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

Working Paper 17

TRENDS IN EDUCATION AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS ACROSS BRITAIN 1984-2002

Background paper for Conference: Education and Social Change: England, Wales and Scotland 1984-2002, to be held in Edinburgh on 12 May 2006

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at broad trends in young people's experiences of education during the 1980s and 1990s and locates them in the context of very considerable social, economic and policy change. It brings together findings of an ESRC-funded research project entitled *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland 1984-2002* (the EYT project). It considers trends that were common throughout Britain, and considers the extent to which these varied across the national territories: a 'Home International' comparison. England, Wales and Scotland have different, though interdependent, education systems for which there has been progressive devolution of responsibility during the last two decades, and there may be increased divergence following the creation of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales in 1999 (Raffe *et al*, 1999). A further comparison is provided of trends in the north and south of England, since there are important regional differences in socio-economic context.

Our framework for considering the broad patterns of social change is described at three inter-connected levels: (1) the societal context; (2) the administrative systems; and (3) aspects of the social relations of education, in terms of outcomes and transitions of young people (Croxford and Raffe, 1999). The specific outcomes considered are attainment, perceptions of the usefulness of school, participation in post-compulsory education, entry to higher education, and transitions to the labour market.

The empirical evidence about young people's experiences comes from time-series data derived from the England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Scottish School Leavers Surveys (SSLS). These are postal questionnaire surveys that cover nationally-representative samples of young people at age 16, and again at age 18. The surveys have been commissioned by government departments since 1984 and some similar questions in the two survey series permit comparative analysis. However, there are considerable problems with the cohort data, arising from changes in survey contractors and survey design, gaps in the series, inconsistencies in question wording and coding, and in some surveys the poor quality

of occupation coding (Croxford, 2006). Because of these problems we must put "health warnings" on the youth cohort data as a source of evidence. Nevertheless, in the absence of alternative data sources, we have attempted to create comparable time-series datasets for the EYT project.

CHANGES IN THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT

The two-decades covered by this paper are the 1980s and 1990s, during which the cumulative effects of social and economic change originating earlier in the century - especially changes in the industrial structure of Britain, the decline in manufacturing industry and related decline in the proportion of workers in manual employment - changed the context of education. The early 1980s, in which the youth cohort surveys were initiated, were characterised by sharp falls in the demand for minimum-age low-qualified school leavers, and consequent development of government sponsored youth training programmes to address the problems of youth unemployment. The period saw a radical changes in the youth labour market coupled with increasing participation in post-16 education (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

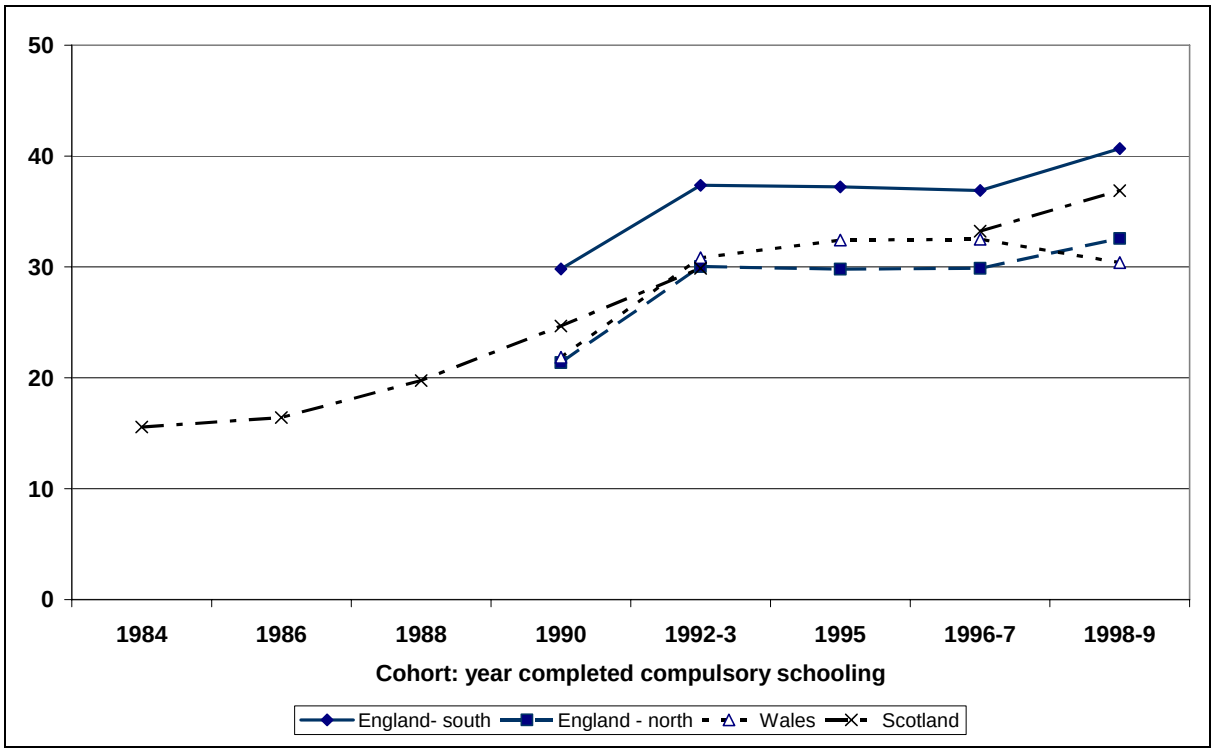
Over the two decades the labour market has demanded higher levels of educational qualifications. An increasing proportion of the work force are engaged in "white collar" jobs, and within their ranks the growing number of managers and professionals reflect the increasingly complex division of labour based on scientific and capital-intensive technology (Halsey, 2000). The need for the education system to develop the skills and talents required in the knowledge-based economy was first emphasised in 1976 by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan when he initiated the "Great Debate", and has been re-iterated by policy makers many times thereafter. Similarly, young people and their parents have increasingly been made aware of the importance of educational qualifications as a means of opening career opportunities.

Education policies in previous decades have themselves played a part in social change. In particular, the increased provision of free public education after the war, and subsequent raising of the school leaving age to 15 in 1947, and 16 in 1972, meant that the parents of the school students of the 1980s and 1990s have themselves experienced increasing levels of education. The reorganisation of schools on comprehensive lines from 1965-80, although contested and incomplete in England, was an important step in reducing social class barriers in education in Scotland (McPherson and Willms, 1987). Labour market changes together with educational expansion and comprehensive reforms enabled a large number of working class children to be upwardly mobile and to enter professional and managerial occupations. However, the relative differences among social classes in the chances of reaching top-level occupations have not substantially changed over time in both England and Scotland (Goldthorpe and Mills, 2004; Iannelli and Paterson, forthcoming).

Data from the youth cohort surveys show some of the impact of societal change on the family background of survey respondents: increasing proportions of parents had post-compulsory education (Figure 1), and were in managerial or professional occupations (Figure 2). The cohort surveys also show regional variations in overall levels of parental background and relative change over time. For example, levels of parental education and

managerial/professional status were higher in the south of England[1] than elsewhere in Britain, and this reflects strong regional differences in economic prosperity and the impact of economic change (Croxford, 2005). The upward trends in levels of parental education and managerial/ professional employment were clearest in Scotland where the rate of increase in these measures over the 1980s and 1990s was greater than in England and Wales. However, the proportion of parents with post-16 education or managerial/professional occupations in Scotland did not catch up with those in the south of England.

Figure 1: Change over time in parents' education[2]: % of parents with A-levels (E&W) or stayed at school to 17+ (Scotland)



During the 1980s and 1990s there have been increasing opportunities for women in education and the labour market, following the reduction of barriers by the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and other successes of feminism (Arnot *et al*, 1999). The effects of these changes include increasing rates of employment and educational participation by women; for example, in the Scottish cohort surveys the proportion with mothers full-time unpaid in the home decreased from 25% in 1984 to 11% in 1998. They impact on the context of schooling through reduction of the gender barriers within schools, including access to some areas of the curriculum and increasing the career aspirations of girls (Croxford, 2000).

