

Grammar School Heads' Association

Newsletter - Edition 10
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Funding Update

Schools face the prospect of significant funding cuts and yet the response in the main has been muted. It is possible that MFG and protection has meant that some schools are yet to engage with the impact of decisions. Protection aims at reducing turbulence by delaying the full impact until 2015 but the time for pressing the funding case is now before key policy decisions are made.

There is a strong case to be made that any changes in post 16 funding should not disproportionately hit schools merely because they are successful. It has been clear that ministers did not realise that grammar schools and high performing comprehensives could face future cuts of 28%+ in post 16 funding. Ministers also seem to see the flaws in linking academies to local funding forums but they are also exposed to the arguments of others who favour such an option.

It can be frustrating when Heads write to Ministers only to receive a standard reply but it does add weight to the dialogue we are having with Ministers and Heads are encouraged to write expressing concerns and making Ministers aware of the consequences of the worst options in the post 16 consultation proposals.

Most academies will be appalled that consultation on the model for a national LACSEG formula has only involved Local Authorities. The response of L.A.s was totally predictable. The document indicates a national funding level of £156 per student. Scrutiny of last year's Section 251 returns indicates that no L.A. had a figure below £156 for secondary schools. Such a low figure suggests that there has been large scale manipulation of Section 251 figures.

A one way consultation means that the interests of the L.A. are given undue credence. There is an assumption that L.A. management structures will remain constant even when maintained schools have considerably shrunk.

There are some positive features in the consultation on LACSEG. The rhetoric is robust with sensible proposals such as including contingency figures in the calculation and there is the promise of thorough scrutiny.



Barry Sindall

There is evidence that some L.A.s are suggesting that former specialist school/HPSS funding can be redistributed. Whilst it is true that all national programme funding has now been subsumed into DSG the reality is that school budgets (after adjustment for numbers) can only be reduced by 1.5% based on the 2011/12 quantum.



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Sponsoring an Academy - a personal account

Skinner's Kent Academy was conceived in the autumn of 2007. There had been widespread concerns in the area regarding the performance of Tunbridge Wells High School. That year it had achieved 12% 5 A* - C grades, including English and Maths; numbers were falling fast in the school as people voted with their feet. Further, tens of children were being permanently excluded each year and the reputation of the school was poor. It was clear something needed to be done. I made a suggestion that the school convert into an academy – and, potentially, that Skinner's School could act as its sponsor and mentor. We had already begun to work with Tunbridge Wells High School in supporting individual children – it seemed possible to develop that work.

That first step set in motion a sequence of events that led to the birth of Skinner's Kent Academy two years later, and allowed a transformation in the educational hopes for children in Tunbridge Wells who were looking for a good all ability school that would allow them to flourish and achieve their potential.

The support of the Governing Body and the Skinner's Company as a whole was necessary. Neither was willing to engage lightly with the obvious challenge, the additional workload, and the potential for reputational risk, without very hard scrutiny. Equally, parents of pupils at Skinner's School were consulted, as was the Director of Children's Services at Kent County Council. All agreed there was a pressing need to provide good non selective education in Tunbridge Wells but should Skinner's School provide the answer? And if so, what difference could it make? West Kent College and KCC came forward as co-sponsors to assist us. The Clerk of The Skinner's Company took a role of true leadership in committing the Company to the project. The Chair of Governors at Skinner's School showed that the Skinner's School was prepared to take risks for its values. The decision was made at Skinner's School to take the role of lead sponsor and oversee the transformation of Tunbridge Wells High School into Skinner's Kent Academy. We were to be the first grammar school to do so.

Thus the hard work began. The process may have changed since, but it is hard to overstate the levels of bureaucratic overload that was required by the then Department of Children, Schools and Families, and thankfully I have repressed the memory of much of it. The expression of interest and the school ethos ran to hundreds of pages and the requirement to map out and justify a curriculum not yet designed, to pupils not yet recruited, taught by a staff not yet formed, according to a developing ethos, was challenging. As I wrote these documents, I was acutely conscious that the whole project was by no means destined for success.

It was obvious to me that the project's success would stand or fall on the quality of leadership that we could find for the Academy. Thankfully, we were able to make a superb appointment. Since then we have built up an outstandingly effective leadership team.

