ESRC Research Project on *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland, 1984-2002*

Working Paper 3

CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND, WALES AND SCOTLAND SINCE 1984

Linda Croxford
Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh

Within the United Kingdom (UK) four separate but interdependent systems of education and training have developed in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. A recent research project at CES entitled *"Home International" Comparison of 14-19 Education and Training Systems in the UK"* focused on the similarities and differences between these systems (Raffe et al 1999). The research is now being extended to consider change over time by a further project, *Education and Youth Transitions in England Wales and Scotland 1984-2002.* A key issue for the research is the extent to which we can analyse and explain convergence/divergence between England Wales and Scotland within the context of overarching trends. This paper outlines the data sources and conceptual framework for the research, and illustrates some early findings relating to trends in young peoples' perceptions of the usefulness of their school courses for future careers.

"HOME INTERNATIONALS"

The "Home Internationals" project found significant differences among the four UK systems which could not be attributed to their different social compositions or local circumstances. But it also drew attention to the similarities of the four systems and to their interdependence. Many of the differences were small, and we found many common features which appeared to reflect distinctively British patterns of attainment, participation and transition.

Table 1: Secondary education in the UK 1999/00

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland
Number of secondary schools	3457	227	387	235
% comprehensive	82	100	100	0
Pupil: teacher ratio	17.2	16.7	12.9	14.7
Post-16 participation (%)	71.0	71.2	80.7	76.5
▪ at school	34.9	37.9	69.0	47.8
▪ in further education college	36.1	33.3	11.7	28.7

Source: National Statistics (2002) **UK Education and Training Statistics.**

Key differences related to school systems (Table 1) and school effects (Croxford and Raffe 1999). Differences between the four systems in the extent of selection and creaming were a major influence on all the educational outcomes included in our analyses. The more comprehensive systems in Wales and Scotland were characterised by more social mixing, and greater equality of attainment than the diverse range of state schools in England and Northern Ireland. Schools in Wales and Scotland were more similar in their 'effects', whereas schools in England and Northern Ireland had greater variability. These findings suggest that comprehensive education may be more effective and receive more public support in Wales and Scotland because the school effect is more uniform: finding the 'right' school is less important (Croxford 2000).

Other differences related to levels of participation in full-time education at 16-plus. More 16-year olds stayed on at school in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, but fewer entered further education (FE) colleges (Table 1). More young people in Scotland and Northern Ireland enter higher education than in England and Wales (Table 2). We initially thought that the more flexible course structure in Scotland encouraged higher and more equitable distribution of participation, but our subsequent analyses cast some doubt on this view because we found that most Scots stayed-on in education for a shorter period than elsewhere, fewer early-leavers re-entered education (Raffe *et al* 2000). Although Scotland had the most 'unified' system of post-compulsory education and training, (and Northern Ireland had the least unified system) Scotland had the most advance 'academic drift' (Raffe *et al* 2001).

Table 2: Participation in Higher Education in the UK, 1998-9

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland
Age participation index (API)	29	30	47	41

Sources: Department for Education and Skills, Scottish Executive, and Department for Education Northern Ireland.

With regard to transitions to the labour market, we identified a distinctively 'British' pattern of transition, characterised by relatively early entry to the labour market, the powerful influence of compulsory school qualifications, the distinctive role of youth training programmes and weak vocational pathways to employment (Raffe *et al* 2001).

However, the *Home Internationals Project* covered only a single cohort of young people in the UK systems, based on youth cohort surveys for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the early 1990s. It could thus provide only a snapshot of differences between the UK systems at one moment in time. Although we could suggest that differences in outcomes of education were conditioned by the institutional context (Muller and Shavit 1998), for example that lower levels of social inequality in Scotland and Wales resulted from the more comprehensive system of schooling, our evidence based on one time point was inconclusive. Consequently, our new research project includes the dimension of change over time.

A framework for comparison

Drawing on the wider comparative literature (eg Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre 1986, Delamont and Rees 1997), the *Home Internationals Project* distinguished three levels of comparison:

- the ***societal context of education and training***: culture and social attitudes, family structure, the economy and labour market, social welfare, political system, and so on;
- the ***administrative system of education and training***: the formal structures of institutions, qualifications, the curriculum, governance and accountability, and so on;
- the ***social relations and processes of education and training***: patterns of participation and flows through the system, learning processes, interactions between teachers and students, learning outcomes and attainments, inequalities by gender, social class and ethnic origin, and so on.

Within each of the three levels we can identify important changes over the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

- Changes in the societal context of education and training - in the period since 1984, which is the focus of the research, changes in societal context include changes in the global economy and related changes in the structure of the labour market, that in turn have influenced family structures and gender identities (Arnot et al 1999).
- Changes in the administrative system of education and training - these include the development of new examination systems providing more comprehensive access to certification, the introduction of a core curriculum within each system, and policies to increase the vocational relevance of the curriculum - these have created similar, but slightly different curricular and examination systems in the three countries (Croxford 2000). Similarly, slightly different methods have been used to introduce education markets (Whitty et al 1998).
- Changes in the social relations and processes of education and training - including rising average attainment, educational participation and changing youth transitions.

