

Grammar School Heads' Association

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Stuck in a Groove?

Is the debate on selective education stuck in the arguments of the 1960s and 1970s? What does the future hold for grammar schools?

The continuing controversy around the Weald of Kent Sevenoaks annexe has revealed quite starkly the political equivocation in relation to grammar schools. Politicians may like the results that many grammar school students obtain but on the front bench there is a reluctance to take a move which would be interpreted by some as adding to their number. However, the climate is very different on the back benches and, if groups like Conservative Voice and UKIP are to be believed, in the country as a whole. It was against this backdrop that Civitas decided to commission twenty three essays on different aspects of selective secondary education. 'The Ins and Outs of Selective Secondary Schools A Debate' was published by Civitas on Monday 16th March and launched with a debate in the Palace of Westminster hosted by MPs Graham Brady and Nic Dakin.

The opening round saw David Davis take on Tristram Hunt. David Davis spoke warmly of his own grammar school education and the transformational impact that it had had on his life and those of his peers. He roundly condemned selection by income: families being unable to afford school fees, the cost of housing in the catchment areas of outstanding schools or the sums that private tutors charge for 11+ coaching. Arguing that grammar schools have an important contribution to make to social mobility and choice as part of a diverse provision, he urged that the current system of selection both covert and overt by wealth be replaced by 'a ladder of opportunity for talented and hardworking youngsters from less privileged backgrounds'. Mr Davis, who lamented the failure to develop a strong technical educational provision, sees no reason why selection should only take place at 11. Instead he proposed that there should be more grammar schools and that they should play a key role in a more flexible system in which students might transfer to a different provision part way through their secondary schooling.

Tristram Hunt, predictably, said that he was not in favour of expanding the grammar school sector and does not favour selection. He agreed that the remaining grammar schools have a part to play as a part of the existing provision but emphasised that they must be socially inclusive and address the under representation of students from deprived backgrounds. He concurred with Mr Davis in lamenting the failure of post war governments to develop a more effective technical provision. If elected, his party will focus on early years provision because this is where tackling the impact of deprivation has most effect. The Labour Party would reintroduce a gifted and talented programme to meet the needs of bright youngsters in all schools. It would address the funding issue for post 16 students by removing the cap on funding and increasing the budget. It would also invest money to develop a high quality maths provision. He sketched out a system in which young people at 14 could choose a range of different pathways including vibrant technical and creative provisions and in which grammar schools would have a part to play alongside comprehensive schools in providing an academic pathway. He also stated that a Labour administration would seek to strengthen the role of Local Authorities in planning school provision as well as extending the authority of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

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Stuck in a Groove? Cont ...

A lively debate then followed amongst the books' contributors which included me and Nicole Chapman who, with Alice Phillips of GSA, argued the case for single sex education. Amongst the ideas debated were a lottery system for allocating school places was the way to covert selection, the move towards a national funding formula which would end much of the unfairness in the present system, more freedom and autonomy for schools and a greater choice for parents.

Graham Brady made the case for extending the number of grammar schools; he argued that all the evidence shows that achievement in areas where there are grammar schools is higher than in totally non-selective areas. He saw a compelling case for the creation of new grammar schools in non selective areas where attainment is low. Extending grammar school provision also widened parental choice and he claimed that where such choice did not exist then more parents opt for independent school education.

It was very clear from the debate that the issue of social mobility will be high on the agenda whichever political party gains power. In the course of the last two years, we have won some ground in that key politicians now understand that analysis of national statistics can be misleading, that tackling underachievement of deprived children needs to start early in their lives and that whilst grammar schools have a part to play in improving social mobility, they can't be held solely accountable for this.

We cannot afford to be complacent about the issue of social inclusion. Whilst I think that most of us would recognise a strong moral obligation to be proactive, political expediency is also a driver. Doing nothing is not an option if we want to retain control of our schools and their admissions processes. We need to publicise the good work in this area that we are undertaking whether it is through partnership, sponsorship, or active attempts to alter our admissions processes to make schools more accessible to those from poor backgrounds. We campaigned for and got a change to the admissions code to enable us to give priority to students in receipt of pupil premium/free school meals. Whilst we aren't a political organisation, our schools are part of a highly politicised educational system and we need to continue to put forward proposals like this which make a real difference.

There are signs that the political debate on grammar schools is moving on from the stale arguments about whether or not we should continue to exist to much more interesting territory which includes debate about the part that we might play in a diverse provision. The needle is shifting onto a new track and we have a chance to shape the tune it will play.

Charlotte Marten

Progress 8 and Grammar Schools

The majority of grammars chose to opt in early to Progress 8. This has added credibility to GSHA's attempt to argue that there is a strong case for changing the points value attributed to higher GCSE grades to better recognise grade intervals. This argument has been accepted and for 2017 there will be changes that should better reflect the progress of children with a KS 2 score above 5.0

Schools have provided their progress 8 score for this year but this article also draws on additional information provided by individual schools. There were returns from 120 schools

The measures need to be treated with an element of caution. The ground rules around eligible qualifications for P8 have not been clear to all schools and some will modify provision as these become clearer. Some schools have gained as a consequence of early AS entry particularly if the subject was not one taken at GCSE. Where any early AS has been taken in a subject that was also sat at GCSE, the picture has been mixed. The AS grade replaces the GCSE grade and in some cases this has lowered the P8 score and the impact is particularly significant if an AS maths grade is below that achieved at GCSE.

What do the measures for Grammar Schools show?