Another area where the project could have run aground was to do with the new building. Tunbridge Wells High School was a rebranded version of Sandown Court School. The greatest threat to the success of the Academy would be that the parents of Tunbridge Wells would perceive Skinner's Kent Academy as little more than another rebranding exercise. In fact it represented a root and branch transformation of education provision. That radical new start needed to be summarized and exemplified by a radical rebuilding. At this point the Government decided to end the 'Building Schools for the Future' project and cease funding new builds for all new academies. Our future hung in the balance and depended upon the whim of the Secretary of State. To our delight, he shortly declared that the Academy would indeed receive its full funding of £21.4 million and a new build could proceed.

The final results of the predecessor school were 17% A* - C, including English and Maths. At the end of its first year the Academy took the performance of its pupils to 32%. In its second this was improved to 46%. Since the opening of the Academy, not one pupil has been permanently excluded. We have achieved the transformation with the same constituency of pupils that was so poorly served by the previous school. In the same period the life expectations of its pupils have been transformed, the pupils have achieved wide recognition as being very well presented and the change of mood is palpable. Children are coming to the Academy in increasing numbers and a strong team has been established to support their progress. By all objective and subjective measures the school is achieving its intention to be a good community school for pupils of all abilities in the Tunbridge Wells area.

Sponsoring an Academy (Cont.)

What has Skinners' School gained from the process? We are richer in innumerable ways. The two schools work closely in CPD, ITT and pupil mentoring. Skinners' takes in some SKA pupils into our Sixth Form. Teachers work closely together to support colleagues and share best practice. Joint extra-curricular activities take place. Governors link the two schools and I chair the Education Committee. Although there was never any guarantee of this, the gratitude of KCC has been reflected in financial support for the school's building programme. Above all, the reputation of Skinners' School has been enhanced as one prepared to take risks for local children. As a school benefitting from selection, it is right that we do something to support those disenfranchised by selection. It allows the school to demonstrate to pupils our values in action.

The process is by no means easy and success is not certain. Despite these caveats, I recommend sponsoring an academy. Skinners' School is the better for it, as is education in Tunbridge Wells.



Simon Everson

House of Commons Reception

House of Commons Reception for Grammar School Heads and Admissions Seminar 17 April.

The House of Commons reception planned for April 17th provides an important occasion for networking. The last Commons event, for example, provided the opportunity to suggest that the end of the Specialist Schools programme made it essential that school budgets should have an element of protection.

It is anticipated that both Michael Gove and Nick Gibb will attend together with others from all the main parties and from a range of educational organisations. At a time when GSHA influence is increasing, and with schools facing many important issues, it would be helpful if headteachers could extend a personal invitation to their constituency M.P.

The new Code on Admissions and the increase in the number of schools that will be managing testing makes it a good time for a seminar on Admissions. In order to make the best use of the day the seminar will take place in the afternoon followed by the reception at 7.00pm.

The seminar will include presentations that cover:

- Developments in Tests that are Coaching Free
- The New Admission Code and Managing Testing before Application
- Admission Case Studies
- How Grammar Schools are Contributing to Social Mobility

The event is being hosted by Kings College and there will be an opportunity to consider developments in university admissions.

There will be a modest charge towards expenses of £25 for the reception. Details have been circulated to schools and early booking is recommended.



Teaching Schools

As Grammar School Heads' Association Chairman, I was recently invited to join the Teaching Schools' Steering Board following a meeting between Di Barnes and the GSHA Executive.

The first round of bids for Teaching School status saw 57 secondaries, 36 primaries and 7 special schools designated. We are now in the second round with 50, 55 and 2 applying.

The Steering Board listened to the experiences of early qualifiers and is already considering how to ensure quality through appropriate evaluation. As the initiative develops the National College wishes to cement key performance indicators, evaluation processes, quality assurance, even de-designation. Before that, however, there are a number of current live issues with which early qualifiers are wrestling. Rather than outlining what may be perceived as negatives, however – let it be said that all involved are excited by the initiative, seeing it as a transformational project which can fundamentally change the educational landscape. The problems are all perceived as challenges to be overcome.

These would include funding, capacity, commercialism, alliances, quality, top down fears, ITT/HEI interface, academisation, geography.

