

School Certificate Examinations in England, 1918 – 1950

**A historical investigation of the formation and maintenance
of a national examination system:
Examination boards, teachers and the state**

This dissertation is submitted for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Cambridge

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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

The dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, am concurrently submitting for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 set by the Faculty of Education's Degree Committee. Excluding footnotes and the bibliography the word count is 79,544.

Abstract

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Submitted by Andrew J. Watts

This dissertation calls for a reevaluation of the place of the School Certificate Examinations (SCE) in the history of the examination system in England. The SCE scheme has been portrayed as the inevitable successor to the independently run “Local Examinations” of the nineteenth century and as a recommendation of the Acland Report in 1911. Such a portrayal leaves out of account, firstly, the deep antipathy towards external examinations that was highly influential in the 19th and 20th centuries and, secondly, the proposed alternatives that were advocated by leading educationalists. The dissertation proposes that the early role of Arthur Acland in this history and his passionate opposition to external examinations have been overlooked in the academic literature. Substitutes for external examinations, such as that promoted by Matthew Arnold and Michael Sadler based on the German *Abitur*, are also shown as persuasively supported by those who wanted the examination system to be more teacher-controlled.

The Bryce Report’s (1895) advocacy of decentralised administration is presented as a key factor in the shaping of early examination policy and the study highlights the influence on decision-makers of a strong resistance to central government control. This context requires a nuanced explanation of the Board of Education’s choice of university-based examination boards to deliver the SC examinations, which was opposed by LEAs and teachers’ organisations. By the end of the 1920s the Board’s officers were becoming disenchanted with these examination boards and they acted to diminish their influence on the Secondary School Examinations Council (SSEC). More generally, those who opposed the external examination system believed it to be a mechanical and bureaucratic assault on education itself. The Norwood Committee’s report (1943), with the support of the Board’s officers, thus proposed the abolition of general school-leaving examinations, limiting their use only to decision making about university entrance and scholarships.

The study suggests reasons for the depth of the antipathy to external examinations, which is seen as deriving from the Board's negative experiences with the Revised Code (1862-1890) and from a private-school ideal of teachers as fully independent professionals. The latter view was notably promoted by Cyril Norwood. The study indicates, however, that the antipathy particularly of the Board's inspectors became an obsession which influenced both their determination to establish more central control of the system and their failure to recognise a legitimate role for school-leaving and vocationally oriented examinations in the newly emerging secondary schools. Such considerations are presented as possible explanations for the survival of the external examination system as it was problematically transformed from the SCE to the GCE in 1951.

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To the staff of various libraries and archives I also extend my thanks. They are to be found in the University Library and the Faculty of Education Library in Cambridge, and at the libraries of the universities of Bristol, Durham, Manchester and Sheffield, at the Institute of Education and the Metropolitan University, London, and at the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University.

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Use of Abbreviations

AAM	Association of Assistant Mistresses in Secondary Schools
AEC	Association of Education Committees
AHM	Association of Head Mistresses
BoE	Board of Education (referred to as “the Board”, with capital letter)
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CHMI	Chief Her / His Majesty’s Inspector
CoE	Church of England
CoP	College of Preceptors
EMEU	East Midlands Education Union
FRCP	Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians
FRS	Fellow of the Royal Society
GCE A	General Certificate of Education, Advanced level
GCE O	General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level
HMA	Head Masters’ Association
HMC	Head Masters’ Conference
HMI	Her / His Majesty’s Inspector (of schools)
HMSO	Her / His Majesty’s Stationery Office (government publications)
HSC	Higher School Certificate (exams)
IAAM	Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters (AMA)
IAHM	Incorporated Association of Head Masters
IIEI	International Institute Examinations Inquiry
IoE	Institute of Education (London University)
JMB	Joint Matriculation Board (as in NUJMB)
LCC	London County Council
LEA	Local Education Authority
MoE	Ministry of Education
MP	Member of Parliament
NA	National Archives
NEF	New Education Fellowship
NUJMB	Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board (JMB)
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OCSEB	Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board (O&C Joint-Board)
PS	Permanent Secretary
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
SC	School Certificate (exams)
SCE	School Certificate Examinations (refers to the examination system)
SSEC	Secondary School Examinations Council
TNA	The National Archives (UK)
	‘TNA’ is used in footnote references to Board of Education files
TRC	Teachers’ Registration Council
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (the Syndicate)
UODLE	University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations (the Delegacy)
WEA	Workers’ Educational Association

Preface

School Certificate Examinations in England, 1918 – 1950¹ A historical investigation of the formation and maintenance of a national examination system: Examination boards, teachers and the state

A procedural question lies behind the title and research questions of this study, which is, How should one write about a national examinations system? A recent volume by Alarcón and Lawn used the term “assessment cultures” in its title and defined this concept as “the totality of interpretation patterns, symbols, discourses, structures, techniques, systems, and/or practices of assessment that have been developed by actors in the context of a specific space and time” (Alarcón & Lawn, 2018, p. 14). Such a definition emphasises the width of the topic and accounts for my need to find a clearly delimited focus for this study. Alarcón and Lawn also acknowledged the depth of the topic and illustrated this with historical perspectives which demonstrate that assessment systems are rooted in the character of specific societies and their particular histories. In reflecting on the issue of ‘cultural depth’ in this fashion I believe we may seek explanations for why the English examination system began as it did.

A most important contemporary figure in this study is Michael Sadler (1861-1943) whose early contributions to comparative education studies are now seen as his main academic legacy. Sadler’s words below refer to studies of the education systems in different countries, but they might equally be applied to the study of assessment cultures in different historical periods.

A national system of Education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties, and of “battles long ago”. It has in it some of the secret workings of national life... Is it not likely that ...if we have endeavoured, in a sympathetic spirit, to understand the real working of a foreign system of education, we shall in turn find ourselves better able to enter into the spirit and tradition of our own national education? The practical value of studying, in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy, the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and to understand our own (Sadler & Higginson, 1979, pp. 49–50).

¹ Examinations in Wales are not addressed in this study, though the Welsh and English systems were closely aligned. See Chapter Six of *The Beloe Report*, “The Position in Wales” (Ministry of Education, 1960). The distinctive features of the Welsh examination system make the case for it being the subject of a separate, individual study.

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

The intentions and approach of this study

My purpose in undertaking this study is to investigate an under-researched stage in the development of the English public examination system. Such a lack of academic attention might be accounted for by the fact that the School Certificate Examinations system (SCE) has been seen as merely transitional, either as the successor to the university 'Local Examinations' (and therefore thoroughly dealt with by Roach) or as a precursor to the widely written about General Certificate of Education ('O' and 'A' levels) which replaced the SCE in 1951. The importance of the Education Act of 1944 for the more recent history of education in England has led education researchers to focus on the post-1944 tripartite system and the "academic" content of the new GCE courses (Lawson & Silver, 1973, pp. 443–444). Simon's comprehensive volumes on the history of the modern English system scarcely mention the SCE (B. Simon, 1974). Brooks has suggested that academic interest in public examinations waned in the 1980s as researchers felt that traditional examining was being superseded (Brooks, 1993). One factor that may account for a dearth of historical attention is a perception that there is little new that can be said about examinations. The problems associated with an external examination system were well-rehearsed before the SCE system came into existence (Herbert, 1889) and most criticisms of examinations have at least a hundred-year history.¹ Given these perspectives it is surprising that the external examination system is still with us and I conclude that we do not yet have a full account which explains what Brooks called "the potency of examinations" (ibid., p.62).

This study follows in the steps of Montgomery (1965) and Roach (1971) and has a similar intention to McCulloch's work on the same period in which he called for an exploration of issues in education that would "convey a sense of the complexity of past dilemmas, as well as their relationship to wider social, political ... and cultural changes" (McCulloch, 1993a, p. 132). In the paper from which these words were taken, McCulloch noted that there were three main groups which had a part in running the then national examination system: the state, the examination boards and the teachers (ibid., p. 131).

¹ In Victorian times examinations were accused of restricting the curriculum, favouring rote-learning and devaluing more significant qualities, removing responsibility from teachers, dominating the minds of students and making them anxious, and incentivising schools to concentrate on a mechanical approach to education in order to bolster their own reputations rather than benefit their students. These criticisms are still made (White, 2014).

These are the groups that, from my own professional experience, I too would nominate. In 1992, as a former secondary teacher, I was part of a successful bid by the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate to develop Key Stage Three English tests for the UK government. I thus became a project manager for a historic examination board whose role was to collaborate on the introduction of a new national testing system with a government agency, and with teachers who were so unwilling to implement the new policy that they boycotted the tests for the first two years. The triangle of forces which was created by the relationships between the state, the teachers and the examination board has been of interest to me since then. A comment from Roach - in a review of Pearce's book *School Examinations* (1972) – supports the choice of this triangle as a key concern by referring to the “combination between academics, administrators and teachers” and reflecting that “some such partnership offers the best likelihood for improving school examinations in the future” (Berenson et al., 1973, p. 115). This comment still applies today and I hope that my study might clarify the nature of such a partnership in order to support such a positive outcome.

My study differs from Roach's approach, which he declared was “focused very much on the classroom” (ibid., p.11), in that my focus is on national examination administration. As compared to Montgomery's work though, which is full of practical information about the uses of the examination system, my study takes on Roach's broader challenge in seeking explanations for why certain policy decisions were made. Gewirtz and Ozga have questioned how far educational policy making has been what has been claimed for it, a “participation” between key groups, and they have suggested that a predominance of “state-control” began well before the 1980s in England, in the strongly centralising tendency of the planning behind the Education Act of 1944 (Gewirtz & Ozga, 1990). My study finds such a tendency towards central control further back. Avoiding such an outcome was a key preoccupation of the planners of the secondary education system and, following the recommendations of the Bryce Commission, the Board of Education Act of 1899 legislated for a Consultative Committee which would draw into the Board a wider variety of educational opinion than that represented by civil servants. Such a body could advise the President of the Board on policy matters. In addition, when the Secondary School Examinations Council (SSEC) was set up people from a range of educational groups were invited on to it. Co-operation was hoped for, arising from the new, more democratic systems of the new century. McCulloch, however, uses the term “contestation” to describe the debates which emerged, including those that resulted from the examination proposals which followed the Education Act of 1944 (McCulloch, 1993b), and the same

concept is found in Ozga's work on education policy (Ozga, 1999). This study will follow the development of the SCE system, drawing out the means by which the key actors made it work as it moved forward, and will ask which terms might best be used to describe their working relationships. What it will certainly show is that the institutional relationships changed markedly during that 32-year period.

Reviewing an accepted account of the development of the SCE system

Much of what Roach wrote about the genesis of the school examination system in England I take as established. However I question Roach's conclusion which, echoing the same points from his final chapter (Roach, 1971, pp. 282–283), he presented in his preface as follows:

By 1900 it was clear that public examinations had come to stay. Controversy revolved much more about ways of making them more efficient than about ways of replacing them by other methods of assessment and selection (ibid., p. viii - ix).

The first problem I find with these words is that it was not at all clear in 1900 that public examinations in schools had come to stay. This point must be clarified by noting the significant distinction between an external and a school-based examination system and it is reasonable to understand here that Roach was stating that an external examination system had come to stay. In his final chapter Roach described in detail the opposition to examinations that was frequently expressed, but his recounting of the steps leading to the externally administered examination system has an air of inevitability about it. My research indicates that at the time such inevitability was not apparent. Those who opposed the external examination system were not only well-placed to make their influence felt, they also had a strong alternative which they consistently proposed. In consequence, I also differ with the second of Roach's sentences above: the controversy was not about how to make the (external) examinations work better. It was about the viability of two, if not more, quite different models for a national examination system.

Roach did not write a full-length sequel to his work on public examinations, but he did publish a paper in *History of Education*: "Examinations and the Secondary Schools, 1900-1945" (Roach, 1979). This paper continued to present the predominance of external examinations as inevitable. Files of the Board of Education may not have been available to Roach and therefore some of the details of the discussions about the examination system may not have been open to him. One crucial feature of that story is the seminal role of Arthur Acland in the Board of Education's Consultative Committee, particularly when he was its chairman from 1907-1915. Acland was an ardent opponent of external

examinations and he did all he could to replace them with a school-based system. When the Consultative Committee, of which Acland was already a member, produced its first report in 1904 it advocated the replacement of the external examination system by a combined examination and inspection system, which would leave the examining function in the hands of teachers with local inspectors performing a quality assurance role. Roach, drawing on the annual Board of Education report for the years 1904/5, correctly noted that the Board “drew back” from the committee’s proposals. But he concluded, “In the early years of getting the new system of secondary education to work, the Board perhaps felt that it had enough on its hands without tackling secondary examinations as well” (ibid., p. 47). In fact, as the Board of Education files reveal and the discussion in chapter four below will show, the reason the Board’s officers did not pursue the committee’s proposal was that they already favoured an external examination system.

The significance of Acland’s later role as chairman of the Board of Education’s Consultative Committee has been overlooked.² The “Acland Report” (Board of Education, 1911), which is commonly referred to as ushering in the SCE system, was in large part a hostile critique of the whole concept of external examinations. In this were reflected Acland’s own strongly held views, but the findings of my research also show how Acland bolstered his position on the committee by getting appointed onto it members who would support the argument against external examinations. So it was that when the Consultative Committee’s second report on examinations was produced it was a more full-blooded attack on external examinations. In this respect Roach’s conclusion that “The 1911 report laid down the basic pattern of the School and Higher School Certificates adopted in 1917, and so defined the lines on which the system was to run until after the end of World War II” (Roach, 1979, p. 47) is a surprisingly positive one. I argue that it serves to repeat the sleight of hand whereby the Board’s officers avoided the awkward truth that the system they were presenting to the country was one opposed by members of their own Consultative Committee. The Board’s settled proposals for the new examination scheme were published in 1914 (Board of Education, 1914 Circular 849) and again Roach notes that “Circular 849 kept very close to the proposals of the Consultative Committee” (ibid., p. 49). Yet it is only possible to reach such a conclusion by overlooking all that the Acland

² The case for a general neglect of Acland’s contribution to education in England and Wales is usefully made by P. W. Evans in a study which asks the question, “Why has Acland received little credit for his contribution to education administration and policy making?”: *The contribution of Arthur Herbert Dyke Acland, (1847-1926) to the Education System of England and Wales*. PhD thesis. Manchester University. (P. Evans, 1989, p. 1).

Report had said against external examinations. How such a contradiction came about and how it might be explained, will be explored in detail in chapter four.

Roach's paper of 1979 is a detailed and helpful description of how the SCE was set up, and how it fared. It described fully how the system was under continuous pressure, sometimes deservedly so when the examination boards seemed unable to carry out their roles reliably. But once again my study maintains that Roach understated the strength of opposition to the examinations and that more account must be taken of that opposition. He did however mention the work on the reliability of examinations that was done by Valentine (Valentine, 1932) together with Michael Sadler's work for the International Institute Examinations Inquiry (Sadler, 1936),³ both of which supported a line of research and analysis that maintained a critical assault on the SCE system. As chapter six below shows, advocates of the newly developing science of psychometrics such as Burt and Ballard vigorously joined in the attack and the external examination system seemed to be facing extinction. Burt gave significant evidence to the Spens Committee, yet when the Spens Report on the curriculum in grammar and technical high schools was published (Board of Education, 1938) its recommendations on examinations were seen as "non-controversial" and in line with changes to the SCE that were already in train or being considered by the SSEC.⁴ This calls for explanation.

Chapter seven of my study shows that the schools' inspectorate in the Board of Education adhered to an anti-examinations policy for most of the period after the setting up of the Board and this eventually came to a head in the recommendations of the Norwood Committee in 1943. Cyril Norwood, who as chairman of the SSEC had been responsible for the running of the system since 1921, had consistently argued for the limiting of the use of school examinations. In his book, *The English Tradition of Education* (Norwood, 1929), in the SSEC's investigation of the SC examinations in 1931 (SSEC, 1932), and in various speeches and papers Norwood voiced his opposition to external examinations for the majority of pupils. The story of how this view came to be expressed in the Norwood Report (Board of Education, 1943), and the reception of that report's recommendations by the education establishment, is explored in chapter eight. With the publication of the report's recommendation that examinations for secondary students below the age of seventeen should be "abolished" it seemed as though the battle against external

³ Sadler was a prominent proponent of an internal examination / inspection system and as a member of the Bryce Commission he had written a description of the Prussian *Abitur*, which was reprinted in the volume cited above.

⁴ Williams, G.G. 16 June 1939. Internal memo. (TNA: ED 136/131).

examinations had been won. However, though the Board was by then leading the contest, it was eventually to be lost as the new GCE system instituted in 1951 was fundamentally similar to the SCE. The national system remained an external examination system delivered by independent examination boards. This study therefore concludes, in chapter nine, with an extended discussion that seeks to account for this survival.