- ◆ A school is below floor target if the progress 8 measure is below -0.5 and the upper band of the 95% confidence interval is below zero. Any school that does not meet the target is likely to trigger an inspection. The evidence of this year suggests that should not be an issue for any grammar school
- ◆ The information received shows a range from + 0.87 to -0.14. with more than 95% having a positive score
- ◆ The mean measure was +0.42

The percentile distribution is

Percentile	P8 Score
90	+0.65
80	0.58
60	0.48
40	0.32
20	0.12

Evidence provided by some schools indicates that, for those with very high KS 2 scores it is both harder to add value and easier to fall below target. There could be value in identifying the percentage of your students that add value. The limited evidence available suggests that even where a school's P8 is a low positive a very significant majority of students are adding value. GSHA is currently in dialogue with FFT about developing further grammar school specific information.

Progress 8 in 2017

The students who are starting GCSE in September will be doing both old and new GCSE. DfE has recognised that there is an issue in terms of the grade intervals from B grade upwards and legacy GCSE grades will have the values below.

GCSE Grade	2016 Points	2017 Points
G	1.0	1.0
F	2.0	1.5
E	3.0	2.0
D	4.0	3.0
C	5.0	4.0
B	6.0	5.5
A	7.0	7.0
A*	8.0	8.5

FFT has looked at the impact of this change and it makes a significant difference to most grammar schools with almost all gaining a higher score. It projects that the average student with a KS 2 score of 5.0 will gain +0.1 on current P8 scores and one with a 5.6 average will increase by 0.27.

The impact on most comprehensive schools will be small. In contrast the average gain across the selective sector will be around 0.15 but some schools may even get close to the exemption from inspection level. The gain may be short lived for it is very likely that as new KS 2 baselines are introduced then the targets for high achieving students will increase.

What does seem strange is that the change is not being introduced for 2016 for official start of P8. Delaying creates a volatile situation that will mean that many comprehensives will have a lower score in 2017 than in the previous year. It would make more sense to introduce the new scale from the start.

There are only about eight schools that have reached the exemption from inspection level; it remains to be seen how the changes will impact on this threshold.

Fischer Family Trust

Aspire now includes much of the data that grammar school leaders requested. What it lacks is the range of comparative indicators that schools would find useful. GSHA is now in dialogue with FFT about developing a Selective Schools Collaborative. This is likely to be sub-divided so that schools can benchmark against schools with similar intakes.

The cost for those that already subscribe to FFT (either individually or through the LA) is likely to be modest. It is anticipated that details will be ready for circulation early next term.

Mike Treadaway, Director of Research for FFT will be speaking at the annual conference..

Admissions - What May Lie Ahead?

It may be impossible to predict the outcome of the election but whatever the outcome it is certain that any new administration will be looking closely at admissions.

This newsletter includes a report from Charlotte Marten on the recent debate on selection that took place in the House of Commons and the common thread across political parties is the concern that admissions should support social mobility. The parties divide in terms of how this might be achieved. There is a concern for some politicians that the autonomy of academies and free schools means that responses to the issue are too dependent on individual schools taking action.

Grammar Schools have shown a more robust response to the issue than other sectors and many that have not taken action intend to do so for next year. It is far easier to defend the autonomy of the sector because of the steps taken thus far. In the period ahead that position will be further strengthened if more schools take positive steps to reach out to the disadvantaged able. In the Commons debate there were many present who are ideologically opposed to selection but their position was muted by the fact that a number of grammars have taken action. Charlotte, for example, reported how changes made at Rugby High and by the King Edward V1 Foundation Birmingham had resulted this year in a significant increase in FSM students without diluting the quality of intake.

The issue of social mobility is not exclusively a grammar school issue. There is a very real prospect that steps such as banding may be adopted in the future. Already there are some local authorities that are claiming that any changes on this scale could mean a change in the admissions calendar requiring an end to pre-testing. It is also possible that Local Authorities may be given greater powers both in planning and co-ordinating school places and in vetting admission criteria.

The current Code on Admissions looks decidedly odd in that it covers only some state funded providers. It seems perverse that OSA will pore over the minute of the admission practices of one group of providers and yet have no part to play in the practices of others. Whichever party is elected it is likely that any review of admissions will have to consider rationalising the Code.

The last newsletter reported on the growing interest of OSA in post sixteen admissions and the unreasonable fact that only 11-18 providers are subject to such scrutiny. There are a growing number of organisations, including some LAs, who argue that the post 16 situation is so complex that the only answer is to remove post 16 admissions from the Code.

The OSA annual report seems to be a document making a pitch for greater powers alongside a reduction in those of academies. The report makes the following claims about schools that are their own admission authority:

- ◆ **'Too many'** do not comply fully with the Code in respect of consultation and publication of their admission arrangements
- ◆ Admissions to sixth form **'frequently'** contravene the Code
- ◆ **'Often'** have arrangements that lack the required information or request prohibited information in supplementary forms
- ◆ **'Far too many'** have arrangements that are too complex and seem to enable the school to choose children rather than having simple criteria

Is this a balanced picture? The overwhelming majority of schools have not had a determination so the descriptions highlighted above apply to only a very small minority of schools that have been subject of an objection.

There are an increasing number of organisations that are questioning aspects of OSA. A particular concern is that the opening up of referrals to anyone is leading to campaign groups using the system. More are now asking whether any determination should only comment on lawful/unlawfulness rather than embracing personal preference of the adjudicators.