Presently schools receive £60,000 to deliver the Teaching School business plan accepted by the National College. This is barely sufficient to fund the level of capacity demanded – however, as schools become more commercially savvy, selling their professional development, the provision will be self-financing – even profit-making. How many schools are in an alliance will vary – and the nature of the collaboration and relationship will differ in different arrangements, but it is not to be a top down model. Rather schools will work together to deliver high quality professional development and Initial Teacher Training and progress will be rigorously assessed. All HEI providers are aware of the developments – currently the rate of progress with HEI varies and ultimately there will be a mixed economy of ITT provision. The TDA – about to morph into the TA – will, as I understand it, accredit the providing Teaching Schools who can then certificate ITT trainees, though, I may have misunderstood – perhaps the TA or even as now the L.A. or similar will carry out that requirement.

So, what we have is a vision where a lead Teaching School – a sort of primus inter pares – brings together up to 25 schools – they can be cross phase or all the same phase – and will pool their high quality expertise and share it with each other to raise standards and offer it on the open market for others to purchase.

At the same time, rather like training schools and SCITT schools, Teaching Schools will welcome increased numbers of initial teacher trainees which they will accredit. I am not sure if this is along the lines of the GTP or something more radical.

The self-evident good sense of all this is that excellent practice in teaching is to be found in schools across the country – to raise standards that excellent practice needs to be identified and exploited through collaborative partnerships wherever possible. What is more, few would disagree that chunks of theory offered by HEI have been perceived as irrelevant whilst trainees have wanted more school-based advice and experience.

The principles behind all this are therefore incontrovertible – the devil is in the detail and the backdrop. While the National College is trying to make progress, the academisation of schools is taking centre stage and is relegating the Teaching School initiative to the margins of national publicity. Many on the outside seem less energised by the Teaching School plans whilst it might just be whispered that in some places the National College representatives may not carry all the credibility needed.

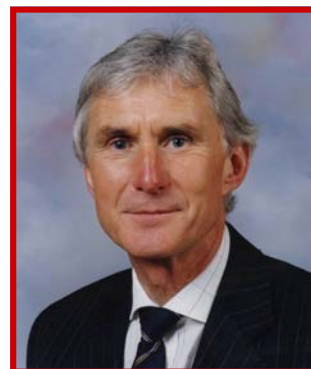
From a GSHA perspective, few grammar schools applied for – and even fewer achieved – Teaching School status. I have no idea why that was – but, as ever, ignorance won't stop me speculating.

Teaching Schools (Cont.)

Many grammar school Heads are confident and engaged in their own initiatives in Outstanding schools – they are engaged with Trust status, sponsoring Academies, the Leading Edge, specialist provision and so on and have not seen the need to seek endorsement by the National College. At the same time my perception is that the National College may not have courted grammar schools because they do not see that we can offer much, serving a narrow band for progress, with few on the pupil premium and free school meals; and, of course, there are also the micro and macro political issues surrounding selection.

The trick then for leaders in our business is to identify, among all the initiatives, which have legs and which do not. Will Teaching Schools be the transformational vehicle 4 years from now or will it have gone the same way as the Diplomas – so espoused by many a short 4 years ago.

The principle is incontestable - the practice



Roy Pike

E.Bacc Survey

A total of 99 schools responded to the survey. The purpose was to provide no more than a snapshot of the impact of E.Bacc on provision.

The majority of schools have made no changes to their options and the increase in compliance was the consequence of students choosing to follow E.Bacc subjects. In general E.Bacc remains a measure of provision rather than achievement.

The perceived status of E.Bacc subjects, as a result of media publicity, has led to more students doing History or Geography and some schools commented that there was an increase in the number following both these subjects.

Most schools are finding that the impact of E.Bacc is minimal. The greatest impact has been felt in schools that have changed their options and 38% of these schools report a drop in those following a second or 3rd MFL subject. Some schools are also reporting a drop in the number opting for Music. In those schools where Music numbers have been low even a small decline in take up is calling into question the viability of the subject. In 17% of schools GCSE Music is provided for outside the normal timetable provision. Several schools fear that any subsequent reduction in staffing will have a negative impact on extra-curricular Music.

The potential impact on minority subjects is greater at KS5 for the smaller KS4 base means that a significant minority of schools anticipate that Music, and to a lesser extent minority MFL subjects, will cease to be viable. Any significant cut in post 16 funding will increase this likelihood.