Considering examination policy development and implementation

This project set out to be a study of the development and implementation of a national examinations system with a particular focus on the contributions of key groups to that process. As I have suggested above, Roach's work provides the most complete model to which I could refer mine. Montgomery's work is helpful as a store of information, but it does not link the SCE to the larger social, political and educational themes that I have in view (Montgomery, 1965). Banks' critical description of the emerging secondary curriculum (Banks, 1955) addresses in one chapter the issue of the role of the examinations in society, with a focus that can be applied to the development of the SCE throughout as it suggests a misunderstanding, on the part of the Board of Education's officers, of the place of examinations in the newly emerging secondary schools. The work of Sutherland (Sutherland, 1973) and Daglish (Daglish, 1996) discusses the influence of civil servants in the development of educational policy but in periods before the SCE. Fisher's PhD thesis, half of which focuses on the inception of the GCE examinations, gives some insight into the workings of the Board of Education as the SCE came to an end (Fisher, 1982). Gosden is helpful in describing the setting up of the new Board of Education and its committees (Gosden, 1966) and its operation during the Second World War (Gosden, 1976), Lowndes focuses on the debates over the nature of the secondary curriculum (Lowndes, 1969) and Leese sees the universities as a negative force in those institutional relationships which had to be counteracted by the inspectorate (Leese, 1950). My own study concentrates on the role of the examination boards and the developing dominance of the Board of Education.

The SCE system is frequently referred to in accounts of the education service in the 1920s and 30s but it can be too readily passed over because the interest of writers has centred on the system after the Education Act of 1944. Simon, in his second volume of the history of education in England covering the period 1870-1920, fails to mention either the university Local Examinations or the SCE, which was just within his period (B. Simon, 1965). He did highlight the Revised Code, which operated between 1862 and 1890, with its system of Inspector-set examinations for elementary schools and "payment-by-results", and he described the damage that that system did to the education of many working-class

children.⁵ In his third volume, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920 – 1940*, examinations for secondary schools and the SCE were again barely mentioned (B. Simon, 1974). Simon's silence on examinations is so apparent that one cannot avoid seeking an explanation for it. Was it perhaps that, since the focus of that volume was 'educational reform', the public examinations were seen as making no contribution to the central theme? In Simon's fourth volume, which covers the period from 1944, he emphasised, in a section under the heading of *Examinations Policy*, that the Department of Education deliberately excluded secondary modern students from taking the newly introduced GCE examinations (B. Simon, 1991).⁶ It might be concluded that Simon held no particular brief for external examinations, but neither was he convinced by Norwood's recommendations. It seems that for him a more salient point, as for some others in the Labour party, was that preventing secondary modern pupils from taking public examinations was a withdrawal of opportunity from an already disadvantaged group.

A model for writing about an examination system that I will not follow is Benjamin Elman's notable *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Elman, 2000). This weighty book, over 800 pages long, impressive not least for the writer's bi-lingualism, is full of factual information about syllabuses, set texts, examination questions, essay topics and examiners' reports from a period of over five hundred years. Though the work sets out to be a cultural history, the human and political story of how the system was created and run by people, and how it affected society, is obscured by the volume of carefully collected and recorded detail. Delandshere has protested that the problem of much writing about assessment is that it focuses on 'technology', and writing about assessment is often "primarily a matter of technique and procedure to which other concerns are subordinated" (Delandshere, 2001, p. 114). A similar criticism might be made of Vlaardingerbroek and Taylor's *Secondary School External Examinations: Reliability, Robustness and Resilience* in which a "nuts and bolts" approach predominates (2009). There is a danger then that a history of an examination system could leave little room for an exploration of the underlying social and educational currents which gave the system life. Alarcón and Lawn note the breadth of issues which have been addressed in international studies of the history of educational assessment systems (2018) and my study

⁵ A symposium entitled *The Sacrifice of Education to Examination* was organised by the Liberal MP Auberon Herbert in 1889. Roach commented that "The unpopularity of the annual examinations by Her Majesty's Inspectorate may well have contributed to the distrust of examinations as an educational instrument which characterised many of those who joined [Herbert's] protest ..." (Roach, 1971, p. 279).

⁶ The [Labour] government thus, wrote Simon, showed its "determination to ensure that the new dispensation did not radically open up new opportunities for the hitherto disadvantaged – that is, to the working class as a whole" (B. Simon, 1991, p. 115).

is conceived as a contribution to that discussion: it is an investigation into the assessment culture from which the national examination system in England emerged.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study have been designed to address the working of the SCE system in its creation, its development and its ending. The questions are:

- What expectations did the key actors in the School Certificate Examination (SCE) system (examination boards, teachers and state) bring to its development?
- How far were contemporary fears of centralisation seen to be justified by the establishment of a nationally-organised examination system?
- What might account for the survival of the external examination system in the face of radical and well-supported alternatives which were proposed during the years 1918-1950?

Following Daglish, my study of the introduction of a national examination system in England sets out to “reveal the aims which underlay the changes” (Daglish, 1996, p. ix). One consequence of this focus is that I do not dwell on the most visible, surface features of the examinations, that is the crucial, routine products of an examination system such as syllabuses, timetables, question papers, mark schemes, results lists, certificates, examiners’ reports.⁷ Indeed, in view of the absence of discussion on these matters in this report, it is necessary to remember that every year the schedule of school examinations was repeating itself, according to a fixed timetable. Any reading of the minutes of the various committees set up within the examination boards confirms that matters to do with the production and use of the annual examinations took up the bulk of the time of those working there. Furthermore, given the small numbers of people employed in examination board offices, the time that could be given to broader considerations of policy would have been restricted by the need to meet annual deadlines.

Because it was a key preoccupation of the Bryce Commission, I have chosen as the focus of my study the relationships among the institutions, and in some cases the individuals, who were actually working on the examinations. So my study addresses, as suggested by Daglish’s metaphor, matters below the surface which are not necessarily immediately obvious. This is not to suggest that the level of relationships was unacknowledged or unconscious: indeed the archives show that it was frequently the topic

⁷ That examination boards were developing such products in the 1860s, which are similar to those produced today, supports a claim for the endurance of the examination system in England.

of conversation between colleagues and was the focus of more formal discussions between cooperating institutions. Attention to these records is thus a major element of this study. Below the acknowledged level of relationships, there inevitably was a less explicit level, as there is in any human activity, as pointed out by Sobe in discussing his proposed “affective turn” in education history (Sobe, 2012). My research questions allude to the existence of such a level, when they refer to ‘expectations’, ‘fears’ and ‘survival’, even if the feelings associated with them were initially unacknowledged. My second research question’s reference to the “fear of centralisation” may be justified by referring to Lowndes, writing in 1937, who noted in a discussion about the effect of examinations on teachers that “those jealous to ensure that secondary schools should give a liberal education ... fear the re-enactment in the secondary schools of many of the educational dangers from which the elementary schools escaped when ‘payment by results’ came to an end” (Lowndes, 1937, p. 117). Emotive language was frequently used about examinations, some of which may appear to be exaggerated, but it may also suggest a strength of feeling that should encourage us to take the statements seriously. A further telling example of such intensity comes from a contributor to a conference on secondary education in Cambridge in 1896, which met to discuss the Bryce Commission’s report:

I dread so much the laying of the dead hand of the state, which I think in this particular case would be a cold and paralyzing hand, upon the sacred ark of secondary education. (University of Cambridge, 1896).⁸

Here is the voice of a person, almost certainly educated in an independent school, who believed that state secondary education could mean, as it formerly had for state elementary schools, a set code of school management applied uniformly throughout the country, assessed by frequent inspectors’ visits and examinations, and possibly with the schools’ incomes depending on the pupils’ results. Such a mind-set accounts well for the use of the word “dread” and for the phrase “the sacred ark”, terms which express the rooted educational ideals of those classically or religiously educated individuals who would have seen such ideals as in danger from utilitarian schooling provided by the government. From time to time, as is the case here, an emotive and forceful statement jumps from the page of an otherwise restrained report and, as will be suggested in later chapters, statements of personal response, sometimes revealed long after the creation of an official text, can affect our understanding of the meaning of a text from which such individual agency is apparently absent.

⁸ Report of a Conference on Secondary Education, 1896. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/JNK 3/5).

While policy makers and administrators are unlikely to legislate for such concerns, the need to address feelings and previously unspoken thoughts as they come to the surface in the communications of key actors will be a part of this study as it develops. These feelings may reveal themselves as prior opinions or attitudes about other groups which individuals and others bring to the project. Alternatively, such feelings and thoughts may be expressed as reactions to events as they unfold, such as welcome, annoyance or surprise. The historian working with written records must take care about the interpretations that can be made of this kind, but documents can be used to address this level when they record or imply the reactions of those involved to such events.

The reader may thus imagine this study as encompassing three features of the examination system appearing differently in time: the routine, surface work of the examination boards, which will not be addressed other than as a background recurring cycle; the continuous flow and development of working relationships between the actors as long as their commitment to this collaborative project was sustained; and the effect of events, occurring randomly, which brought to the surface reactions which indicated opinions and attitudes that may not have been expressed initially. Archive and other materials that address these last two levels provide the basis of answers to the research questions on which this study is based.

CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Traditional archive research

This research is designed as an archival study whose rationale recognises that any study springs from a chosen perspective.¹ Elton described the first step in a “proper” historical study as when the historian “makes [a] choice of a main area of study or line of approach”. After that “he [sic] becomes the servant of his evidence of which he will, or should, ask no specific questions until he has absorbed what it says ... he opens his mind to the evidence both passively (listening) and actively (asking)” (Elton, 1967, p. 62). Starting with my title and research questions, I follow Elton’s method in working with the documents, allowing the archival material to shape my thinking, and having taken account of other available evidence I move on to an interpretation of what has been found.² Marwick too promoted “the long-established, though constantly developing, canons of the historical profession” (Marwick, 2001, p. 3). His 13-section typology of primary sources is a useful reminder to think broadly about what sources might be available and his distinction between “witting and unwitting testimony” (ibid., p.172–179) is one to which I link Ricoeur’s concept of “surplus meaning” which is discussed below. I also follow McCulloch and Richardson who in their volume *Historical Research in Educational Settings* accepted the legitimacy of the criticisms by mainstream historians of much that went under the heading of “educational history” from the 1960s onwards, but who also reacted against a “social research” model of education research which was during that time becoming detached “from any secure grounding in traditional historical method” (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000, p. 17). ‘Perspectives’, ‘sources’, ‘traditional historical methods’, all have been critiqued in the context of a wider discussion during the past half-century about the nature of academic history itself, creating the debate to which McCulloch and Richardson referred.³

¹ As noted by Steedman: “No one historian’s archive is ever like another’s” (C. Steedman, 2001, p. 9).

² Elton’s focus is on fundamental principles rather than on detailed advice about how to proceed. The first principle of historical *understanding* is, he says, “that the past must be studied in its own right, for its own sake and on its own terms”. The first principles of historical *method* (my italics) he captures in two questions: “exactly what evidence is here? ... and exactly what does it mean?” (ibid., p.65).

³ McCulloch and Richardson noted that criticism of educational history continued into the 1990s. “The most significant failure of such texts has been the absence of a problematic approach to the interpretation of historical sources in the light of historiographical debate. Only a handful [of texts] ... have risen above the assertion of a rigid and essentially static model of historical research divorced from the central controversies and practical choices that have faced working historians over the past three decades” (ibid., p.13).

Popkewitz's descriptive term for my study would be 'historicist', as opposed to his post-Foucauldian 'historicising', which he proposed in *Rethinking the history of education: Transnational perspectives on its questions, methods and knowledge* (2013) as an alternative to a traditional archival study. Popkewitz's critique affords a useful opportunity to assess the assumptions of my own study as his analysis of historicism described those foundational principles which he saw as problematic. The first of these was a "humanistic" belief in the role of "agents" as the cause of historical change, since that resulted in "ahistorical" portrayals of such agents divorced from their historical contexts. This criticism could be applied to the use of the concept "roles" in my first research question. The agents referred to there are organisations which are seen as having roles that could, in Popkewitz's terms, be presented 'ahistorically'. However, a fundamental aim of the study is to describe the changing social, political and educational contexts which surrounded the examination system during the years in question, and these are the contexts in which those organisations worked out their roles. They are presented in the study as struggling to maintain their agency within these changing contexts and the terms in which the study has been conceived envisage those struggles as its major concern. How far and in what ways they managed to maintain their agential integrity is an open question throughout the study.

Secondly, this is a study which could fall under Popkewitz's judgement that humanistic approaches to history have overvalued consciousness and intentionality in their tracing of historical change. Consciousness, he wrote,

is a particular awareness of ordering, classifying, and 'thinking' through concepts that enable the individual to analytically divide and order the things of the world and the inner qualities of the self into systems (ibid., p.5).

Popkewitz suggested that this kind of analysis had led to a post-enlightenment fallacy that over-emphasises the rational and the individual, setting them against more holistic and traditional understandings of the workings of society. However, this research comprises a study of an administrative enterprise which focuses on an intentionally rational system that, it might be presumed, set out to make the reasons for its actions clear and to leave behind a record of which others could take note.⁴ Yet the setting up of such a scheme could not avoid the likelihood, common to any policy implementation, that it would overlook possibilities, such as its reception by certain groups of people. That there were

⁴ On the other hand there are instances, a significant example is referred to in chapter four, when the researcher might think that a 'rational' official record has been deliberately constructed to divert attention from what has happened. Such claims need to be supported by good evidence from elsewhere if they are to be accepted.

inadequacies in bureaucracies, especially of a centralising kind, was recognised by those who set up the SCE system and this study discusses at length the kind of flexibility that those individuals built in in order to enable the system to accommodate new factors which emerged as the system developed. The need therefore for bureaucratic systems to be flexible in order to respond to unexpected outcomes is a key theme. How far sufficient responses were devised to the currents of national feeling which emerged in the SCE system, assuming these could be identified, is a point for reflection at the end of the study.

The third of Popkewitz's charges against historicism suggests that it gives too much credence to a chronological perception of the passage of time as an explanation for change and progress: "... history in the eighteenth century becomes an ordering of human affairs through regular, sequential and irreversible movements of secular time"; modern history, "is the calculations that place human life and its processes as its centre to find direction" (ibid., p.7). Clearly chronology is important, but an awareness of its ambiguities, for example of the overlapping of events or of thoughts, motivations and feelings that move backwards and forwards through time, runs through this study. The School Certificate system was formed and maintained in a context of criticism and contestation that continued until it was finally brought to an end. It was perceived as a feature of "modern" life in the first half of the twentieth century but how far it represented progress was debated throughout that period. Whether the external examination system that was decided upon was the right choice to have made, given the alternatives that were seriously proposed, will not be a question that this study can finally answer. How far the SCE and its transformation into the GCE represented an advance is also a decision that readers will have to make for themselves. What I claim for the study is that it demonstrates what the key actors involved in the scheme at the time believed to be progress and what were the criteria by which they judged its success or failure.

The 'disinterestedness' of the historian

Popkewitz finally challenges the historian to be aware of the implications of "the inscription of difference", which he characterises as a way of making it "possible to 'see' and think historically" (ibid., p.20). This study crucially depends upon the distinctions I make between 'external' and 'internal' examinations, and between a more broadly conceived central control of education policy and the devolution of powers to local authorities, schools and teachers. These are terms which I have chosen to use and I clarify their definition to the extent, for example, that when the Acland Committee proposed a system of "external examinations" I maintain that they were in fact proposing an internal

system, since teachers were envisaged as setting and marking the examinations for their own students. Popkewitz counsels awareness of what may lie behind the ascription of such differences. Internal autonomy and devolution are commonly regarded as desired features of modern administration but the historical researcher must be aware of the implications of believing that “the present is more advanced than its predecessors” and thus unwittingly subscribe to “the optimism of progress” (ibid., p.10). The researcher may also, in drawing attention to perceived differences, harbour personal biases of which the reader should be aware. My own experience of having worked for a historic examinations board, particularly in its relations with the UK government (see pages 1-2 of this dissertation), leaves me with a prior sympathy for those who may be concerned about the impact of ‘centralisation’. I am also convinced of the need for examination boards which will act as intermediaries between, on the one hand, examination candidates and their teachers and, on the other, the state or any other body which represents the requirements of society for the results of schooling. This means that I am aware of the pull of opposing forces. Perhaps, using Michael Sadler’s term, this is an example of English “two-mindedness”. I draw support for such acknowledgement of my own positioning from Popkewitz’s assertion that “the reading of the past is not only about technologies or methods but also of a self that sees, think[s], and acts on documents in particular ways” (ibid., p.20). In this sense, if in different ways, the administrator, and the historian, and the reader must each review the evidence and make judgements.

An example of the challenges of such judgements relates to the claim by the Secretary of the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate, Walter Nalder Williams, that its involvement in the national examination system was “disinterested”. (See page 89 below.) In saying this he specifically claimed that the university did not aim to make a financial profit from school examinations but also, by implication, that the university’s work was a principled contribution to national education generally. In critiquing Nalder Williams’ claim, the historian – endeavouring, like Nalder Williams, to maintain a disinterested position - must consider its context. Firstly, disinterestedness had from the time of Matthew Arnold⁵ been a desired concept which referred to the need to avoid personal bias in making necessary judgements of criticism or action. A contemporary of Nalder Williams wrote in the *Journal of Higher Education* of “disinterested curiosity, which is the

⁵ Matthew Arnold in an article entitled “The Function of Criticism in the Present Time” states about criticism that a fundamental “law of its being” is: “the idea of a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas.” Republished from *The National Review*, November, 1864, in *Essays in Criticism*, (Arnold, 1886).

lifeblood of science” (Broudy, 1943, p. 426). Secondly, from the records we may infer that Nalder Williams was not someone who was likely to claim something which he knew to be untrue and the historian should therefore, at least initially, presume that he believed what he had written. Thirdly, his statement was approved by senior committees in his university. Fourthly, evidence can be cited that the same claim was made by others who supported university involvement. Petch, for example, made a sustained argument for the disinterestedness of the northern universities’ involvement in the School Certificate system (J. A. Petch, 1994, p. 48).⁶ But, fifthly, it must be acknowledged that others in England at the time would not have believed Nalder Williams’ statement, for it was frequently claimed that the universities were acting in their own self or financial interest. A head teacher, Miss Gadesden, is cited in chapter 3 as saying this in 1917 (page 57, below) and Norwood referred in 1943 to the universities’ “self-interest”.⁷ So, given the available evidence, the historian must make a judgement. How plausible was it at the time such claims were made, and how plausible is it now, that what Nalder Williams and others claimed was true?