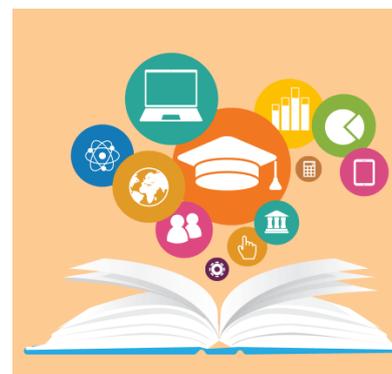
The one certainty is that grammar schools will be more secure if we can demonstrate that we are proactive in terms of action that supports social mobility. It was encouraging that Tristan Hunt in the recent debate recognised that social mobility was about providing opportunities to both the disadvantaged poor and to those 'ordinary' middle class families.

Testing and Selection

(Member schools that use GL tests have expressed an interest in forming a GL user group. Heather Payne, the author of the article below, has been part of a GSHA group that has been exploring the matter with GL. The response of GL has been totally positive.)

Testing and Selection: Establishing a GL User Group

There is no doubt that all schools are now subject to an increasing and unprecedented level of scrutiny, much of which is externally driven. The spotlight is now being trained on admissions more generally and selection in particular; those that oppose grammar schools invariably focus on the flaws in the process. Indeed, the media has delighted in making much of the role coaching for the eleven plus plays as a means of ensuring that the most affluent parents gain access to the very best schools for their children. Whilst much ground has been gained through the work of GSHA on social mobility and fairer testing, there is still work to be done.



Grammar schools need to be able to demonstrate that their testing arrangements are effective, able to reliably identify their intake, to negate the effects of coaching and to be fair. From recent dealings with the DfE, GSHA understands that this is unlikely to be realised if testing arrangements remain entirely local. Across the country there is a wide range of different testing arrangements with about a 50:50 split between those using CEM and those using GL Assessment (formerly NFER).

Equally, whilst many grammar schools have been quick to enjoy the freedom that academisation brings, it has also resulted in more schools than even before having sole responsibility for their admission arrangements. The more robust and transparent grammar school testing systems are, the sharper our admissions practice and the blunter the dissenters' arguments become.

However, grammar schools themselves have much to gain from securing a system of testing that is going to be effective, valid and reliable. Having tests which are fair and promote social mobility and that actively reduce the impact that coaching can have is something that every school wants. Whatever our arrangements for testing, they also need to be cost effective; there is no scope to fund anything fanciful in our budgets.

As a school that uses GL Assessment to provide our tests, it has been interesting to watch the work that GSHA has undertaken with CEM over the last few years. The relationship has evolved and is much closer to achieving some of the desired improvements in testing than those schools that are with GL Assessment. There is a genuine partnership between CEM and the schools it is working with; the dialogue has been about developing a series of tests around the areas of efficacy, fairness and cost. The work is delivering in other ways with the potential to provide data that supports analysis at a local and national level, for more coordination of test arrangements across larger geographical areas and to have tests that can also function as a baseline assessment measure. As might be expected, the consortium covers a wide range of schools with varying priorities; it contains groups of schools and standalone users. Over the last three years, the consortium members have discovered that it is possible to have tests that can be varied to meet particular needs whilst also having the benefit of a degree of common practice. The success of the group is down to having a mechanism for shared dialogue, something which GL Assessment schools currently lack. This is not a criticism of GL who are often prepared to provide a bespoke service but there is the potential to build on this through shared dialogue.

Testing and Selection cont ...

The possibility of working with GL Assessment to develop tests that meet the needs of schools, that increase the integrity and reliability of our selection procedures and that offer the benefit of economies of scale as the user group grows, is exciting. At the beginning of March GSHA organised an initial meeting with representatives from GL Assessment to explore the idea of forming a user group. GL Assessment was keen on the concept of a user group and of working more proactively with schools. The next step is to find out whether there is sufficient interest in having a user group from GSHA members and to find a structure that would give a user group that is viable in size and yet is geographically representative. One possibility would be to identify geographical clusters and then to weight them according to the number of users: the composition would look something like this:

3 representatives from Kent, 1 from Medway, 2 from Lincolnshire, 2 from the South West, 2 from Yorkshire, 2 from Trafford and 1 from Lancaster.

The opportunity to work alongside other grammar schools beyond our own locality, pooling expertise and exploring possibilities in a genuine dialogue with GL Assessment, has much to commend it. The next meeting of the GSHA Steering Committee is in early May. If you are interested in being involved, contact Barry Sindall and we can organise an exploratory meeting before the end of the summer term.

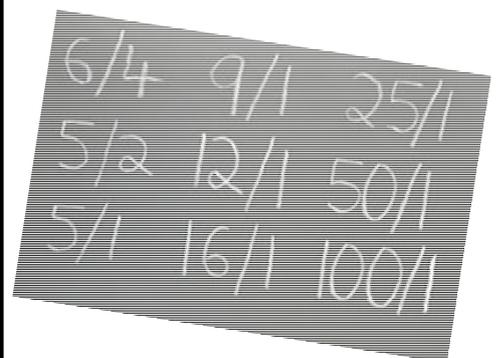
Heather Payne, Headteacher Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Horncastle. Lincolnshire.

1 to 5, 9 to 1? What are the odds on getting assessment right?

Are you still pondering whether there will be life without levels? If you are, you are in good company. It was clear that a lot of schools attending the GL Assessment Conference in London at the beginning of March are waiting to see what others do before committing to a new system and living in the hope that there will be a national consensus regarding what comes next.

The stand out speaker of the day for me was Charlie Leadbeater. He described the unknowable nature of the twenty first century, we are unable to foresee what life will be like in sixty years' time. Arguing that we live with endemic uncertainty in an age in which technological developments have opened the way for limitless collaboration, he claimed that the organisations that thrive well are those that are open, adaptive, innovative and purposeful. To fit our students to play a part in the creative communities that are driving innovation we need to ensure that they know how to:

- ◆ search, reassemble and apply knowledge
- ◆ pose good questions which open up debate, create challenge
- ◆ present, show and persuade others
- ◆ work with others, to make the most of combined ideas
- ◆ create tangible products with others
- ◆ be persistent, recover from setbacks and learn the pleasure of achievement hard won.