The general picture is that grammar schools do not consider E.Bacc to be a problem and that the impact on most subjects is marginal. It is therefore quite surprising that DfE officers have been very engaged by the outcomes with a particular concern about Music. It is likely that DfE will undertake a survey in 2013 to consider the impact on KS5.

Re-engineering Leadership

In the changing world of education, traditional leadership models may not achieve the profound transformation required in 21st Century schools. This is an account of one school's attempt to re-engineer the leadership paradigm.

As a driver for change and to redesign learning, we set the empowerment of teachers at all levels – and our students – as a priority. Transition has been gradual; it began five or six years ago and is ongoing – though the pace of change has accelerated considerably during the last year as we begin to grasp the real scope of the opportunity to construct learning collaboratively.

Overview

Many factors have influenced the progressive empowerment of teachers and learners – new ways of working, new structures, new systems.

Key markers were our designation as an Engineering Specialist School and the extensive development of the ICT infrastructure. Then, a new Head's determination six years ago to develop a student-focused rather than a teacher-led institution helped develop a vision around which people could come together and heralded a period of intense renewal.

But more potent still is an emerging leadership model which has moved dramatically along the continuum from directive to facilitative, and has seen key aspects of decision-making about the personalisation of learning driven into the core of the intuition, firstly from the senior management team, then to middle leaders and now into the classroom.

Reflecting on our journey has helped identify the elements which are critical to where we are today.

New structures – new ways of working

Several years ago now, early moves to amalgamate discrete subject areas into faculties brought demonstrable benefits of rationalisation and coherence. Implicit too was an onus to operate increasingly in networks, initially at a micro level.

Director of Studies posts were created for those who led faculties and their forum became one such network. Faculty meetings brought staff together from across subject disciplines, as did working groups centered initially around the specialism: all began to open up cross-curricular working as never before. The new Directors of Study had an authority and profile to which they were unaccustomed, plus a level of responsibility and accountability which some found dauntingly beyond their comfort zone. A degree of staff turbulence offered opportunity for buy-in from others. The experience we gained and the new contexts for collaboration proved invaluable and crucial to future success.

Moving tutorial arrangements to a vertical system in 2005 further eroded hierarchies of decision. For the first time a major initiative was driven by senior leaders other than the Head, working with a group of middle leaders and through consultation with the whole staff and student body.

The school saw the benefits and took ownership, the self-belief of the leaders increased, the academic-pastoral divide narrowed, the restructuring impinged on all and the shift in focus to learning in all aspects of the daily life of the school progressed.

The wide-ranging involvement of the leadership and faculty teams preceded the far reaching decision to reconfigure parts of the curriculum. An accelerated KS3 (currently in its third year) and now enhanced KS4 have generated many challenges but at the same time provided the impetus for middle leaders to engage in debate and discussion about the underlying principles and practicalities of linking key elements of the 'Deeps**'- weighing the risks and taking responsibility for driving forward the implementation of change.

(** Identified by Professor David Hargreaves et al as Deep learning; Deep support: Deep experience and Deep leadership).

Embedding and enabling change

Allied to the above was our designation by The Schools Network as a Development and Research Hub, first for student voice and then Deep Learning. At the same time the faculty structure was streamlined and the leadership team – comprising newly renamed Learning Directors (LDs) and the existing senior leadership team – was created.

In a changing environment some Learning Directors and teachers boldly seized on the opportunity to innovate, drew in students, and pockets of development emerged in new and exciting networks. Interestingly some early developments gained greater momentum as a result of networking with colleagues in other schools.

Our Learning Directors, teachers and students began leading workshops at local meetings, regional and national conferences. Contacts with schools across the country have since flourished, as have visits by colleagues in some of those schools.

As a result our staff and students have discussed practice in different contexts, considered policy and procedures and shared expertise, which in itself has been reinforcing and developmental for so many.

External endorsement has not only affirmed and acclaimed some of their groundbreaking work, but has boosted both enthusiasm and the confidence to question existing practice and implement change. As Learning Directors begin to understand the power of establishing forums for cross-school innovation at a macro level and observe their impact, the school is set to drive forward change as never before. At the heart of this is the Leadership Team.

Learning Directors are embracing their role as key change makers, handling increasingly complex problems which present multiple solutions, and beginning to find an emerging consensus.