This raises the question of the disinterestedness of the historian, in an age in which the very possibility of personal disinterestedness is questioned. Bourdieu suggests that the individual cannot do other than protect his or her own “symbolic capital” since “all apparently disinterested actions conceal intentions to maximise a certain kind of profit” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 86). So it might be doubted whether someone who has invested in the work of a university examination board, like Nalder Williams and myself, can be disinterested in judging the motives of such boards. Bourdieu in fact accepts that disinterestedness is possible but also that it can be used as a tool of “domination” in rationalized systems (ibid., p.90) and thus “the dominated can and must also use reason to defend themselves”. Concerning the question of whether Nalder Williams’ claim on behalf of a privileged university sector can be taken at face value, a judgement will be required of the reader: how plausible is the claim, given the evidence presented in the thesis of which it is part? Such an openness to the question requires transparency on the part of the

⁶ Petch claimed that over the 32 years of the SCE the five northern universities behind the JMB made approximately a quarter of a million pounds. Dividing that total by five and by the number of years brought him to £1700 for each university each year. He noted that payments had not been asked for the use of universities’ accommodation or the time of their staff spent on committees and in other advisory roles. He also noted that the universities had taken on a financial risk which the Treasury had been unwilling to take on.

⁷ Letter from Norwood to G.G. Williams, 10 November 1943. (TNA: ED 12/480).

historian so that relevant information should be put before the reader, which should include his or her own experience and propensities.⁸

The contexts of documents

Skinner's work on how the meaning of historical texts might be understood has importantly influenced this study because of his emphasis on the importance of understanding the contexts in which statements of beliefs, - to which we might add opinions, theories, ideologies - were made.

Any particular belief in which an historian is interested will ... be likely to present itself holistically as part of a network of beliefs, a network within which the various individual items supply each other with mutual support (Skinner, 2002, p. 43).

Skinner's insistence on the need to achieve a rich understanding of the context within which a text has been created informs the work of the early chapters in this report, which seek to understand the contemporary uses of such key terms as 'examinations' or 'centralisation'. As a further example from later on, the Norwood Committee proposed though did not reference a controversial concept, "internal examination with external assessment"; it requires knowledge of other and earlier uses of those words fully to comprehend the intention of the proposal.⁹

This is a study in the field of education and its key words refer to categories, such as curriculum, examinations, teacher control and so on, which are very familiar. But it is necessary to be aware of the possibility of misunderstanding the way these categories were thought of in the past. This will be particularly so when encountering issues over which differences of opinion are still strongly held today. Is the researcher to report more favourably those in the 1930s and 1940s who argued for 'multilateral schools' as opposed to 'grammar schools'? Were those who argued for external examinations less 'progressive' than those who favoured school-based assessments? The historical challenge is to present such opinions without taking sides and within the meanings of terms used at the time. When writing about how historians might address the truth of unfamiliar beliefs, Skinner proposed three precepts which can be applied to the reporting of all historical opinions. They should, firstly, make agents' opinions appear as rational as possible; secondly, take what is said or written at face value (this is what they thought); and, thirdly, surround any

⁸ As proposed by Fellman and Rahikainen this introduction includes reference to myself and to my lines of reasoning, in the hope that others will join in this enquiry (Fellman & Rahikainen, 2012, p. 13).

⁹ The phrase was used about examinations in Technical Schools in the Spens Report (1938, recommendation 117, p.373) but its meaning can be traced back to proposals made in the nineteenth century.

particular statement of opinion with an intellectual context that serves to lend it adequate support (ibid., p.42). Thus historians will give actors from the past the credit that they knew and understood what they were saying and will avoid the temptation of making judgements which imply the researcher's own superior understanding.

Secondly, Skinner followed Wittgenstein and Austin in emphasising what human beings do with language and suggests that it is the "illocutionary intention" (ibid., p.99) of what is stated that should be researchers' focus: that is their attention should be on "agency, usage and especially intentionality" (ibid., p.2). In this study, many of the sources being considered clearly indicate what their authors intend their readers to do in response. Such administrative texts are not the product of an individual but of a group, so personal perspectives, if they were originally there, will have been lost in the drafting. This does not mean that the intention of all such texts is unambiguous. It is possible in some cases to follow the genesis of a document through its different stages and then to identify where and how different contributors have different opinions. Chapter eight refers to the Board of Education's Circular 103, the drafts of which reflected the different intentions of the Board's officers who wrote them. There are also cases in which what appears to be a document with a straightforward intention, such as to record the points made during a meeting, may in fact have a less obvious intention, for example to ensure that one stated point of view is privileged as the approved one. The documents that have come from the Norwood Committee provide examples of this.

This leads to a third point which Skinner made and which provides a useful reminder to those dealing with government or other regulatory documents. He noted that not only do the creators of texts aim to convey meaning, they also "claim authority for [their] utterances" (ibid., p.6). This can apply to a document created in the Board of Education, in a school, in an examination board or by a teachers' organisation. In respect of government archives, Steedman's search, following Derrida, for a reason for an archive to exist is in one way more straightforward (C. Steedman, 2001, p. 6). Here, the existence of the government archive is explicitly, not just implicitly, about power, for it has been put together in order to record decisions to which civil servants can return to find precedents for future decisions. Steedman comments that Derrida's thought was that archives betoken the human urge to "find a beginning", which is often both a bureaucratic and political task as well as representing the hope of the historian, (which in Derrida's philosophy will prove

illusory).¹⁰ Nevertheless the administrator, as well as the historian, must make that search: in government files one frequently encounters a document written by a civil servant who has been asked to explain how a current situation came about.¹¹ More generally, the link between language and power is to be found in any context in which differing views are being contested. The university examination boards, when they were arguing with the Board of Education, could strengthen their argument by arranging for their parent universities to write to the Board, since they held the key to university entrance which was so vital to the working of the system. The universities wrote with greater authority, often by-passing the SSEC and writing directly to the President of the Board of Education. Skinner describes such a context as follows, showing the importance of language in the process:

We are embedded in practices ... but those practices owe their dominance in part to the power of our normative language to hold them in place (ibid., p.7).

Sociological imagination

Writing within a decade of the ending of the SCE system in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), C. Wright Mills reflected on a mid-twentieth century struggle within the West's bureaucracies between liberalism and conservatism.

The older liberal practicality of 'social problems' still goes on, but it has been overshadowed by newer conservative uses of a managerial and manipulative sort (Mills, 2000, p. 100).

The story of the SCE, from the liberal intentions underpinning the way the Board of Education and the SSEC were set up at the beginning of the century to the attempt by a group of civil servants to re-establish their position of dominance in the 1940s, provides a historical example of the concerns that Mills identified. "Manipulation", his expression in the footnote below, accurately characterises the running of the Norwood Committee and it is a feature of that period which was recognised at the time. We may see this, using Mills' terms, as a triumph of "rationalised bureaucracy" over the freedom to reason on the part of individuals who were both involved and excluded from the development of examinations

¹⁰ Steedman is reflecting on Derrida's paper, *Mal d'archive*: "What [the concept] 'archive' is doing there at all, then, is the work of meditating on starting places, the search for which, because it is impossible, Derrida names as a sickness, a movement towards death" (C. Steedman, 2001, p. 6).

¹¹ Eustace Percy's query about why the Joint-Four teachers' organisations were not originally given places on the SSEC is an example referred to in chapter seven (fn. 34).

policy in that period.¹² Mills recognised that increased bureaucratic control emanated from the war years and it is notable that a chief protagonist of the radical implementation of Norwood's proposals (Senior Chief Inspector Roseveare) had been a leading administrator of the rationing system in the Ministry of Food during the war. However, the conclusion of the story was that the imposed proposals of the Norwood Report were eventually overturned as the more participative policy approaches of the earlier period were allowed to reassert themselves at a time when other priorities occupied the education system.

Mills' main plea was to sociologists to incorporate history into their studies and he made a particular case for the importance of biography¹³ as a way of linking the real concerns of people, their "troubles", to socially wider views and explanations of their society's "issues" (ibid., p.8). His plea was for sociological studies to attend to the effect of social trends on individuals in a way that grounded them in the real experiences of people's lives. This study is a historical study which also shows how the biographies of key individuals impinged on discussions of examination policy in the first half of the twentieth century – those of Acland, Sadler, Hartog, Norwood, Holmes and Roseveare all illuminate their contributions. Mills made a number of striking comments about the role of historians: their aim should be, "to keep the human record straight" and to "[represent] the organised history of mankind" (Mills, 2000, p. 144). But he is also dismissive of historians who "have no theory": "... they may provide material for the writing of history but they cannot themselves write it. They can entertain, but they cannot keep the record straight" (ibid., p.145). A plea for a 'humanistic' approach to the writing of history is welcome and it explains the narrative and person-centred approach that I have adopted in this study. I also see a pattern in the changing administration of the SCE system, from the hoped-for co-operation of the setting up period under the influence of the Bryce Report, to the developing contestation among the institutional actors as they sought to defend their particular interests, to the Board of Education's attempt to impose central control in order to rationalise what they saw as a surfeit of points-of-view which would delay policy implementation. Where the current research departs from being a sociological study is that it does not extend to other policy situations, in different places and at different times, and thus I make no claim that a process from co-operation to contestation to central control has

¹² "Rationally organised social arrangements are not necessarily a means of increased freedom – for the individual or for the society. In fact, often they are a means of tyranny and manipulation, a means of expropriating the very chance to reason, the very capacity to act as a free man [sic]" (Mills, 2000, p. 169).

¹³ "That these three – biography, history, society – are the co-ordinate points of the proper study of man has been a major platform on which I have stood when criticising several current schools of sociology whose practitioners have abandoned this classic tradition" (ibid., p.143).

been reproduced elsewhere. But I do believe that studying this particular example in detail, and providing an in-depth record of it, is worth the effort. Indeed, if ‘reasoning’ is the key aim of Mills’ view of a modern approach to social issues, then just one persuasive example would be enough to make a helpful contribution to the understanding of an issue. The intrinsic value of ‘comparing’ lies at the heart of the rationale for comparative studies of education systems (Phillips, 2006).

Peter Burke’s discussion of theories of social change noted that it is all too easy for researchers looking for a theory to believe they have found an underlying structure when it can only be defended by restricting the number of cited examples. His critique of the theory of ‘modernisation’ identified the value in historical studies of a study of “the particular, the unique, the unrepeatable” (Burke, 2005, p. 21). He pointed out that the process of history shows there is no “unilinear ... one-way street” towards what might be termed modernisation. Secondly he noted that theories of modernisation can erroneously rest on “the assumption that change is essentially internal to the social system, the development of potential, the growth of a branching tree” (Burke, 2005, pp. 146–147) and thus may underestimate the importance of human agency. Thirdly, he suggested that if an understanding of *why* social change takes place is wanted we must first understand *how* it takes place (ibid., p.147). He concluded, “There is more than one path to modernity” (ibid., p.149). This is a defence of the value of studies of the particular, within Burke’s overall argument that historical and sociological approaches need each other.

Such a focus for the outcomes of my study still leaves me open to Wright Mills’ accusation against the historian that I have no theory and therefore no way of making the research useful, an accusation reiterated in Burke’s description of “distinct professions or even subcultures” in which “Sociologists ... have long viewed historians as amateurish, myopic fact-collectors without system or method, the imprecision of their ‘data-base’ matched only by their incapacity to analyse it” (Burke, 2005, p. 3). It is true that I am not attempting a sociological study. But I will address the issue of the function of examinations in early twentieth century England, and I follow McCulloch and Richardson who quote Tosh’s contention (Tosh, 1984 edition) that historians “have a practical role to perform” which is to provide “a much needed historical perspective on some of the most pressing problems of our time” (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000, p. 51). There are critiques of examination systems in the work of those sociologists who see them as structural components in a system that fails to offer students equal educational opportunities, (Broadfoot, 1979; Gipps & Murphy, 1994), but my study does not set out to support or deny that claim, though it draws out from the contemporary record what was said about the

effect of the SCE on different groups of students. While some at the time saw the examinations as biased against working class children, others, within the Trades Union movement for example, saw them as offering new opportunities.

Foucault, Skinner and the meaning of historical texts

Foucault's metaphor for historical study as 'archaeology' invites the historian to remember that "many different things ... occurred at the same time" (Fendler, 2010, p. 38)¹⁴ and also highlights the importance of recovering the meaning of ideas from within the contexts of sources themselves rather than developing wide narratives, of inevitable improvement over time for example, which may divert the historian from a just interpretation of the past or present.¹⁵ Many of the key words and phrases that already have been used in this study - examinations, the education system, secondary schools, national policy - had meanings in the early twentieth century which could be unrecognised if it was simply assumed that they mean precisely the same things today. McCulloch and Richardson put it thus:

Current notions of school and education ... are historical creations that came into being and became established for specific reasons that have much to do with their cultural surroundings ... Understanding the origins of such phenomena, the ways in which they were regarded, the alternative forms and principles with which they were contrasted and the reasons for their resilience and ultimate decline is the basic purpose of historical research on education (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000, p. 6).

The need to reach such understanding is a key motivation of this study.

The principal historical data used for my project has comprised documentary material, that is to say, written words, and so the epistemological challenge for the project has been the interpretation of those words. This has affected discussion of the attitudes of the three main actors in the examination system - the teachers, the examination boards and the state - since my first research question identifies their "underlying expectations" as an

¹⁴ Fendler is distinguishing here between Foucault's approach to history which, she says, is "spatial" or "cross-sectional" and traditional history which is "temporal" or "longitudinal". Traditional historians reacted negatively to such statements because they believed that their work did "try to make sense of how all those artifacts [*of one period*] fit together" (Fendler, *ibid.*, p.38). See Megill's paper on the reception of Foucault by historians. "Though he is not of the discipline [of History], [Foucault] is important *to* it, partly because he has called attention to hitherto neglected fields of research, but mostly because he fosters a self-reflection that is needed to counteract the sclerosis, the self-satisfaction, the smugness that constantly threaten" (Megill, 1987, p. 134).

¹⁵ Foucault's metaphor also makes the point that the history still exists in the present, as I have already suggested is the case for public examinations, but I do not go so far as to say with him that the only meaning it now has is what it means for us today.

issue for study. How may the historian know the answer to this question? Post-modern theorists have suggested that it cannot be known what people in the past have meant even if we have an accurate record of their words. Evans saw this kind of argument as an existential challenge to the study of history, citing in *In Defence of History* as one example, Hayden White's historiography which suggested that there is little difference between a work of history and a work of fiction.¹⁶ However, having reviewed the whole field, Evans concluded,

I will look humbly at the past and say despite them all, it really happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it happened and reach some tenable though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant (R. J. Evans, 1997, p. 253).

Foucault's work, though he is not considered to be a historian by traditional historians (Megill, 1987) (nor did he consider himself to be a historian), nevertheless challenged the historian's key positions. Kjellström in a 1995 paper focused on the fact that both Foucault and Skinner were concerned with the linguistic challenge of understanding texts within the social and personal contexts in which they were produced. Skinner, he wrote, emphasised that the "discursive context" of the text should be investigated in as much detail as possible and that the historian should seek "to know exactly what the 'agent's primary *intentions* [were] in issuing that particular utterance'" (1995, p. 23).¹⁷ Kjellström underlined Skinner's requirement that it is the historian's business to describe "with the highest degree of precision" the contexts of the texts which they encountered when decoding the intentions of their writers.¹⁸ This work can be done "based on the absolute commitment that there is in fact a demonstrably true version or account of a particular historical ply [sic] of discourse", or in Skinner's own words from his study of Machiavelli, "The business of the historian ... is surely to serve as a recording angel" (ibid., p.24). Thus Skinner, as did Elton and Marwick, insisted that there is an accurate version of the story to be told and that to do this the historian must work to take into account all the available evidence.

¹⁶ Evans comments: "... in [his] approach there is no real difference between history and fiction. For Hayden White, researching and writing a history book is much the same as researching and writing a novel" (R. J. Evans, 1997, p. 100).

¹⁷ Quotation from *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and his critics* (Tully, ed., 1988, p. 74).

¹⁸ Kjellström, ibid. p.23: "The appropriate methodology for the history of ideas must be concerned, first of all, to delineate the whole range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion by the utterance and, next, to trace the relations between the given utterance and this wider linguistic context as a means of decoding the actual intention of the writer" (Skinner in Tully [ed] 1988, p. 63).

Kjellström suggested that Skinner, in asking for such precision, was asking for the impossible by mistaking the map of his own historical discourse for the actual terrain which it represented (Kjellström, 1995, p. 26).¹⁹ In challenging Skinner's claims Kjellström contrasted them with, and thereby moved closer to, those of Foucault. He noted that in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* Foucault went further than Skinner in requiring the historian to take account of the hidden, repressed aspects of a text's meaning as well as its 'manifest discourse'. Kjellström explained Foucault's position thus:

Gazing back through the ages, filled with a desire to understand, we must make an effort to reach *within* discourse and to accomplish that endeavour we have to refrain from creating yet another narrative from *outside* of it, since if we do, we necessarily silence those murmuring, alternative voices that are wording doubt and difference in subtler language (ibid., p.29).