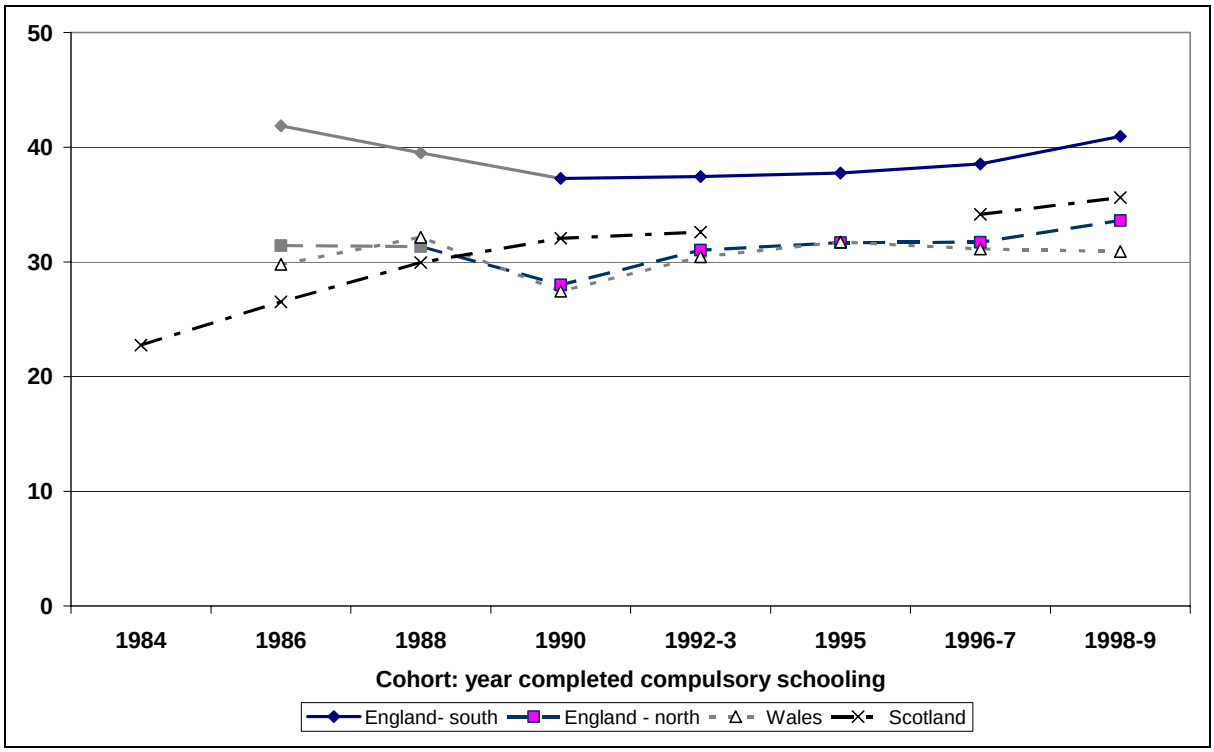
The two decades covered by this research were also a period of demographic change, with the numbers of 16-year olds in the population falling to a low-point in 1993. In England and

[1] For this analysis the south of England comprises four government office regions: south-west, south-east, east of England and London. Although government office regions were not defined in the early youth cohort surveys, we allocated these retrospectively using Standard Statistical Region and local education authority.

[2] The last three Scottish cohorts do not coincide exactly with the England and Wales cohorts, but for simplicity of presentation, the Scottish 1992, 1996 and 1998 cohorts are included with the 1993, 1997 and 1999 cohorts respectively. There was no Scottish survey of the 1994 cohort.
Cohort surveys in England and Wales prior to 1990 did not include questions on parental education and did not provide detailed occupation codes for parents. The 1984 cohort for E&W is omitted because it did not include independent schools.

Wales the size of the 16-year old population in 1993 was just 72% of that in 1984, although there was a slight increase to 81% by 1999. In Scotland the decline in the numbers of 16-year olds was steeper and more sustained that elsewhere in Britain, and by 1998 the numbers were just 71% of the 1984 level. Hayward *et al* (2005) suggest that schools and colleges met the consequent challenge of reduced student numbers by diversifying their provision of courses to allow participation by a wider range of students.

Figure 2: Change over time in parents' social class: % of parents in managerial or professional occupations



ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS AND POLICY CHANGES IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

The education and training systems of the three national territories are interdependent and share many common features which reflect distinctively British patterns of attainment, participation and transition, but there are significant differences between them (Croxford and Raffe, 1999; Raffe *et al*, 1999). A key difference between their school systems arises because in Wales and Scotland secondary schools are more comprehensive, and characterised by more social mixing, compared with the diverse range of state schools in England (Croxford and Paterson, *forthcoming*). In England the independent sector is larger than elsewhere in Britain, and there are also more single-sex and "faith" schools. There were regional differences within England in the coverage of the comprehensive system, with 80% of young people in the south of England attending schools that were at least nominally comprehensive, compared with 90% in the north of England, 95% in Scotland and 98% in Wales.

During the 1980s and 1990s there were a number of important developments in education and training (detailed by Jones, 2003; Wright and Oancea, 2004); we outline several key developments below. The implementation of these changes took slightly different forms in the three national territories.

Creation of quasi-markets in education, including greater parental choice of school from 1980. Performance indicators for schools were published from 1992. Further measures to promote market forces in schools in England and Wales (but not Scotland) were introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), including Open Enrolment, reduction of local authority control over schools, and National Testing at key stages. The development of quasi-markets went much further in England than in Scotland or Wales (Adler, 1997; Raffe, 2005). More recently, policies to introduce specialist schools in England have not been adopted in Scotland or Wales.

New systems of assessment and certification at age 16, providing appropriate awards for pupils of all levels of attainment. The systems of examination in place at the beginning of the 1980s had been designed to cater for the top third of the ability range, and were not appropriate for all students. The division of students between "certificate" and "non-certificate" classes was very selective and had negative effects on pupils' motivation (Gow and McPherson, 1980). The introduction in 1986 of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in England and Wales and Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE) Standard Grade in Scotland provided systems of certification for a much wider range of abilities, and thus provided greater motivation for students (Ashford *et al*, 1993; Gamoran 1996). Initially, both GCSE and Standard Grade included assessment of course work as a component of the final grade, and this is still the case in the Scottish examinations. However, in England there has been increasing emphasis on external examinations, and erosion of the role of course work, because of anxieties about "standards".

Curriculum change. The introduction of a common curriculum framework in Scotland from 1983, and National Curriculum in England and Wales following the 1988 ERA may to some extent have created a curriculum entitlement that reduced inequalities by gender and social class (Croxford, 1996, 2000). However, the common core has been reduced in the 1990s to give greater flexibility of subject choice. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) from 1983 aimed to make what was taught in schools more relevant to the world of work.

New qualifications for post-compulsory stages. In England and Wales the main academic post-compulsory qualification is Advanced (A) level which is taken over two years, with students needing at least two A-level passes for entry to Higher Education. In Scotland the SCE Higher Grade is usually taken over one year, in which students take up to five subjects, although 3+ Higher Grade passes are the notional equivalent of the 2+ A-levels needed for entry to Higher Education. The Scottish Higher Grade has been regarded as less specialised than the A-level, and this, coupled with its shorter duration, has been seen to encourage higher levels of participation. Major reforms of post-compulsory qualifications were introduced at the end of the 1990s, including the reform of A-levels and creation of A/S levels in E&W, and the Higher Still reforms in Scotland which attempted to create a unified system of academic and vocational qualifications (Howieson *et al*, 1997).

New types of vocational qualifications

New types of vocational qualifications were introduced (and modified) in the 1980s and 90s in response to the perceived need to raise skill levels in Britain, to improve its economic competitiveness and to provide appropriate opportunities for the increasing proportion of the cohort staying on in full-time education. A new type of work-based qualification based on

occupational standards – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) – and its Scottish equivalent (SVQ) - was introduced from 1986. In England and Wales, a more broad based vocational qualification – the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) - was introduced in 1992 for full-time study in schools and colleges. GNVQs were envisaged as providing progression into both employment and also higher education but, in practice, they became more aligned with A levels and tend to function as a route to continued full-time study. GNVQs were introduced alongside existing broad vocational qualifications in England and Wales (eg BTEC and City and Guilds). In Scotland, National Certificate modules covering both general and vocational learning were introduced in 1986 for use in school, college and the work place. National Certificate modules blurred the boundaries between academic and vocational education and helped to prevent the development of a distinct broad vocational track as in England. When the Scottish equivalent of GNVQs was introduced in 1992, they lacked the clear client group that existed for GNVQs. National Certificate modules were subsumed within the unified system of academic and vocational qualifications in 1999. Overall, levels of participation in vocational qualifications tended to be lower in Scotland than in England. However, in all three systems vocational qualifications have tended to be regarded with lower esteem than academic qualifications (Raffe *et al* 2001), and to be less well understood by the respondents to youth cohort surveys.

Government-supported training. Government sponsored training originated in programmes set up in the late 1970s in response to increasing levels of youth unemployment. The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) introduced in 1983, was the first of a series of national programmes that went beyond this, aiming to provide 16-18 year olds with integrated programmes of work experience and training. While unemployed young people were guaranteed a place on YTS (and subsequent programmes), in contrast to the programmes it replaced, young people did not **have** to be unemployed to enter YTS and participants could be employees (employed status) rather than trainees. The national programmes of youth training have been re-structured and re-launched over the years in an effort to raise their status and improve the training provided, for example, by increasing the proportions of participants on training programmes who are employees rather than trainees, encouraging greater employer involvement and 'ownership' and focusing on the achievement of outcomes, especially the attainment of NVQs/SVQs (Raffe *et al*, 1998). From the mid 1990s, in an effort to reinvigorate youth training, government has consciously drawn on the apprenticeship tradition with the creation of the Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Government training programmes across the national territories began to diverge in certain respects (including their criteria for eligibility and selection) from 1990 when responsibility for them passed from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to the newly created Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC) in England and Wales and Local Enterprise Companies (LEC) in Scotland. National Traineeships and later Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (training to NVQ level 2) and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in England but not in Scotland. Instead, in Scotland, Skillseekers became the national programme, later incorporating Modern Apprenticeships, available only at the higher level of NVQ/SVQ 3 (technician level).

Expansion of participation in Higher Education (HE). Since the 1980s there has been a period of rapid expansion in HE, and in 1992 the former polytechnics and "old" universities were brought into a single system. The HE system in Scotland has a number of differences

compared to elsewhere in Britain, including higher levels of participation, and greater provision of HE qualifications in further education (FE) colleges (Iannelli, 2005).

