

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

Working Paper 9

**NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES
OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING IN BRITAIN: TRENDS 1984-99**

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The aim of this paper is to examine differences between the regions of England and the national territories of England, Wales and Scotland, including inequalities and change over time, in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment in compulsory education. The question it raises is whether regional differences are as great as the differences between the national systems. So far, the main focus of the EYT project has been “home international” comparison of trends in the three home nations (Raffe *et al* 1999). We have argued that their administrative systems of education differ in ways that are associated with historic and cultural differences, and divergence in education policy has made the Scottish and Welsh systems more comprehensive than that in England, and provided less support for education markets, specialisation and diversity (Croxford and Raffe 2005). We have examined the extent to which these policies have led to differences in outcomes, and found some evidence that in the period since 1984 social class inequalities in attainment have weakened in Scotland to a greater extent than in England, but no evidence of a similar trend in Wales. Can we claim that the Scottish education system is intrinsically different than elsewhere in Britain, and has become more egalitarian? Or, are we making false comparisons, and are there diverse regional systems within England that lead to equally different educational experiences and outcomes?

The regions considered in this paper are the Government Office Regions (GOR) that were established across England in 1994 reflecting the hierarchical administration of government departments. The benefit of using GORs for this analysis is that government regional statistics are published within the GOR classification. However, GORs do not necessarily have a well-established identity with respect to education, and lack the national identity and devolved powers for education that make Wales and Scotland more natural units of analysis. The regions of England are all subject to the English administrative system, including its national curriculum and assessment, while education policies in Wales and Scotland have distinctively different features, including Welsh language and Scottish curriculum and qualification systems. A further feature of the English administrative system is that until 1997 there were a number of organisations responsible for examinations and qualifications, each located in different regions (although the number is now reduced to three), whereas Wales and Scotland each have a single qualifications authority (Spours *et al* 1998).

Local education authorities (LEA) have local responsibility for school education, and their policies have been very important for shaping education in local areas (Lowe 2002). In particular, decisions by LEAs have created local differences in the provision of selective versus comprehensive schools (Kerckhoff *et al* 1996) and these policies shaped the extent to which local schools were socially segregated (Fitz *et al* 2002). The powers of LEAs were greatly reduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act and the marketisation of education, but following the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act there are significant differences in LEA's school admissions policies and these continue to influence the extent of segregation between schools (op. cit). Local government reorganisation over the 1990s has increased the number of local authorities with responsibility for education in England to 150; of these, 36 are metropolitan authorities, 33 London boroughs, 47 shire unitary authorities and 34 county councils. Similarly, there are 22 unitary authorities within Wales, and 32 within Scotland. LEAs are too numerous and small to serve the purpose of the current analysis of looking at broad regional differences and trends, but we must be aware when looking at regional/ national differences that each encompasses a number of education authorities, and consequently there is potential for a great deal of variation within each region/ national system..

Where the English regions do show considerable differences is in their socio-economic context, and these are well demonstrated by government statistics. Table 1 shows various indicators of socio-economic context at the end of the 1990s.¹

Table 1: Regional and national differences in socio-economic indicators

	Disposable income per head 1999¹ (Index UK=100)	% of all working age people unemployed Mar 1998-Feb 1999	% of all working age people with NVQ level 4+ Mar 1998-Feb 1999	% of 16 year olds in full-time education 1999/2000
North East	82.9	8.2	16.3	64
North West	93.0	6.3	19.4	67
Yorkshire and The Humber	92.3	6.9	19.0	66
East Midlands	92.7	5.1	18.5	69
West Midlands	91.2	6.5	17.9	69
Eastern	111.7	4.5	20.2	75
London	119.4	7.8	27.5	75
South East	111.6	4.2	25.2	75
South West	97.5	4.5	22.6	74
England	101.6	5.9	21.5	71
Wales	90.4	7.1	19.6	71
Scotland	94.9	7.4	24.0	81

Source col 1: Clifton-Fearnside 2001

col 2-3: Labour Force Survey 1998

col 4: National Statistics 2005

¹ Statistics for these years are shown, rather than more recent figures, because they are more appropriate to the timing of the most recent of the cohort surveys used in the analysis.

The first column in Table 1 shows disposable income per head in 1999 (Clifton-Fearnside 2001), and is a measure of relative wealth or poverty of the population in each region. It shows that the four regions with highest levels of disposable income per head were London (19% higher than the UK average), East and South East England (each 12% higher) and South West England (98% of UK average). In contrast, North East England had the lowest disposable income per head at just 83% of the UK average. Based on these data, the map of Britain (Figure 1) can be divided by a line from the Wash to the Severn Estuary, with the wealthier regions to the south of the line, and all other parts of Britain, including Scotland and Wales, to the north, with the North East experiencing the lowest income levels. A further dimension of income distribution is provided by poverty indicators produced by the New Policy Institute/ Joseph Rowntree Foundation to monitor poverty and social exclusion (NPI 2005). Geographic indicators include the proportion of people in each region who are in the poorest fifth and the richest fifth of the population in terms of income in 2001-4; the figures indicate that London and the South East have the highest proportions of people with high income, but they also suggest that (Inner) London is deeply divided, with by far the highest proportion of people on low income as well as the highest proportion on high income. The North East, West Midlands and Wales have the lowest proportion of people on high income. Regional inequalities in income distribution arise from historic differences in industrial and occupational location - those regions which until the mid-20th century focused on coalmining, shipbuilding, steel, bulk chemicals and heavy engineering have difficulties in replacing their whole economic base. Jobs in London and the south-east are not the same in terms of industry or occupation as those in other parts of the country, because higher-order managerial functions within both public and private sectors tend to be concentrated both in and around London (Fothergill 2005).

Figure 1: Regional differences in Household disposable income in 1999



Source: Clifton-Fearnside (2001) Regional Accounts 1999: part2

Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 show data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 1998, and confirm the relative advantage of the south and east of the country, and the varied pattern for London. Unemployment in London was quite high, but it was relatively low in other parts of the south and east. On the other hand, there are more graduate-level jobs in and around London, and consequently the proportion of the working-age population with higher education qualifications (NVQ level 4) was highest in London, and relatively high in the south east and south west. The LFS data confirm the disadvantaged position of the North East – it had the highest unemployment rate and the lowest level of higher education qualifications. Levels of education in the population provide a context that influences attitudes to school. A recent study based on the 2001 census compared the percentage of 16-17 year-olds with level 2 qualifications in each unitary authority with the percentage of 40-54 year-olds with high level qualifications; it concluded that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 16-17 year-olds are more likely to obtain good GCSEs and equivalent qualifications if they live in an area where a high proportion of people of their parents' generation (people aged 40-54) are well qualified. The researchers find the relationship is weaker in Scotland, where there is much less geographic variability in the proportion of young people who have qualifications (Wheeler *et al* 2005).