Self and peer assessment that ensures a continual flow of information and formative feedback is an essential tool in these communities. Young people need to be able to give and take feedback in a wide variety of ways. Schools should be places where students learn what matters to them, a place of purpose.

Angela Westington, an HMI, gave a presentation of Ofsted's approach to the new assessment landscape. She emphasised that Ofsted are not looking for a particular approach. Instead, they are looking to see if schools, students and parents know how well students are learning and that data is used to influence planning. She said that assessment reports show inspectors looking at a wide range of information. Schools need to be able to show that they are analysing their current data and using it to evaluate and improve practice. Data should be featuring in performance management discussions with individual members of staff. Ofsted will be looking for a rich mixture of different types of assessment. Governors need to be assured of the rigour of the assessment process. Schools should be working with other schools to ensure this. Ofsted will be looking at curriculum plans and schemes of work to see how they have been adapted and what the impact of the changes that have been made has been on students.

Andrew Carter (primary headteacher and member of Nick Gibbs' Assessment Commission) talked about the importance of training teachers how to use data: trainee teachers have very little experience of using assessment. He pointed out the paradox that the majority of children on a standardised assessment will be within the normal range and yet parents are deeply unhappy to be told that their child is normal. He pointed out the contrast with the health service, where everyone is relieved to be normal.

Andy Golding from Hinchingsbrooke School and Steve Walters from St Peter's School Wolverhampton described their contrasting approaches to assessment without levels. The former uses a 1 to 5 scale where 1 equates to beginning and 5 equates to mastering, the latter uses an incremental scale tied to current GCSE grades. You can read more about this at <http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/life-after-levels/case-studies>.

Brian Lightman, General Secretary of ASCL, spoke about his concern that levels had been abolished without thought being given to what was to replace them and queried whether the skills and expertise currently existed within the profession to fashion alternatives. He talked about the additional difficulty of trying to do this whilst there is still uncertainty about what the new GCSE grades mean in terms of comparability to existing grades and before we have any students who have been through the new GCSE assessment process. He talked about the tensions that exist between norm and criteria referencing in the current system and pointed out that levels were not originally designed to be applied to individual pieces of work. The volume of change and the pace of change are significant issues for the profession.

Jane Starbuck spoke on Newark's closing the gap project that was focused on transition: trying to reduce the number of students who reach secondary school and are excluded. You can read more about the GL PASS tests <http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/pass-pupil-attitudes-self-and-school> that the schools in the project use to help them to target support for the most vulnerable and more about the Newark project here: <http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/research-and-articles/closing-gap-newark-using-pass>. PASS looks like it could be a very useful tool. At £950 + VAT for a school of 11-15 year olds of less than 1000 it doesn't come cheap. On the other hand, if you purchase it for the main school, you can have the sixth form version for just £300 + VAT.

Vic Goddard from Passmore's Academy (Educating Essex) was the closing speaker. His focus is primarily to ensure that his students are safe and happy. He talked about the importance of his role as a filter: ensuring that at a time of great change the pressures on his staff were moderated. He sees his job as head being to work out what's important and to ignore the rest.

Do I have any more answers on assessment as a result of attending this conference? No. But I am far from alone. I came away with a clearer vision of the skills and dispositions that I need to be cultivating in my students. That's a good outcome in a very uncertain educational landscape.

Charlotte Marten

Planning for assessment without levels at Skipton Girls High School

Our journey so far...

It is a truth universally acknowledged that giving students numerical feedback does not help them to focus on the fundamental process of identifying improvements and next steps in their learning. Despite that, our KS3 students had become so used to and comfortable with being levelled that any assessment without this has caused minor insurrection in recent years and clamours for 'what level is this?' or worse – 'what level am I?'.

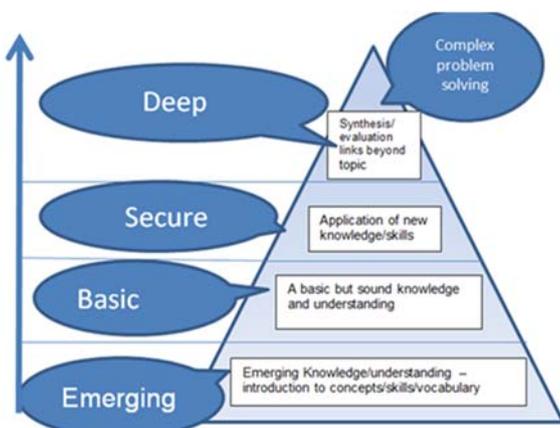
Teachers and students came to be on excellent terms with levels; parents, however, often remained at sea. The division of levels into as, bs and cs produced detailed and perhaps philosophically dubious tracking of individuals' and cohorts' progress. The language of levels blossomed – levels were converted to grades, expected progress evaluated by teachers and senior leaders worried about the 4bs; and KS2 children possibly traumatised if they were entered for, but missed, a level 6.

Removing levels therefore can quite rightly be seen as a wonderful opportunity...but the danger is merely to replace the nationally determined levels for a school's version of the same system. The move from levels demands answers to two questions; firstly, how do students know what they can do and what they need to do to develop? Secondly, how do school leaders, and those who ask these questions, know what progress individuals and cohorts are making? Throughout secondary schools and academies, the students' journey to GCSE is thrown into much sharper focus without our traditional 'end of KS3' assessment.