To some extent these changes reflect the transition from 'economic nationalism' to the 'new consensus' on education's centrality in post-industrial societies (Brown, Halsey, Lauder and Wells 1997) and consequent policy convergence that tightens the bond between education and the economy. That transition has been experienced throughout Britain and mediated by the UK government. At the same time, it is necessary to take account of the fact that England, Wales and Scotland have different, though interdependent, education systems for which there has been progressive devolution of responsibility during the last two decades (Raffe *et al* 1999). Ideologies, priorities and policy implementation have differed; in particular the restructuring of educational provision through the introduction of market principles and competition between schools in England has been muted in Scotland and Wales (Ozga and Lawn 1999a). Following the creation of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales in 1999 the systems are exhibiting some signs of increased divergence. The current project, through a comparative study of changes in young people's education and youth transitions in England, Wales and Scotland, takes advantage of the unique opportunity

offered in the post-devolution policy context to distinguish the relative impact of common socio-economic trends on the one hand and divergent policy developments on the other.

Datasets for empirical analysis

For the *Home Internationals Project* we constructed and analysed an integrated dataset linking youth cohort surveys for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the early 1990s. For the new research project a major priority is to create time-series datasets from the youth cohort surveys to analyse the changing patterns and outcomes of education and training in Britain[1]. It is currently extremely difficult to analyse change over time in young people's experiences, because of inconsistencies between data sources and lack of time-series data. The project will construct youth cohort time-series, based on the England and Wales Youth Cohort Surveys and Scottish Young People's Surveys/School Leavers Surveys. Both surveys provide longitudinal data to approximately age 19 on nationally representative cross-sections of year groups or age cohorts. Both surveys have been carried out regularly since 1985 and cover very similar topics. Variables include gender, age, socio-economic status, truancy, attitudes to school, participation in post-compulsory education, academic and vocational qualifications, educational or labour-market status at each time point, including details of further and higher education courses, training and jobs at 18-plus, school characteristics, school composition, and area characteristics such as local unemployment rates.

However, difficulties arise because of differences within and between the cohort series in question wording and coding. These difficulties will be illustrated below.

The England and Wales Youth Cohorts

At present there are ten separate cohort datasets for England and Wales (Table 3). The England and Wales cohorts are age cohorts comprised of young people aged 16 at the end of August of the relevant school session, most of whom were in the last year of compulsory schooling (known as year 11 or Y11). The first sweep was administered in spring of the year following that in which sample members completed compulsory schooling, when the sample was aged approximately 17. The design of cohorts 1 to 6 included two subsequent annual sweeps at approximately age 18 and 19 respectively. There was a fourth sweep of the third cohort in 1994 when sample members were approximately 23-years old. For cohorts 7-10 the timing of second and third sweeps has been varied. Until recently the YCS surveys were all conducted using postal questionnaires, but in recent surveys some interviewing has been included.

There are difficulties in analysing data from the England and Wales cohorts as a time-series because there has been change over time in the questions asked, the way in which questions have been asked, and the way the answers have been coded. There is also considerable difficulty in obtaining contextual information about the schools attended by young people, such as denomination and single-sex schools, and the characteristics of local areas. This is partly because the two-stage sampling arrangements mean that different schools are included

[1] Northern Ireland is not included in this project because there has not been a series of youth cohort surveys in Northern Ireland

in each survey. We found that it is almost impossible to obtain data on school characteristics retrospectively.

The Scottish Youth Cohorts

There is a great deal of similarity between the Scottish youth cohort surveys and those for England and Wales, and there has been some collaboration and mutual learning over design issues. At present there are seven separate Scottish cohort datasets, and a further cohort survey is planned for 2003. England and Wales cohorts 1, 3, 4 and 5 correspond to Scottish cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4, but England and Wales cohorts 6, 8 and 9 occurred one year earlier than Scottish cohorts 5, 6 and 7.

The Scottish youth cohorts are defined by year-stage, and comprise cohorts of students in the last year of compulsory schooling (know as the S4 stage) at all Scottish secondary schools. Because of different school entry and leaving arrangements the cohorts in England and Wales are some six months older on average than the Scottish cohorts.

The surveys were all conducted using postal questionnaires. The first sweep was administered in spring of the year following that in which sample members completed S4, when the sample was aged 16 plus. A subsequent sweep was carried out two years later when the sample was aged approximately 19. There was an intermediate sweep at age 17 plus of the first cohort, but this was not repeated for subsequent cohorts. The design of Cohort 5 was rather unusual, because it was reconstructed from three annual school-leavers surveys. Members of the cohort who left school at the end of S4, S5 or S6 were included in the school-leavers surveys of 1993, 1994 and 1994 respectively. Sweep 2 data for the S4 and S5 leavers were collected by a subsequent survey in 1995. Sweep 2 data for the S6 leavers were collected as part of the 1995 school-leavers survey. Data relating to each leaver group were subsequently brought together in a cohort dataset. A further survey of this cohort was carried out in 1999 when the young people were approximately 23 years of age.

