subdivided into a series of scales which measure various aspects of school life.

SEL4.2: Patterns of participation in grammar and secondary schools (T Gallagher, P McKeown and E McKeown)

This paper analyses social, religious and gender patterns in participation in grammar and secondary schools. The data are based on questionnaire data collected from 4,544 pupils in grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.3: Interviews with principals of post-primary schools (G Byrne)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with principals in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.4: Interviews with members of senior management teams (T Gallagher)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with members of senior management teams in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.5: Interviews with Heads of Departments of Mathematics (E McKeown)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with Heads of Mathematics Departments in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.6: Interviews with Post-primary Heads of English Departments (J Alexander)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with Heads of English Departments in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.7: Interviews with Heads of Departments of Science (T Gallagher and W McClune)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with Heads of Science Departments in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.8: Interviews with Special Educational Needs' Co-ordinators and Heads of Pastoral Care (R Kilpatrick and F Quinn)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with teachers with responsibility for special needs and pastoral care in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.9: Interviews with groups of Year 8 pupils (A Sutherland)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with groups of Year 8 pupils in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.10: Interviews with Year 12 pupils (T Gallagher)

This paper analyses data arising from interviews with groups of Year 12 pupils in a sample of grammar and secondary schools.

SEL4.11: Area Study (P McKeown, I Shuttleworth, E McKeown, A Smith, U Birthistle and A Montgomery)

This paper is based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from grammar and secondary schools in a geographical area of Northern Ireland.

## SEL5: Paper analysing issues related to pupils' motivation and attitudes

SEL5.1: Pupil Motivation and Attitudes - Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, Learning Disposition and the Impact of Selection on Teaching and Learning (J Johnston and W McClune)

This paper is based on research carried out in 22 primary schools which examined teaching and learning styles, how these were effected by the Transfer Tests and the implications for different groups of pupils. In addition, the paper focuses on the impact of selection on pupils' motivation and attitudes.

## SEL6: Papers examining the impact of selection on teachers

SEL6.1: Teachers and Selection in Northern Ireland (A Smith, U Birthistle, A Montgomery and S Farrell)

This paper analyses general issues related to the impact of selection on teachers. This includes an examination of the way their perceptions and expectations of pupils are mediated by selection, and the way this affects their perception and expectations of themselves.

## SEL7: Paper analysing coaching and preparation for the Transfer Tests

SEL7.1: Impact of coaching (L Caul, G Eason and S McWilliams)

This paper analyses survey and focus group data on the extent and nature of preparation for the Transfer Tests. This includes an examination of in-school preparation and out-of-school coaching.

## SEL8: Papers examining the impact of selection on public attitudes and perceptions

SEL8.1: Public views on selection (BDO Stoy Hayward)

This paper analyses survey and interview data which examines the views of adults, young people over 16 years, employers, and training and third-level education providers. The paper examines their views on the selective system and the way this effects their views of education more generally.

## SEL9: Papers which examine comparative evidence

SEL9.1: Comparative perspectives on school systems (T Gallagher)

This paper examines policy and practice in a range of countries, with a particular focus on educational structures and the extent to which pupils are institutionally separated on the basis of ability. The paper also examines research evidence on the implications of different systems.

SEL9.2: Case study schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland (T Gallagher and E McKeown)

This paper is based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected in a number of comprehensive schools in an area of Scotland. The paper examines the internal organisation of the schools and they way they relate to one another. Comparative analysis is carried out with the area study schools in Northern Ireland.

SEL9.3: Survey of selective schools in England (AM Montgomery and T Gallagher)

This paper is based on a survey of academically selective schools in England. The paper discusses the procedures used to select pupils for admission to grammar schools.

In addition, members of the research prepared a number of papers which are outside the terms of reference of the Department of Education project, but which are relevant to discussions on selection. These papers have been published separately in: Gallagher, AM and Smith, A (2000) Educational and legal aspects of selection in schools. Belfast/Coleraine: Queen's University/University of Ulster.