These were the questions grappled with by Northern Lights Teaching School Alliance (NL TSA) strategic partners (primary, secondary, rural, city centre, comprehensive and selective schools working together). Whatever system we developed must build motivation and confidence, self-reliance and provide challenge. It should demonstrate to students what they can do and identify the next steps in their learning journey; it should be able to be differentiated by ability; by subject; by phase. From a more whole school perspective it should measure progress over time and support appropriate and timely interventions.

We focused first on teaching and learning to design a manageable system that could work across all phases and subjects. Focussing on a taxonomy approach we reviewed SOLO, Blooms and other taxonomies and devised a system whereby learning outcomes were classified into 4 levels representing students' understanding of a topic:

- **Emerging** knowledge and understanding; an introduction to new concepts and new vocabulary
- **Basic:** Key ideas and concepts are grasped but there is limited ability to apply this knowledge or to use it confidently and consciously - **all** students should achieve this competency.
- **Secure:** New ideas can be applied or used in a confident and more sophisticated and conscious manner; **the majority** of students should progress to a secure knowledge and understanding
- **Deep:** the key characteristics of a really deep knowledge and understanding are synthesis and evaluation, alongside an ability to generalise and to abstract, drawing on more complex ideas and broadening beyond the formal thread of study

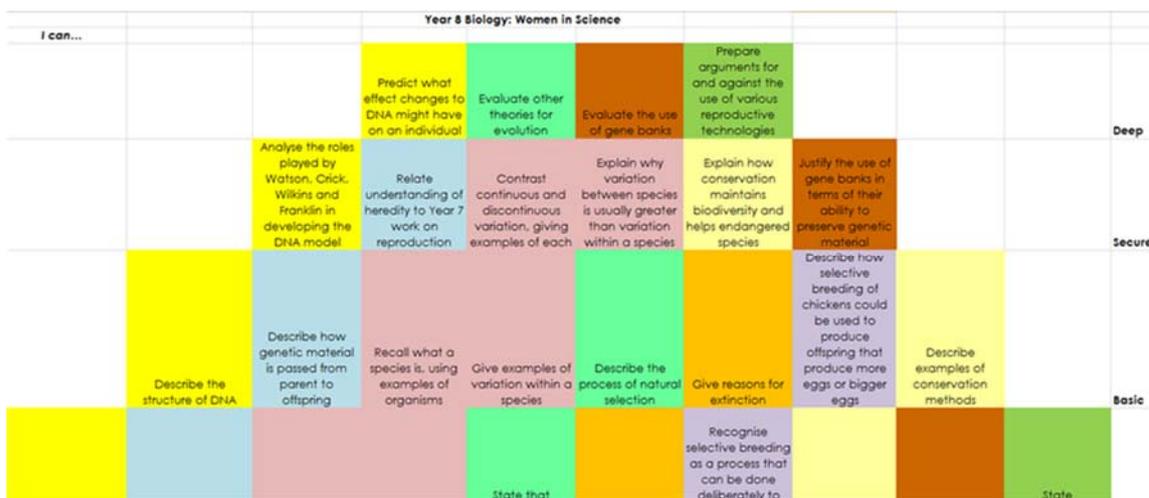


To put this into practical terms within each topic area:

- The learning outcomes are divided into a set of staged competencies
- There are competencies for each level of the triangle
- These competencies are tracked by the students e.g. with passport; dartboard; ladder; flight path; table.
- Students provide evidence that they have mastered each competency

Skipton Girls' High School has now trialled this approach in four Year 8 subjects; Mathematics; English; Art and Design and Biology. All of these subjects were able to implement the system within their context. Across all subjects, students have responded very positively, particularly in reporting that they are far more focused on the next steps to improvement rather than their level - the description "deep" encourages them to work towards this level of understanding rather than encouraging self-limiting approaches as levels did. Whether in arts or sciences, students have enjoyed the motivating aspect of "deep" learning – students in English commented that they like the fact they can "just keep going" rather than feeling limited by their level, whereas in Biology, students have expressed a firmer understanding of the "basic" foundations, rather than skipping 'lower level' work needed to underpin their deeper explanations. The description 'deep' encourages them to work towards this level of understanding in a way a number never did. We are now preparing to roll out the programme to staff across the school. Another NLTSA strategic partner has developed this to 3 levels of competencies 'breakthrough; intermediate and advanced'. This approach is delivered in all their KS3 English lessons.

The diagram below shows a topic in Biology mapped to this system. Each colour is a lesson with the learning outcomes ranked so that students work up the pyramid. Feedback from students led to the development of the black and white grid, which poses the outcomes as questions to be answered and allows students to highlight and evidence their progress. Student feedback included the following observations.. –“ it tells you what you still need to learn – either at home or in next lesson by asking questions”; “it helps us to know in detail what we specifically need to do to improve and revise.”



Women in Science - Progress Tracker

Learning Structure	Emerging	Basic	Secure	Deep
<i>Natural selection</i>	What is the name of the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin?	What are the key ideas in this theory?	How does a species evolve, according to Darwin's theory?	What are some other theories of evolution? What are their pros and cons?
<i>Extinction</i>	What are some examples of extinct organisms?	What are some reasons for species becoming extinct?	Explain some of the causes of extinction and some negative consequences of species becoming extinct	How can politicians ensure that species do not become extinct.
<i>Gene banks and reproduction ethics</i>	What are some examples of gene banks?	What needs to be stored in a gene bank?	Are gene banks justified in terms of their ability to preserve genetic material?	What are the arguments for and against the use of reproductive technologies involving gene banks?