The final column of Table 1 shows regional differences in participation in full-time education by 16 year-olds in 1999-2000. The relatively high levels of participation in the south and east of England contrast with the relatively low participation in the north of England. Participation was highest in Scotland.

Two studies have looked at the effects of region in addition to the effects of socio-economic background. McNiece and Jolliffe (1998) investigated differences in performance between regions and LEAs using multilevel modelling techniques and data from the National Child Development Study; they concluded that differences between regions and LEAs are negligible, and the main source of variation is social background. On the other hand, Dolton *et al* (1999) used data from the YCS to model a number of outcomes, including attainment and probability of staying-on in full-time education. The research concluded that region and local unemployment rate were factors that had a significant effect on these outcomes, in addition to ethnic group, parents' occupation, family background and school type. The researchers argued for policies geared towards making school seem more useful to high risk or disadvantaged young people, so as to curb truancy, keep young people in education longer and enhance their future prospects. They also argued for more active regional policy, and increased funding for disadvantaged local authorities in order to make a difference to the lives of young people (*op. cit.* p70).

Research in Scotland based on the Scottish School Leavers Survey found opposite links between unemployment and education, suggesting a young person attending a school in an area of high unemployment was more likely to stay on at school after the end of compulsory schooling. This they termed a “discouraged worker” effect (Raffe and Willms 1989, Paterson and Raffe 1995), but research in England did not find this effect (Gray *et al* 1992).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The over-arching question for this paper is whether the differences between the national systems of England, Wales and Scotland are smaller or greater than the regional differences

within England. The paper focuses on differences in young people's experiences and outcomes, which are measured by their responses to questions in the surveys about truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment at the end of compulsory schooling. It considers the following questions:

- Are there differences in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment between regions within England? and are they smaller or greater than national differences between England, Wales and Scotland?
- Have trends over time in the experiences and outcomes of young people differed between regions within England, and between the national systems of England, Wales and Scotland?
- To what extent are differences associated with gender and social class? and do such associations vary between regions within England and between national systems?

DATA USED FOR THE ANALYSIS

Data for these analyses come from time-series datasets developed for the Education and Youth Transitions Project (EYT) from the England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Scottish School Leavers Surveys (SSLS); details are given in Croxford (2004a). The earliest cohort in the series refers to young people who completed compulsory schooling (year 11 in England and Wales and secondary 4 (S4) in Scotland) in 1984; the latest cohort for England and Wales completed year 11 in 1999, and the latest for Scotland completed S4 in 1998. The GOR categorisation of English regions was not developed until 1994, but it has been retrospectively constructed for all cohorts based on LEA.

Variables summarising family social class have been derived from the status of mother's or father's occupation, whichever was the higher. Occupation was coded to the 3-class NS-SEC classification (Rose and O'Reilly 1998). Differences over time in occupational classifications, and in survey design and procedures create some inconsistencies in the social class variables (see Croxford 2004b), and for this reason the 1984 England and Wales cohort is not included in analyses using social class.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

In line with the differences in socio-economic context (Table 1), there were national and regional differences in the characteristics of young people in the youth cohort surveys. Figures 2-5 show average differences in the 1995-8 cohorts. On average, the mothers of young people south of the line from the Wash to the Severn Estuary (ie in the south-east, south-west, east and London) were more likely to have gained A-levels than their counterparts in other regions of England. The percentage of mothers with A-levels was lower in Wales than in England as a whole, while in Scotland, the percentage of mothers who left school at age 17 or older is quite high. Although the Scottish data are not wholly compatible with the figures for England and Wales, the national and regional differences in mother's education shown by Figure 2 are similar to the pattern of qualifications in Table 1.

Figure 2: Mothers had post-compulsory education (% of 1995-8 cohorts)