In the last year, all whole-school training has been devised and led by them and has stimulated new levels of collaborative thinking and engagement. As Learning Directors have acquired expertise through experience and training so they have become the leadership coaches and mentors for aspiring Curriculum Leaders and others, and possess an increasing awareness of their role in succession planning. It is they who are now charged with supporting Curriculum Leaders to broaden the base of innovation, leading clusters of staff and students to explore the new ways of working as partnership and leadership in the classroom are re-thought; taking ownership of the next wave of change.

Some staff, especially younger teachers keen to explore the potential of new technologies, have relished the opportunity to bring student leadership of learning to the fore as they redesign the classroom experience through use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The development of learning conversations among students and between students and staff is still in its infancy but offers exciting possibilities as teachers and learners grapple with the enormous potential of this largely untapped resource.

The latest work is set to build on the peer mentoring and academic mentoring which has blossomed in the wake of vertical tutoring. Instigated by students for students, academic peer mentoring has become a powerful dimension of student learning for both mentor and mentee and is founded on the principle that the most effective form of learning is to 'teach' someone in the same or different age group.

As teachers who initially devised discrete mentor training programmes have worked alongside Sixth Form mentors both in and out of classes, they too have become reflective and reactive learners. The easy and speedy assimilation of learning and 'effective enlightenment' which appears to occur when 'mentor speak' is deployed is proving a significant agent for developing practice as teachers and learners take forward the co-construction of learning.

*Janet Renou, Headteacher
Skipton Girls' High School*



Grammar School
Heads' Association

Re-engineering Leadership (Cont.)

Next steps...

Generation Y – the cohort born roughly between 1982 and 1994 – is growing up with the rise of instant communication technologies made possible through use of the internet, such as email and texting, plus IM and new media used through websites like You Tube and social networking sites. A number of themes emerge as we work to empower those students in steering a truly personal route in their learning:

- The skills and attributes of our 'thinking student' need to be explicitly developed and embedded in collaboration with the student body.
- Essential knowledge, skills and understanding must be available in the public domain and accessible to the whole community.
- Opportunities across the full age range which address the 'stage not age' imperative are available to all as curriculum innovation continues.
- We need to expand on the embryonic work with year 9 to develop project and problem- based learning.
- We should encourage a situation in which students negotiate a package of learning in an agreed time scale, in which the learning is owned by the student and facilitated by the teacher.
- We should enhance the partnership with students so that they take more responsibility for decision-making about the operation of the school
- We need to capitalise on the chances the VLE offers to establish learning networks with staff and students in other classes, schools locally and across the UK, and eventually on a global level.

As well as being a channel for the transmission of society's shared values and knowledge, education is a preparation for the world students must inhabit and manage.

Grounded in our shared values we're working towards a paradigm that will support our Generation Y (and Z!) pupils as they keep pace with an endless cycle of dynamic change.

Janet Renou

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Dates for the Diary / Events

- **23rd March Assessment and Data Conference for Grammar Schools, London**
- **17th April Admissions Seminar 1.45—5.15 Kings College London, followed by House of Commons Reception**
- **20th April Executive Committee. Lansdowne Club**
- **4th May Steering Committee King Edward V1 Five Ways Birmingham**
- **20/21 June Annual Conference Lansdowne Club London**
- **July 3rd (date to be confirmed). Head of Sixth Form Conference London**

Other seminars and conferences are being planned and details will be sent to schools.

Schooling in Sevenoaks

The Grammar School Heads in West Kent (11+ entry) are facing a very interesting time as a number of coincident factors are re-awakening the hope of some (in the local populace of Sevenoaks) that selective schooling may again be provided in the town. Selective places disappeared from Sevenoaks with the loss of the Assisted Places scheme and since then grammar-assessed children have travelled to Tonbridge or Tunbridge Wells: over 1000 on a daily basis, with journeys ranging from 7-15 miles and journey times often in excess of 1 hour.

Speculation is growing in both the local and national press that Grammar School provision may soon be made in Sevenoaks and that one or more of the six, single-sex, Grammar Schools in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells will enable this to happen. The speculation is hardly surprising given that Kent County Council is talking openly about the possibility.