CHANGES IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

Our information about young people's experiences comes from their responses to the youth cohort surveys: the Scottish School Leavers Surveys and the England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (Croxford, 2006).

Some idea of the extent of change in young people's experiences can be gained by contrasting the information provided by cohorts who completed compulsory schooling in the mid 1980s with those of the late 1990s (Table 1).[3] In the mid-1980s, over 40% of young people did not achieve any examination passes by age 16, 58% left education as soon as they could legally do so at the end of compulsory schooling, and over half felt that school had done little to prepare them for life after school. At that time, secondary education was geared to the more academically able pupils, but over the 1980s and 1990s there were considerable changes in school systems, including widening participation in examinations. By the end of the 1990s the proportion with no exam success was halved and over half of the cohort attained 5+ awards at A-C. More young people at the end of the compulsory stages had fallen to less than a third, while two-thirds of young people disagreed with the statement that school had done little to prepare them for life after school.

The school to work transition changed dramatically over the 1980s and 1990s. At the start of the 1980s the majority of young people entered the labour market at age 16, although jobs were becoming scarce and unemployment rising. Government-supported youth training programmes were the main labour market activity for young people in the 1986 cohort, especially young men. By the late 1990s the flow of entrants to the labour market aged 16-18 was greatly reduced, as more young people remained in full-time education for longer periods.

Educational outcomes of 18-year olds have also changed over the 1980s and 1990s. The proportion gaining level 3 qualifications[4] has risen from a fifth of the cohort to almost a half. The early years of the cohort surveys show that higher education was an experience enjoyed by just a small minority: 11% had entered HE by age 18, and just 9% were studying for a degree. By the end of the 1990s these proportions had more than doubled.

However, there were some variations in these trends between different groups of young people, and we consider these in turn.

[3] In Table 1 data for England, Wales and Scotland are combined (and the cases are weighted to compensate for the larger sampling fraction in Scottish surveys); the 1986 cohort is used as the early time point rather than the 1984 cohort which excluded independent schools in England and Wales; the 1998/9 cohort refers to the 1998 cohort for Scotland and the 1999 cohort for England and Wales.

[4] NQF levels have been applied retrospectively to the qualifications of the early cohorts.

Table 1: Experiences of school and subsequent destinations of the 1986 and 1998/9 cohorts (%)

	1986 cohort	1998/9 cohort
Experiences of school		
Achieved 5+ awards at A-C in national examinations at age 16	26	52
Did not achieve any examination passes at age 16	42	21
Left education at the end of compulsory stages	58	28
Agreed: "School has done little to prepare me for life after school"	53	34
Played truant in last year of compulsory schooling (Y11 or S4)	53	36
Main activity at age 16		
Full-time education	42	72
Full-time job	22	9
Government supported training	26	9
Unemployed	8	5
other	2	4
Main activity at age 18		
Full-time education	20	41
Full-time job	63	31
Government supported training	3	8
Unemployed	8	7
other	6	13
Outcomes at age 18		
Achieved level 3 qualification (academic or vocational)	21	47
Achieved 2+ A-levels or 3+ Highers	15	33
In Higher Education	11	27
Studying for a degree	9	22

ATTAINMENT AT AGE 16

Attainment in national examinations at age 16 is an important outcome for young people. Following the administrative reforms that introduced GCSE and Standard Grade examination, almost all students participated in these examinations. Upward trends in attainment are illustrated in Figure 3, focusing on gender difference in the percentage of respondents achieving five or more awards at GCE/GCSE A-C or Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE) Ordinary/Standard Grade 1-3.[5] On average, females achieved higher attainment than males throughout the period, and the gap widened because the average attainment of females rose more rapidly than that of males. These upward trends in attainment and gender differences were found in each of the British education systems, but the gender gap widened over time, faster in England and Wales than in Scotland (Croxford and Raffe, 2006).

[5] For this analysis awards at 1, 2, 3 of SCE Ordinary/Standard Grade are equivalent to GCSE A, B, C respectively. The measure 5+ A-C is frequently used in England and Wales as a selection criterion for entry to post-16 courses, and as a performance indicator. This measure is less appropriate for Scotland, but is used here for simplicity of presentation. Other analyses based on attainment point scores show similar results.

Figure 3: Gender differences in attainment of 5+ GCSE/SG at A-C/1-3

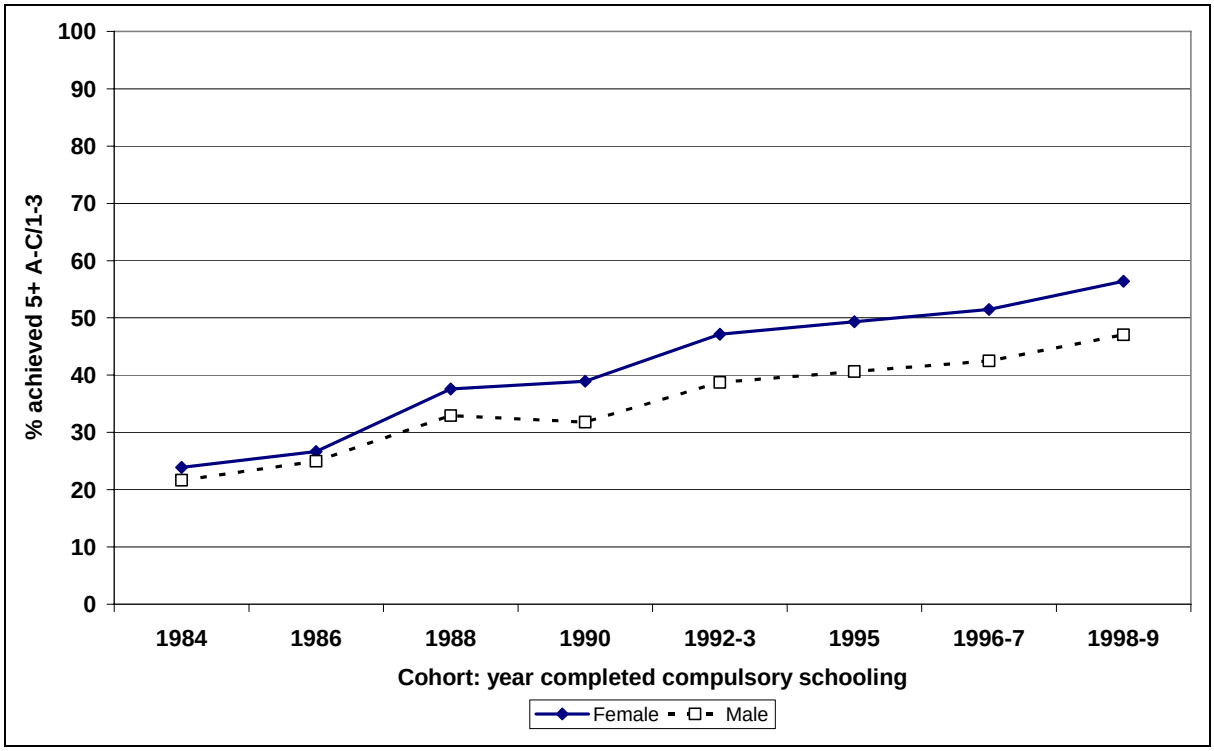
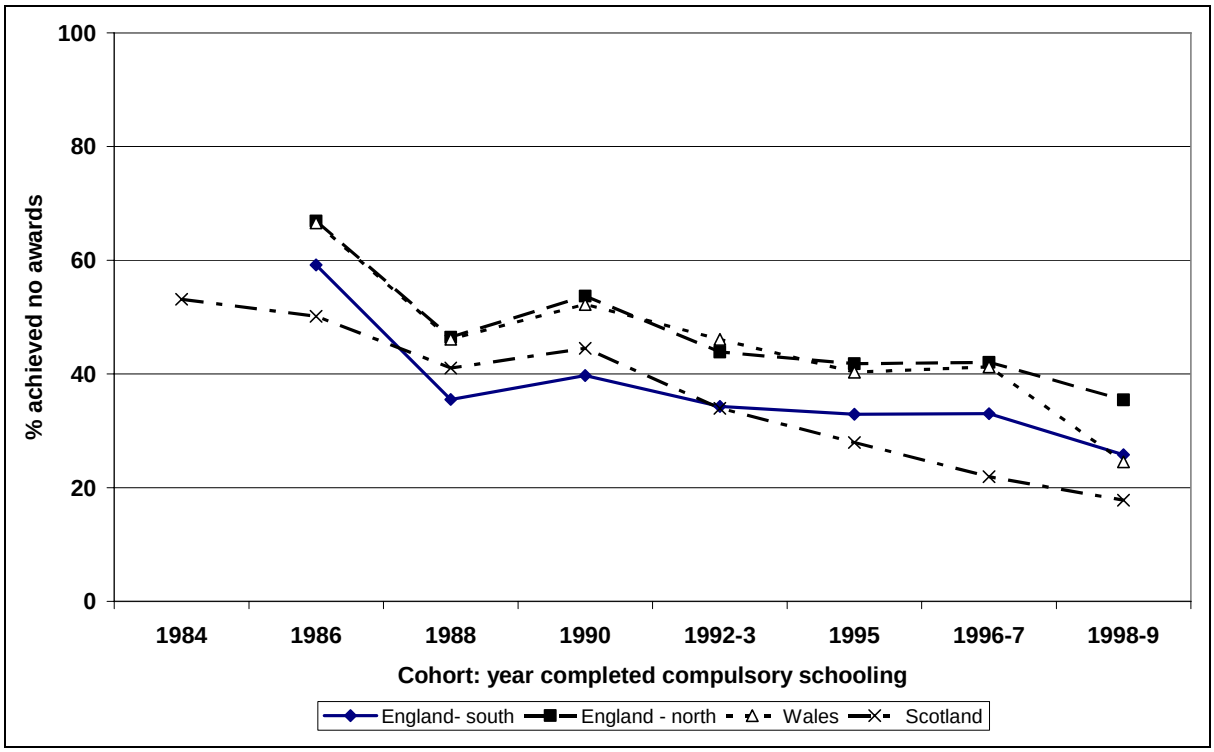