At present it is difficult for researchers to analyse data from the Scottish cohorts as a time-series. There are separate datasets for each cohort, and bringing them together is not straightforward. The design and conduct of the surveys has changed over time, and although cohorts 1 to 4 have a broadly similar design, the more recent cohorts have undergone a number of changes. As a result, the details of many variables included in each cohort have changed, so that investigation is needed to create comparability between the cohorts. In some cases, question wording has changed in subtle ways that may result in different responses. In other cases, coding changes reflect policy developments such as the new forms of youth training, and post-compulsory education, and in these cases it is necessary to investigate and record the underlying meaning of such changes.

We are at a very early stage of dataset construction for this project. At future stages of the research we will link labour-market information by region. We hope to develop variables to measure differences and changes in social composition from information about respondents' family background. It should be possible to derive social origin from mothers'/fathers' occupation, but here we face the problem that methods of coding and classifying occupations have changed over time. To cope with this we need to consider the substantive issues of changing occupational structures in addition to the data management issues of creating

comparable measures of social class. There are also problems arising from the differences in questions and coding between surveys. Both surveys ask questions about levels of parental education, but the form of question for England and Wales is whether or not mother/father had achieved one or more A-levels, whereas the Scottish survey asks the age at which mother/father left school. These questions are almost comparable - but not the same.

Table 3: Youth Cohort Datasets (and year of survey/sweeps)

Cohort: ended Y11 or S4 in	Scotland	E&W
1984	SYPS85 (1985, 1986, 1987a)	YCS1 (1985, 86, 87)
1985		YCS2 (1986, 87, 88)
1986	SYPS87 (1987,1989a)	YCS3 (1987, 88, 89 + 94)
1987		
1988	SYPS89 (1989,1991a)	YCS4 (1989, 90, 91)
1989		
1990 HIP	SYPS91 (1991, 1993a)	YCS5 (1991, 92, 93)
1991		YCS6 (1992, 93, 94s, 94a)
1992	SSLS Reconstructed Cohort (1993-5, 1999)	
1993		YCS7 (1994, 96)
1994		
1995		YCS8 (1996, 98, 2000a)
1996	SSLS97 (1997, 1999)	
1997		YCS9 (1998, 99, 2000s, 2000a +02)
1998	SSLS99 (1999, 2001)	
1999		YCS10 (2000s, 2000a, 2002)
2000		
2001		
2002		YCS11 (2002, ?)

At the end of the Home Internationals Project, we noted that we were struggling to ensure comparability between data sources, yet by the standards of international datasets ours achieved a high-level of cross-national comparability. This paradox led us to coin Murphy's Law of Home International Comparisons:

> *The more similar the systems being compared, the greater the problems caused by small differences in data sources.*

Young people's perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of schooling to future careers: an example of problems in 'home international' comparison over time

We are currently at a very early stage of the research project. Our initial focus has been dataset construction relating to experiences of compulsory schooling and demographic factors. Nevertheless, there are some interesting trends relating to young people's perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of schooling to future careers, and we use these data as an illustration of some issues in comparative analysis between countries and over time.

Perceptions that schooling was relevant and useful to future careers

Three questions about young peoples' perceptions of their last two years of compulsory schooling have been included in the cohort surveys consistently over a number of years. These questions, which were typically the first items in the Sweep 1 questionnaire, asked:

> *Here are some things, both good and bad, which people have said about their last two years at secondary school? We would like to know what you think?*
>
> *Please tick a boy for each one to say whether you agree or disagree.*
>
> - *School has helped give me confidence to make decisions.*
> - *School has done little to prepare me for life when I leave school.*
> - *School has taught me things which would be useful in a job.*

Changes over time in responses to these questions are shown by Figures 1 to 4, and reveal that young people throughout Britain are becoming increasingly positive about their school experience. There is a clear upward trends in the proportions of young people who agreed that school taught them things which would be useful in a job, and a more modest increase in those who agreed that school helped give them confidence to make decisions. Similarly, increasing proportions of young people disagreed with the statement that school has done little to prepare them for life after school.