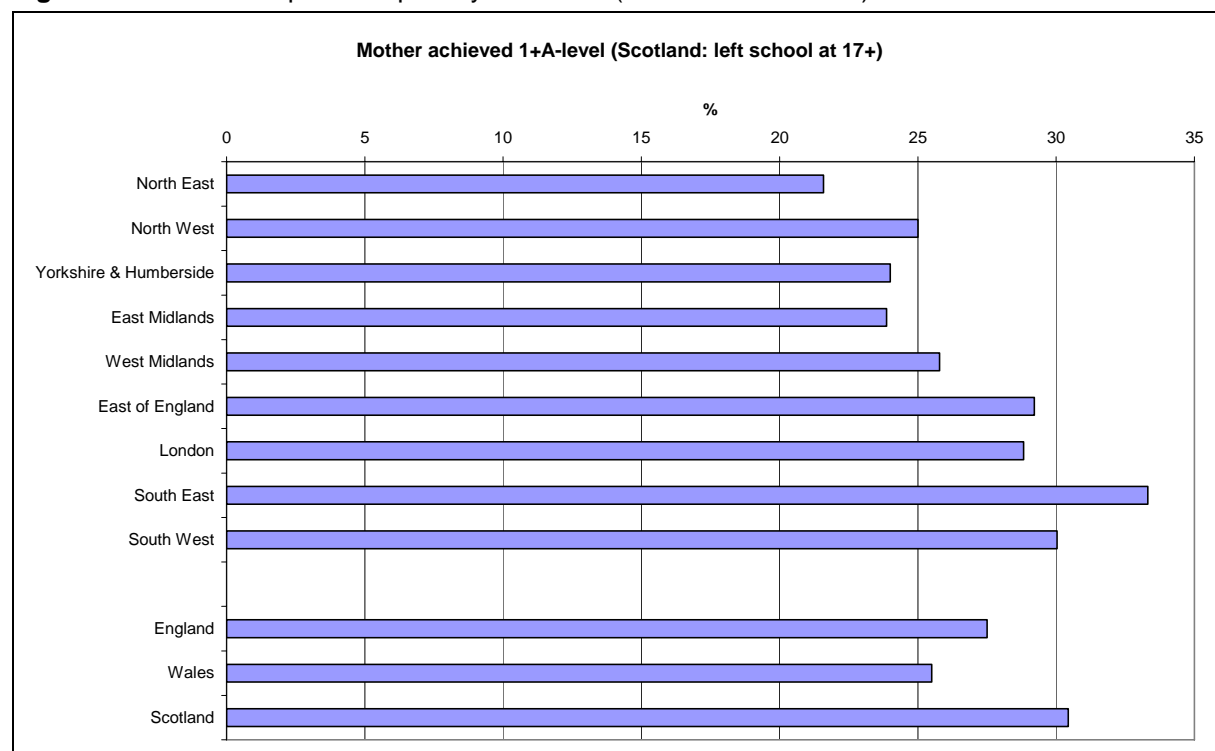
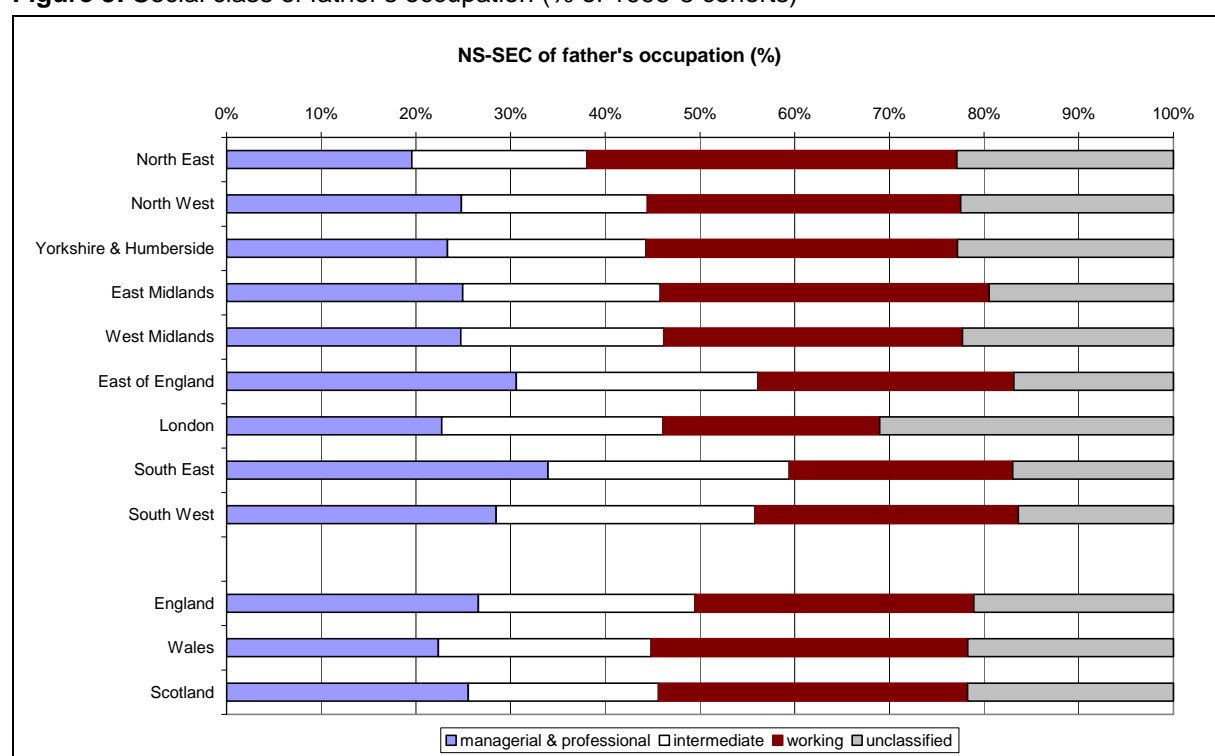


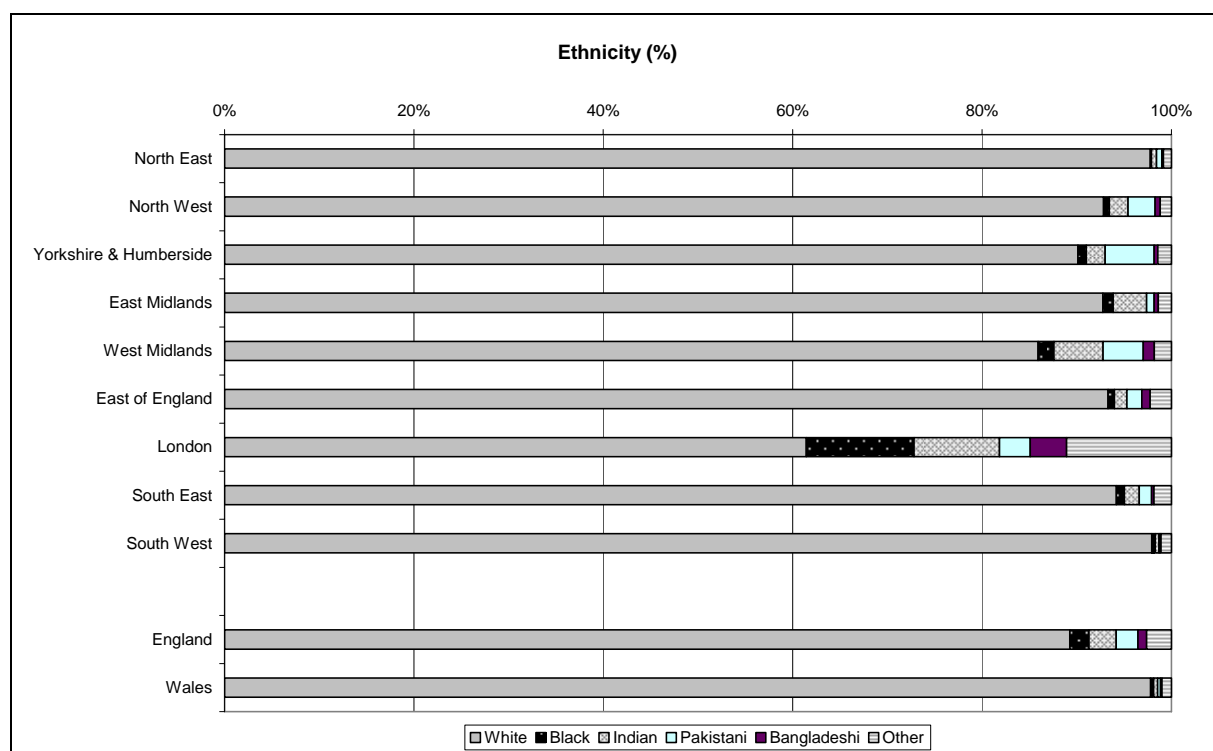
Figure 3: Social class of father's occupation (% of 1995-8 cohorts)



The social class of father's occupation is shown in Figure 3; fathers of young people in the South-east, East and South-west were more likely to be in managerial/professional or intermediate occupations, while those in the North East were most likely to be in working class occupations. The distribution of father's occupational social class in London shows relatively low proportion in managerial/professional occupations together with the highest proportion of fathers in unclassified occupations; this is at odds with the pattern of income