Figure 4: % achieved no awards at A-C in GCSE or SG at age 16



The proportion of young people who failed to gain any exam passes at A-C fell substantially over the two decades (Figure 4). The sharp decline in low attainment between the 1986 and 1988 cohorts is undoubtedly the impact of the introduction of new examination systems throughout Britain that were designed to encompass a wide range of ability. On average the proportion with no awards at A-C was lower in the south of England than in the north of

England or Wales, and this reflects regional differences in socio-economic context, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 above. However, if we compare the trends for the south of England with those in Scotland we see that socio-economic context has less impact than the differences between national education systems. Scotland's socio-economic context had more in common with the north of England and Wales, but the decline in the proportion of low attainers was greater in Scotland than the south of England, and we may suggest that this may be a reflection of a more inclusive education system in Scotland.

POST-16 PARTICIPATION

Our measure of post-16 participation is based on responses to questions about main activity in the spring approximately nine months after the end of compulsory schooling. Throughout Britain, overall levels of participation rose sharply until 1992-3, and then remained steady through the 1990s (Figure 5). On average, post-16 participation was higher in the south of England than elsewhere, and this reflects not only regional differences in socio-economic context, but also differences in GCSE attainment (Payne, 1995). Figure 6 confirms that post-16 participation is strongly associated with attainment at age 16, and that the vast majority of high attainers (ie those with 5+A-C awards) stayed on in full-time education throughout the period. Young people with medium and low attainment were much less likely to stay on in education during the 1980s, but there was a sharp increase in their participation in the early 1990s, reaching a peak between 1992 and 1995. Thus the overall increase in post-16 participation is partly, but not wholly, explained by rising levels of attainment in compulsory schooling. Paterson and Raffe (1995) suggested that only one third of the increase in participation could be explained by 'compositional' factors, that is, by the increasing proportion of 16-year olds with high attainment in national examinations or increasing levels of parental education and that other factors also play a part: that changes in the labour market, and in HE, had weakened the 'pull' of young people out of education at 16 and increased the incentives to stay on. Similar patterns for the period to 1999 were found by Shapira and Howieson (2005). The changing balance of incentives may help to explain the levelling off and then the slight decline in participation rates in England from 1992-3. Hayward *et al* (2005) suggest that the recovery of the labour market, including an expansion of demand for less-qualified workers, meant that the returns to continuing in education became more marginal for those with lower GCSE qualifications who began to leave full-time education at 16 or 17 to enter the labour market.

Figure 5: Participation in full-time education in spring, nine months after the end of compulsory schooling (%)

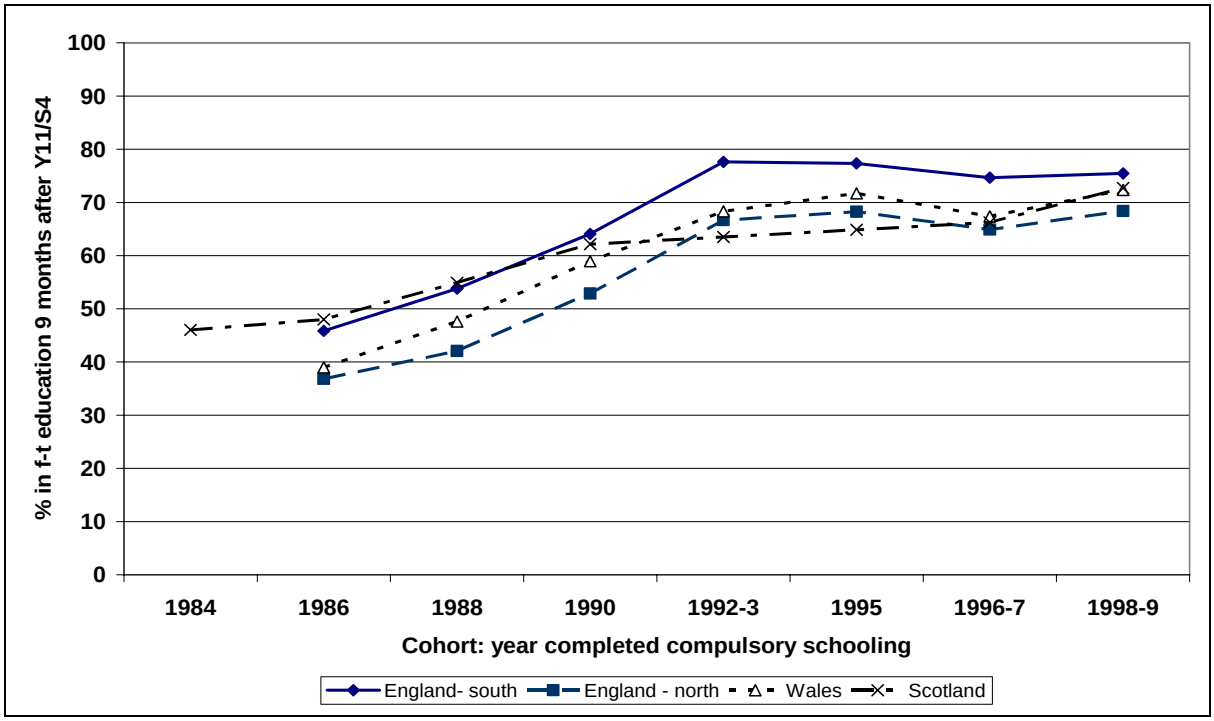
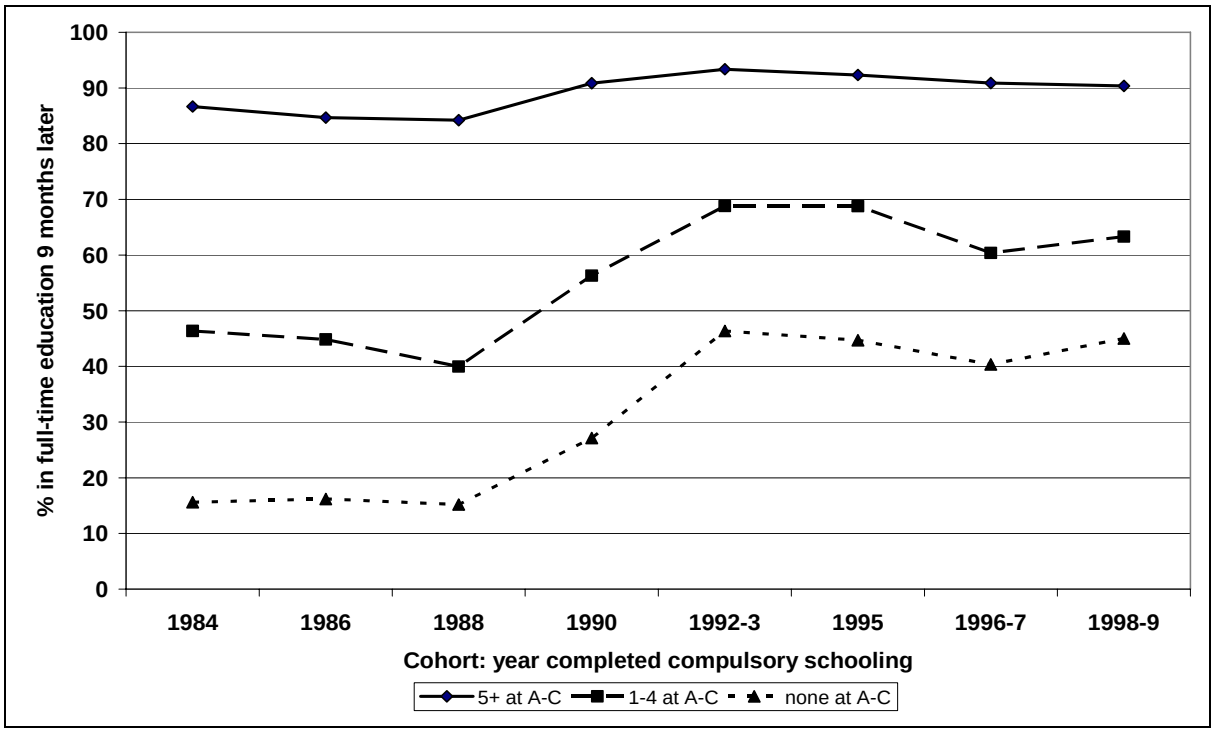


Figure 6: Participation in post-compulsory education by attainment at age 16



YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Three questions about young peoples' perceptions of their last two years of compulsory schooling have been included in the England and Wales cohort surveys consistently over a number of years, and also in the Scottish surveys since 1992. 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 box 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 7, and reveal that young people are becoming increasingly positive about their school experience. There are clear upward trends in the proportions of young people who agreed that school helped give them confidence to make decisions and taught them things which would be useful in a job. Similarly, increasing proportions of young people disagreed with the statement that school has done little to prepare them for life after school. These trends did not vary between the north or south of England or between England and Wales. In Scotland the questions were not asked until 1992, at which point attitudes were similar to those in England and Wales, and thereafter the trend towards positive attitudes to school is a little steeper in Scotland than elsewhere.