Planning for Assessment cont ...

Any system also needs to meet the needs of the whole school tracking and reporting systems that forensically track progress from KS2 to KS4 and within an academic year. Without the externally fixed end of key stage assessments it seems sensible to peg all standards to GCSE outcomes; this is a currency in which standards are understood by all stakeholders and moderated across establishments. Target grades or flight paths for expected and more than expected progress can be identified tracking from KS2 to GCSE outcomes. These can be expressed as grades or fractions of a grade using numbers or letters.

The options here are

- Identify GCSE targets for individual students and express progress in terms of 'on track' ratings. These targets can be broken down into smaller steps;
- set expected progress for each year with a transition matrix that can be shared with students and parents. This progress could be in fractions of a GCSE grade. This assumes a particular flight path or rate of progress for students but this can be differentiated by subject. Progress can then be Rag rated.
- For each Year group express achievement as a grade linked to a GCSE expectation. For example, Year 7 students currently working in a way ultimately leading to a grade 9 would be awarded 7.9. These could be determined through a UMS-style system where raw marks/assessment piece can be mapped to a mark on a 1-9 or 0-100 scale.
- The UMS system could be linked to a range of expected outcomes for each year. Effectively a flight path model.

The challenge for all of us here is not to implement a system which has all of the weaknesses of levels without the national standardisation. Key issues now include the challenges of 'mastery' systems; objective measurements of in-year progress and, most importantly of all, motivating and equipping students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for success.

Kate Walter – Skipton Girls' High School

Planning Key Stage 4

(The article below explains how a survey of other grammar schools helped in making decisions about provision at KS 4)

Now that the national changes to assessment are fully underway, we at Townley, like many other schools, have been reviewing our whole school curriculum. Our goal has been to determine how we might revise our current curriculum structure to effectively deliver the new GCSE and A levels, as well as preparing for 'life after levels'.



At the outset, we agreed that the best approach would be to break any review down into Key Stages and to start from the top down, initially looking at Key Stage 5. We also decided that we wanted the process to be an open and consultative one involving as many stakeholders as we could. So as well as holding discussions with academic departments as to potential changes, we also set up a consultative group of staff and governors to look at proposals. We also ensured that the School Council and our Parent Forum were able to voice their views. This meant we had to make sure that students, staff, governors and our parent body were fully informed about the new qualifications and the timing of their introduction.

Through this process, we quickly came to the decision that for Key Stage 5 we would, for now, continue with our current model despite the financial implications. In other words students going into the Sixth Form would continue to choose four AS levels subjects, sit the AS level examinations in all subjects at the end of Year 12 and then choose three subjects with which to continue into Year 13 regardless of whether the subject had changed to the new A level. We realised that this had a cost implication but on balance felt this was in the best interests of our students.

The next phase was to review the balance and structure of Key Stage 4 and in doing so we came up with a number of questions that we felt we needed to try and answer.

■ How many GCSEs should our students be taking?

Currently all of our girls take eleven GCSEs, with the exception of a very small minority that drop down to Double Science from Triple Science. We were concerned that given the intended rigour and increased content of the new qualifications, expecting students to carry on with eleven subjects might be overburdening them and therefore have a negative impact on their welfare and results. Also will there be a detrimental impact on students' involvement in our extra-curricular programme?

■ How many option subjects should our students be taking?

If we were minded to reduce the number of GCSEs taken by our students, what was the best way to do it? One solution would be to reduce the number of option subjects our students currently take from four to three. This would have the added advantage of freeing up more curriculum time for other areas. However as a large girls' grammar school with a specialism in Performing and Visual Arts (as well as Mathematics and Computing) we place a large emphasis on creativity, choice and personalisation and this is reflected in the relatively wide selection of option subjects available at GCSE (eighteen option subjects alongside English, Mathematics, Science and RS). As we compel all students to take a language GCSE, our concern was that reducing the number of option choices would make it more likely that insufficient students would choose particular options, making them less viable. This was a particular concern in performing arts subjects and textiles. Therefore, as a consequence, would our curriculum offer suddenly become quite narrow?

■ Should we continue to compel students to take Full Course Religious Studies GCSE?

All of our students take a full GCSE in Religious Studies and this has proved to be very successful in terms of outcomes. However an alternative to reducing the number of options would be to no longer compel students to take the full course GCSE in RS. The full course is already delivered on a relatively small timetable allocation so this allocation would be unlikely to change. Is enabling our students to gain a GCSE therefore a more effective use of this time?

■ How much curriculum time should be given to Mathematics and English and where should any additional time go?

The other key question for us was whether more curriculum time would be needed for English and Mathematics given the increase in content and rigour that is clear from the new specifications. We also needed to decide where in the structure any additional curriculum time would go. For example, our Mathematics department felt that the additional time would be better served in Year 9. Given the greater emphasis on SPAG, should we be looking at additional time for English lower down the school instead? Of course this also raises the question as to where any additional time would come from.

We also wanted to consider some other proposals, such as introducing a three year Key Stage 4, increasing the curriculum time for PE, to review compelling students to take a language as well as embedding the Higher Project as additional provision for high achievers.

All of these questions have been discussed by our various groups but what we discovered was that to further inform these discussions and any subsequent decisions, we needed some benchmarking data. We needed a stronger sense of how our curriculum structure and subject allocations compared with other grammar schools; schools in similar contexts to us rather than just relying on national data. For example, we had a strong feeling that the curriculum time we gave to English at Key Stage 4 was very generous but we had limited evidence to support this. So we agreed that we would approach other grammar schools, through the GSHA, to gather information that would help us in answering our questions.



Planning Key Stage 4 cont ...