Here's one example of the speculation from the Daily Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9005038/A-green-light-for-more-grammar-schools.html>

Window of Opportunity

There is no doubt that there is a brief window of opportunity in which a big solution to the inherent issue of schooling in Sevenoaks may be addressed. Throughout West Kent there is a surge of student numbers going through the primary sector which will hit the secondary schools in 4 years time. KCC's figures, which they are yet to release, suggest that this surge will be maintained and that it would therefore be sensible to invest in new school building in areas which are poorly served. A moment's consideration quickly reveals that Sevenoaks, in comparison to Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, is poorly served in both the number and variety of school places available in the secondary sector.

Grammar School Headteacher Statement

The press has become very excited by the thought of a new grammar school, but it is clear that all children need to be considered and all forms of schooling within that. As Grammar School Heads we have issued the following statement in an effort to quell the excitement and keep matters behind closed doors:

"We, the Headteachers of the grammar schools in West Kent, are aware that it is likely that the number of West Kent secondary age children will rise in the near future. Whilst there are currently surplus all-ability spaces these, it appears, will not be sufficient to cover the projected increase in pupil numbers. Any increase in provision needs to be very carefully planned, with the impact on all children and all schools carefully considered. Inevitably this will raise the question of increased selective provision in West Kent and, in particular, the lack of provision in Sevenoaks. We think it wise for the Local Authority to consider a range of possible options to meet the increased demand and grammar school provision should be a consideration within that; however only careful scoping will reveal whether further grammar provision in Sevenoaks is good news for all students. We hope that the politics surrounding grammar school provision can be taken out of this planning process. West Kent is blessed with interdependent, outstanding and diverse schools – we believe that all children benefit when all schools are confident about the future."

Needless to say our statement has had little effect! Our major concern with the public debate is that Sevenoaks becomes a major campaign ground for pro- and anti-selection campaigners.

Alliance of Parents

In a clear demonstration of people power a petition in Sevenoaks has garnered enough signatories (1500+) to force a debate on selective schooling in Sevenoaks at KCC. A further development is the establishment of a Sevenoaks alliance of parents with a much broader interest base, see: www.sevenoaksace.org. Both groups are endeavouring to reach parents through our schools.

Schooling in Sevenoaks (Cont.)

Could a New School be built in Sevenoaks?

If it was concluded that further selective places need to be made available and that these should be sited in Sevenoaks then the obvious solution is a new grammar school. However current legislation prohibits the establishment of any new selective schools. KCC is also, therefore, exploring the idea of annexes (of existing grammar schools in West Kent). To most of us the idea of establishing a small annexe some 10 miles away is pretty unattractive at first glance – issues regarding admissions, employment contracts and long term viability are not easy to see through. In addition the clear preference in Sevenoaks is for a coeducational grammar school – as we are all single-sex none of us can provide that.

To me the Government needs to do better than this. Kent is a selective authority and the increasing number of students in West Kent merits an increase in all types of schooling, including selective. If the County Council, as commissioning authority, considers that the best solution includes a new grammar school in Sevenoaks, then they should be allowed to commission just that. I'd like to think that the DfE is giving this serious consideration.

Robert Masters, The Judd School



A Levels - From Which Direction is the Wind of Change Blowing?



(Over the last decade GCE A levels have often suffered from a negative presentation by the media and policy makers have been quick to reinforce criticism, all too often without any supporting evidence.

Recently GSHA was invited to a closed conference where Michael Gove spoke and at which the outcomes of Ofqual's comparative research into how A level standards compare to other international qualifications were considered. In January GSHA was invited to a meeting attended by Michael Gove and Nick Gibb together with representatives from Higher Education groups, Ofqual, and several members of the Education Select Committee.

The article below shows the link between and considers the pointers for the future.)

Ofqual Research:

Ofqual is undertaking a six year research study that will compare the standards of assessments taken internationally with those taken in England. The first study has focused on assessments taken before entry to university. The next study will consider post 16 qualifications.

The research compared standards in A level Mathematics, Chemistry, English and History with those of 22 countries. The study also included I.B. It was recognised that comparison had to be made on a like for like basis as some qualifications offer a wider range of subjects at varying levels. Standard level I.B. Maths, for example, was considered comparable with GCSE rather than A level.

The research judged that A level subjects compared very well in terms of depth, breadth, and analysis. Assessment at A level was considered straightforward and transparent compared to many systems. Some international qualifications make a greater use of multiple choice questions and these could be demanding. Surprisingly, perhaps, the study suggests that A level questions are less predictable than many systems and considers that the predictability of some systems erodes the element of apparent challenge.