Perceptions of school were associated with young people's attainment at age 16 (illustrated by Figure 8). Those with low levels of attainment (no awards at A-C/1-3) were much more likely to think that "School has done little to prepare me for life after school" than those with high attainment. Although the proportion of each attainment group expressing negative perceptions of the usefulness of school declined over the period, there was a widening gap in perceptions between low and high attainers (of the 1986 cohort, 57% of low attainers, 54% of mid-attainers and 43% of high attainers agreed that "School has done little to prepare me for life after school", and the corresponding proportions of the 1998-9 cohort were 45%, 38% and 26%). We might expect that females would have more positive attitudes to school than males, especially in view of their higher average attainment, but there was no evidence of gender differences in attitudes to school, and the increasingly positive attitudes were shown by both males and females.

Figure 7: Young people's perceptions of school (% agreed with statement)

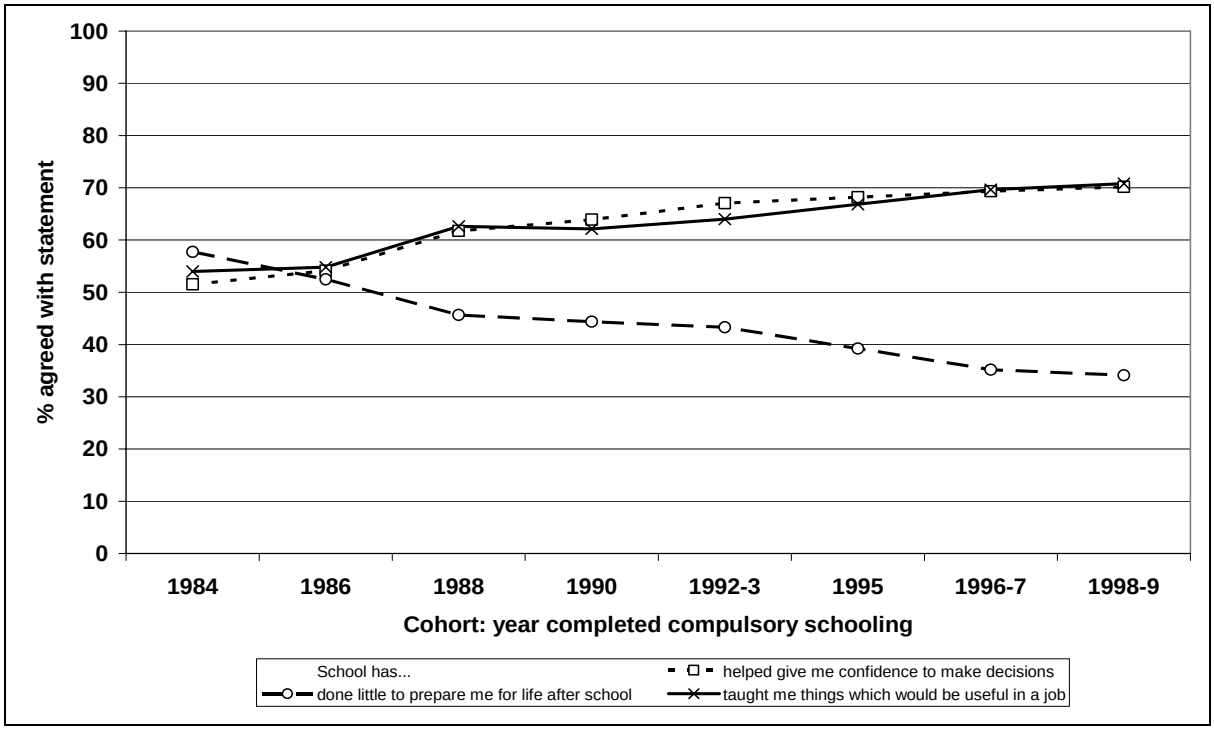
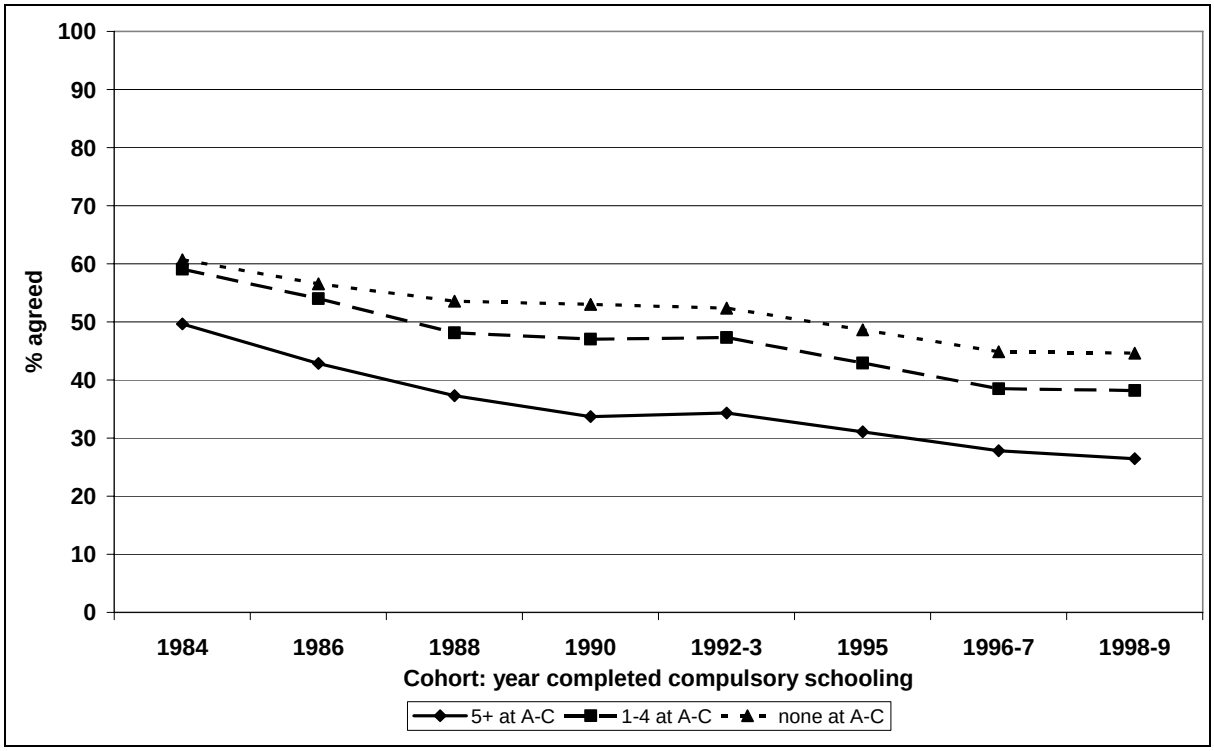


Figure 8: "School has done little to prepare me for life after school" (% agreed by attainment at 16)



MAIN ACTIVITY AT AGE 18

There was a further survey of each cohort of young people two years and nine months after the end of compulsory schooling, when they were aged approximately 18. In this section we report on the activities at age 18 of (1) those who had left school at the end of compulsory education and (2) those who remained in full-time education after the compulsory stage.

We look first at those who left education at the end of the compulsory stage. As we have seen from Table 1, the numbers of early leavers fell very substantially over the period. Figure 9 shows that at age 18, the vast majority of early leavers were in the labour market, but their likelihood of being in a full-time job declined over the 1980s and 90s. Some of the shortfall in employment was made up by government-supported training, and there was a small increase in the proportions returning to full-time education, but there was also an increase in the category of early leavers who were not in (full-time[6]) education, employment or training (NEET). In Wales the decline in full-time jobs at age 18 was greater than elsewhere, especially among early leavers.

[6] The category "other" includes part-time jobs/study, looking after family and voluntary work.