Kjellström thus summarised the difference between Skinner's and Foucault's methodologies as work done from outside the texts and work done from inside them. For Skinner meaning was "found" by the reader but for Foucault meaning was "made" by the reader (ibid., p.39).

Such divergence does not call for an either-or judgement, since historians may both find the meaning of texts and then re-make it for the purposes of their own discourse. But Foucault's comments about the power of an 'episteme' do encourage a recognition that a twenty-first century judgement about an examination system a century ago could be reached through a filter of 'modern' thinking which may lead to misunderstanding of what was happening at the time. So I follow Kjellström's conclusion that Foucault's archaeology, with its focus on inner meaning which the scholar can aim to remake in the present, is "the more realistic mode of the constitution of meaning" compared to Skinner's approach (ibid., p.40). This perspective will lead to closer engagement with the archival material, which after all was also Skinner's key emphasis. But it still does not affirm a mixed methodology using a traditional historical approach of working with texts at the same time as incorporating the 'post-modern' insights of which Foucault was one exponent. I turn below to a possible resolution of the problem in Paul Ricoeur's work on hermeneutics.

¹⁹ Weiler took the argument about the "historian as author" a step further, seeing their work as a recreation, not just a representation, in a Response piece to the May 2011 volume of the *History of Education Quarterly*. "What is at stake in the writing of history, then, is not a reflection of a prior reality, but an intervention in the creation of a sense of reality" (Weiler K., 2011, p. 252).

Foucault and examinations

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault presented a series of provocative images which situated examinations within a disciplinary system of education whose effect was to confine citizens into the roles which society required them to play. In his vision the school was like a prison and the classroom, the curriculum, the school hierarchy and the examinations all became means of control that suppressed the pupils' individuality.

Foucault said about the examination system:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish (Foucault, 1971, p. 184).

He presented a challenge to those who would write about examinations.

People write the history of experiments on those born blind, on wolf-children or under hypnosis. But who will write the more general, more fluid, but also more determinant history of the 'examination' – its rituals, its methods, its characters and their roles. Its play of questions and answers, its systems of marking and classifications? (ibid., p. 185).

This is a challenge not only to the educationalist who may see a more positive role for examinations but also to the historian whose methodology, Foucault implied, had failed to give a full history of them.

Foucault's call for more study of 'the examination' was vivid, stimulating and intentionally, as Fendler has shown, "provocative" (Fendler, 2010, p. 5 and 82). Hoskin sought to develop understanding of Foucault's thinking in a 1979 paper in which he noted that at the time school examinations were being introduced in their present form, the school system was being "rationalised". His paper showed that systems of examining, mainly oral in nature, had existed in European universities for several centuries and they were giving way to written equivalents by the end of the eighteenth century (Hoskin, 1979, p. 143). He noted that at the same time the curriculum was being structured into packages, students were being taught in classes and teachers were being trained to "work in bureaucratic organizations" (ibid., p.135). The same can be said of examining: a large change is made when examinations develop from being run by teachers in order to assess the progress of individuals, to becoming a national system that assesses all who want to take part. In 1895, the hope of the Bryce Commission that the new examination system would include oral examinations suggests that they were envisaging internal examinations and had not fully come to terms with the implications of a large-scale national system

externally administered.²⁰ The growth in numbers in the system, as secondary schooling for all became the policy, required systematization and that, inevitably, implied “normalisation”, which was the target of Foucault’s negative conclusions.

An adaptation of Hoskin’s 1979 paper, giving special treatment to the examining of science, appeared in MacLeod’s volume *Days of Judgement* (1982). This version highlighted Hoskin’s aim to “conduct what one might term an ‘archaeology’ of the examination and the way in which it does or does not link knowledge and power ... Such an archaeology leads partly to the historical question of origins” (MacLeod, 1982, p. 215). Hoskin differentiated the ‘traditional’ use of examinations as a “terminal ritual, undergone almost exclusively in universities, a signal that an apprenticeship in knowledge had been completed” (ibid., p.213) from the constant assessment and evaluation of behaviour which Foucault had cited in the seventeenth century La Salle institutes.²¹ The link between the latter and “surveillance” is clear but if an assessment at the end of an apprenticeship is different, which model of examining could a system like the SCE be said to be following? Foucault’s critique was that the examination system was one by which the assessment of students’ knowledge was used to discipline them and thus was an example of the working of “power-knowledge”. Hoskin, speaking of the opinions of science teachers at least, saw no alternative to such “coercion”. He cited Michael Young as saying that a science education was “necessarily dogmatic ... producing technological domination rather than emancipation” (ibid., p.215). Young, and Hoskin, concluded that “the real problem is learning Boyle’s law” (ibid., p.233). Such an insistence on the acquisition of basic knowledge is reminiscent of Gramsci’s critique of Gentile’s ‘progressive’ reforms in 1920s Italy²² which, he claimed, denied the pupils access to basic information on which their understanding of their world could be based (Entwistle, 1979).

Hoskin welcomed Foucault’s insight into “the centrality of education in our construction of modernity” in a chapter entitled “Foucault under Examination: The crypto-educationalist unmasked” in Ball’s volume *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (Ball, 2013, p. 29). He was also clear about the central place of examination in that process, but went on to question the meaning of Foucault’s central concept of “power-

²⁰ It was on this issue that James Booth, who believed an oral was an essential part of examining, parted company after 1856 with the Society of Arts (F. Foden, 1989).

²¹ An example of such detailed assessment of the individual in a non-religious, “philanthropic” school, is given in the volume *Assessment Cultures* by Berdelmann in a chapter on “The Emergence of Pedagogical Observation in the Context of Student Assessment in the 18th Century” (Alarcón & Lawn, 2018, pp. 57–83).

²² Gramsci saw these ‘reforms’ as the “degeneration” of the Italian elementary curriculum. He referred to the “the new verbalism”, which prioritised opinion, belief and judgement that did not have a basis in concrete information (Entwistle, 1979, p. 47).

knowledge” which he declared to be ambiguous. He followed Derrida’s critique that Foucault’s project could not simply relate to the world of the past two hundred years but that what he was engaged with was “the fundamental permanence of the logico-philosophical heritage” [Derrida quoted by Hoskin, (Ball, 2013, pp. 41–42)] which went back to the classical roots of western civilization. Hoskin followed this lead in his examination of the meanings of fundamental educational ideas. He related the two-sided meaning of “power-knowledge” to the dual meaning of the word “discipline” and this led him back through the Christian era to classical times where examples of ‘the examination’ could also be found. He concluded that Foucault “got his history of the examination wrong” and erred “by confusing the invention of formal academic examinations with the invention of modern formal academic examinations” (ibid., p.45). Hoskin claimed that what characterised ‘modern’ examinations was the use of marks (or scores), which rapidly gave rise to what was claimed to be the possibility of scientific enquiry into “the ‘objective quantification’ of the inner truth of the self” (ibid., p.47). This was indeed a significant development, that in the time of the SCE created controversy in thinking about education policy.

However, Hoskin’s commentary has moved from school examinations to psychometrically conceived tests and I do not agree that a reaction to quantification was Foucault’s error. It would be possible to agree with Foucault’s critique of the power of exams if his point was that using numbers to objectify complex areas of human ability can give such judgements a questionable, ‘scientific’ authority. But the outcome that Foucault described was that the learners “took within themselves” the normalising judgements and believed them to be true, and this would not be particularly dependent on the use of numbers. It was the judgements themselves to which Foucault objected.²³

Another of Foucault’s concepts was, however, that where power is exercised there will inevitably be “resistance” (Fendler, 2010, pp. 51–53). So it must not be imagined that the student is in a state of total powerlessness. This suggests there could be a more positive message from Foucault for students who, as they increase in knowledge, will also sense their increasing power, for example to choose a path for their lives. Gramsci too saw a function of examinations as “to enable the student to monitor his own progress” (Entwistle, 1979, p. 50). Fendler would encourage us to take this more optimistic view of Foucault’s

²³ “He who is subjected to a field of visibility (*or discipline*), and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1971, pp. 202–203).

critique of education (ibid., p.81), but tolling in our ears is his sentence with which we began this section, which ends with the words, “to qualify, to classify and *to punish*”. My view is that we do not have to submit to Foucault’s negativity about society and its organisation, which leads to his gloomy view of classrooms and examinations. A final point from Hoskin’s 1990 paper relates to the emphasis he put on Foucault’s deep-rooted, personal commitment to “self-examination” (Ball, 2013, p. 37). So why could school examinations not also be seen as part of the student’s search for self-knowledge? Such a possibility will at least open to us the prospect that there could historically be more positive, educational attitudes to examinations than those which are wholly influenced by negative sociological critiques of examination systems.

Ricoeur and the meaning of historical texts

I noted earlier that historical research is about the collection of data and then interpretation, and that such interpretation has led in extreme cases to the accusation that history is just ‘made up’. Gardner’s work on hermeneutics focuses on the way Paul Ricoeur addressed this issue. Firstly, he notes that Ricoeur summarised three stages of the process of historical research:

- the documentary phase: “the declarations of eyewitnesses to the constituting of archives, which takes as its epistemological program the establishing of documentary proof”;
- the explanation / understanding phase, which asks the question, “why?”, seeking the reasons for why things happened as they did;
- the representative phase, which leads to the organisation of results into a “literary or written form of discourse” (Gardner, 2010, p. 25).

These stages summarise a response to what Gardner describes as the challenge to history to “hold together a realist epistemology and an interpretative methodology” (ibid., p.11). They envisage a close and accurate attention to the available sources and accept that the act of writing an account is inevitably a representation, but it is a representation which “is always objectively constrained and disciplined by the stages that precede it” (ibid., p.25). Interpretation emerges from the sources and representation is an inevitable consequence of the act of communication which comes next. Ricoeur defended this from merely being the process of a later generation inventing a version of the historic past which suited them. His approach resonated with J.S. Mill’s differentiation of the approach to history of Bentham, who in response to opinion received from the past asked ‘Is it true?’, as opposed to Coleridge, who asked ‘What is the meaning of it?’ For Ricoeur this was the

“great opposition” as it suggested that one either *explains* as a natural scientist or one *interprets* as a historian (ibid., p. 46). Gardner’s work shows how Ricoeur sought to overcome this opposition.

Ricoeur noted that all language has “surplus meaning” and that this is encoded in the language of the past and may have to await the understanding of the future. He accounted for the human capability to interpret the meanings of the past by asserting that people are linked by common human experience. Gadamer had described a shared tradition of meaning: “Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are mediated” (Gadamer cited by Gardner, ibid., p.53). When they stand before a text to comprehend it they bring with them a measure of understanding (in Ricoeur’s words *pré-compréhension* and *compréhension naïve* (Bell, 2011, p. 527)) for which the word “prejudice” (which “may not be unfounded or illegitimate” (ibid., p.530)) has been used. So Ricoeur could say that,

History precedes me and outstrips my reflection; I belong to history before belonging to myself ... what is called prejudice expresses the structure of anticipation of human experience (ibid., p.54).

Such anticipations, which shape or constrain our understanding, may, as Gadamer argued, be negative or positive in character. The process of interpretation assists us in distinguishing the two.

Part of the human experience is the awareness of our being alive in time. Gardner again quotes Gadamer to emphasise this point: “The truth claim of the past is that what it has to say concerns and addresses the present too. If it does not, it is simply not true” (ibid., p.55). Behind this claim stands the idea of a dialogue which can take place between the past and the present. Reflecting on this Ricoeur noted a categorical difference between oral and written communication. In all communications the intentions of the author are an indicator of their meaning: in oral communication it is possible that intention will be apparent in the communicative act itself, whereas in a written document the intention of the writer may become separated from its meaning. This is the space in which interpretation must operate, which will enable even readers in years to come to interpret the text. “Reading is not simply a kind of listening,” Ricoeur claimed. “A [written] text must be able ... to decontextualise itself in such a way that it can be recontextualised in a new situation” (ibid., pp. 68 and 65). That contextualisation, which the reader of the future can recover, is an important part of grasping the surplus meaning of the text. Indeed, Gardner notes that Ricoeur claimed that the passing of time, “distanciation”, is a condition

for the elaboration of surplus meaning” (ibid., p.65). For Ricoeur this reunited the processes of explanation and understanding in recovering the meaning of historical texts.

Ricoeur also emphasised the centrality of narrative to human thought. It is not that narrative suggests the construction of stories that arise from the present which we then impose on the past, but that narrative is an inevitable consequence of humans being alive in time. Gardner quotes Ricoeur as stating that “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of narrative” (ibid., p.87) emphasising the point with a description of “Narrative ... as the mode through which all conscious temporal beings characteristically endeavour to understand and explain the circumstances and events of their existence” (ibid., p.90). Johnson, using Ricoeur’s work to reflect on the “transdisciplinarity” of history and cultural studies, writes of “the historicity of things”²⁴ a concept derived from Augustine’s treatise which identifies three aspects of present time – memory, expectation, and attention. Thus the past and the future are present in present time and “All intellectual work can, perhaps should, be ‘historical’ in sharing a sensitivity to human temporality ...” (Richard Johnson, 2001, p. 278).

These are important observations for the work of a historian. They emphasise the ‘facts’ of the past and assert that there are ‘truths’ about the past to be addressed and understood. They affirm that the past can be found and not merely constructed. But they also accept that the process of re-presenting the past to a new audience consists in a rediscovery of meanings in a text, or even a new discovery of meanings that inhere within it. These meanings, which might answer the question ‘Why?’, are inevitably couched in a narrative form. The historian’s narrative discourse is a linking of ideas and events through time, which is the human way of our making sense of our past. This is not a random and undisciplined making up of a story, as some critics might allege, for such criticisms do not “attend properly to the phases of historical research that precede narration” (ibid., p. 106).

Policy making and implementation

Stephen Ball in his book *Policy and policy making in education* (1990) prioritised the importance of understanding the underlying philosophies and motivations of those who take part in developing educational policy making (Ball, 1990). Sutherland (1973) and Dalglish (1996) undertook such detailed studies of education policy-making in the later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Board of Education showing the impact of individuals associated with the Board of Education. Such an approach to a consideration of

²⁴ Johnson, 2001. “Historical Returns”, in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol 4(5), p. 268.

government education policy supports the focus of my title on the key actors in the SCE system. In considering the actors, we need, as McCulloch and Ball have suggested, to understand their motivations and their institutional relationships. McCulloch indicates that the way to understand their actions is to recognise the inevitable ‘contestation’ which administrative situations engender (McCulloch, 1993b). Both the Board of Education and the Consultative Committee were keen initially not to set up an over-mighty, centralised organisation. They set out believing that the key actors could collaborate “with such avoidance of the dangers of centralisation as would avert embarrassing opposition and invite the friendly co-operation of the bodies already engaged in the work” (Board of Education, 1911, p. 133). Patrick Joyce’s book *The Rule of Freedom* (2003) asked what it was that enabled a society that cherished its liberties, whose social arrangements favoured ‘liberalism’, to submit itself in the early twentieth century to increased rule by the central government. He emphasised that social (and of course educational) phenomena are processes not things: social ordering is “a fluid and many-stranded activity” (Joyce, 2003, p. 6). This leads to the question of what groups and individuals do to make policies work. Joyce wrote of town planning and maps, of systems of data collection and public registers, of public health, sanitation, libraries and cemeteries and also of the civil service examinations introduced in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ He described “a political economy of infrastructure which set up the conditions of possibility in which freedom might be exercised” (ibid., p.11). He also referred to contestation in society, defining politics as “the more or less organised ground of differences about the disposition of state power” (ibid., p.99) and stating that “As a form of governmentality, liberalism had to be realised within politics, and one way of thinking of its ethics of governance is its realisation *in struggle*” (ibid., p.101). This analysis supports an understanding of the political context in which the SCE system was introduced and the place of struggle within policy implementation. As an explanation of the external examination system being seen by some as a positive innovation, Joyce’s phrase “the conditions of possibility” is, I believe, a significant and productive one.

²⁵ “As a technology of publicity, the public examinations fabricated an ethical persona for the administrator of government ... A supposedly neutral persona was created, independent of politics, which would enable not only merit but accountability to manifest itself. This supposed neutrality was synonymous with liberal toleration, and was an ‘ethic of distance’, so that ruling at a distance also meant ruling through distance in the sense of the ethical disengagement of those who governed” (Joyce, 2003, p. 123).

The interpretation of institutional relationships

The political context impacted on the relationships between the key institutions involved in the running the SCE system, as is foregrounded in my title. In its opening comments the Bryce Commission's report stated that "some central authority is required ... to bring among the various agencies which provide education a harmony and co-operation which is now wanting" (Board of Education, 1895, p. 1). Frequent references to '(friendly) co-operation' were an indication of the way that official opinion regarded the hoped-for relationship between the central body and its chosen partners. McCulloch, however, characterised the outworking of those relationships as "contestation", with the main actors seeking to dominate the system, resulting in a "war of attrition" in which the proposals of Norwood were "lost" and the examining bodies won the day (McCulloch, 1993b, p. 179). Yet I have found that investigation of the discussions about the future of the SCE does not support the imagery of warring sides, or winning and losing, not least because the differing points of view were less clear-cut than such phrases suggest. As can be seen in the discussion of Joyce's work above, a more nuanced meaning to the term 'contestation' may be sought. Avril and Neem also adhered to Joyce's view, by invoking Gramsci's concept of "civil society" and Habermas's notion of the "public sphere", presenting contestation as an inevitable and desirable feature,

of 'contested democracy' in which citizens and leaders struggle over the procedures and institutions of consent ... It is a matter not just of which policies are passed: it is also a matter of how (Avril & Neem, 2014, p. 5).