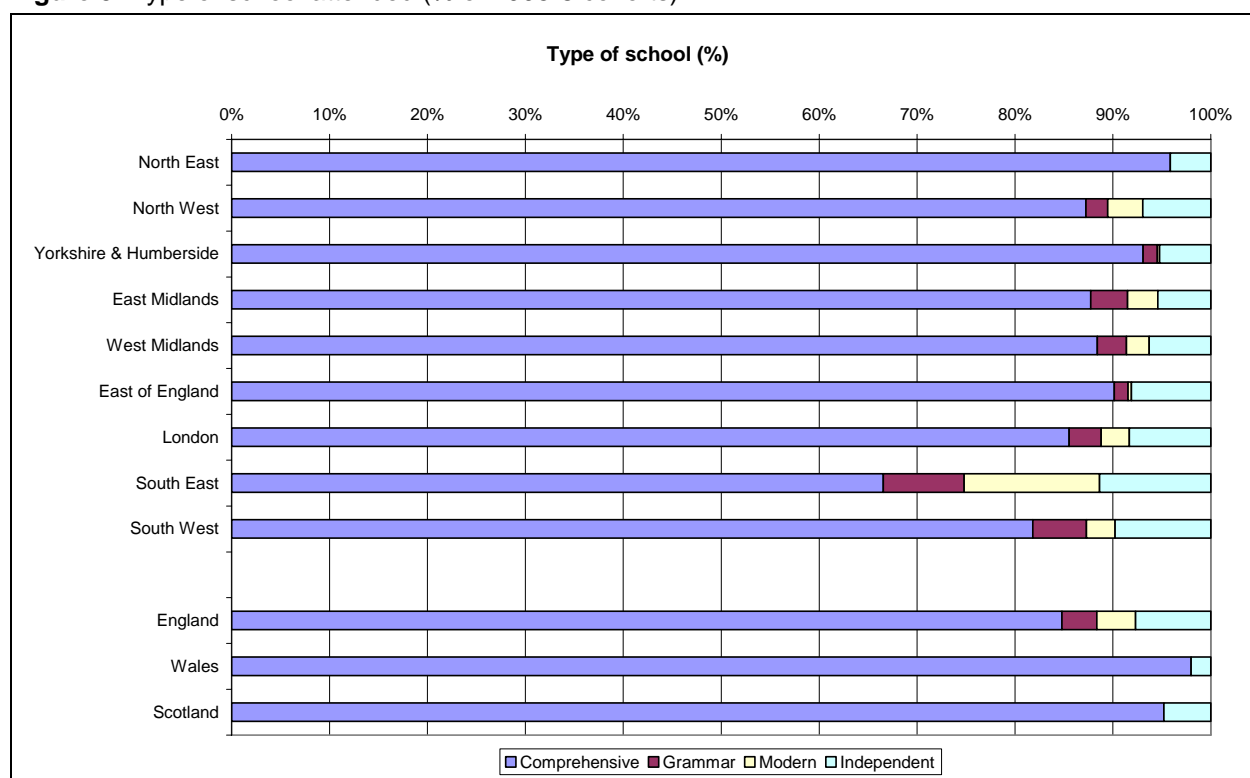
and qualifications shown in Table 1, and possibly reflects the polarised nature of the London population, in which parents exhibit different socio-economic characteristics than, for example young graduates in the city. (The regional patterns of father's education and mother's occupation are very similar to those displayed in Figures 2 and 3 respectively). Figure 4 shows the strong concentration of minority ethnic groups in London, and to a far lesser extent in West Midlands and other regions. The proportions of minority ethnic groups in North East, South West (and Wales) are very small. (Data on ethnicity are not available for Scotland).

Figure 4: Ethnicity (% of 1995-8 cohorts in England and Wales). Data on ethnicity are not available for Scotland



National and regional differences in the types of school attended by young people in the youth cohort surveys are shown by Figure 5. The majority of the 1995-8 cohorts in England attended comprehensive schools (85%), but 4% went to grammar schools, 4% to secondary modern schools and 8% to independent schools. In Wales and Scotland there were no selective schools, and the proportions attending comprehensive schools were 98% and 95%. The proportion of young people attending comprehensive schools was much lower in South-East England (67%) than elsewhere. There were substantial minorities of young people attending non-comprehensive schools in other regions of England, and only in the North East and Yorkshire/Humberside did the proportion of young people attending comprehensive schools (respectively 96% and 93%) come close to those of Wales and Scotland.

Figure 5: Type of school attended (% of 1995-8 cohorts)



ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

The variables describing young people's experiences and outcomes in this analysis are:

1. Self-reported truancy
2. Perceptions of school
3. Attainment score at the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) O-level, and in Scotland the Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE) Standard Grade.

For each variable the overall trends in young people's responses are described, and the variable was modelled twice using linear regression models, firstly in order to estimate the extent of regional differences in trends, and secondly to estimate national differences between the three home countries. The models took account of gender and social class, and in order to see whether the experience of gender and social class differed between regions/nations over time, the models tested 2-way and 3-way interactions between gender/social class and region/nation and change over time. Effect sizes of regional differences from the three statistical models are summarised in Table 2, and effect sizes of national differences are in Table 3. Effect sizes are derived from standardised beta coefficients, and are expressed in terms of standard deviations (sd).

Table 2: Differences in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment, by region/nation, gender, social class and time (England and Wales 1986-99, Scotland 1984-98)