Figure 9: Main activity at age 18 of young people who did not stay-on in full-time education at age 16

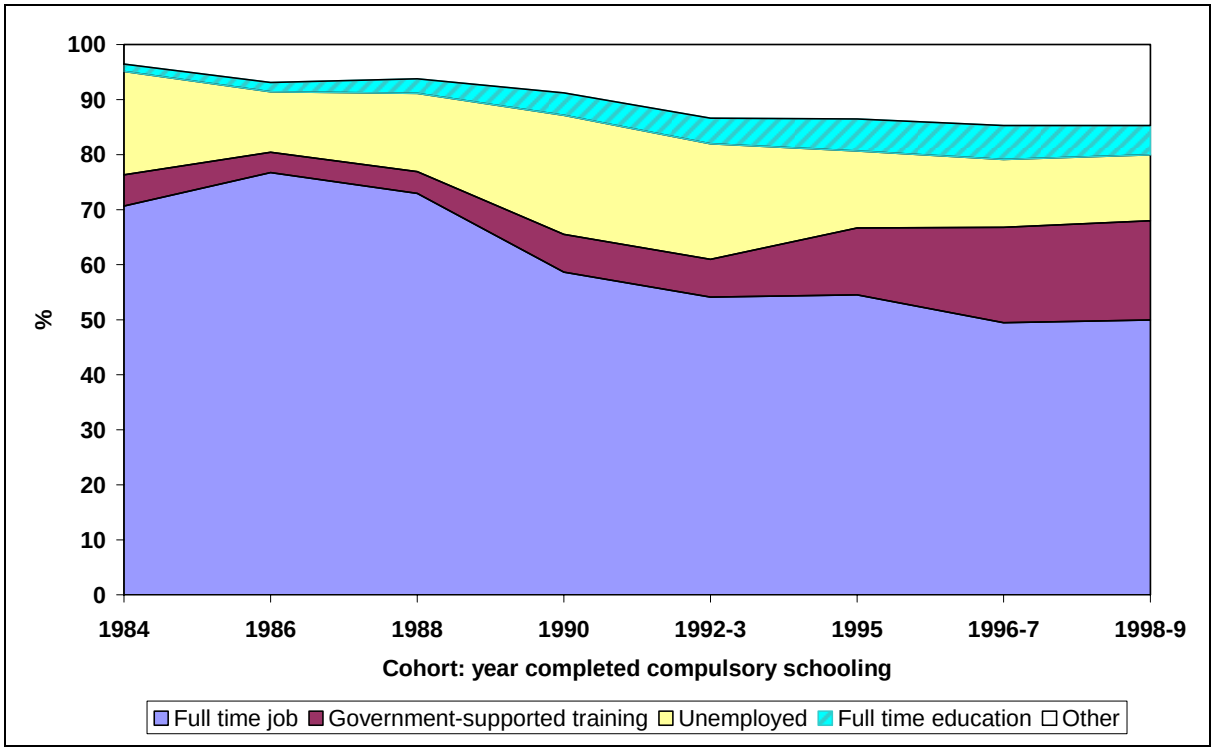
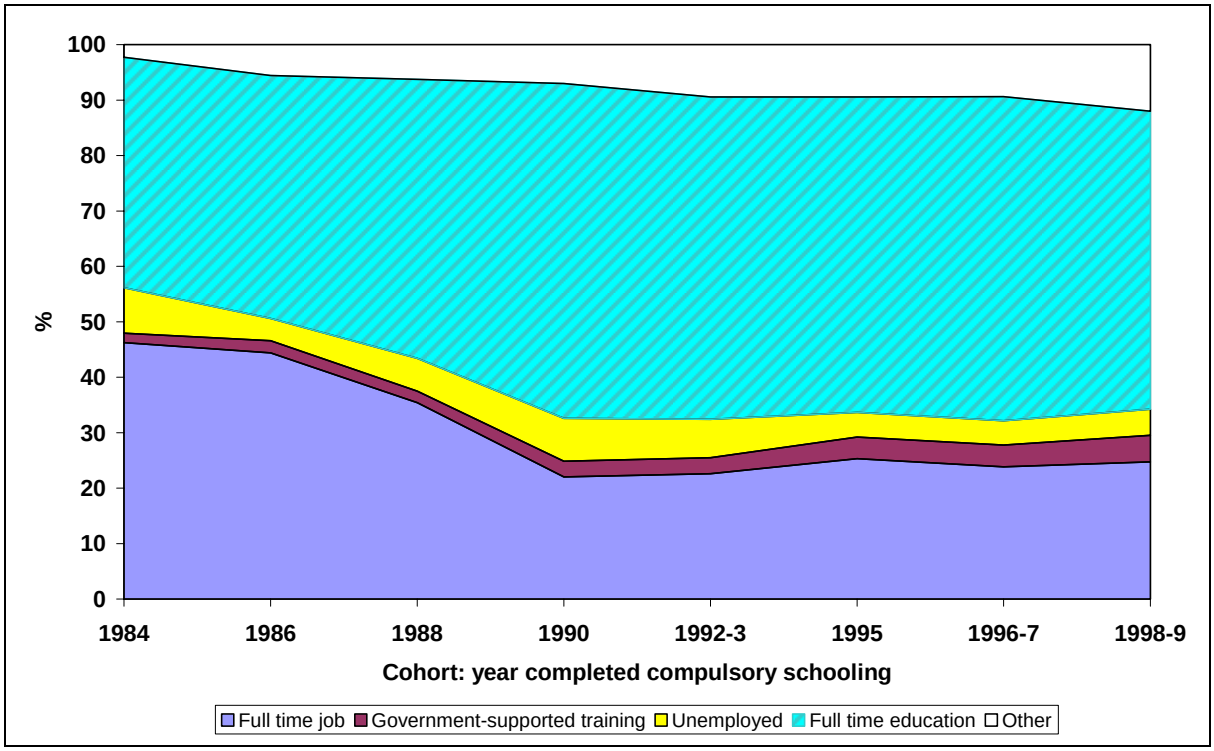


Figure 10 shows the main activity at age 18 of the other group of young people - the increasing proportion of young people who had remained in full-time education after the compulsory stage of schooling. Throughout the period, the majority of them were still in full-time education at 18, and the proportion of this group entering labour market destinations at 18 declined substantially over time.

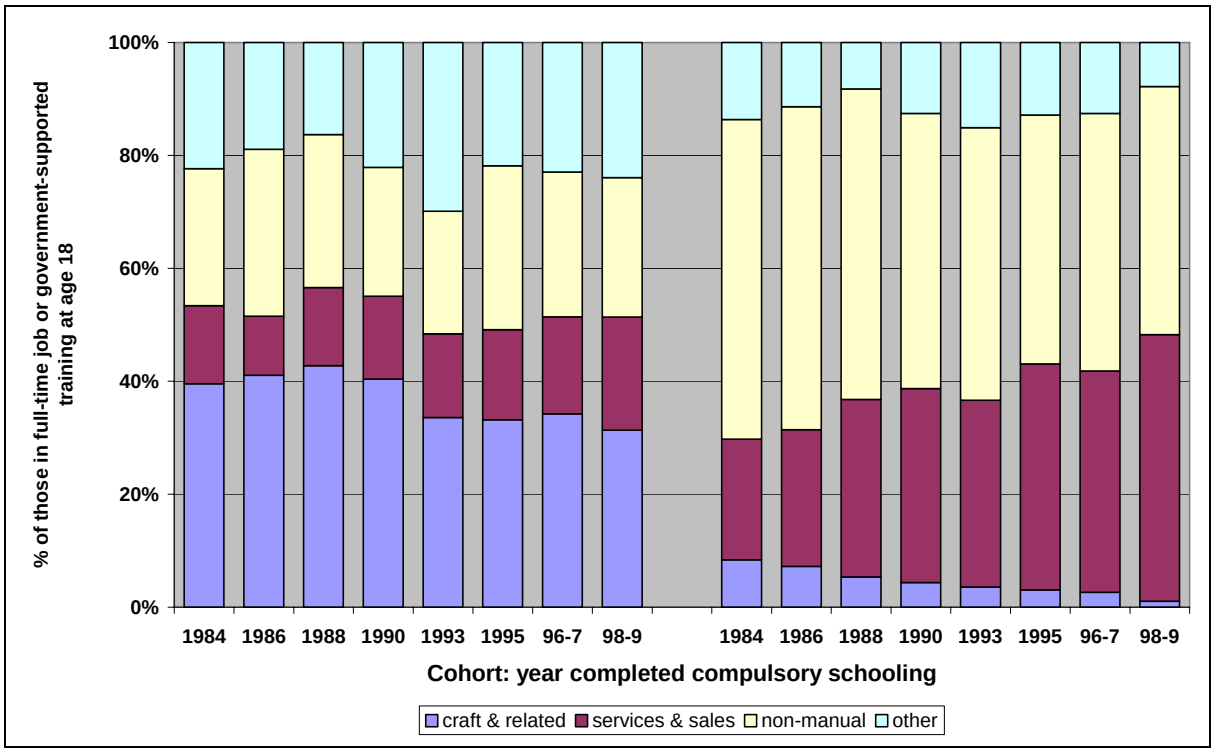
Figure 10: Main activity at age 18 of young people who stayed in education at age 16



OCCUPATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ENTERED THE LABOUR MARKET

Although there was a strong downward trend in the proportions of young people entering the labour market at age 16, the occupations they entered remained remarkably stable over the period (table not shown). Fifty percent of the young men who were in full-time jobs or training at age 16 were in craft and related occupations, and this proportion varied by no more than four percentage points until the 1998-9 cohort when it fell to 42%. There was a similar stable trend in the occupations of young men at age 18 (Figure 11[7]). Forty percent of the young men who were in full-time jobs or training at age 18 were in craft and related occupations, and this proportion fell gradually to 31 percent of the 1998-9 cohort (Shapira, *forthcoming*).