I see this as a helpful observation as it enables the implementation of the SCE system to be placed at the beginning of the twentieth century within a newly-created context of democratic participation, a context with which the Board of Education and its officers were only just coming to terms.

Regarding the SCE it would not be difficult simply to outline 'what happened' in the system in those thirty-two years, but my research questions require both interpretation of events and a discussion of causation. Why did the main actors act as they did? What led to the outcomes with which they then had to work? These questions require the building up of a picture of the discourses of each of the three "main actors" and of how they utilised those discourses to explain and justify their actions. This follows Lytje's proposal about how Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' and his categories of historical enquiry – "archaeology", "genealogy" and "strategics" – could be "useful for 'traditional' archival research" (Lytje, 2012, p. 1). Lytje suggested that, at the archaeological level, the concept of power-knowledge implies "that justification is essential to human action: in order to act,

action must somehow make sense and be justified” (ibid., p.16). She referred this to Patrick Joyce’s study cited above in which he incorporated into Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ “the ways in which those who would exercise rule have posed to themselves the question of the reasons, justifications, means and ends of rule” (ibid., p.17). In reflecting on Foucault’s strategies Lytje sought to supply what has been claimed to be a missing stage in Foucault’s scheme, namely how “big power” (for example, the dominance of what is socially accepted) links with “small power” (of administrative decisions and actions, for example). Lytje suggested that her gloss on strategies supplies Foucault’s “missing actor” which otherwise leaves the concept power-knowledge insubstantial (ibid., p.20).²⁶ In this light, the archival evidence on which this study is based illuminates how the three groups of actors exercised and explained the authority that they had been accorded within the SCE system.

Lessons learnt

In claiming that lessons can be learned from the past in a way which may help the development of education thinking in the present, I follow a consensus view that a distinctive aim of education history is to affect and improve education structures (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000). But I am tentative about what that learning may involve, not least because what this study has shown is the complexity of the issues which surrounded the formation of a national examination system in England. Burke resisted historians’ claims to the “uniqueness” of their chosen topics, but he nevertheless described “a unique combination of elements each one of which has parallels elsewhere” (Burke, 2005, p. 2). Each of the elements may be independently explicable, but the combination of elements multiplies the degree of complexity as each element changes and adapts to the others as they too change. The unique interaction of elements is precisely what makes a description of policy planning and implementation challenging.

A theme to emerge from this study which demands emphasis is the consistent opposition to external examinations, an enduring opposition that resulted in a number of influential proposals for the replacement of external examinations by systems more closely embedded in schools. Why those attempts failed and how far the resilience of the external

²⁶ Lytje concludes, “Focusing on ... traditional sites of power (the government or the media, for example) could prove quite useful and insert what is, for all effects and purposes, the missing actor which makes theories of power and domination credible” (Lytje, 2012, p. 23). It is notable how when one is talking about power in Foucauldian terms one quickly comes to talk also about ‘domination’. This is what the actors in the SCE, with their aversion to centralisation, said they wished to avoid.

examination system might account for that are questions referred to throughout this study. Skinner has noted how the present can learn from the past by emphasising the importance of intention and choice in the statements of historical actors. This study shows how the national examination system has not been bequeathed to us because it was universally agreed to be the right option, but as a result of a series of choices that were made in the past. Thus, using Skinner's words, we may see in our present historical studies "the distinction between what is necessary and what is contingently the product of our own local arrangements" (1969, p. 89). Precisely because significant choices were made in the past, significant choices can be made in the present. The study of history may help us to make better choices.

CHAPTER 3 : HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nineteen-eighteen was the year which saw the beginning of the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate examinations. However, as David Phillips, quoting Grant, noted “there is the ‘proviso that in history no entirely new beginning is ever possible, since, consciously or unconsciously there is always a deep connection with what has happened in the past’”(Phillips, 2002). The purpose of this chapter is to explore this “deep connection”, starting with the first official recommendation that a secondary school examination system should be set up, a proposal that is found in the report of the Taunton Commission (*Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission*, 1868). This was the start of a long period of official consideration about what kind of system was needed. Even after the report of the Bryce Commission in 1895, which repeated the recommendation, it was to be a further twenty-three years before the Board of Education finally introduced the School Certificate Examinations (SCE). The process of deciding on the form of an examination system for England and Wales therefore took fifty years. This chapter explores some of the issues in the historical context which account for the length of what has sometimes been described as an official “delay”.¹

The Taunton Commission was asked to look into the work of secondary schools other than the nine ancient endowed schools² which had been the focus of the earlier Clarendon Report (1864). The Taunton Commissioners made official the widely-held assumption that post-elementary schools could be graded according to their different purposes and clientele (Woodard, 1848). This classification is important for the history of

¹ From some perspectives the “delay” in setting up a central education authority has been seen as an opportunity lost. For Bishop the lack of progress had been “ignoble” (Bishop, 1971, p. 276) and for Green, writing from a non-historical point of view, the allowances made for individualism (or independence) were “the major impediment to the creation of the kind of dynamic state without which modernisation could not occur” (Green, 2013, p. 229). The point he makes is much broader than about education: rather, he concludes about government activity generally that “The formation of rational systems occurred first and fastest in countries where the process of state formation was most intensive” (ibid. p.299). Clearly the progress of development in education in England and Wales comes under Green’s criticism, as does the system of examinations, which he calls “the un-coordinated chaos of private examining bodies” (ibid. p.303). These comments are, however, anachronistic: the issues would not have been referred to with such certainty at the time. This chapter shows that people had different reasons for resisting government control and that, for many of them, local control was the way to avoid what they saw as the dangers of centralisation. Green is very certain about what a ‘rational system’ is, but in England by the beginning of the twentieth century there had been a reaction against rationalism. One of the countries whose nation-building Green holds up for approval is Prussia, and we will see that the College of Preceptors at least would have balked at such an example as it ignores what they saw at the time as the problems of a centralised system.

² Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Merchant Taylors', Rugby, Shrewsbury, St Paul's, Westminster, and Winchester.

the examination system as it was in “Second-grade”, or “middle-class”, schools that examinations were thought to be especially necessary (Roach, 1971). The Taunton Commission put examinations at the top of its agenda stating, “It will have been seen that the examination of the schools is the pivot of all the improvements that we have recommended” (*Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission (Taunton Commission)*, 1868, p. 648) and it proposed that annual examinations of the schools should be held. However, in that statement the report was clearly referring to a system in which inspection and examination were combined, a difference of perception with which the modern researcher must come to terms. That the commission did not have in mind the kind of examinations which are run today can be seen in the fact that it proposed that only a third of the pupils in each school would be ‘examined’ each year. The focus would thus be on the quality of education offered by the schools not on the achievements of each pupil.

The Taunton Commission’s proposed scheme

In its plan for a national system of examinations the Taunton Commission proposed the setting up of, firstly, a “Central Council of Examinations” (ibid., p.649) which would be responsible for drawing up the general rules by which the examinations would be run and, secondly, “Courts of Examiners” or “Provincial Boards”, directed by “Official District Commissioners”, which would arrange for the annual examinations of schools in their district. The governors of schools, “subject to the approval of the Provincial Board”, would “prescribe the subjects of instruction” in their schools and, in preparation for the annual examination, notify their Provincial Boards about what they wanted their pupils to be examined on. Thereafter “the papers should be set accordingly” (ibid., p.622). There are two significant features of this proposed system which had a lasting effect on, particularly, teachers’ expectations. Firstly, the Commission envisaged that though school governors would lay down the outline of their school’s curriculum, “The mode of teaching, the text books, the number of hours to be given to each subject should, in our [the Commission’s] opinion, be left to the schoolmaster” (ibid., p.648). The teachers would also be able to say what they wanted their pupils to be examined on. These provisions reflected a general belief that teachers’ work should not be interfered with³ and that the regulation of examinations should “leave the schools perfect independence in their work” (ibid., p.650).

³ Katz noted an assumption in England in the period starting with the Bryce Report that advances in education would be led by individual teachers (Katz, 1965). The citation above shows this belief had been established even further back.

The second significant feature of this system was that a prominent role would be played by a ‘District Commissioner’ whose status would be analogous to that of a senior local inspector who would have close contact with the schools.

This examination proposal was based on the school-leaving *Abiturienten-Examen* in Prussia which Matthew Arnold had studied during a visit which he made in order to prepare a comparative report. His admiration for the education system in Prussia was vigorously expressed in his later book *Higher Schools and Universities in Germany* (Arnold, 1882) and a chapter in that work deals with the *Abitur* in some detail. Given the forum in which these ideas were initially presented and the way that the *Abitur* was referred to subsequently, this model, which I describe as a coordinated internal examination and inspection model, must be seen as a serious alternative to the university boards’ external examination system.⁴ Arnold himself was no supporter of external examinations, having seen the effect of the Revised Code tests on elementary schools and being very much opposed to the phenomenon of ‘cramming’ which was widely thought to be the worst effect of such examinations. More deeply than that, Arnold favoured two main lines of thought that influenced all those who were opposed to external examinations. The first was his support for secondary education as being a general education, “*allgemeine wissenschaftliche Bildung*” (Arnold, 1882), focusing on “the formation of [the student’s] mind and of his [sic] powers of knowledge, without prematurely taking thought for the practical applicability of what he studies” (ibid., pp.12 -13). The second underlying thought was that what primarily mattered was the quality of education that the schools provided: “how entirely it is the boy’s school and training which the Prussian Government thinks the great matter, and not his examination” (ibid., p.62).⁵ These beliefs were deeply embedded in England and will be seen to have influenced leading educationalists well into the next century.

The universities’ “Local examinations” system had been in existence in England for fewer than ten years when the commission was appointed. It was positively described in its report, but the commission did not unambiguously put forward external examinations as the model for the future. The report stated that “The Local Examinations of the

⁴ This could be a somewhat anachronistic distinction since it would be more accurate to say that the university model *became* an external examination system as, for a lengthy period, the university boards offered to schools inspection as well as examinations. However, the schools could opt for examinations only, and when they did so the questions were set and marked by the university examiners rather than the students’ own teachers.

⁵ This is in fact an exaggeration, for the *Abitur* was set up to address issues to do with university entrance (Heafford, 1995). The statement reflects the position of Arnold and many others in the educational establishment about what the purpose of examining should be.

Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the examinations of the College of Preceptors more nearly supply the need than anything else” (ibid., p.620).⁶ However, the university-set examinations were reported as “hardly easy enough to test the work of any large proportion of the scholars”, whereas the College of Preceptors, did not have “sufficient authority in the country at large” (ibid. p.620). Nevertheless, the report suggested that the local ‘Courts of Examiners’ might be “appointed by the universities or some independent authority” (ibid., p.621) and also that the universities might write the examination regulations. In support of this the report noted that

the great majority, especially of school masters, were in favour of putting [the providing and superintending of such examinations] into the hands of the universities. The universities, as being themselves institutions for education, are considered by the schoolmasters to be their natural centres (ibid., p. 648).

The desire of the secondary teachers for a link with the universities was a particularly influential opinion. So the Taunton Commission moved closer to a conclusion that

The Local Examinations have already succeeded so far, as to mark out the Universities as the fittest bodies that can be found, for testing and in some degree guiding school work. These examinations have their faults, but they are the best examinations of their kind, and appear to have secured to a great extent the confidence of the country (ibid., p.649).

However, the combined examination and inspection scheme remained as a serious alternative to external examinations.

The Bryce Commission’s proposals

When the Bryce Commission was set up it provided a second opportunity to address the question of a national examination system, this time within the context of a wider consideration of the nature of secondary schooling in the country and the need for a central authority for education.⁷ Its examination proposals followed those of the Taunton

⁶ It must also be remembered that London University’s entrance examinations had been taken by students as school leaving examinations since the 1830s, and Durham University was also offering local examinations on a smaller scale in the north of England (Newton, et al, 2007. p.88).

⁷ The Bryce Commission was set up in March 1894 during Arthur Acland’s tenure as Vice-President of the Council for Education (1892-1895). Acland was appointed to this post by Gladstone and given the additional authority of a seat in the cabinet. Sutherland comments that in doing this Gladstone was “putting in sole charge of education the most committed reformer ever to hold [the] office” (Sutherland, 1973, p. 313). That there should be a Royal Commission on Secondary Education was a proposal that had been made at a conference in Oxford in 1893. The conference was an initiative of Michael Sadler’s, whom Acland was soon to appoint as Director of Special Inquiries and Reports in a newly created section of the Education

Commission. The ‘co-ordinated model’ (of examination and inspection) was taken up by the Bryce Commission and particularly by Michael Sadler, another leading educational thinker who believed that Britain had much to learn from Germany’s education system. Sadler, as a member of the commission, wrote a full description to explain how the *Abitur* scheme worked (Sadler, 1936).⁸ He concluded that “There seems ... nothing to prevent this method of examination (with some modification) from being tried experimentally by one or other of our examining authorities” (ibid., p.150). Once the Board of Education had been set up, a coordinated scheme was twice proposed by its Consultative Committee, in 1904 and 1911,⁹ which was in line with Sadler’s¹⁰ and in the 1920s a system of ‘National Certificates’ for post-secondary technical institutions was developed on similar lines (F. E. Foden, 2007). When Sadler’s paper for the Bryce Commission was reprinted (in *Essays on Examinations*, 1936) alongside it was a chapter describing the National Certificate system which was then still in use. It has been too easily over-looked that during the period from the 1860s to the 1940s there was a well-articulated alternative to external examinations that could have been chosen for the national system.

The Bryce Commission’s first proposal advocated a reduction in the number of examinations that secondary students might take and, significantly, pronounced against there being “a central authority to conduct or prescribe in detail any uniform system”. Instead it proposed “a Central Office, assisted by [an] Educational Council” (ibid., p.304). The commission envisaged a possible increase in the number of examining bodies and further that the governing regulations “should be of a wide and elastic character” with different kinds of examinations being offered to different schools, and the governing bodies of the schools being given a free hand to choose their examining body and to “direct the course of the particular examination”. Its next proposal noted that “The Local Authority for Secondary Education should have no direct powers of interference with the examinations”, with the schools being left free to decide on their own examining regimes

Department (Sadler, 1949). The one idea discussed at the conference with which there was general agreement was that a commission should be set up to advise on the amalgamation of the Education Department, the Science and Art Department and the Charity Commission in order to bring together the administration of elementary, secondary and technical education (Lilley, 1982). The commission’s brief was to “Consider what are the best methods of establishing a well-organised system of Secondary Education in England, taking into account existing deficiencies and having regard to such local sources of revenue from endowment or otherwise as are available or might be made available for this purpose” (Board of Education, 1895, pp.iii-iv).

⁸ Volume V, pp. 27 of the Bryce Report - which was later republished by the International Institute Examinations Inquiry in the book *Essays on Examinations* (Sadler ed. 1936).

⁹ Key elements of the co-ordinated scheme are described in chapter four below where the proposals of the Consultative Committee are considered.

¹⁰ Sadler was a member of this committee when it prepared its second report (Board of Education, 1911, p. vi).

and the Central Office being the body which would monitor the running of the scheme (ibid., para. 128).¹¹ Its third proposal gave to “the Central Office, aided by the Council” the responsibility of ensuring the imposition of common standards on the boards with the intention that the Civil Service and other professional bodies might accept the standards set as equivalent to those in their own qualifying examinations (ibid., para. 129). Setting these proposals alongside each other well illustrates the intention to create a balance between national standardisation and the schools’ individual freedom to devise their own examinations. What can be seen here is an attempt to share power within the system and particularly to avoid giving too much power over schools to the proposed Central Office or to the new Local Authorities. As did the Local Authorities, the examination boards had a part to play in this power-sharing, while the commission also favoured a significant degree of influence over the system for teachers and schools.

Elasticity, a liberal doctrine

One conclusion that the Bryce commissioners reached was that, whatever structure the examination system was to have, a key requirement was that it should be marked by the quality of flexibility.

It was not generally contemplated that the Central Authority should itself act as an examining board, or form such a board. Its function with reference to examination, as also to inspection, lies in the laying down of some general rules as are applicable to all cases. According to the English conception of variety and elasticity in educational organisation, this is a function which, though important, is not large (Board of Education, 1895, p. 167).

This is a striking statement of intent. “The English conception of variety and elasticity” is a most telling phrase which alludes to a national reluctance to stifle independence, and to the aim of incorporating what is new into what is simultaneously seen as timelessly true for education. The description of the role of central government as “not large” is an accurate reflection of thinking at the end of the nineteenth century: it certainly amounts to a radical comment in the light of most thinking about government in the later twentieth century.