Figure 1

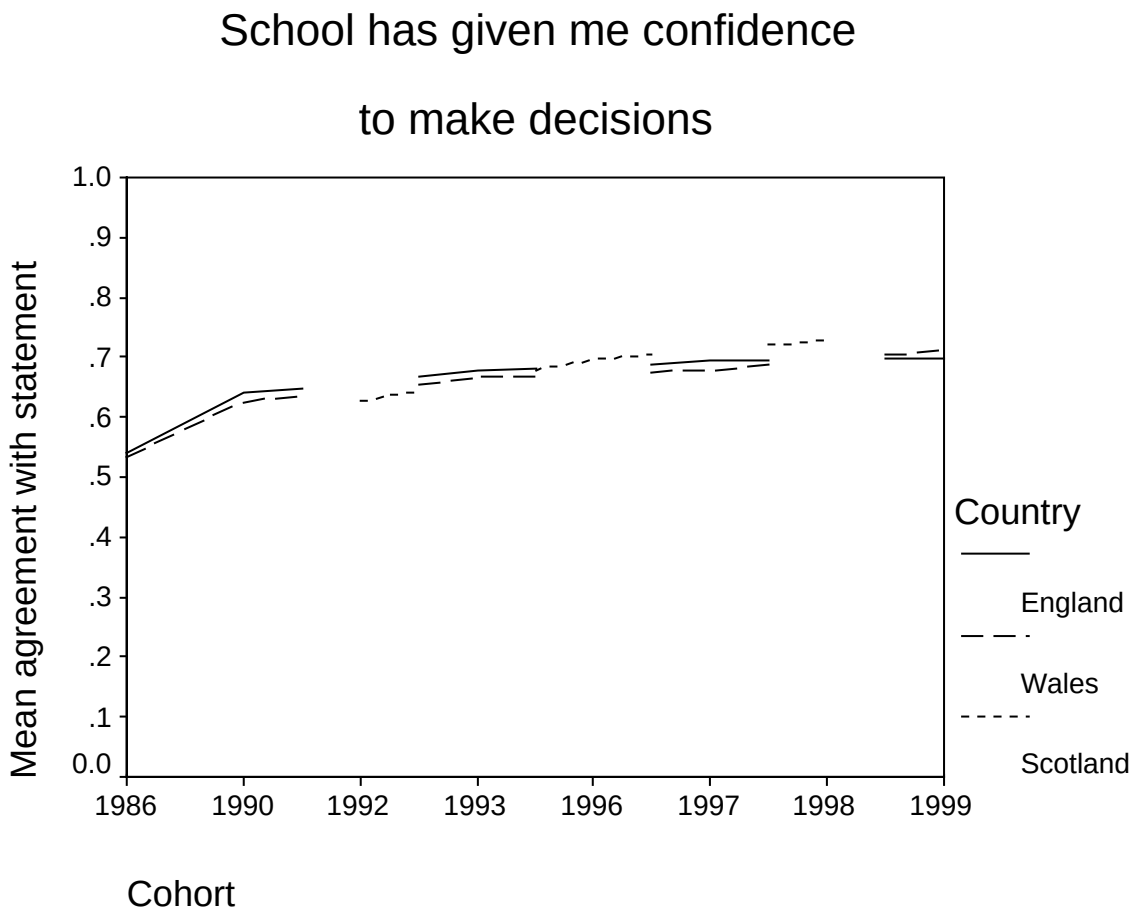


Figure 2

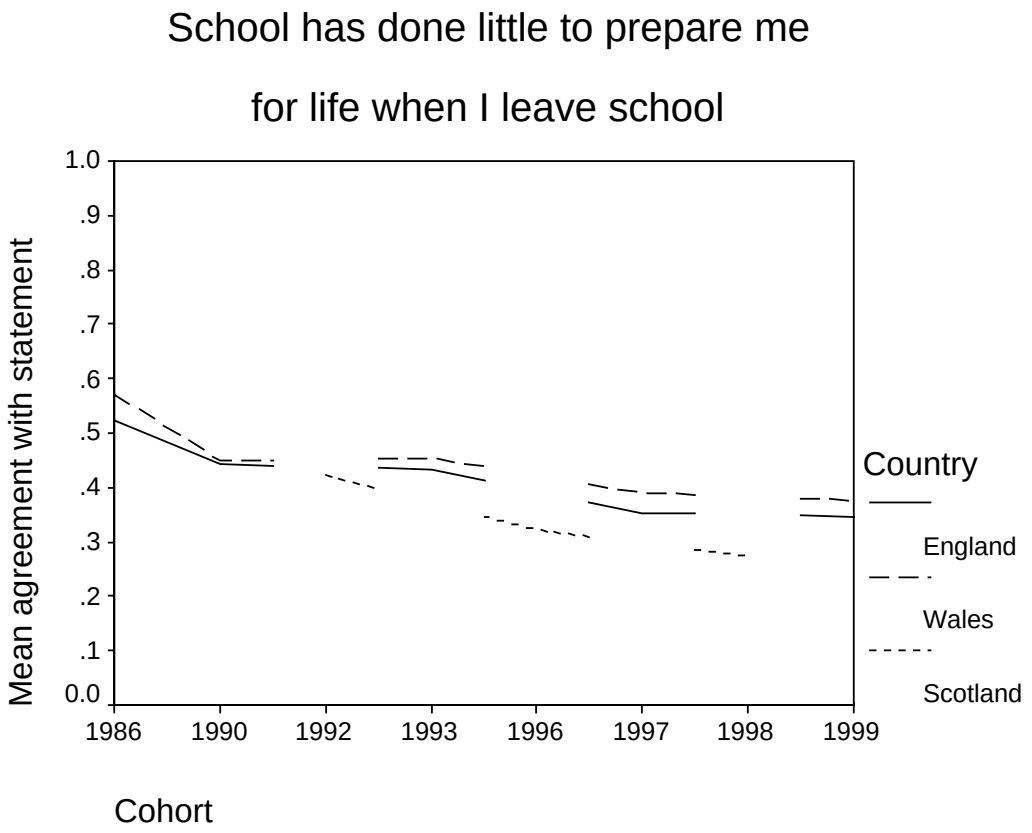