Figure 11: Occupations of young people who were in full-time jobs or government-supported training at age 18



This relative stability in the occupational destinations of young men contrasts with the picture of dramatic structural change painted by the contemporary literature on the youth labour market. This described a "collapse" of youth employment in craft and related occupations (Ashton *et al*, 1990; Elias and McKnight, 1998). We believe that the reason for the difference in findings is that other analyses focus on the decline in **numbers** of young males entering craft and related occupations, which is influenced partly by the declining population of 16-year olds, and partly by the decline in numbers entering the labour market. A further factor is the shift of craft and related employment from 'ordinary' jobs to government supported

[7] Occupations shown in Figure 11 have been derived from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) major groups. The non-manual occupational category is mainly comprised of Clerical and Secretarial (SOC major group 4) which accounts for three-quarters of this category; SOC major groups 1 (Managers & Administrators) 2 (Professional) 3 (Associate professional & technical) make up the remainder.
Craft and related is SOC major group 5.
Services and Sales include SOC major groups 6 and 7 (Personal & protective services; and Sales)
The "other" category includes SOC major group 9 (Other) with the addition of SOC major group 8 (Plant & machine operatives).

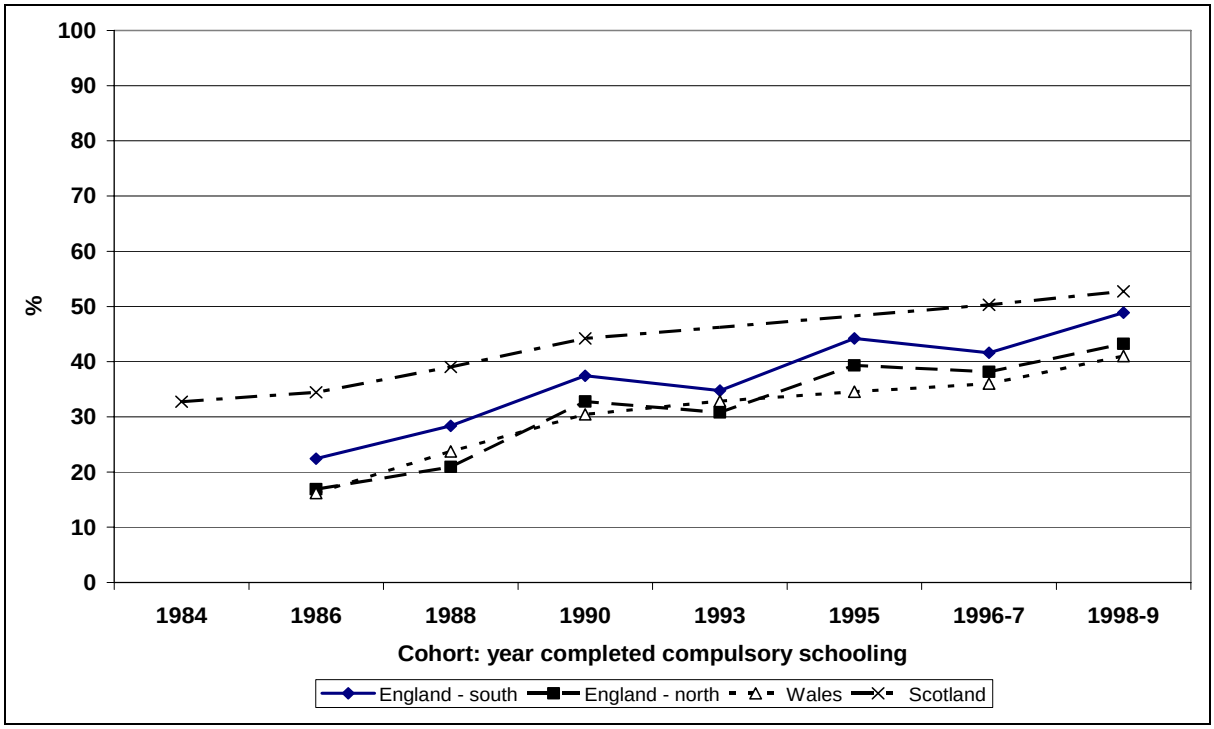
training as this became more employment based as noted earlier (although it is difficult to separate these in the survey data). Our findings suggest that although the numbers of young men entering the full-time labour market have shrunk considerably, the occupations they enter have not changed to a very great extent. This is supported by another study using SSLS data which concluded that despite the absolute decline in skilled manual occupations, the craft and related occupations offer a 'sheltered entry point' for male school leavers (Biggart, 2002).

Occupations entered by young women at age 16 also changed very gradually. Of the young women who entered full-time jobs or training at age 16, 42 percent of the 1984 cohort were in clerical and secretarial occupations, and this declined gradually to 35 percent of the 1998-9 cohort, and conversely the proportions entering services and sales occupations increased gradually from 26 to 44 percent. Slightly greater changes are found at age 18 (Figure 11): of the young women who were in full-time jobs at age 18, the proportion in non-manual occupations declined from 57% of the 1984 cohort to 44%of the 1998-9 cohort, and the corresponding increase in services and sales occupations was from 21% to 47%.

ATTAINMENT AT AGE 18

Comparison of attainment over time is complicated by the introduction of new qualifications, and comparison across Britain is further complicated by differences in the structure of qualifications. In order to make these comparisons we have used the National Qualification Framework (NQF), and applied definitions of NQF levels retrospectively to the qualifications achieved by early cohorts. The NQF combines both academic and vocational qualifications, and level 3 includes A-levels, AS levels and SCE Higher Grade as well as level 3 vocational qualifications. Figure 12 shows that overall levels achievement of a qualification at NQF level 3 by age 18 increased substantially over the 1980s and 1990s.

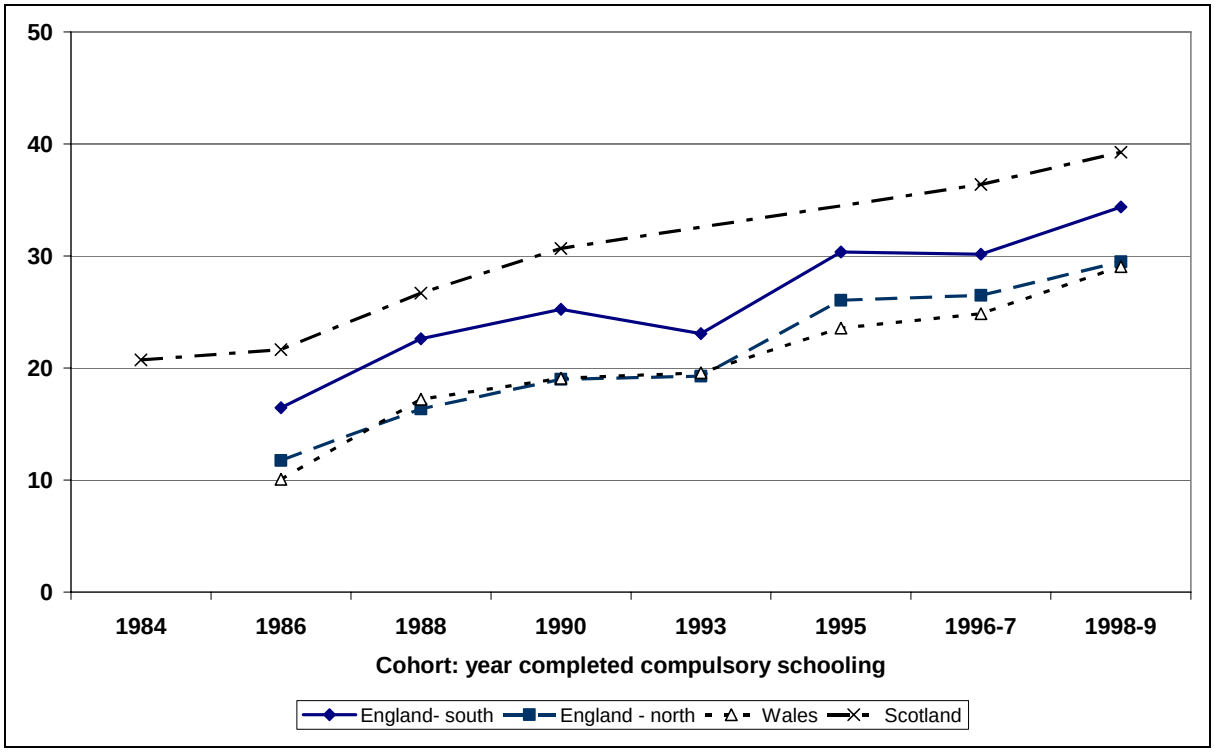
Figure 12: Achieved qualification at level 3 by age 18 (%) (academic and vocational qualifications combined)



The proportion of young people in Scotland who achieved level 3 was significantly greater than elsewhere in Britain, but there was some evidence that the gap was narrowing. There are some fluctuations in the trends for England and Wales, which may be a consequence of changes in survey design rather than real-world changes (see Croxford, 2006).

The notional entry qualification for HE is two or more A-levels, or the Scottish equivalent three or more Highers, and trends in this level of qualification are shown by Figure 13. Throughout the period, Scottish students were more likely to gain this level of qualification than their counterparts in England and Wales. This may be because there is a greater chance of young people attempting and completing one-year Highers courses, than A-level courses which require a two-year commitment. On average attainment of 2+ A-levels was higher in the south of England than north of England or Wales, and this reflects regional differences in the socio-economic context, with greater proportions of parents having the social characteristics associated with high attainment in the south of England then elsewhere in Britain. However, if we compare the trends for Scotland with those for the south of England we see that the differences between national education systems has greater impact than socio-economic context – Scotland's socio-economic context had more in common with the north of England and Wales, but Scotland had consistently higher levels of academic attainment than the south of England.