“Elasticity” was an apt metaphor for a desired quality in English educational policy at the time, conforming with Katz’s reflection on that period’s policy planning in England as the “institutionalisation of historical evolution” (Katz, 1965). It is therefore important to

¹¹ In the next section of the Recommendations the report states that the Local Authorities will be given responsibility for the schools’ inspection regime (ibid., para. 131-135).

reflect on what the commission, and what other users of this noteworthy term in the late 1880s and 90s meant by it. The Google tool 'Ngram' shows that the use of the words 'elastic' and 'elasticity' had steadily increased during the nineteenth-century, the metaphor no doubt appealing to those whose use of products which incorporated elastic was also increasing.¹² The Google corpus shows that in the 1880s the words 'elastic' and 'elasticity' were more commonly used than 'flexible' and 'flexibility',¹³ and the word 'compromise', a possible synonym, was used about as frequently as 'elasticity'. The Google corpus draws on many science texts from the period and in consequence shows a widespread use of the terms 'elastic' and 'elasticity' to describe physical properties. Darwin used the words to describe the properties of the structure of insects and plants. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to Karl Pearson in 1885 writing of an 'elastician' who is defined as "one who is conversant with the science of elasticity" ('Oxford English Dictionary Online', 2000). A use of these terms metaphorically is also evident. Dickens employs the word 'elastic' to describe a character's physical demeanour and mood. In *Oliver Twist* an undertaker is described as being "in general rather given to professional jocosity; his step was elastic and his face betokened inward pleasantry" (Dickens, 1839).¹⁴ The word resonated positively for Dickens and indeed elasticity was generally seen as a beneficial quality. The concept was also used in connection with institutions and social administration. Writing about the American colonies in the 18th century William Woodward noted: "Not the Mother-Country, not any European state, enjoyed so full a measure of self-government, institutions so elastic, a freedom of enterprise, of thought, and of religion, so unfettered" (Woodward, 1893, p. 205).¹⁵ This use is similar to the way in which the Bryce Commission employed the term.

Comparing the use of the words given by the NGram analysis one can conclude that the concepts of elastic and elasticity, used to describe a beneficial aspect of

¹² Inventions came on the market in the first half of the century: braces and garters (1839), elastic bands (1836), elastic socks, and webbing for boots (1850s). Rubber in its natural state was initially called "gum elastic".

¹³ The measure is the percentage of the use of each word against all the words in the corpus. The figures given for 1890 by NGram are: **elastic: 0.0014%**; flexible: 0.00040%; compromise: 0.00081%. **Elasticity: 0.0080%**; flexibility: 0.00010. As a comparison see the following figures – cotton: 0.0030%; warmth: 0.0013; and hardness: 0.00060%. According to NGram in the late 1800s 'elastic' was used about as frequently as 'warmth'.

¹⁴ *Oliver Twist*, chapter four, para. three.

¹⁵ Woodward wrote on educational and historical themes. He was Professor of Education at the University of Liverpool in the period 1899-1907.

administration, were noticeably frequent in the Bryce Report.¹⁶ The chairman asked the witness Sir George Young about endowment schemes that were “more elastic”; Llewellyn Smith referred to an LCC scheme that was “rather elastic”; Miss Hughes of the Cambridge Training College for Women described her course as “very elastic”; Mr Lyttelton invited a witness from a private school to say whether such schools were “more capable and elastic in devising new methods”. The point here is that it was not just an individual member of the commission who used the term, nor was it only the commissioners. The term was widely used, its frequency in the report showed it to be a preoccupation of the commission’s thinking. Nor were the terms used only within the confines of the commission’s discussions. Brehony noted how, during the parliamentary discussions of the Board of Education Bill of 1899, those who opposed the Bill because of the dangers of uniformity if the government took over secondary education, were reassured by Sir Richard Jebb, M.P. another member of the Bryce Commission. He commented that: “in elementary education such uniformity is to a certain extent inevitable but in secondary education elasticity is indispensable” (Brehony, 1994, p. 180).

Elasticity is a concept that suggests the ability to compromise. John Morley in his book *On Compromise*, first published in 1874, used the word ‘elastic’ to describe how criticism of traditional religion had “driven the defenders of the old faith into the milder and more genial climate of non-natural interpretations and a certain elastic relativity of dogma” (Morley, 1886, p. 151). His political plea was for progressive policies “before there has been time for the social structure to become ossified and inelastic” (ibid., p.207). Morley was a member of Gladstone’s last cabinet, as was James Bryce and also Arthur Acland, who brought the Bryce Commission into being. Other associates of Acland’s were on the Commission; Sadler, Llewellyn Smith and Roscoe, as well as the first women to be appointed to a government commission, Sophie Bryant, Lucy Cavendish and Eleanor Sidgwick. One can see this as a ‘liberal’ (or even Liberal) commission and the concept of elasticity as expressing a liberal ideal. Morley’s essay brought together a progressive desire for fundamental improvement in society with a non-conformist attachment to individuality and freedom of action. It was not necessary to administer a violent shock to the system because,

¹⁶ The above references to evidence given to the Commission were found by searching on ‘elastic’ and ‘elasticity’ in Volumes II to VII of the Bryce Report. ProQuest, UK Parliamentary Papers, Command 7862.

A progressive society is now constantly and justly compared to a growing organism. Its vitality in this aspect consists of a series of changes in ideas and institutions. These changes arise spontaneously from the operation of the whole body of social conditions, external and internal (ibid., pp.206-207).

Here, writing after Darwin, Morley used an evolutionary metaphor by which he saw progress as a natural growth which depended on “tendencies and forces in a community” (ibid., p.210). He maintained his progressive credentials by reiterating “the importance of self-assertion, tenacity, and positiveness of principles” (ibid., p.242) but he was prevented from becoming a revolutionary by “the principle of liberty”.¹⁷ The job of the government then was to nurture an environment in which the needed changes could grow. This liberal philosophy accounts for the commission’s approval of a guiding centre but with local control. In the narrower area of a national examination system, the commission’s careful sharing of responsibilities and balancing of areas of activity can be seen as in line with its purpose of creating a fertile space in which a new institution might root itself and develop.

Michael Sadler, who did a great deal of work on the Bryce Report (Grier, 1952, p. 46), was strongly supportive of the philosophy which imbued it. As Grier noted, Sadler’s relative youth among the commissioners and long service to education meant that for the next forty years there would be an active member of the education establishment who would uphold the Bryce principles, the principles which underlay the call for ‘elasticity’. These were not to be found in lists of tasks to be done, or detailed policy documents, but in working relationships and a professional commitment to the best that could be achieved through collaborative judgement. In this connection, Brehony cites Sadler’s declaration that questions of policy implementation had to be settled “not in the light of abstract theory alone, but under the pressure of conflicting forces, the comparative weight of which could not be judged beforehand” (Brehony, 1994, p. 193).

KEY HISTORICAL ISSUES

A number of contentious issues underlay the recommendations of both the Taunton and the Bryce Commissions; these will be reviewed below to illuminate the historical context for the establishment of the SCE. What researchers cannot allow themselves to think is that the movement towards a national examination system progressed inevitably

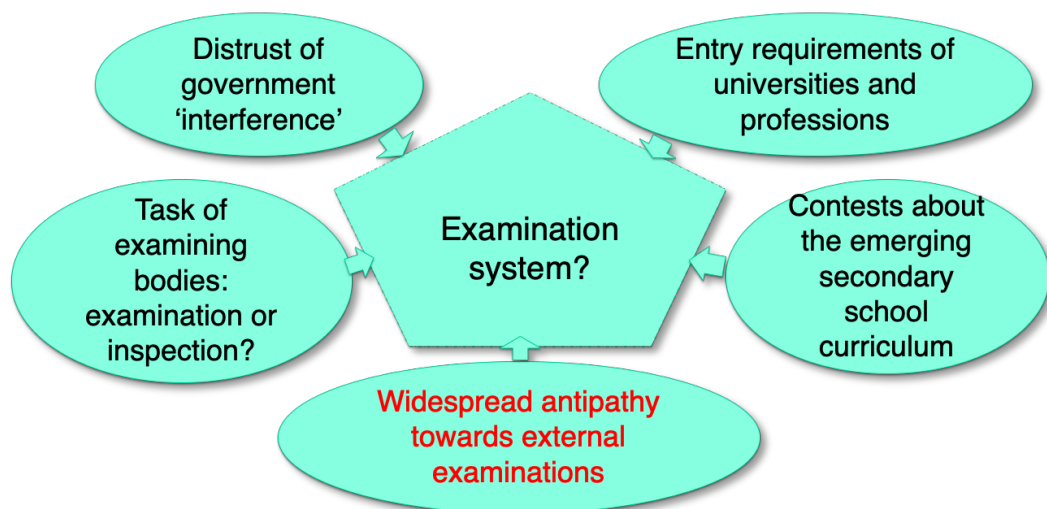
¹⁷ “The first foundation stone for the doctrine of liberty is to be sought in the conception of society as a growing and developing organism” (ibid. p.250).

forward, driven by a consistent vision for what secondary schooling in the country should be like. While there was general agreement about the need for ‘examination of the schools’, the moves towards a national examination system were characteristically contested. The following discussion examines the main trends of opinion that made external examinations a contentious issue. It is organised into the following four sections:

- Centralisation and government action in the field of education
- Public and professional attitudes to examinations and antipathy towards them
- Methodologies of examining: inspection or examination?
- The development of secondary schools and debates about their curriculum

To these key issues must be added that of the procedures for university entrance which will be discussed in chapter five. The following figure indicates the impact of these issues upon the new examination system; it supports Morley’s ecological reference to social structures as part of “a growing organism” which is always in the process of accommodating itself to change (p.42 above).

Figure 1: Contested issues impacting on the examination system



Centralisation and government action in the field of education

Suspicion of the intervention of the central government, which Sutherland noted was often seen as “interference” (Sutherland, 1972, p. 10), was a fact of the social and political life of the country for most of the nineteenth century. Bishop described this as due to such factors as the belief that it was local bodies that could be trusted and that central government was likely to be incompetent, corrupt or even oppressive. Voluntary

institutions had done good work in education, though they often tended to be conservative and to serve vested interests, but there was contention over the question of whether the education of children was the responsibility of parents, or of religious bodies or the state (Bishop, 1971, pp. 1–2).

In the fields of education and examining one response to these challenges was the establishment in 1846 of the College of Preceptors by a group of secondary school teachers in Brighton, who set out to offer teaching qualifications by examination and also, from 1850, examinations for students in secondary schools (Chapman, 1985). This was ‘self-help’ in action in the secondary schools. Official recognition for the enterprise was given in 1849 when the college was given a Royal Charter, and the college continued its work well into the twentieth century. Not surprisingly the college stood for independent rather than state action and, after nearly seventy years of existence, as it realised that it was not going to be allowed to be part of the SCE system, it reacted in protest. In the February 1st edition of *The Educational Times* of 1918, it warned the then President of the Board of Education, Fisher, of “the danger of over-centralisation”. The college’s arguments addressed a deeper level than the merely procedural as it accused the government of forgetting two things. Firstly, that a “Central Board [will] have a tendency to become rigid and inhuman when invested with complete power and removed from personal contact with those they govern.” Secondly, that “Central government by removing from locality the power of initiative and the sense of responsibility, tends to destroy interest and take away life from the institution that is created.”¹⁸ In May of the same year, and with more impassioned rhetorical emphasis, *The Educational Times* linked over-centralisation to “German methods of educational administration” and claimed that “There has never been a time when it was more necessary than it is at the present moment for the College of Preceptors to raise its voice in defence of personal freedom and liberty in education.”¹⁹

It may be, as suggested earlier, that the cause of the College of Preceptors had been lost as far back as the Taunton Report, but the note of disappointment that was felt by its staff when it reported a decisive meeting in October 1919 at the Board of Education was palpable. A delegation had gone to the Board to put the case for the recognition of the college’s Senior Certificate. It reported back that,

The Board seemed to take the view that when work which has been initiated by a private body was subsequently undertaken by the state, the private body must be

¹⁸ *Educational Times*. 1918. Vol. LXXI, February 1st, p.5. (Institute of Education, London: DC/COP/K1/55).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* May 1st. 1918, p.47.

prepared sooner or later to give up that work because of the impossibility of competing with the state.

Not only were the college's Senior Certificates not to be allowed to become part of the national scheme, they were also informed that it was very unlikely that the Board would support the College of Preceptors as an inspecting body.²⁰

What the Board's officers actually said is not necessarily what they were reported as saying, but the phrase in the College's minutes - 'give up that work' – clearly reflects the delegation's reaction and it has a distinctly deadening tone to it. The historical importance of the role played by the College of Preceptors was that it demonstrated the power of the arguments in favour of independence. This accounts for the earlier care with which the Bryce Commission treated the subject and it suggests that the university boards were given their role as a counter-weight to the dangers of centralisation. The College of Preceptors was not won over by the latter argument. In its reaction to the university examination boards it represented a point of view which was widely held by secondary teachers. In the minutes of the college's Future Policy Committee meetings the following is recorded under the heading School Examinations:

[It is] recognised as universally desirable ... that the examination of school pupils should be conducted by those who have actual experience of school work, that question papers should be set and answers revised, not by those whose sole claim is knowledge of the subject, but by those who have learned something of the powers and limitations of the ordinary child.²¹

A further insight into the attitudes of those who argued strongly for the independence of teachers and schools can be gained from Edward Thring who, during the 1870s, came to national prominence as a spokesman for the Headmasters' Conference, which he was instrumental in setting up to champion the independence of schools. In 1853 Thring had become headmaster of Uppingham Grammar School, which had about 40 pupils and had functioned as a local school for nearly three hundred years (Richardson, 2014, pp. 25–26). It was not one of the 'great' public schools which were considered by the Clarendon Commission: Thring was critical of the products of those schools (he had been a pupil at Eton himself), and also of the fact that they were treated differently to all other secondary schools. Under Thring's energetic leadership Uppingham School attracted

²⁰ Minute Book of the Council. Sept 1919 – Oct. 1922: 25th October 1919. (IoE: COP/C/2/4).

²¹ Minutes of the Future Policy Committee meetings held on 23 and 30 September, and 4 November 1918. Dated 14 March 1919. (IoE: COP/D/5/2, p. 40-41).

increasing numbers of boarders, reaching a total of nearly 340 in 1873 (ibid., p.173). He brought housemasters to Uppingham, stipulating that they buy their own houses and take an income from the fees of those students who boarded there. By 1881 there were thirteen boarding houses linked to the school (ibid., p.347). The ancient charity which was responsible for Uppingham School was overseen by a Board of Governors for whom Thring had little respect. It was made up of local squires, senior Anglican clergy, ex-Tory MPs and Lords Lieutenant of Rutland who were alarmed by the scale of Thring's ambition and he regarded them as "mean-spirited, consequential dignitaries" (ibid., p.66). Given this context we may understand what independence meant for Thring and his colleagues. The suggestion that a department of the government might tell them how they should run the school would hardly be welcome. Given his experience of lack of support for the growth of Uppingham School from his governors, Thring opposed the provisions of the Endowed Schools Bill (1868) that put more responsibility for endowment schemes into governors' hands. Furthermore, he believed his governors were just the kind of people whom Local Education Boards might impose on schools if the government took greater control. For Thring the teachers in the school were the professionals whereas bodies of local governors were no more than amateurs.²² Attitudes such as this were widespread and influential, especially in the schools which policy makers and education leaders had attended, as the country moved towards a national system of secondary education.

Idealism in the late-nineteenth century

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a significant change was taking place in national attitudes to central government action which was influenced by the 'Idealist' movement associated with the philosopher, T.H.Green, of Balliol College, Oxford. Green's philosophy stimulated an emphasis on the importance of active citizenship, of community engagement and commitment to social improvement. Some of the many students who were influenced by him and who later played important roles in the development of the school and examination systems were Acland, Mansbridge, Sadler, Morant, Haldane, Tawney and Fisher (Gordon & White, 1979). Sadler spoke at a conference in Brussels in 1910 of two forces in England, of collectivism on the one hand and the desire for intellectual and religious freedom on the other, whose interaction shaped public policy. He described a contemporary willingness in England to accept a collectivism which would "enforce in

²² Richardson cited Thring's reaction to this issue in the Endowed Schools Bill: "How ridiculous it will seem in years to come appointing a lot of squires and a stray lord or two to gather promiscuous evidence on an intricate professional question, and to pronounce infallible judgement on it" (ibid., p.109).

education and in industrial and social conditions” such reforms as would “diffuse comfort, lessen the waste of physical and intellectual power caused by a hurtful environment, and tend to equalise opportunities of happiness” (M. Harris, 1911, pp. 337–338). Jose Harris has suggested that this climate of thought helped to create “new styles of social intervention by an often reluctant centralised state” among which she included the establishment of the Board of Education (J. Harris, 1993, p. 12). The state was reluctant in Britain because “the preservation of local autonomy” was preferred to “the centralisation, rationality and legalistic uniformity imposed on continental countries by the legacy of the two Napoleons” (ibid., p.18). But a new attitude to government action was emerging which Harris has suggested amounted to a “modernist reformulation” or “ethical replacement” for Christianity (1992, p. 124). She also pointed to a link with Plato’s teaching on the relationship of the citizen and society which deeply influenced those classically trained civil servants who were appointed as ‘guardians’ of the education system.²³ She illustrated the idealist vision by citing the hoped-for outcomes in the mind of the philosopher, Bernard Bosanquet:²⁴

a republic of free, equal, independent, ethically mature and public spirited citizens of the kind that haunted European consciousness ever since it was mooted in the minds of the sages of fifth century Athens (J. Harris, 1992, p. 132).