## SELECTION PROJECT: Project Team

The present paper represents the views of the authors and does not claim to represent the views of any other individuals or organisations. The paper is based on a series of papers authored by members of the Project Team. In addition, other members of the Project Team contributed to the fieldwork during 1999 and 2000. The members of the Project Team were:

Professor Tony Gallagher, Graduate School of Education, Queen's University

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Joy Alexander, Graduate School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

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*Annex 3:*

## SELECTION PROJECT: Terms of reference

1. To investigate the effects on pupils and their families, teachers, schools and the community of the existing selective structure of secondary education in Northern Ireland, in order to provide a better basis for informed debate on the future structure of secondary education. Particular attention needs to be given to the identification of any differences in opportunity and performance in respect of different socio-economic groups, and especially between the constituent parts of the Northern Ireland community, which may result from the present system and structures.

2. To prepare a Final Report setting out the key findings, supported by quantitative and qualitative evidence, and highlighting the main issues emerging for consideration in light of the research. This report should draw together all the relevant aspects, but may be supported by more detailed papers as necessary. Interim Reports on specific aspects of the project should be prepared and presented to the Department on a schedule to be agreed at the outset of the assignment.

The main focus should be on the effects of the selective structure of the secondary sector, though attention should also be given to the effects of the Transfer Procedure. The study should consider how well the present structure serves to promote learning through fostering values and attitudes; raising standards of learning; and providing opportunities for personal development and fulfillment.

The research team should consult with the DE Inspectorate where appropriate.

The following points should be covered in the investigation and the report:

I **Pupils:**

a. effects of selection on achievement at GCSE level for all groups, including comparison of patterns of achievement by those of similar ability who attend selective and non-selective secondary schools;

b. effects on patterns of school leavers' destinations, including routes into employment, FE, HE and training; and

c. effects on motivation and social attitudes.

**II Teachers:**

a. effects on teachers' perceptions and expectations of pupils; and

b. effects on teacher motivation and performance.

**III Secondary Schools:**

a. for both selective and non-selective secondary schools:

opportunities and constraints in the curriculum, and in particular an assessment of the extent to which selective and non-selective schools provide alternative pathways which meet the different needs of pupils, and the extent to which academic, vocational and pastoral provision are appropriate to the capabilities and needs of pupils;

an analysis of the extent and impact of transfer of pupils between selective and non-selective schools; and

the extent to which NI has more small secondary schools than would be necessary in a non-selective system, and the implications, if any.

b. for non-selective schools:

trends in enrolment, and especially the implications of a reduced proportion of higher achieving pupils attending these schools as a result of the increased intakes to selective schools consequent on open enrolment;

the extent to which the performance of non-selective schools reflects the quality of their intake;

analysis of the changes in the pattern of ability levels on intake over the last ten years, and the resulting effects on performance; and

the restoration of pupil self-confidence and motivation in Key Stage 3.

c. for selective schools:

the extent to which the performance of selective schools reflects the quality of their intake;

the extent to which selective schools have adapted their curricular provision to address the wider range of abilities attending these schools as a result of open enrolment; and sustaining performance of lower achieving pupils.

**IV Primary Schools**

a. the researchers should consult with the DE Inspectorate on its findings on the effects of the Transfer Procedure on the implementation of the KS2 curriculum;

b. the extent of coaching, the reasons why it is sought, and the costs and other implications for pupils, parents and schools; and

c. the consequences of perceptions of Transfer Test performance for enrolment patterns of primary schools.

**V Society**

a. the effects on attitudes to education in both young people and adults;

b. an analysis of the reasons why some parents choose not to enter their children for the Transfer Tests; and

c. the effects of selection on how individuals are perceived by parents, employers, and tertiary education and training providers.

**VI Comparative Study**

a. a literature review on systems of schooling outside of Northern Ireland to inform discussions on the selective system of grammar and secondary schools;

b. a comparison of data on schools in England and Wales with Northern Ireland; and

c. a compilation of new data on a sample of schools in Scotland in an area analogous to the area study being carried out in Northern Ireland.



The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Education which funded the study.

The findings of the Research Project into the effects of the selective system in Northern Ireland are published in 3 formats:

- Research Briefing (summarising key findings)
- Main Report (drawing out key themes and issues)
- Research Papers (2 volumes containing all the individual reports)

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