	Truancy			Perceptions of school			Attainment		
	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error
(Constant)		0.18	0.01		1.69	0.01		22.70	0.21
Female	0.02	0.04	0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.03	1.20	0.15
Managerial/professional	-0.14	-0.22	0.01	0.07	0.15	0.01	0.43	16.18	0.17
Intermediate	-0.06	-0.11	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.19	7.77	0.20
Unclassified	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.07	0.02	0.01	0.56	0.39
Time	-0.07	-0.01	0.001	0.13	0.03	0.001	0.42	1.65	0.04
Time squared	-0.07	-0.001	0.0001				-0.09	-0.04	0.00
Female*time	0.03	0.005	0.001				0.05	0.23	0.02
Managerial*time							-0.03	-0.15	0.02
Intermediate*time				0.02	0.007	0.002	-0.01	-0.05	0.03
Unclassified*time				-0.01	-0.007	0.003	-0.02	-0.18	0.04
North East	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	-0.01	-1.32	0.34
North West	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	-0.01	-0.32	0.19
Yorks & Humber	0.01	0.04	0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.03	-2.12	0.21
East Midlands	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	-0.01	-1.09	0.22
West Midlands	0.00	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.02	-0.02	-1.39	0.27
East of England	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.41	0.20
London	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.45	0.30
South West	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.43	0.21
WALES	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	-1.40	0.40
SCOTLAND	0.08	0.13	0.01	-0.05	-0.15	0.03	-0.05	-2.29	0.29
North East*unclassified							-0.02	-4.42	0.70
North East*time							-0.01	-0.18	0.05
North West*unclassified							-0.02	-3.68	0.51
Yorks & Humber*female	-0.01	-0.04	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.02			
Yorks & Humber*unclassified							-0.02	-3.60	0.59
East Midlands*unclassified							-0.01	-1.35	0.67
West Midlands*female	-0.02	-0.09	0.02						
West Midlands*managerial				-0.01	-0.06	0.02			
West Midlands*unclassified							-0.01	-2.63	0.56
West Midlands*time	0.00	-0.001	0.003				-0.04	-0.47	0.10
West Midlands*time squared							0.04	0.05	0.01
West Midlands*female*time	0.01	0.008	0.003						
London*managerial	0.02	0.09	0.02						
London*intermediate	0.01	0.05	0.02						
London* unclassified							-0.02	-2.94	0.52
London*time							-0.05	-0.53	0.11
London*time squared							0.05	0.06	0.01
Wales*female	-0.01	-0.05	0.02				0.01	1.16	0.41
Wales*managerial	0.01	0.07	0.02						
Wales*unclassified							-0.01	-3.86	0.72
Wales*time							-0.02	-0.33	0.13
Wales*time squared							0.02	0.04	0.01
Scotland*female	-0.05	-0.11	0.01	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.01	0.58	0.24
Scotland* managerial				-0.01	-0.06	0.02	-0.04	-2.70	0.26
Scotland*intermediate	-0.01	-0.03	0.01				0.01	0.96	0.31
Scotland*unclassified	0.02	0.11	0.02				-0.05	-5.46	0.51
Scotland*time	0.01	0.003	0.001	0.10	0.03	0.00	-0.11	-0.74	0.06
Scotland*time squared							0.12	0.09	0.01
Scotland*female*time	0.02	0.007	0.002				-0.01	-0.10	0.04
Scotland*intermediate*time							-0.02	-0.19	0.05
Scotland*unclassified*time							0.02	0.46	0.07

Reference category is male, working class, 1988 cohort, in South East England.

Table 3: Differences in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment, by national system, gender, social class and time (England and Wales 1986-1999, Scotland 1984-1998)

	Truancy			Perceptions of school			Attainment		
	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error	Effect size	Co-efficient	Std Error
(Constant)		0.19	0.01		1.70	0.01		22.27	0.18
Female	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.03	1.17	0.15
Managerial/professional	-0.14	-0.22	0.01	0.07	0.15	0.01	0.42	15.92	0.20
Intermediate	-0.06	-0.10	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.18	7.61	0.21
Unclassified	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.06	0.02	-0.03	-1.98	0.29
Time	-0.08	-0.013	0.002	0.16	0.038	0.003	0.37	1.47	0.04
Time squared	-0.07	-0.001	0.0002	-0.03	-0.001	0.0002	-0.07	-0.03	0.00
Female*time	0.03	0.006	0.001	0.00	0.001	0.002	0.05	0.24	0.02
Managerial/prof*time	0.02	0.003	0.002	0.00	-0.0001	0.002	-0.01	-0.05	0.03
Intermediate*time	0.00	-0.001	0.002	0.02	0.007	0.002	0.00	0.01	0.03
Unclassified*time	0.00	-0.001	0.002	-0.01	-0.007	0.003	-0.01	-0.11	0.05
WALES	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.00	-0.02	0.04	-0.01	-0.89	0.65
Wales*female	-0.01	-0.07	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.01	1.06	0.60
Wales*managerial	0.01	0.06	0.04	-0.01	-0.09	0.05	0.00	-0.20	0.77
Wales*intermediate	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.00	0.0003	0.06	0.00	0.71	0.81
Wales*unclassified	0.00	-0.02	0.05	-0.01	-0.10	0.07	-0.01	-1.49	1.06
SCOTLAND	0.07	0.12	0.01	-0.17	-0.53	0.12	-0.05	-2.05	0.27
Scotland*female	-0.05	-0.10	0.01	0.04	0.15	0.06	0.01	0.61	0.24
Scotland* managerial	0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.02	0.07	0.08	-0.03	-2.02	0.30
Scotland*intermediate	-0.02	-0.05	0.02	0.03	0.19	0.09	0.02	1.26	0.32
Scotland*unclassified	0.02	0.11	0.02	-0.01	-0.09	0.11	-0.02	-2.79	0.44
Wales*time	0.01	0.005	0.008	0.00	0.002	0.012	-0.03	-0.35	0.16
Wales*time squared	-0.01	-0.001	0.001	0.00	-0.0003	0.001	0.02	0.03	0.01
Wales*female*time	0.01	0.007	0.005	-0.01	-0.013	0.007	0.00	0.02	0.10
Wales*managerial*time	0.00	-0.001	0.006	0.01	0.014	0.009	0.01	0.22	0.12
Wales*intermediate*time	0.00	-0.001	0.006	0.00	0.007	0.009	0.00	0.11	0.13
Wales*unclassified*time	0.00	0.006	0.009	0.01	0.019	0.013	0.00	0.15	0.18
Scotland*time	0.03	0.007	0.003	0.35	0.123	0.035	-0.07	-0.48	0.06
Scotland*time squared	0.00	0.000	0.000	-0.12	-0.005	0.002	0.11	0.08	0.01
Scotland*female*time	0.02	0.006	0.002	-0.02	-0.011	0.008	-0.01	-0.11	0.04
Scotland* managerial*time	-0.02	-0.006	0.002	-0.03	-0.018	0.010	-0.03	-0.29	0.05
Scotland*intermediate*time	0.00	0.000	0.003	-0.04	-0.025	0.010	-0.03	-0.36	0.06
Scotland*unclassified*time	-0.01	-0.006	0.003	0.00	0.004	0.013	0.01	0.29	0.07