Public and professional antipathy towards examinations

The depth of antipathy towards examinations, and its dispersion throughout the educated classes in Victorian society, is a striking feature of English education at the end of the nineteenth century. This antipathy remained a constant background to the running of the SCE system for its 32 years of existence. Frequent references can be found to the ‘evils of examinations’, not least in government documents, references which conjure up the world of the ‘crammers’ which concentrated their students’ minds on whatever tactics were necessary to scrape marks in the Civil Service or other entrance examinations. Such practices were widely seen to be the opposite of what education should be. Two strands of educational experience, one from elementary and the other from secondary schools, fed into this opinion. The first was the inspection and examination regime which had developed as a result of the Revised Code, introduced in 1862 by the government and

²³ Cyril Norwood’s views are a notable example of this outlook (McCulloch, 2007, pp. 121–123).

²⁴ Another Balliol philosopher, lecturer and admirer of Green (Gordon & White, 1979, pp. 117–120).

designed to maximise the efficiency of elementary schools. In his HMI's report for 1869 Matthew Arnold wrote:

The mode of teaching in the primary schools has certainly fallen off in intelligence, spirit and inventiveness during the four or five years which have elapsed since my last report. It could not well be otherwise. In a country where everyone is prone to rely too much on mechanical processes, and too little on intelligence, a change in the Education Department's regulations, which by making two-thirds of the government's grant depend upon a mechanical examination, inevitably gives a mechanical turn to the school teaching, a mechanical turn to the inspection (Arnold, 1908, p. 113).

Here Arnold highlighted the opposition of "mechanical processes", which included the processes of examining, to teaching which was imbued with "spirit and inventiveness". This fundamental opposition was related to examining from this time onwards, resulting in frequent comments which implied that examinations undermined good teaching.²⁵ The Taunton Report, published less than fifteen years after the introduction of the Civil Service examinations and only six years after the introduction of the Revised Code, recorded the negative reactions.²⁶ Yet Roach has shown that the Oxford and Cambridge Local examinations, introduced four years before the Revised Code in 1858, were widely welcomed, coming as they did in the wake of a belief that examinations were going to recognise and reward merit.²⁷ Nevertheless Roach also commented that experience of the examination regime allied to the Revised Code created distrust in all examining and state education, which accounted for the reaction of some teachers to proposals for a national system of secondary examinations (Roach, 1971, p. 279).

While experience of the Revised Code in elementary schools affected both professional and public opinion, experience in the secondary schools also contributed to the antipathy towards examinations. Here it was the impact of entrance examinations for what might come after school that weighed on the teachers. We shall consider university entrance in chapter five but, for those secondary pupils who were not going to university,

²⁵ Of three "dangers" facing education, Cyril Norwood later nominated "mechanization" as the first (Norwood, 1929).

²⁶ The Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, Mark Pattison, was reported as telling the Commission that examinations were "a necessary evil" which was "yearly increasing" (Taunton Report, p. 322). His quandary in recognizing the positive impact of examinations at Oxford and also their ill-effects is discussed by Nimmo in his chapter, "Mark Pattison and the Dilemma of University Examinations" in MacLeod's *Days of Judgement* (1982).

²⁷ Roach cited the *English Journal of Education*'s reaction in 1857 (Vol. XI, p.226) to Temple's plan for an Oxford Delegacy that he "had struck the key to the thoughts of a thousand hearts" (Roach, 1971, p. 72).

occupational examinations, such as for the civil service or army, loomed large and led to demands that schools should prepare their pupils for them. Pattison described these examinations as a “blight on education” (Taunton Report, p.322). The report distinguished between examinations which were in line with the schools’ curriculum (of which the Locals were an example) and those that were divorced from it (for example, the army’s entrance exams) but it also pointed to defects of the Locals, particularly that they were too hard for most secondary pupils (Taunton Report, p.322 – 325).

Methodologies of examining: inspection or examination?

It is an instructive example of the challenges that face the historian that every time a modern reader might see a reference to ‘examinations’ in documents written prior to the mid-nineteen fifties it is possible that the writer’s meaning could be misunderstood. This is because, since the mid-nineteenth century, the same word had been used with a different meaning. Selby-Bigge,²⁸ in his book entitled *The Board of Education*, included a 37-page chapter headed ‘Inspection and Examination’ in which the SCE was mentioned on only a single page. This is surprising since the SCE was started during his time as Permanent Secretary. Clearly his priority was inspection, whose function, “rests on the necessity both of supervising and safeguarding the expenditure of public money and of getting the largest possible return for it” (Selby-Bigge, 1927, p. 121). In his historical review of the inspection system, which began with a decision of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education in 1839, he noted that the Newcastle Commission (1861) concluded that there were limitations to the inspections being carried out because they merely gained a general impression of the school. That commission decided, in Selby-Bigge’s words, that “recourse must be had to examination and to payment of grants partly on the results of examination of individual children” (ibid. p.128). It is this recommendation, “examination of individual children” as a part of inspection, that the Revised Code of 1862 implemented. Selby-Bigge believed it was a mistake and he concluded: “Experience showed that the Department was trying to combine incompatible ideas, and the tribute which it thus paid to the true idea of inspection was little more than verbal” (ibid. p.129). Selby-Bigge’s phrase “the true idea of inspection”, with its implication that the examination of individual children actually hampered what was the central task, is revealing.

²⁸ Lewis Selby-Bigge was Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education from 1911-1925.

The university examining boards had been conducting inspections of schools since they were formed and since the 1899 Education Act inspections had been carried out with the approval of the Board of Education. These continued into the 1920s and thus the boards needed to distinguish for themselves between the inspection of schools and the entry of schools' pupils to the SC examinations. In May 1927, the same year that Selby-Bigge's book was published, the Cambridge Syndicate provided a set of guidelines for "Inspectors and Examiners" which confusingly still used the term "examining schools":

The main object of an Examination is to ascertain the general condition and efficiency of the work of a school or part of a school ... [Examiners could] take into consideration the circumstances and equipment of the school, and its organisation, discipline and curriculum. [The examiner] may inspect the school buildings and apparatus, so far as may be necessary to assist him in forming a judgement on the work.²⁹

These examiners were also told that they, not the teachers in the school, could set examination papers to be given to pupils, but these should support the school's teaching. It was made clear to examiners that when they conducted an "oral examination of a class" they did not have to award marks to individuals. The explanation given was that "The Examiner will be fully occupied in ascertaining the general condition of the class and the efficiency of the teaching without having to assign marks to individuals." As alluded to in this document the activities of 'examining' and 'inspecting' overlapped, and this illustrates how one of the School Certificate examination boards still found it difficult publicly to distinguish between the two. This ambiguity even appears in the Norwood Committee's report, as is discussed in chapter seven (pages 155 - 156 below).

Debates about the secondary school curriculum

The SCE system came into being in the same year that an act of parliament raised the school leaving age to 14, so decisions about the examination system were being taken while the wider educational context was changing significantly. The Consultative Committee of the Board of Education considered the issue of the developing secondary curriculum on several occasions; three times (in 1909, 1911 and 1913) when Arthur Acland was chairman, once under Hadow, when its report was entitled *On the Education of the Adolescent* (1926), and once under Spens, which reported *On Secondary Education with Special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (1938).

²⁹ Instructions to Examiners and Inspectors of Schools. May 1927. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 1/2).

Whitbread in her paper “The early twentieth-century curriculum debate in England” concluded that “historians and educationalists have largely ignored that early-twentieth century debate and the Acland Reports” (Whitbread, 1984, p. 221) and this is a claim I echo in chapter four in connection with Acland’s 1911 report, which focused specifically on secondary school examinations. However, Whitbread does not take her comment further. She does not relate that report to Acland’s other reforming work in education, nor to its place in the overall narrative of events leading up to the establishment of the SCE. She does however suggest that a result of this oversight is that “an unjustified assumption has generally been made of an inevitable continuity” (ibid. p.22) in thinking about the development of the curriculum, a conclusion which I also reach in relation to the English examination system.

The curriculum debates on which Whitbread focused were firstly to do with the replacement of the classical secondary curriculum by a ‘modern’ one, including science and modern languages, and secondly the inclusion in the post-elementary curriculum of practical and technical subjects. That the secondary curriculum should support a ‘liberal’ education was frequently alluded to and this had an impact on the examination system not least because it was frequently claimed that examinations would bring about an illiberal outcome. In an Appendix written for the Spens Committee (1938), the secretary of that committee, HMI R.F. Young, explained the development of what he called “The conception of general liberal education”. In common usage the two words ‘general’ and ‘liberal’ to qualify ‘education’ described a similar attitude to the curriculum, but Young’s exposition pointed out that in ancient Greece there developed a description of the seven “liberal arts”.³⁰ He commented:

These arts were called liberal because they were originally regarded as the branches of knowledge appropriate for freemen as opposed to those trades and skills practised for economic purposes by slaves or persons without political rights (Board of Education, 1938, p. 404).

A liberal education was an education of the character, an induction into a cultured and moral community. In the mid-eighteenth century, Young wrote, there had been a revival of interest in Greek learning at the public schools and universities and a liberal education came to mean an education based on the classics. Arnold, in his evidence to the Taunton Commission, had described the concept of a liberal education as it had been developed in

³⁰ Grammar, music, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, rhetoric and dialectics.

Germany as an education “based on the neo-humanistic conception of general culture” (ibid., p.408). Young went on to cite Leibniz, Latham, Whitehead and Dewey in bringing the concept up to date. Dewey had addressed the issue of the application of a liberal education in a society in which there was supposed to be an equality of provision and a share of benefits for all (ibid., p.414).

The desire to see a liberal education provided in secondary schools was a powerful one which must be recognised to understand why some of the most educated people in the country had such a negative reaction to examinations. The philosophy of Idealism underpinned a vision of the potential of education for society and it drew strength from the classical heritage. Such a vision inspired the cause of progressive education and infused the excitement associated with the New Education Fellowship which drew in leading educational thinkers of the day. This influence continued throughout the period of the SCE and Norwood, the final major figure in the SCE story, was particularly affected by it, though negatively, for he felt that something of deep importance was being lost to modernity (of which examinations were a part). In reflecting on the curriculum debates of this period it is well to remember Harris’s comment:

The invocation of Hellenism, and particularly of Plato, was more than just decorative rhetoric. It was designed to provide a model that would help to reintegrate the fragmented consciousness of modern man into cohesive corporate communities. And it was meant to assist in addressing an age-old, but newly relevant question: how can men live in large groups and yet remain free? (J. Harris, 1992, p. 140).

The policy that secondary education should be general, and therefore not a specific training for particular employment, meant that technical education was seen as a post-secondary issue either for employment training or for courses in technical colleges. Nevertheless, it was argued that the SCE science curriculum could prepare students for such studies and when the courses seemed to be more adapted to university study rather than practical application, the charge was levelled that the SCE was ‘too academic’.³¹ Secondly, practical subjects were examined, though the introduction of new subjects was slow. Hunt has described how pressure from girls’ schools led firstly to ‘Group Four’ subjects being accepted as an examined part of the curriculum (Hunt, 1991). The rules for obtaining a certificate were changed in 1928 to require a minimum of a pass in one subject

³¹ Simon saw the situation in terms of a larger political picture, the imposition of “restrictive, class-based policies” within an “academic tradition ... a predominantly literary form of education” (B. Simon, 1965, pp. 259–260)

from each of Groups One ('English' subjects), Two (languages) and Three (Maths and Science), plus two other subjects, both of which could be chosen from Group Four (ibid. p.89). Official thinking on the curriculum developed so that by the nineteen-thirties the Consultative Committee was recommending for all pupils, whether girls or boys, that "the curriculum should be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored" (Board of Education, 1938, p. 152).³² Hunt's explanation of the reason for the difficulties in managing the tension between academic and practical subjects was that schools were "putting larger numbers of pupils though an examination system designed to cream off the exceptional few" (Hunt, 1991. p.92).

Higher Grade Schools

Vlaeminke's vigorous discussion of the debate about the appropriate curriculum for post-elementary age pupils is signaled in her book's title *The English Higher Grade Schools: A Lost Opportunity* (2000). In line with Simon's critique of elitist schooling in England, she proposed that in the late 1800s a type of post-elementary school, established under certain local education boards, presented an alternative to the Board of Education's conception of secondary education. Vlaeminke argued that the curriculum offered in those schools was both a better preparation for life and employment in modern Britain, and more in conformity with working-class culture. The Board's policy after 1902 under Morant was responsible for the "destruction" of those promising schools, which in many cases were forced into becoming grammar schools which then did not meet the educational needs which the former schools had met (Vlaeminke, 2000, pp. 226–227). Vlaeminke argued that the educational establishment chronically suffered from "liberal-romantic attitudes" that made the education system unsuitable for those modern conditions which demanded more scientific and practical approaches to schooling (ibid., p.214). It has been argued that the examination system necessarily supported a more literary and academic curriculum, but Vlaeminke did not argue that. Examinations gave the subjects examined an added prestige, but the reason Vlaeminke offered for the failure to examine a wider range of knowledge and skill was that the Board of Education did not chose for it to happen. The SC examinations supported a focus in the curriculum that favoured a 'general' education, a focus which could, if it was wanted, have been reset to encourage a more scientific and practical approach to the curriculum. As was frequently said at the time, the first question

³² This point had already been made in the Consultative Committee's comments on *The Primary School* (1931).

to be answered was, what kind of curriculum is required?³³ Vlaeminke's judgement was that part of the Board's failure to provide a suitable secondary education for 'less academic' children was its refusal to allow the development of appropriate examinations.

The Board's resistance to examinations showed an ignorance of how important it was for many children to get a quick and tangible return from their extended schooling. Examination qualifications were becoming the single most important vehicle for social and occupational mobility, and the commercial and scientific/technical examinations of the Higher Grade Schools, constructed in intensive one-and two-year courses, had been ideal in that respect (ibid. p.154).

This is a thesis which my study supports. The old Science and Art Department's technical examinations, which Vlaeminke alluded to above, had their successes in supporting the learning and teaching of science though they were rejected by the Bryce Commission (MacLeod, 1982).³⁴ The delivery of a carefully planned curriculum in evening classes, and testing which was closely related to it, suited the kind of post-elementary courses which students who were at work felt they could commit to. Yet elements of that system could not be incorporated into the developing secondary curriculum because, according to Vlaeminke, the Board of Education's officers knew little about science and technology and believed "that [science] was an inferior intellectual discipline, of utility to the lower classes pursuing industrial occupations, but lacking the humanizing qualities which were the true hallmark of education as they understood it" (Vlaeminke, 2000, p. 39).³⁵

Finally, in the light of the focus of my second research question, it must be noted that the local school boards which had established Higher Grade schools were demonstrating what the advocates of independence claimed was a benefit of a decentralised system. They had developed an innovative solution to an educational problem and were harnessing local initiative and motivation to create institutions suited to local needs. The Board of Education was behaving in just the way that opponents of central control feared: within ten years of the liberal administrative proposals of the Bryce Commission, a centralising tendency had emerged in the Board of Education (ibid. pp. 172-3, pp.186-7). The examination boards could become collaborators with, or victims of,

³³ [It is] "a cardinal principle that the examination should follow the curriculum and not determine it." Circular 1034, Board of Education, March 1918.

³⁴ Butterworth, H., 'The Science and Art Department Examinations: Origins and Achievements' (Butterworth, 1982) and Heward, C. 'Education, Examinations and the Artisans: The Department of Science and Art in Birmingham, 1853-1902' (Heward, 1982).

³⁵ Banks' critique of the SC system noted what it was that the Board was failing to recognise, or was determined not to support: that the power of these examinations was in "their value as passports to a better job" (Banks, 1955, p. 96).

this tendency; alternatively, when supporting teacher initiative, they could become centres of resistance to it.

The expectations of teachers

This chapter has provided a number of insights into possible answers to my first research question concerning teachers' expectations of a national examination system. I include headteachers in this group, but I restrict it to secondary teachers, a distinction referred to at the time by those who argued it was the opinions of those who would prepare students for the examinations which should be sought.³⁶ In the period which included the Taunton and Bryce reports teachers came to accept both inspection of schools and examinations for their pupils. Even Thring in his evidence to the Taunton Commission, while resisting inspection by "unqualified" people, had accepted that "If we are sure that we have examiners who, if I may use the expression, will work with us, I believe we should all welcome inspection..."³⁷ In the same evidence he also spoke positively of the local examinations, but noted that his boys "did not want" to enter for them because they were focusing on examinations for university entrance or entry to "higher trade, such as merchants and lawyers" and for the Indian Civil Service, all of which he agreed had become a "cramming system". If they were aiming for a military career they left school to go to "crammers" (ibid., paras. 10,021-10,034). Schools such as Thring's could not resist the demand that their pupils should be prepared for examinations that affected their futures, and therefore the suggestion that one national system might be used for these multiple purposes was seen as a useful reform by teachers.

The Bryce Report grouped secondary schools under the headings of 'endowed schools' (which included the ancient grammar schools), 'proprietary schools' (often locally-based philanthropic institutions) and 'private schools', all of which would have valued their ability to act independently.³⁸ The setting up of the College of Preceptors (CoP) and the Head Masters' Conference (HMC) demonstrated the motivation of secondary school teachers to be involved in national projects and, at the same time, to protect their own independence. Both these organisations sponsored examination schemes,

³⁶ Association of Headmistresses, 14 June 1917. Resolution. (TNA: ED 12/481); Hon., Secretary of Joint-Four, 3 June 1928, letter to President. (TNA: ED 12/482); Internal memo (S496/8), 7 April 1936. Note of secondary membership of NUT, 4,000. Total of Joint-Four memberships 21,000. (TNA: ED 12/482).