Figure 3

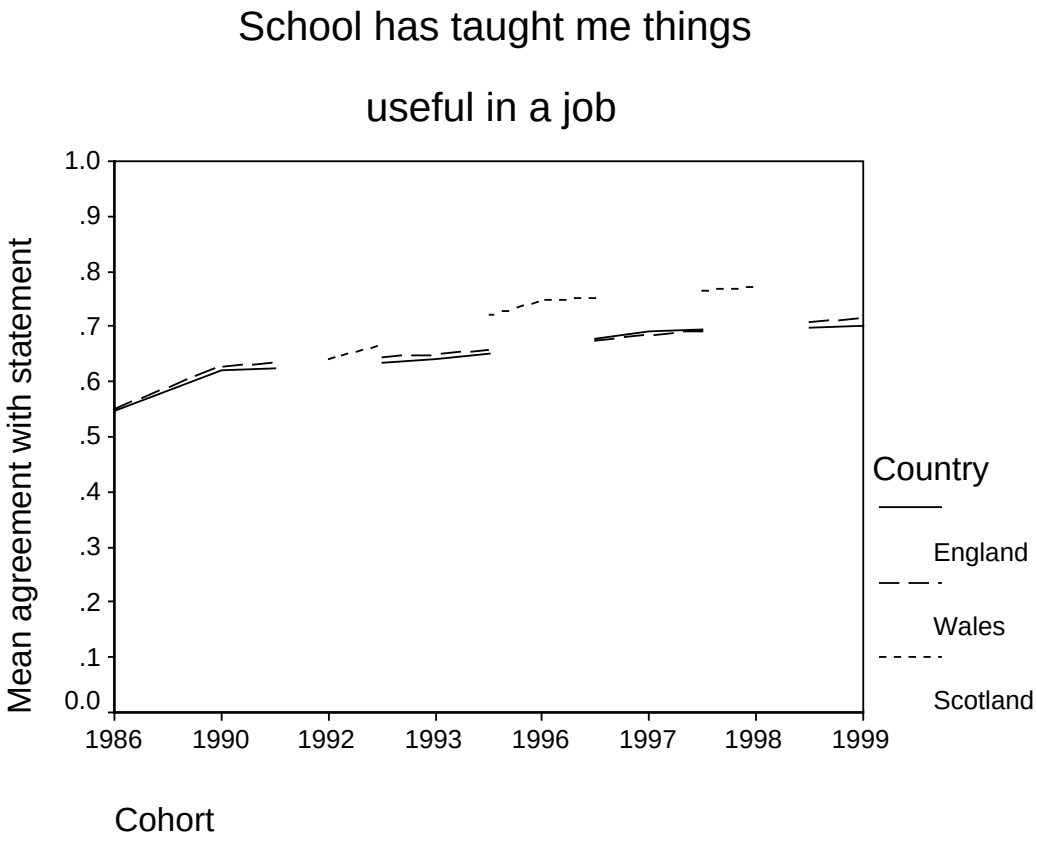
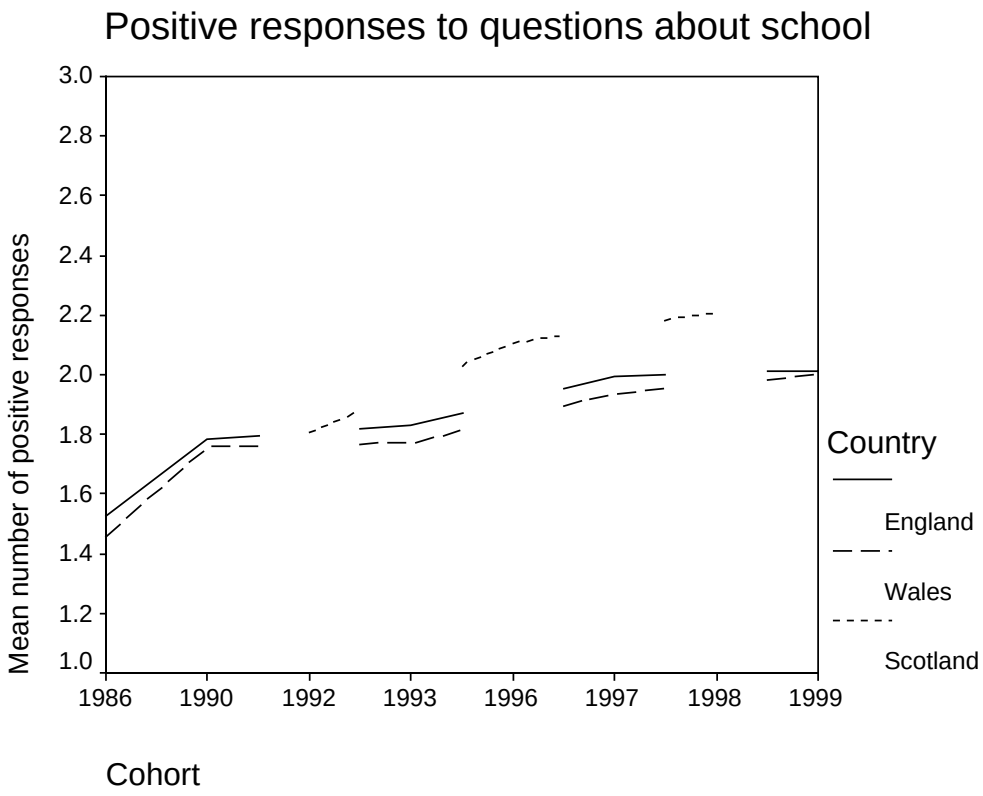