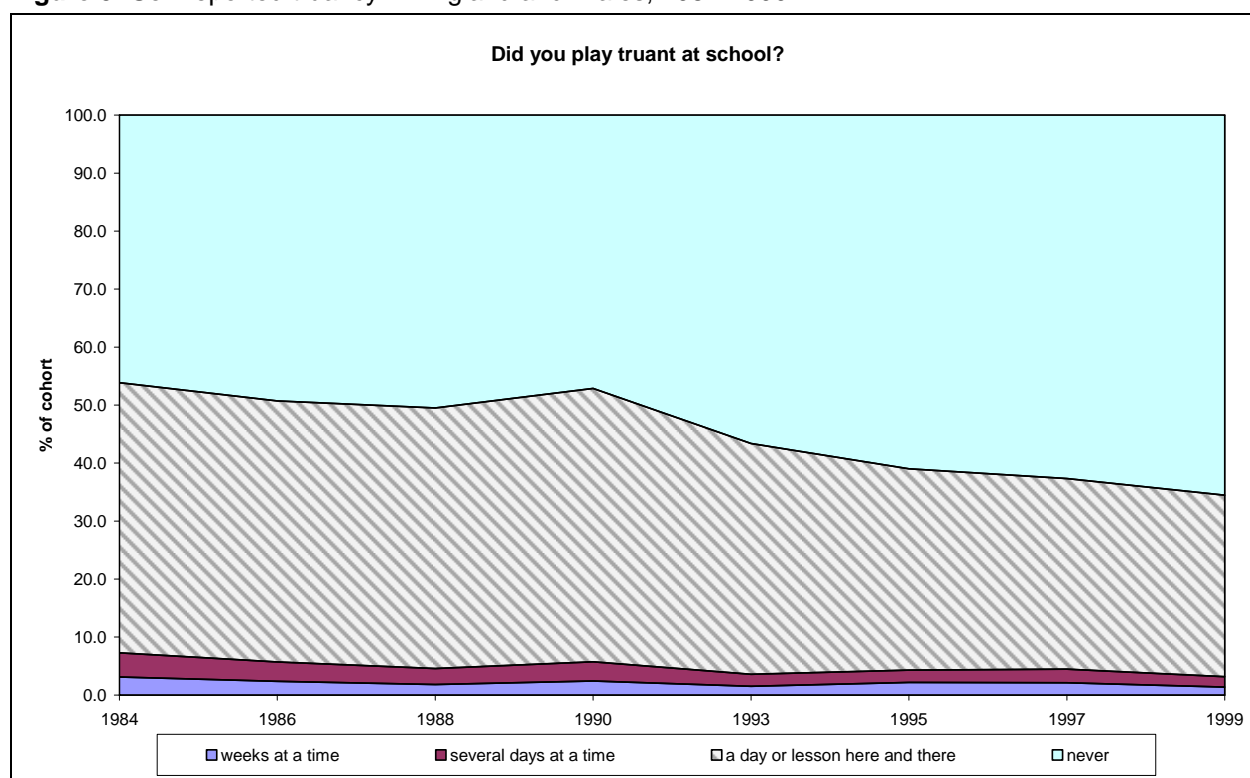
Reference category is male, working class, 1988 cohort, in England.

1. Truancy

Overall responses to the survey questions about truancy, and change over time, are shown in Figure 6. (This and subsequent charts are restricted to England and Wales for simplicity of presentation). Reports of serious truancy, indicated by “weeks at a time” and “days at a time”, were made by very small numbers of survey respondents²: 3% and 4% in 1984 to 1% and 2% respectively in 1999. There was a gradual decline in occasional truancy, indicated by “a day or lesson here and there”, and consequent increase in the proportion of young people who said they never played truant from 46% in 1984 to 66% in 1999.

² It is possible that the figures are biased by differential non-response to the surveys.

Figure 5: Self-reported truancy in England and Wales, 1984-1999



Differences in trends were investigated using a linear regression model. However, since the variable describing levels of truancy is a categorical variable, it was transformed to a normal score; the scale values given to each category were:

- weeks at a time 2.39
- several days at a time 1.90
- a day or lesson here and there 0.72
- never -0.57

Thus, the variable used in the linear regression model is normally distributed, with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. It has a high value for high levels of truancy, and a low value for low levels of truancy.

The model compared levels of truancy by gender, social class, and change over cohorts 1986 to 1999 (Scottish cohorts were 1984-1998). The reference category was male, working class, in the 1988 cohort and in South-East England. The effect sizes are shown in column 1 of Tables 2 and 3, but none of the effect sizes are very large. Average regional differences are shown after taking account of differences in social composition of each area; the effect sizes suggest that average regional differences are quite small and the contrast between England, Wales and Scotland is greater than differences between regions within England (effect size for Wales 0.02 sd, and Scotland 0.07 sd: Table 3 column 1).

The largest differences in truancy levels throughout Britain are associated with social class; pupils of managerial/professional SEC had lower truancy (-0.14 sd) than working class pupils, and truancy was also lower among those of intermediate SEC (-0.06 sd). However, there were some national and regional differences to these patterns; in London managerial/professional and intermediate pupils were more likely to play truant than their

counterparts elsewhere, and the same was true of managerial/professional pupils in Wales. In Scotland, intermediate pupils reported lower truancy than their counterparts elsewhere, but on the other hand pupils of unclassified SEC had higher truancy.

On average truancy was slightly higher among females than males, but the gender gap was narrower in Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands, than in South-East England and in Wales and Scotland than in England as a whole.

On average truancy declined over time (-0.08 sd), and the quadratic term (year squared) suggests that the decline was steepest among the most recent cohorts. However, there is some suggestion from the interaction terms that truancy did not decline to the same extent among females as among males, and it did not decline to the same extent in Scotland as elsewhere. There is also some suggestion from the model that truancy among females in West Midlands and Scotland declined even more slowly than among females elsewhere.

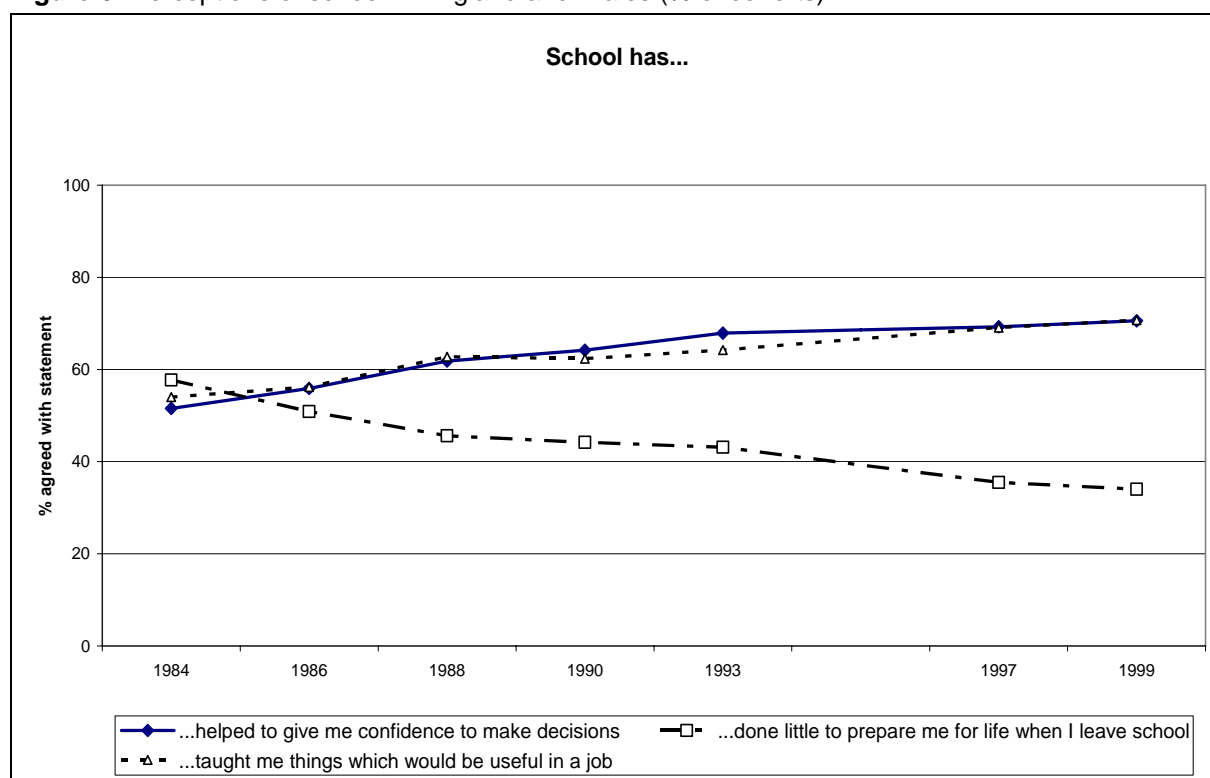
What lessons can we draw from the analysis of truancy? Firstly, that the downward trends in truancy are very similar across Britain, and the association of truancy with gender and social class is very similar in all areas. Nevertheless, effect sizes for truancy in Wales and Scotland are higher than in the English regions, and this may suggest that differences between the national systems are greater than those arising from different regional contexts. There are, however, some small differences between the regions, even after taking account of gender and social class composition, that may indicate differences in young people's experience of schooling in these regions. But, the regional differences shown by the model do not follow the socio-economic divisions outlined in the first section of this paper – there is no evidence of a north-south divide in levels of truancy.