We knew that any requests for information we made had to be concise and focus on the key pieces of data that were most useful; over burdening Senior Leaders in other schools with requests for excessive information was not going to help anyone or encourage a wide range of responses. So we asked other grammar schools to provide answers to the following questions:

- ◆ How many hours of Mathematics do you currently teach a week?
- ◆ How many hours of English do you currently teach a week?
- ◆ Do you intend to change the above in light of the new GCSEs?
- ◆ How many full GCSEs do your students take? Does this include RS GCSE?
- ◆ How many option choices do your students make?

The response we received from schools was both quick and wide ranging with around forty grammar schools providing us with the information. It allowed us to build up very quickly a broad picture of provision across the grammar school sector and what the current thinking was in these schools as to how they are likely to respond to the assessment changes. An anonymised summary of the information gathered was then sent out to all schools that took part.

This benchmarking exercise soon proved to be very valuable, adding extra weight to a number of arguments and providing important context to our discussions alongside our school's unique situation and ethos. The survey produced some useful results, for example

- ◆ Half of the schools surveyed compelled students to take full course RS GCSE
- ◆ Two fifths of schools surveyed offer students a diet of eleven GCSEs or more
- ◆ The current average curriculum allocation for Mathematics is 3 hours per week and 3.3 hours for English

There are still important decisions to be made but this information enabled us to reach a number of conclusions. Firstly it confirmed our view that we are very generous with our English curriculum time, even when compared with schools that are increasing this in response to the new GCSE. This has proved particularly useful as we also know that we need to increase our curriculum time for PE at Key Stage 4 and we have been struggling with where that time will come from.

Secondly that we are broadly in line with other schools in terms of our Mathematics provision at Key Stage 4, even after schools have adjusted timings for the new GCSE, and that we should be looking at our provision in Year 9 instead.

Thirdly, we have decided to adopt a 'wait and see' policy as to the impact of the new GCSEs rather than make any decisions on reducing the number taken at this stage given that we are in line with a number of other grammar school in offering eleven GCSEs which includes four option choices.

Finally we concluded that the gathering and the sharing of this information was an extremely valuable and worthwhile exercise and that it would be extremely useful to share information regarding our Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 5 provision as well. My thanks to all the schools that responded and I hope that you found the summary information useful as well. With all of us having to make decisions about our current curriculum offer as well as progress measures in light of the removal of levels, it is important that we do not all end up working in isolation. Any opportunity to share information and work collaboratively with each other, particularly given the current changes to the education landscape, is a very worthwhile and potentially time saving endeavour.

Richard Booth

Adding Value with Homework

A huge amount of staff and pupil time goes into the setting, marking and completing of homework; probably more so in a grammar school context and yet how often do we discuss it as part of our drive to improve teaching and learning? With willing students and supportive parents high quality homework has the potential to add significantly to student performance and engagement.

An article in the Leader Magazine inspired some action at Colyton Grammar School to re-evaluate our homework provision. The article questioned what is the value of homework? - It's a subject that has divided teachers for decades. Does setting homework add any value to a pupil's learning or is it an unnecessary distraction that puts pressure on young people? And if it is set how long should students be expected to spend on it? With government guidelines on home study now removed, the setting of homework has become a matter for schools to decide individually. (Leader Magazine, June 2012)

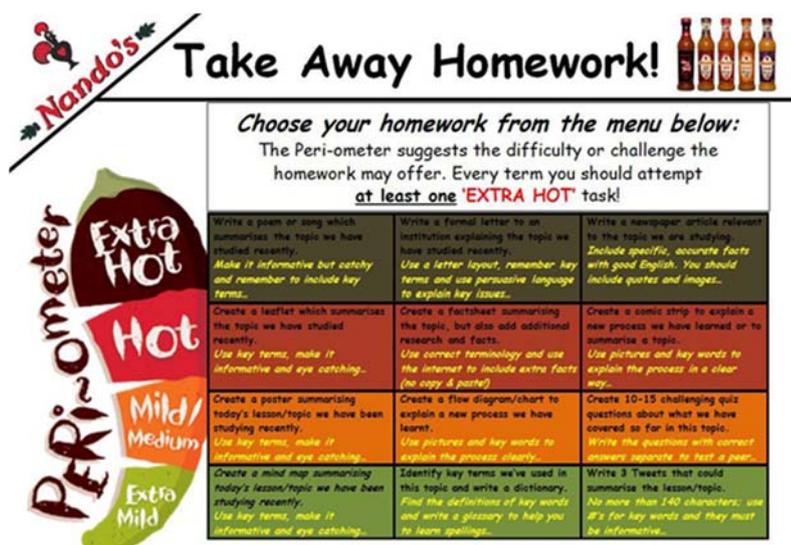
At Colyton Grammar we also had an increasing body of evidence from student voice surveys and feedback from parents and teachers that we can improve the homework provision across the school. A staff Twilight session highlighted the need for quality rather than quantity, time to do work well, and connection and relevance to the work completed in class.

We also felt we shouldn't be setting too much homework and that children should be allowed to be children. The provision of excessive homework should not prohibit reasonable involvement in activities such as sports clubs, or learning an instrument or girl guides or scouts.

So what's new? Following on from a large scale consultation of stakeholders last year at Colyton - that's students, parents and staff - the whole school policy has been revised to include guidance points and absolutes (possibly a bit draconian but we need to have the students' interest at heart). Poster tasks have been banned in KS3!

The key changes that we have made are to encourage teachers to make the homework fun, creative, motivational and interesting. We also encouraged teachers to give students more choice in the tasks they complete for homework. Policy guidance has been followed up at the school with inset and sharing of novel homework ideas. We have also been recording all homework tasks in SIMS which are then available to students and parents via their mobile devices.