Figure 13: Achieved 2+ A-levels (E&W) or 3+ Highers (Scotland) (%)



ENTRY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

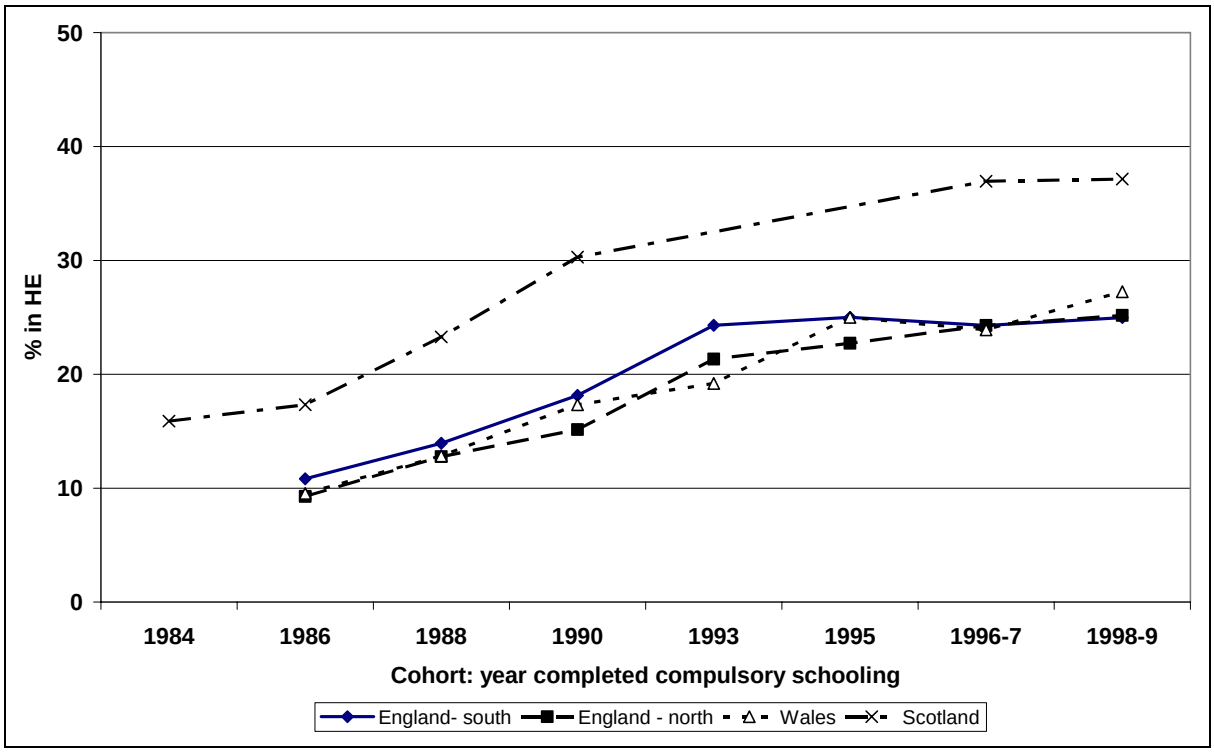
Over the 1980s and 1990s an increasing proportion of young people throughout Britain entered HE courses (degree and sub-degree) by age 18[8] (Figure 14). Throughout the period there was a striking difference in levels of participation between Scotland and the rest of

[8] Because of the timing of the youth cohort surveys, our time series includes only those young people who entered HE by the 3rd post-compulsory year, and excludes any who delayed their entry for any reason.

Britain - in the 1980s a significantly greater proportion of Scots entered HE, and the gap widened in the course of the 1990s. Most of the difference in participation levels between the national systems relates to entry to degree courses, but there are also differences in levels of participation in sub-degree courses: participation in sub-degree courses in Scotland increased from 3% to 8%, but remained at 3-4% in England and Wales (Iannelli, 2005).

Another striking difference between Scotland and England and Wales relates to the percentage of young people who were still studying for non-advanced qualifications, including A-level, at age 18-19 (table not shown). The percentage is particularly high in England and Wales, but very low in Scotland. It appears that about 5-6% of young people south of the border may have been attempting to gain sufficient A-levels for entry to HE while their counterparts in Scotland had gained sufficient Highers to enter HE (Iannelli, 2005).

Figure 14: In Higher Education at age 18 (% of whole cohort)



Rates of participation in HE by both men and women increased over time, but the rate of increase by women was greater than that by men. Thus, in the 1990s women in HE began to outnumber men in all three countries. The trend started earlier in Scotland (since the beginning of the 1990s) than in England and Wales (from 1996 onwards). (Iannelli, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper has been to examine trends in young people's experiences of education during the 1980s and 1990s, in the light of both social and policy change.

- Social and economic changes in the last half of the 20th century have transformed the societal context in which education takes place - industrial change led to declining demand for minimum-age low-qualified school leavers and educational qualifications became more important for entry to knowledge-based occupations.

- There were major policy changes affecting education and training during the 1980s and 1990s, including: creation of quasi-markets in education; new systems of assessment and certification at age 16; curriculum change; new qualifications for post-compulsory stages; new types of vocational qualification; introduction of government-supported training programmes; expansion of higher education.
- Young people's experiences of education have changed over the two decades: more young people feel positive about their school experiences; more achieve examination passes; and more stay on for post-compulsory education.
- There were differences between the experiences of young people in Scotland compared with the rest of Britain - in particular, more young people achieved post-compulsory qualifications and entered higher education in Scotland than elsewhere.

Can we draw any conclusions about the effects of government policies on educational change?

We might argue that a crucial development at the beginning of the 1980s was the introduction of GCSE and Standard Grade examinations at age 16, which for the first time included almost all young people in national systems of certification. The new examinations made the education systems more inclusive. Previous examination systems had been designed for the top 30% of the ability range, and thus created an artificial barrier that prevented the majority of young people from progressing further in education.

Our analysis shows very marked upward trends in attainment, both at the end of compulsory schooling, and at the end of two post-compulsory years. To some extent these upward trends reflect the success of educational reforms that have enabled more young people to achieve more highly, but also they reflect wider social change. For example, the increasing levels of attainment of female students relative to males may be traced partly to more inclusive education and examination systems, but also to equal opportunities policies, the changing roles of women in society, rising aspirations and the changing skill needs of a knowledge-based economy (Arnot *et al*, 1999; Croxford *et al*, 2003).

The analyses show that young people are increasingly positive in their perceptions of the usefulness of school. This may reflect the impact of policies towards curriculum and assessment as more young people achieve success in examinations and have an increasing sense of achievement. However, social change may also have an impact, as there is growing awareness among young people that their future career prospects depend upon the academic credentials that schools provide. Nevertheless, there is still a substantial minority of young people for whom education is not such a positive experience - one third of young people felt that school had done little to prepare them for life after school.

The youth labour market has shrunk over the last two decades but, nevertheless, while smaller numbers of young people are entering the labour market, the occupational areas they enter look very much the same. Whereas the majority of young people in the early 1980s could expect to leave school at age 16 and find employment, their counterparts in later cohorts had to revise their expectations. Raffe and Surridge (1995) argued that young people tend to respond more or less rationally to the opportunities and incentives that face them. The "pull" from the youth labour market, which used to offer good jobs and high wages to attract 16 year olds out of school, has weakened substantially. At the same time opportunities for entry to further and higher education increased, and have had a "backwash effect" on 16-18

participation as more young people stay on to get qualifications for HE. Another factor influencing increased participation in education may be the "social contagion" effect as young people see that the majority of their peers are remaining in education.

There are important contrasts between the experiences of young people in Scotland, Wales and England that may reflect differences in emphasis on social inclusion, social justice, citizenship and personal development (Ozga and Lawn, 1999; Raffe and Byrne, 2005). Unfortunately, however, there is very little that we can say about Wales, because the Welsh sample in YCS is too small and inconsistent to produce reliable findings. Consequently, our findings focus on the contrast between Scotland and England. Compared with England, the secondary school systems in Scotland is more comprehensive, with weaker quasi- markets and lower levels of social segregation between schools (Croxford and Paterson, *forthcoming*). Our analyses show that over the 1980s and 1990s the proportion of young people who were low attainers (no awards at A-C) at age 16 declined to a greater extent in Scotland than in England. Differences in the system of post-compulsory qualifications in Scotland are associated with significantly higher rates of attainment at NQF level 3 in Scotland than elsewhere, and higher rates of entry to HE (at both degree and sub-degree level).

Raffe (2004) has argued that "the administrative system of Scottish education has several features which make it distinctive within the UK, including the organisation of schools, the curriculum and the qualifications system. In addition there are several small differences whose cumulative impact may be significant." The trends described in this paper suggest that these distinctive features have enabled young people in Scotland to achieve more highly, and enter HE in greater numbers than their counterparts south of the border. These differences in outcomes are over an above anything that might have been caused by differences in socio-economic context, since levels of achievement of the outcomes described were higher in Scotland than in the south of England where socio-economic context was higher. We would suggest that these empirical findings provide evidence that there is scope for policy learning within Britain (Raffe and Spours, *forthcoming*).

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