2. Perceptions of school

The surveys asked young people whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about school:

- 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.

Responses to these statements in England and Wales are shown by Figure 6. (In Scotland the questions were asked in cohorts 1992-8 only). It is evident that on the whole young people have become more positive in their attitudes to school.

Figure 6: Perceptions of school in England and Wales (% of cohorts)

A summary score with values 0 to 3 was derived by summing the number of positive responses to these three statements. The summary score was used as the dependent variable in linear regression models to examine the extent of regional and national differences in perceptions of school. The results are shown in column 4 of Tables 2 and 3.

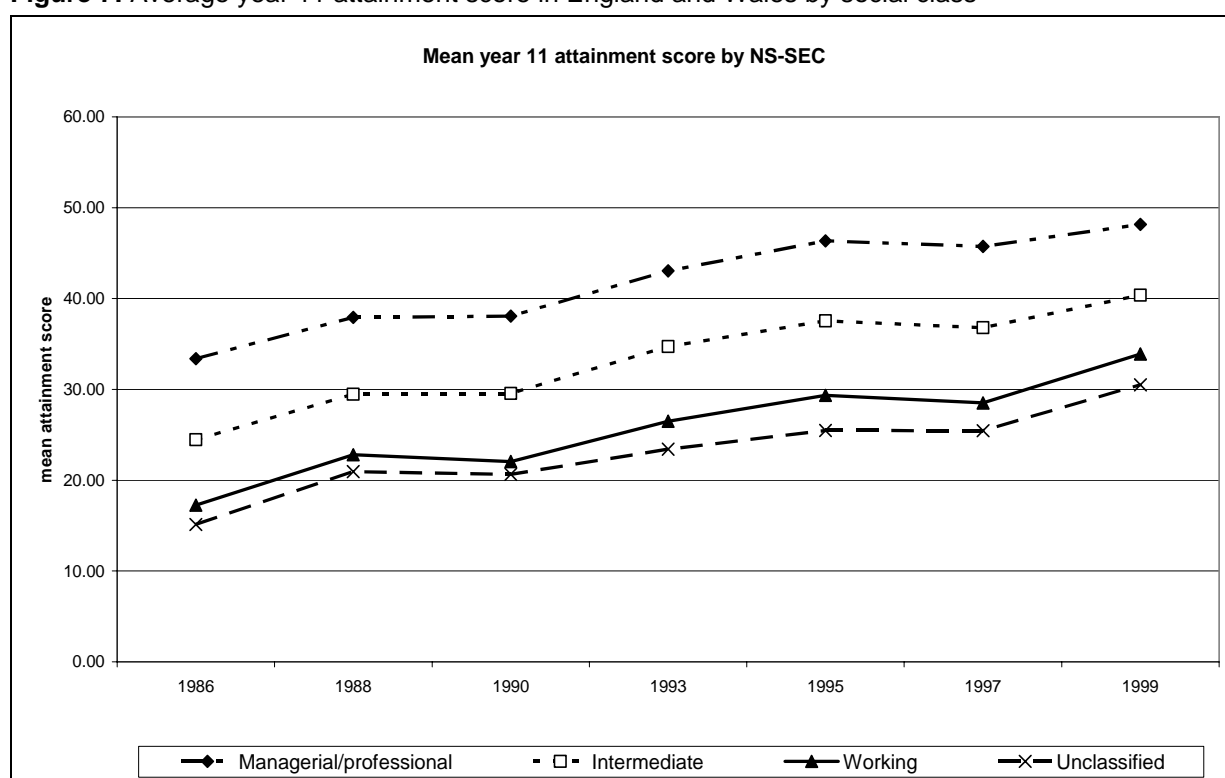
Change over time was the most important factor in the model, with an effect size of 0.13 sd. Social class made a significant difference also, with young people from managerial/professional backgrounds expressing more positive attitudes (0.07 sd) than those from other social classes, and young people with unclassified class were least positive in their attitudes to school (-0.02 sd). The social class difference in perceptions of school was a little smaller in the West Midlands and Scotland than elsewhere (-0.01 sd in each). On average, females expressed fewer positive attitudes to school than males (-0.01 sd), but the attitudes of females in Yorkshire/Humberside and Scotland were more similar to those of males than was the case elsewhere. Although over time there was an overall increase in the number of positive responses, this differed by social class; the increase was a little steeper among students from the intermediate class, but did not increase to the same extent among young people of unclassified SEC.

The Scottish data do not cover the whole time series, and although there is some evidence that Scots were less positive in their attitudes to school at the start of the 1990s (-0.17 sd), thereafter the increase in positive attitudes was steeper than elsewhere (0.35 sd). It is clear from the analysis that time and social class were the key factors influencing young people's attitudes to school. Regional differences were very small indeed.