In general A level was seen as a very good preparation for university but there was acknowledgement of the value in some systems, such as I.B., of a research project or extended essay.

A Levels - From Which Direction is the Wind of Change Blowing?

The findings for the four subjects were:

Mathematics: A level was found to be unique in terms of its range as it embraced both pure and applied. Assessments in Hong Kong are more demanding but over a narrower range of study. A level is unusual in including Mechanics for in most countries this element is included in Physics specifications. The research suggests that the absence of Mechanics in Physics papers leads some students to feel that there is little problem-solving in Physics and speculates that this could be a factor in the relatively low application rates for degrees in Physics.

Chemistry: A level offers a significantly wider programme than most systems and a better balance of inorganic, organic, physical, and analytical content. It was also considered to have more challenging topics.

English: There was no consensus about what is meant by English and A level stands apart by having an almost exclusive focus on reading and interpreting traditional forms of text. Other systems have a wider view of what constitutes a text and include photographs and film. The research suggests that this wider approach would provide a better foundation for degree work.

History: There were varied attitudes about the purpose of History with very significant differences in the amount of national history that is studied. A level stood out in terms of preparation for a degree course as it had a good balance of content combined with the concepts and skills to analyse and interpret materials.

Meeting with Ministers: It was very clear that the research has influenced the way Ministers perceive A Level. The discussion was firmly rooted in the assumption that A level will stay and the focus was on further improvement. Universities were equally positive about A level although expressing concern that sometimes additional teaching has to be undertaken to make good gaps in knowledge. It was recognised that this could be due to the range of subjects that universities accept for entry. Some also felt that modularity meant that gaps developed because students did not re-visit earlier learning.

Universities like A/S and find it a reliable indicator when selecting, but many felt that A/S could be uncoupled from A2 so that the A level grade was derived exclusively from A2 work.

There was significant support for making the Extended Project a core requirement as well as some support for CAS type provision. It was an opportunity to remind Ministers that any funding model must reflect the volume of study (at a meeting the previous day GSHA had presented Michael Gove with a letter that suggested a funding model that would support challenge). The minister seemed to accept the principle.

Less than a year ago Ministers seemed unwilling to countenance reform of Examination Boards, but at this meeting it was apparent that change could be considered and that this might range from a reduction in specifications to the reform of Awarding Bodies.

There were no decisions made at the meeting but it was possible to speculate about possible future changes.

- Universities are likely to become more involved in developing future specifications
- Over time A2 assessment will become more analytical
- A/S is likely to survive (PQA, however, may reduce its value)
- In the medium term it is possible that E.P. will become part of a core. It is also possible that there could be a core Maths requirement
- Ofqual research is likely to be a major factor in informing decisions about GCSE, A levels, and Examination Board reform

Executive Committee



Chairman:

Roy Pike - Torquay Boys' Grammar School

Vice Chairman (Chairman Designate for 2012/13):

Mark Fenton - Dr Challoner's Grammar School

Vice Chairman:

Simon Everson - Skinners' School Tunbridge Wells

Treasurer:

David Wheeldon - King Edward V1 Five Ways School. Birmingham

Regional Representatives

Kent	Rosemary Joyce, Matthew Bartlett
Medway	Christine Probyn
Bucks	Stephen Nokes, Phillip Wayne
London	James Skinner, Liz Allen
Lincolnshire	Tim Clark
South West	Ian Carter, Stuart Smallwood
Gloucestershire	Jon Standen, Ewa Sawicka
Birmingham	Colin Parker
Reading/Slough	Marsha Carey-Elms, John Weeds
Lancashire/Cumbria	Andrew Jarman
Essex	Nicole Chapman
Midlands	Tim Swain, Julie Lawton
Trafford	Tim Gartside, Mike Thompson
Merseyside	Elaine Cogan
Warwickshire	Ian Blackie, Charlotte Marten
Yorkshire	Martin Pearman



*We wish two retiring heads - **Marsha Carey-Elms & David Wheeldon** - and we who know them well know just how retiring they are - all good wishes for the future.*

We hope to maintain our association by creating a past membership connection - we do not want to lose the years of experience built up by such leaders.

Good luck to you both!