Two of our key policy guidance points could be tackled with the idea of "Un-homework" espoused in the book of the same name by Mark Creasy and also another very similar idea called "TakeAway Homework".



Nando's Take Away Homework!

Choose your homework from the menu below:
The Peri-ometer suggests the difficulty or challenge the homework may offer. Every term you should attempt **at least one 'EXTRA HOT'** task!

<p>Extra Hot</p> <p>Write a poem or song which summarises the topic we have studied recently. <i>Make it informative but catchy and remember to include key terms...</i></p>	<p>Write a formal letter to an institution explaining the topic we have studied recently. <i>Use a letter layout, remember key terms and use persuasive language to explain key issues.</i></p>	<p>Write a newspaper article relevant to the topic we are studying. <i>Include specific, accurate facts with good English. You should include quotes and images...</i></p>
<p>Hot</p> <p>Create a leaflet which summarises the topic we have studied recently. <i>Use key terms, make it informative and eye catching...</i></p>	<p>Create a factsheet summarising the topic, but also add additional research and facts. <i>Use correct terminology and use the internet to include extra facts (no copy & paste)</i></p>	<p>Create a comic strip to explain a new process we have learned or to summarise a topic. <i>Use pictures and key words to explain the process in a clear way...</i></p>
<p>Mild/ Medium</p> <p>Create a poster summarising today's lesson/topic we have been studying recently. <i>Use key terms, make it informative and eye catching...</i></p>	<p>Create a flow diagram/chart to explain a new process we have learnt. <i>Use pictures and key words to explain the process clearly.</i></p>	<p>Create 10-15 challenging quiz questions about what we have covered so far in this topic. <i>Write the questions with correct answer options, to test a peer...</i></p>
<p>Extra Mild</p> <p>Create a mind map summarising today's lesson/topic we have been studying recently. <i>Use key terms, make it informative and eye catching...</i></p>	<p>Identify key terms we've used in this topic and write a dictionary. <i>Find the definitions of key words and write a glossary to help you to learn spellings.</i></p>	<p>Write 3 Tweets that could summarise the lesson/topic. <i>No more than 140 characters; use #s for key words and they must be informative.</i></p>

Departments at Colyton were invited to have a go at producing a homework Takeaway menu. The un-homework book was made available for staff.

Example of TakeAway homework from @TeacherToolkit

The days of "Finish off your classwork" or "Complete worksheet 5.3a" should be numbered. A development plan focus on improving homework may not seem very fashionable but in this time of new GCSE and A level specifications what better time to re-evaluate this significant but often neglected area of pedagogy.

Rex Stidwell

Assistant Head - Colyton Grammar School

The Campaign for More Grammar Schools

The Conservative Voice campaign for more grammar schools is not looking for a grammar school in every town. Some of the issues on which it is campaigning are likely to be supported by most grammar schools; for example, they are arguing that existing grammars should retain the same rights to expand as other schools.

The statement below is from Conservative Voice and Heads may want to look at the details of the campaign to determine if there are any points that they wish to bring to the attention of others.

More Grammar Schools is a campaign that is fighting to reverse government legislation banning the creation of new grammar schools. We are also fighting for the right of existing grammar schools to expand.

We believe that the distribution of grammar schools should be focused on where they have the most significant impact on social mobility. This means in communities where the educational provisions are poor in terms of outcomes.

Our campaign is already backed by 80 MPs and has attracted attention from those at the top of Westminster. To take this campaign to the next level we now need wider support from local schools and communities. Please sign and share our petition calling for more grammar schools.

We are also asking people to contact their local MPs urging them to back the campaign and its values.

You can sign the petition at
www.moregrammarschools.co.uk

Grammar school areas and groups as identified by the Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998. LEAs considered grammar areas are shown filled, while circles indicate isolated grammar schools or clusters of neighbouring schools.



Funding Update



In February a report was circulated to heads of the meeting of GSHA with the Secretary of State for Education. At that meeting we were supported by a cross party group of MPs. Thank you to all who responded to the invitation to write to Nicky Morgan.



GSHA has consistently supported the introduction of a national funding formula. The fact remains that even if there is a political will for reform on this scale it would take four or five years of transition. NFF could still remain a means of identifying funding to an LA and local decision making could continue to leave grammar schools and those with high numbers of mainstream students facing unfair funding. We will continue to press the case that LAs should have to allocate a defined greater proportion of the School block to basic AWPU as this offers the prospect of action which could immediately make a difference.



It was very clear from our discussions that there was no real understanding at DfE of the inexplicable range of allocations made by LAs to the various elements of disadvantage or of the consequence for schools with a low proportion of disadvantaged children.



The current review will look at these factors and after the election the more that individual schools can add to the understanding of ministers the greater the chance of achieving some quick changes that would offer relief to many of the schools that are most hard pressed.

... Dates for the Diary ...

*16/17 June - GSHA Annual Conference RAF Club 128 Piccadilly London
(Booking forms have been circulated and should be returned by 20th May)*

*1st July - Deputy Heads Annual Conference. Broadway House,
Westminster London*

*13th October - 6.30pm House of Commons Reception for Grammar School
Headteachers and Chairs of Governors*



Executive Committee



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Vice Chairman

Stephen Nokes - John Hampden Grammar School

Treasurer:

Yvonne Wilkinson - King Edward VI Five Ways School, Birmingham

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South West	Stuart Smallwood
Gloucestershire	Jon Standen, Russell Ellicott
Birmingham	Dominic Robson
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