3. Attainment

The measure of attainment used for this analysis is derived from GCSEs sat in year 11 (in England and Wales) or Standard grades (in Scotland). These are subject-based examinations, typically taken in up to ten subjects in England and Wales and up to eight subjects in Scotland. Each subject is separately certificated, and graded on a scale from A* to F (GCSEs) or 1 to 7 (Standard grades). For the analyses below we have calculated an attainment score by allocating 7 points for an A or 1, 6 points for B or 2, 5 points for C or 3, and so on. Figure 7 shows trends in average attainment scores by social class in England and Wales. It is clear that average attainment by all social groups increased over the period, but social class differences remained quite wide.

Figure 7: Average year 11 attainment score in England and Wales by social class



Results of the statistical models of attainment are shown in column seven of Tables 2 and 3. They confirm that social class differences in attainment were wide. Managerial/professional students had much higher attainment than working class students (0.43 sd), but the managerial advantage decreased slightly over time (-0.03 sd). Students of intermediate SEC had higher attainment than their working class counterparts (0.19 sd) but this advantage decreased slightly over time (-0.01 sd). So for working class pupils (the reference category) there is evidence of a slight narrowing of the attainment gap relative to higher social class groups. However, the relative low attainment of students of unclassified SEC worsened slightly over time (-0.02 sd). The average attainment advantage enjoyed by managerial/professional students was the same in all areas of Britain, but the average disadvantage of unclassified students was greater in the North East, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, London, than in South East England. Social class differences in attainment in Scotland decreased over time to a greater extent than in England and Wales (managerial/professional -0.03 sd, intermediate -0.03 sd and unclassified 0.01: Table 3).

On average females had slightly higher attainment than males (0.03 sd), and the gender gap increased over time (0.05 sd). There were no regional differences within England in the extent of the gender gap, but average gender difference was wider in Wales and Scotland than in England. In Scotland the gender gap decreased over time.

There were small regional differences in average attainment, after taking account of gender and social class. Compared with South East England, average attainment was higher in the South West but lower in the North East, Yorkshire/Humberside, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England; Average attainment was lower in Wales and Scotland than in England. With the exception of East of England, this pattern of attainment mirrors the division of Britain by wealth/poverty shown in Table 1 above.

Most regions shared in the general increase in attainment over time, but in the North East, West Midlands and London attainment did not increase as steeply as elsewhere. Similarly, in Wales and Scotland average attainment did not increase to the same extent as in England. In general, the increase in attainment slowed down in the later cohorts (shown by the negative effect of the quadratic term “time squared”), but the opposite effect is shown in the West Midlands, London, Wales and Scotland, where it appears that attainment rose more rapidly in the later cohorts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analyses described above suggest the following answers to the initial questions.

Are there differences in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment between regions within England? and are they smaller or greater than national differences between England, Wales and Scotland?

Average levels of truancy and perceptions of school were very similar across England, once differences in social class and gender were taken into account. Truancy was a little higher in Scotland (and Wales to a lesser extent) than in England. There were small regional differences in average attainment, with highest average attainment in South-East and South-West England.

Have trends over time in the experiences and outcomes of young people differed between regions within England, and between the national systems of England, Wales and Scotland?

There have been very pronounced changes over time in levels of truancy, attitudes to school and average attainment, and these trends were experienced throughout Britain. The upward trend in attainment was lower at the beginning of the period in North East, West Midlands, London, Wales and Scotland, but with the exception of the North East, has risen more steeply in these areas in more recent years.

To what extent are differences associated with gender and social class? and do such associations vary between regions within England and between national systems?

Social class was the biggest source of difference in truancy, perceptions of school, and attainment throughout Britain, and national and regional variations in these associations were very small: the association of truancy and social class was a little less clear in London and Wales than elsewhere, whereas it was slightly stronger with respect to unclassified and intermediate students in Scotland; the more positive attitudes shown by

managerial/professional students was less pronounced in West Midlands and Scotland than elsewhere. Perhaps the greatest relative difference by regions/national systems was in average working class attainment (the reference category) which was higher in South East and South West England than the rest of Britain, added to which the relatively lower average attainment by unclassified students was even lower in the North East, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, London, Wales and Scotland. These areas coincide with higher average unemployment, and (other than London) with lower average income, and this suggests that they suffer a negative contextual effect that is strongest for young people with the lowest social status.

Over time social class differences in attainment have narrowed in Scotland, but there is no evidence of similar change in any of the English regions or in Wales.

Females had slightly higher truancy and less positive attitudes to school than males. This finding is counter-intuitive in view of the higher average attainment among females than males, and it is possible that it may be an indication that working class girls are failed by the education system while the greater success of middle class females dominates the headlines; this will be investigated further in a future study. Gender differences were smaller with respect to truancy in Yorkshire/Humberside, West Midlands, Wales and Scotland, and with respect to attitudes to school in Yorkshire/Humberside and Scotland. Gender differences in attainment did not vary between English regions, but were wider in Wales and Scotland than elsewhere.

This paper set out to explore the extent of differences in young people's experiences and outcomes of compulsory schooling between the regions within England, and the home countries of Britain. We had a clear rationale for home-international comparisons of England, Wales and Scotland (Raffe *et al* 1999), but there was some anxiety that we might be reading too much into the differences between national systems, and that regional difference could explain as much as home-international difference. In fact the case for home-international comparison is to some extent strengthened by the analyses described above – differences between Scotland and England are greater than differences between the regions, but differences between Wales and England are less clear cut.

The analysis described above emphasises that the key divisions within British schooling are by social class. Wherever they live in Britain students with parents in managerial/professional occupations are much less likely to truant from school, are much more likely to perceive that their school experience were useful, and far more likely to achieve a high level of exam success. Conversely, the position of students of unclassified SEC worsened over time. It is instructive that the average attainment of those with unclassified SEC was lower in regions north of the Severn-Wash line where there is lower average income and a smaller proportion of graduates in the population. It seems likely that the models are failing to capture differences in social composition arising from the contextual effect of regional poverty and regional differences in the qualifications of the population. Many studies have emphasised the negative effects of area-poverty on schooling (Smith and Noble 1995, Harris and Ranson 2005). In 1993 Ofsted reported on a study of disadvantaged urban areas "Beyond the school gate are underlying social issues such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing, inadequate health care and the frequent break up of families. Education by itself can only do so much to enable individuals to reach beyond the limiting contours of their personal and social circumstances and succeed" (Ofsted 1993.) Ten years later David Bell, HM chief inspector

reflected on the report and the government initiatives attempting to tackle disadvantage; he concluded that there had been improvement, but not enough (Bell 2003).

What really stands out from the analysis is enormous change over time in young people's experiences and outcomes. Over the period 1984 to 1999 the majority of young people became much more positive in their perceptions of the usefulness of schooling, their propensity to play truant declined, and their attainment increased. These trends were found throughout Britain, and although there were small differences by region and national system, such differences pale to insignificance compared with the overall change that has taken place.

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