Figure 4: Summary



The overall trends towards more positive attitudes to school are evident in all three education systems, but there are some system differences. The proportion of respondents from Wales expressing positive attitudes was consistently lower than the proportion in England. The trends for Scotland are steeper than in either England or Wales. In 1992 the proportion of Scottish youngsters expressing positive views of their schooling was very similar to that in England, but thereafter increased much more steeply to 1998. Are these differences a commentary on the English/Welsh/Scottish systems? or consequences of compositional differences in socio-economic background?

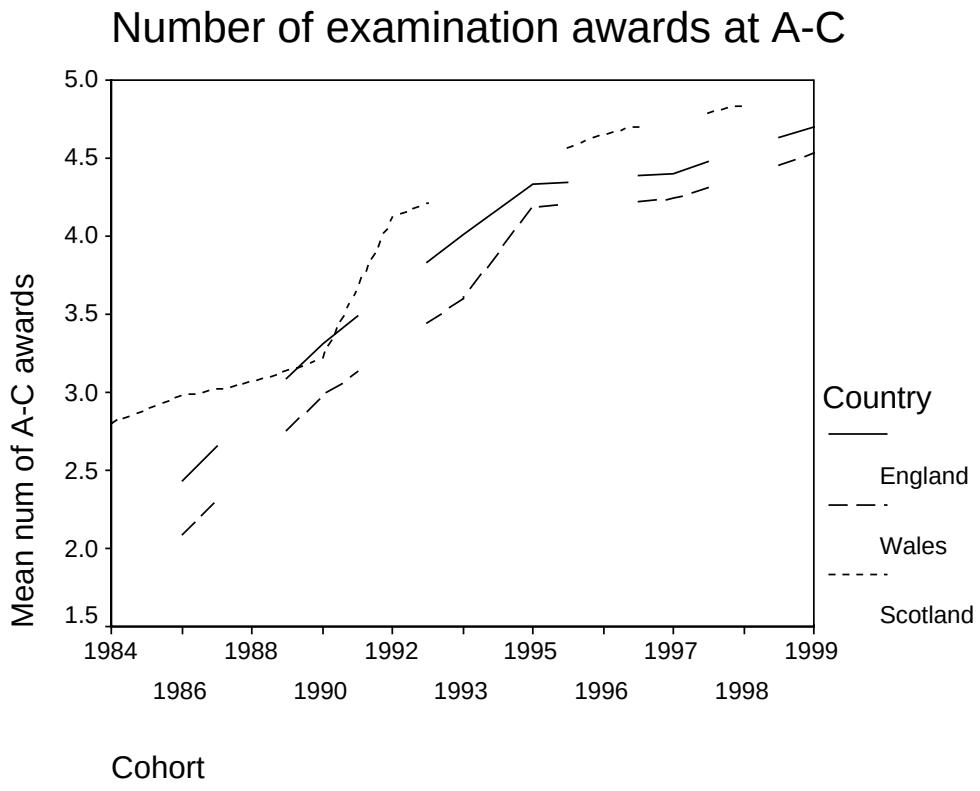
We used a statistical model to test the trends in young people's attitudes. The dependent variable was a score calculated from the number of positive responses to the attitudinal questions (counting as positive responses "agree" for the first and last question, and "disagree" for the second question). The effect of change over time was represented by continuous measure of the year of cohort (ie the year each cohort completed compulsory schooling); the measure was centred on 1990 (the most recent year for which there are English, Welsh and Scottish cohorts in the datasets). The model was a standard linear regression model, and the results are shown in Table 4: model 1. The results confirm that overall attitudes to school were significantly more positive among each successive cohort (+0.04 per year). They also confirm that among the 1990 cohort attitudes were less positive on average in Wales than in England or Scotland (-0.05). In Scotland the upward trend in young people's attitudes to school was steeper than in England and Wales (+0.03 per year).

Table 4: Effects of cohort and country on attitudes to school

	Model 1: cohort and country	
	Estimate	**SE**
Mean of reference category (see note 1)	1.72	.005
Year of cohort (effect of each year after 1990: see note 2)	0.04	.001
Country		
Wales	-0.05	.020
Scotland	-0.04ns	.025
Wales * year of cohort	0.002ns	.004
Scotland * year of cohort	0.03	.004

Notes 1: The reference category refers to: the 1990 cohort; England.
2. "Year of cohort" is a continuous variable centred on 1990 (1984 is -6 and 1999 is +9).
3. Other 2-way interactions were not significant
4. N=91219 cases

Figure 5



Model 2 examines the extent to which increasingly positive attitudes to school are associated with rising levels of attainment and participation in post-16 education. There have been very substantial increases in average levels of attainment in the 1980s and 1990s; Figure 5 shows the average number of awards achieved at grades A-C (or 1-3) in public examinations at the end of compulsory schooling. In fact the examination systems themselves have been transformed over this period,[2] from systems intended for the top third of the ability range to

[2] At the beginning of the 1980s, the examinations in England and Wales were known as the General Certificate of Education O-level, and these were replaced from by a new system know as the General Certificate of

systems that can be accessed by all pupils. Nevertheless, we can compare attainment across the cohorts using this measure because the examination organisations have attempted to maintain grades A-C (or 1-3) at a comparable standard across the systems. Figure 5 shows that the increase in average attainment occurred throughout Britain. However, there were differences in attainment between the three systems, with consistently lower average attainment in Wales than in England. These differences may be associated with lower average socio-economic status in Wales than England.

Figure 6

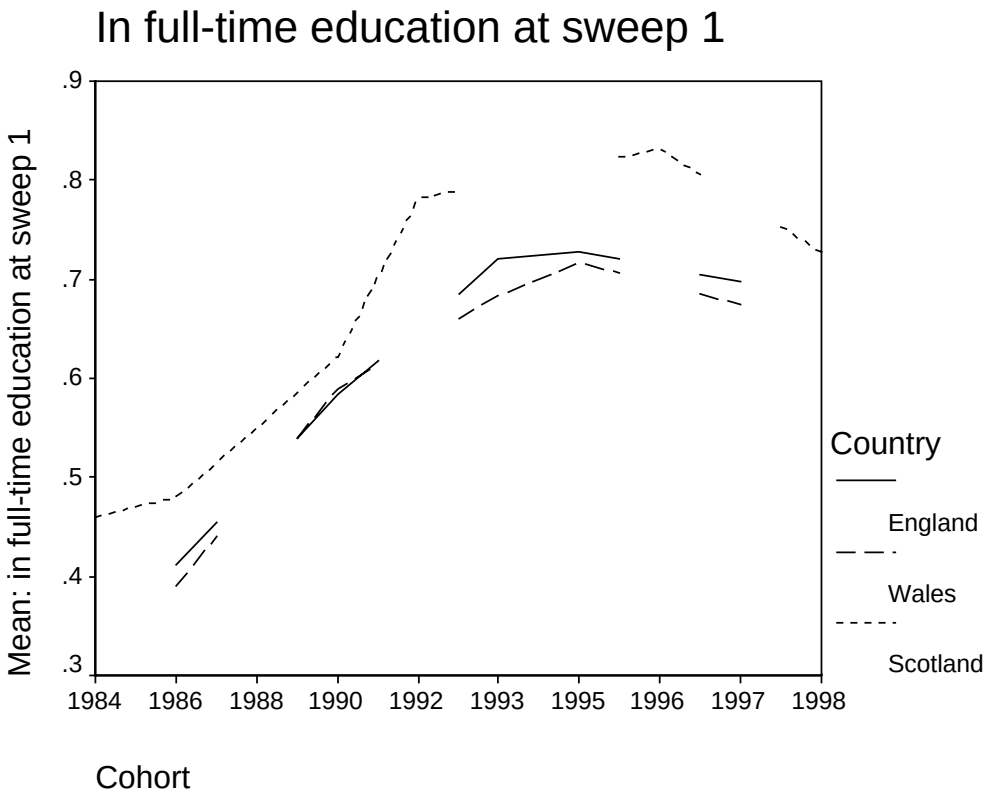


Figure 6 shows the increasing proportion of young people who stayed on in full-time education after the end of compulsory schooling. It confirms that in Scotland participation in the first post-compulsory year has been consistently higher than elsewhere in Britain, and the upward trend in the early 1990s was steeper. However, the high peak in 1996 in Scotland is caused by a survey-design error, and the subsequent falling trend in participation between 1996 and 1998 is exaggerated.

Secondary Education (GCSE). Similar development in Scotland led to the replacement of the Scottish Certificate of Education "Ordinary grade" by "Standard grade".

Table 5: Factors associated with attitudes to school

	Model 2: attainment and school type	
	Estimate	**SE**
Mean of reference category (see note 1)	1.42	.007
Year of cohort (effect of each year after 1990: see note 2)	0.02	.002
Country		
Wales	-0.03 ns	.018
Scotland	-0.08	.028
Scotland * year of cohort	0.04	.004
Attainment (effect of each award at A-C)	0.04	.002
Attainment*year of cohort	-0.001	.000
Attainment*Scotland	-0.01	.003
In full-time education at sweep 1	0.28	.011
In full-time education*year	0.009	.002
School type		
Secondary Modern	ns	
Grammar	-0.13	.028
Independent	0.07	.016
Special status state-funded	ns	
Grammar*year of cohort	0.02	.006

Notes 1: The reference category refers to: the 1990 cohort; England; no awards at A-C; not in full-time education at sweep 1; comprehensive school.
2. "Year of cohort" is a continuous variable centred on 1990 (1984 is -6 and 1999 is +9).
3. Other 2-way interactions were not significant.
4. N=76829 cases

Model 2 (Table 5) suggests that young people with higher levels of attainment tended to have more positive attitudes to school (Table 5: +0.04 for each additional examination award on average) but the negative interaction term between attainment and year of cohort suggests that the effects of attainment on attitudes to school were smaller in later cohorts than in 1990. There was also a negative interaction between attainment and Scotland (Table 5: -0.01), which suggests that the relationship between attainment and attitudes to school is weaker in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain.

Young people who were still in full-time education at sweep 1 were more likely to have positive attitudes to school than those who had left education (Table 5: +0.28). Moreover, the difference in attitudes between those who were in full-time education and those who were not increased over the time period (Table 5: +0.009).

Attitudes were more positive, on average, among pupils in independent schools than those in state-funded schools (+0.07). However, it is surprising to find that pupils in grammar schools had more negative attitudes than other schools (-0.13), since grammar schools have selective intakes with relatively high average socio-economic status and achieve high average attainment. There was, however, an upward trend in attitudes in the grammar schools among later cohorts. There was no evidence that young people who attended other types of school,

such as secondary moderns or schools with special status, had different attitudes than pupils in comprehensive schools.

Perhaps the most interesting finding from Model 2 is that the overall increase in positive attitudes to school was still significant after taking account of attainment, post-16 participation and school-type. This suggests that young people who attended comprehensive schools had increasingly positive attitudes to their school experience, irrespective of their attainment. In addition, the differences between Scotland and England are still evident after controlling for attainment and school type: in 1992 young people in Scotland had less positive attitudes to school than those in England, but attitudes improved more sharply thereafter, so that at the end of the decade young people at Scottish comprehensive schools had even more positive attitudes to school than their counterparts in England and Wales.

Problems of explanation

How can we explain these trends that young people are becoming more positive about their school experiences?

- Do they arise from changes in *societal context*? Can we suggest that common (upward) trends arise from changes in societal context that are common across the UK (and perhaps more widely)? For example, have changes in the labour market led to greater awareness among young people of the value of school curriculum and qualifications?
- To what extent do changes in the *administrative systems* impact on young people's attitudes? Can we suggest that policy differences between England, Wales and Scotland have led to different trends in attitudes? Are youngsters becoming more positive because the curriculum is more relevant following curriculum reforms? Have reforms of the examination system made schooling more inclusive and relevant for young people with average and lower attainment?
- What is the relationship between improved attitudes and other changes in *social relations?* for example, could we say that attitudes have been influenced by rising levels of attainment and post-16 participation? or, on the other hand, that improved attitudes have been a factor influencing levels of attainment and participation?
- Have problems with the *data* created spurious differences in trends?

Perhaps the conceptual framework with which we started this project is too static, and we need a new framework to understand changes over time. Changes at each level of the framework may reinforce changes at other levels. We have seen that there are clear patterns of association between attitudes, attainment and post-16 participation. It seems likely that factors arising from societal context and administrative systems are bringing about simultaneous changes in a number of outcomes. In fact, these changes are mutually reinforcing, since the overall context of education is changed by the increasing levels of attainment and participation, and increasing levels of satisfaction with schooling.

These analyses will be developed further in coming months as we develop the time series datasets to include variables describing socio-economic status and contextual information.

Future work

The research project will encompass a number of issues related to education and youth transitions, and adding the trend dimension to our Home Internationals study will enable us to address new questions, including the comparative effect of social and demographic change; the comparative effects of expansion in post-compulsory and higher education; the effect of devolution (administrative and subsequently political).

Further information about the research is available: http://www.ed.ac.uk/ces

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