³⁷ Taunton Report, Volume V, para. 10,016, p.106.

³⁸ There was no record of how many private schools there were in England but the Bryce Commission suggested a number between 10,000 and 15,000, some of them small which might not survive for long. Para. 58, p. 51. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/bryce1895/bryce-report.pdf>

the CoP having offered examinations to schools since the middle of the 19th century and the HMC being instrumental in setting up the Oxford and Cambridge Joint-Board in 1873 (Howat, 1973). Examining was seen as an aspect of teachers' professional role, but teachers' valuation of external examinations was also indicated by the increasing numbers of their pupils that they were entering for them. In 1883 the College of Preceptors had examined pupils from 2,700 schools (Chapman, 1985, p. 86): by 1895 the Bryce Commission reported a significant increase in the college's examining work, noting that of schools entering pupils for its examinations 3,236 were "private schools" (ibid., fn. 38 above). Concerning any plans for a possible examination scheme the Board of Education had to take account of the teachers in such schools.

While valuing their independence, teachers also saw the value of working together and teachers' organisations became increasingly influential in this period. The National Union of Elementary Teachers was founded in 1870 (becoming the NUT in 1889). For secondary teachers specifically four associations were formed: the Headmistresses (1874) and the Assistant Mistresses (1884), the Headmasters (1891) and the Assistant Masters (1891). These began to co-ordinate their efforts at the beginning of the SCE period as "the Joint-Four", which was formed in 1919 (Cook, Jones, Sinclair, & Weeks, 1975). The College of Preceptors' work to promote teachers' professionalism was significant and the choice of commissioners for the Bryce Commission indicated that the college was recognised as an influential contributor to national thinking on education. Dr. Richard Wormell, a member of the college's council, was appointed a member of the commission³⁹ as was Dr. Sophie Bryant, who had succeeded Miss Buss as headmistress of the North London Collegiate School. She was one of the three women on the Bryce Commission and she became a leading advocate of its plan for the creation of a professional body for teachers, the Teachers Registration Council. The teachers' organisations played an important role in supporting women into prominence in the education system. Bryant went on to be a member of the Board of Education's Consultative Committee and President of the Association of Headmistresses (Aldrich & Gordon, 1989, p. 33).⁴⁰ Another leading educationalist who had been a member of the Council of the College of Preceptors (CoP) since 1889 and who gave evidence to the Bryce Commission, was Elizabeth Hughes,

³⁹ Wormell had begun his career as a pupil-teacher and in 1874, at the age of 36, was appointed Headmaster of the Central Foundation School (set to become possibly the largest secondary school in England with 1350 pupils). He made innovative contributions to the teaching of mathematics. For a period he was editor of *The Educational Times* and President of the College of Preceptors between 1905-1908 (Chapman, 1985, p. 80).

⁴⁰ Also selected as Bryce Commissioners were Eleanor Sidgwick and Lucy Cavendish, who were well-connected politically but prominent in their own right, the former becoming Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge and the latter being a life-long campaigner for girls' education.

Principal of the Cambridge Training College for Women, which is now Hughes Hall (Chapman, 1985, p. 93).

In the half-century which has been the focus of this chapter, it was teachers who invited tutors from the universities, on an informal basis, to visit their schools and ‘examine’ them, and the profession saw a benefit in creating links with the universities (Roach, 1971; Raban, 2008). However, reservations came to be expressed when the external marking of pupils’ answers was done by university staff, as was the case with the examination boards, rather than by teachers, as was the case for the College of Preceptors. At a meeting at the Board of Education with representatives of the Teachers’ Registration Council, Miss Gadesden⁴¹ was recorded as saying that “teachers alone know how examinations could help or hinder” the students. The universities had “vested interests” and only “theoretical knowledge of what children could do and stand”.⁴² The Board’s pressure on examination boards to appoint more teacher examiners did not satisfy teachers’ organisations until the issue of university matriculation had been separated from the outcomes of the SCE in the late 1930s (see chapter five below).

This chapter has described the conflicting attitudes towards examinations in Victorian society and how the teachers’ organisations reflected this conflict. On the one hand the chapter reported the CoP’s disappointment when the Board of Education decided there was no place for it in the SCE scheme. Chapman, who worked for the college from 1950, referred to the announcement at the meeting in October 1919 with the Board of Education as the “final twist of the knife” (Chapman, 1985, p. 111). On the other hand, there was a strand of opinion within the college that showed the same hostility towards examinations as was shown elsewhere and James Simpson, who became Dean of the college in 1942, severely cut back the college’s examining work, responding to the argument that such work made the college appear unprogressive. However, there was always a body of teachers who saw an important role for school-leaving examinations, a fact which, as Chapman reports, Simpson himself came to recognise for secondary modern schools after 1950 (ibid., pp. 133–137). Throughout the SCE period there was the same demand and a belief that examinations could be beneficial for both the pupils and their schools. At the North London Collegiate School Miss Buss had argued that examinations had helped advance the cause of girls’ education (Roach, 1971. pp. 129-131). Dr. Bryant

⁴¹ Headteacher at Blackheath School (Board of Education *Annual Report for 1906/1907*, TRC section).

⁴² Bruce, 17th August 1917. Report of meeting between President and TRC delegation. (TNA: ED 12/246).

continued that policy: the pupils “... ought to aim at some final certificate; and the public reputation of a school depends much on those final certificates” (Chapman, 1985, p. 83).

This chapter has shown that the proposals by the Taunton and Bryce Commissions for an “Advisory Council”⁴³ raised teachers’ expectations that they would be prominent in the running of a national examination system. In what way and how far the Board might facilitate this was to be part of that negotiation of policy which the Bryce Commission envisioned. There was no doubt that there was a demand for examinations among the teachers, but whether they might prefer an internal to an external system was an ambiguity with which the Board of Education’s policy makers would have to work.

⁴³ As described in chapter four, this became the Consultative Committee in the Board of Education.

CHAPTER 4 THE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The educational state?

The identification of key actors that I have used in my title was derived from the conceptual formulation “the educational state”, which Ball defined as “that conglomeration of sites and agencies concerned with the regulation of the education system” (Ball, 1990, p. 20). However, to incorporate Ball’s definition, which is deliberately a wide one,¹ into my study would create confusion. My intention is to distinguish the teachers and the examination boards from what I call ‘the state’, and I bring them together to compare the ways they carried out their different responsibilities for the delivery of the examination system. Clarification of these responsibilities would put all three of my groups of actors at the centre of examination policy making.² All of them were represented on the Secondary School Examinations Council (SSEC), which would make Ball’s suggested centre-periphery continuum unnecessary, at least for the period in question, since in the SCE system all were close to the centre, as the Bryce Commission had proposed.

Ball refers to others’ descriptions of people involved in education policy-making: thus, Raymond Williams’ conceptualised those with different positions on policy as ‘old humanists’, ‘democrats’ and ‘industrial trainers’ (ibid. p.4.), and Lawton differentiated people within the Ministry of Education according to their educational “beliefs, values and tastes” as bureaucrats, professionals (the HMI) and politicians (ibid. p.6). Ball himself attempted to work with similar classifications and found, in Margaret Thatcher’s time, a prominent strand of “reformist old-humanism” in the educational discourse. This attempt to sharpen the focus of the term illustrates the difficulty of applying to a new situation a label devised to describe another, as though “old-humanism” has some kind of de-contextualised existence. So Ball proposed “to trace a specific set of educational issues and the conflicts, pressures and influences which attend their translation into policy” (Ball, 1990, p. 8). I find the focus on issues helpful and have described my chosen issues in the

¹ Ball’s list of relevant “sites and agencies” includes civil servants, local authorities, teacher unions, employers, other government departments, the HMI, the Further Education Unit, curriculum and regulatory bodies, other quangos and examination boards. Thus he concludes, “we need to be aware of centre-periphery relations within the educational state itself” (Ball, 1990, p. 20).

² The “centre” is a metaphor which I would use to refer to whether the groups in question were close enough to the examinations to make a direct impact on their development and delivery.

previous chapter. Rather than attempting to classify the actors by their ideologies or educational philosophies, I foreground their responsibilities, as follows:

The state: regulation and funding of the system;

The examination boards: creation of examinations and delivery of results;

Teachers: preparation of students and management of examination days.

An alternative to external examinations

Opposition to external examinations found strong support within the Board of Education's own Consultative Committee³ and this was particularly associated with Arthur Acland.⁴ The committee formally published two reports on examinations, in 1904 and 1911, both of which advocated school-based examinations co-ordinated with inspection, rather than an external examination system.⁵ The second report, often referred to as the "Acland Report", is said to have paved the way for the SCE⁶ but in fact it presented a damning critique of external examinations. The SSEC's later review of the history of the SCE struggled to reconcile these two widely-differing interpretations:

The [Acland] Committee, while they had much to say by way of criticism of many of the existing arrangements, were careful to explain that their criticisms must not be taken as implying any antagonism to external examinations as such (SSEC, 1932, p. 9).

The following discussion examines how it was that a positive endorsement of an external examination system entered the historical record and I link this to my title and research questions. The key to any misunderstanding is a misjudgement about the extent of Arthur Acland's radicalism and how far he was supported by leading educationalists on the

³ The Consultative Committee was established on 7 August 1900 by an Order in Council.

⁴ Arthur Acland M.P., was the son of T.D. Acland M.P. who had sponsored the "Exeter experiment" that had led to the setting up of the Oxbridge Local exams. In Gladstone's fourth government Arthur Acland was made Vice-President of the Board of Education with a seat in cabinet (1892 to 1895). The Dictionary of National Biography describes him as "an education reformer" (Ockwell, 2008). He did not hold a government position between 1905 to 1915 but he was well acquainted with the Liberal party's leaders and had sufficient influence politically not to be ignored.

⁵ To distinguish the committee's and the Board's proposed systems I have chosen the words "co-ordinated" and "external". The coordinated system brought together internal examinations and inspection and it required the appointment of examiner/inspectors who would maintain close contact with the schools and the teachers who would conduct the examinations. The Board's preferred external system, which the Consultative Committee did not favour, involved examinations that could be set and marked completely independently by an examination board.

⁶ Gordon and White in reviewing Acland's contribution to the national system of education describe the Acland Report as "notable" yet simply state that "The Committee supported a single system of public examinations for school-leavers at sixteen to take the place of the many which were offered by a variety of bodies; this led to the Secondary School Certificate Examination a few years later in 1917" (Gordon & White, 1979, p. 146). The factual accuracy of this sentence is questionable if it suggests that the committee supported the setting up of the SCE.

committee. Montgomery's detailed historical review of the English examination system, for example, does not mention Acland's role (Montgomery, 1965, pp. 68–69) and the first chapter of this dissertation proposed that Roach's account underestimated the strength of Acland's opposition. The hostility of the Consultative Committee to external examinations needs to be recognised for it represented an important strand of contemporary educational thought; it had an impact on the working relationships of the LEAs with the Board of Education and the examination boards, and it led to a pessimism within the Board about the possibility of co-operation with other groups. Also, at this point in the study, what the Acland Commission proposed must be taken seriously and not be simply dismissed by history, as it was by the Board.

Arthur Acland's personal beliefs

As this chapter proposes a revision to elements of the history of the English examination system, it must begin with a key piece of evidence which comes from the end of the sequence of policy discussions. The evidence is a personal letter which Acland wrote to the then Permanent Secretary, Selby-Bigge. It was written after the date on which the Board of Education had made its plans for external examinations public, in the process of which it had implied that the plans were based on the proposals of Acland's own committee.

A file in the National Archives contains the responses given to the Board of Education's invitation to participate in the SCE system which had been accompanied by a copy of Circular 849. The file contains two letters to Selby-Bigge from Acland, the more formal of which is a covering letter accompanying the Teachers' Registration Council's (TRC)⁷ response to Board's invitation. In the second, personal letter Acland confessed his complete lack of enthusiasm for what had now emerged as the examination scheme.

⁷ Set up after the Board of Education Act (1899) and reconstituted in 1912. Acland was the first Chairman of the reconstituted TRC and Michael Sadler the second, as noted in minutes of Council meetings held on 23 July 1912 (TNA: ED 44/6) and on 15 July 1915 (TNA: ED 44/7).

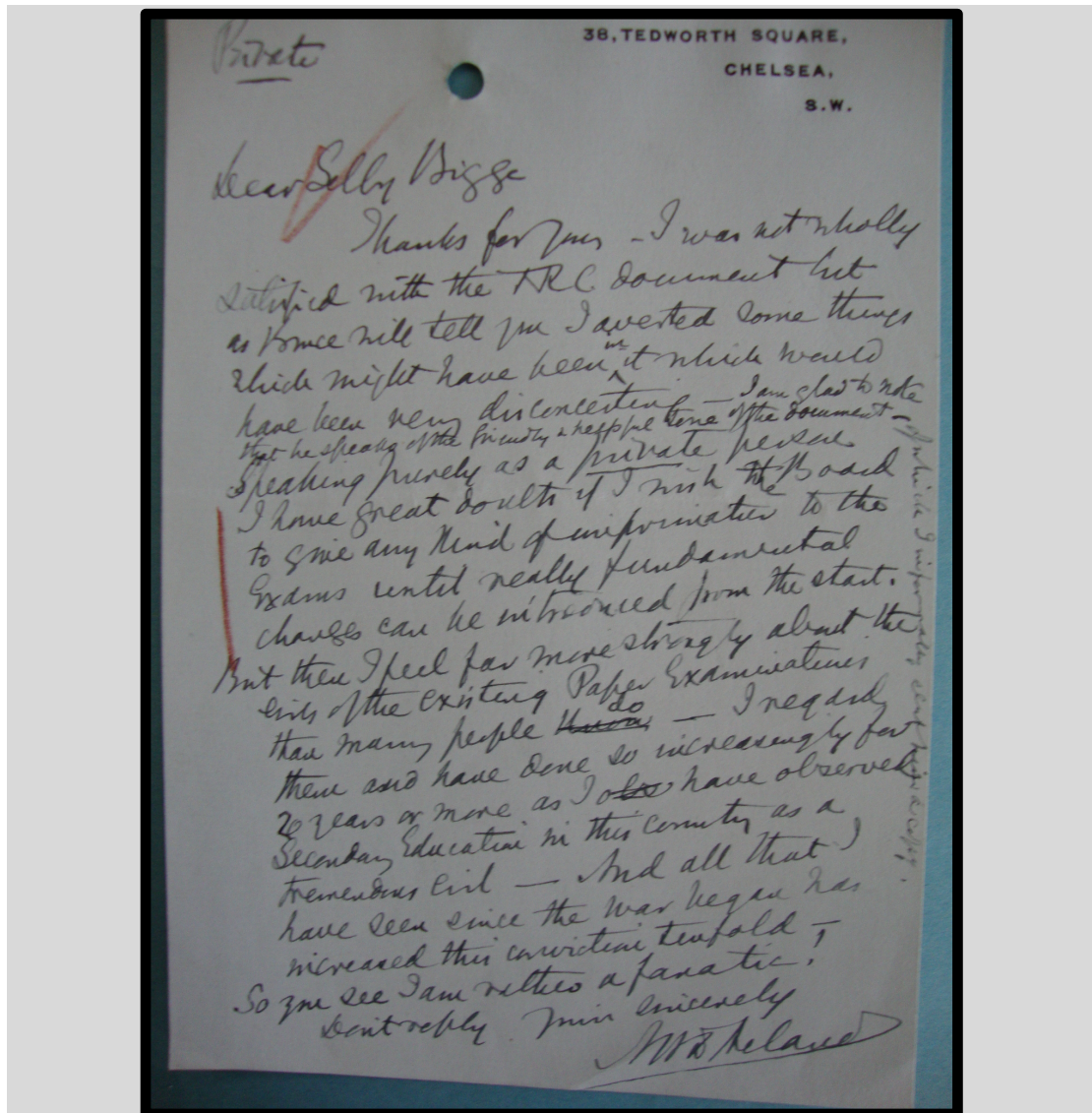


Figure 2: Acland's letter to Selby-Bigge, 15 May 1915? (TNA: ED 24/1653)

Transcription of the body of the letter

Speaking purely as a private person I have great doubts if I wish the Board to give any kind of imprimatur to the Exams until really fundamental changes can be introduced from the start. But then I feel far more strongly about the evils of the existing Paper Examinations than many people do.

I regard them and have done so increasingly for twenty years or more as I have observed Secondary Education in this country as a tremendous evil – And all that I have seen since the war began has increased this conviction tenfold – So you see I am rather a fanatic!⁸

⁸ Acland, private letter to Selby-Bigge, filed with a letter dated 15 May 1915. (TNA: ED 24/1653).

Acland had realised, a realisation no doubt sharpened on seeing the Board's Circular 849 (dated July 1914 – which could account for his reference to his opinions becoming stronger “since the war began”), that his vision for a radically reformed examination system had been rejected. Inspection, which had been at the heart of the Consultative Committee's proposals, was not to form a part of it. Acland's letter is an uncompromising revelation of personal opinions and feelings, deeply held over a long period of time. It is a document that calls for a review of Acland's role throughout the earlier discussions about a national examination system.

Formation of a Consultative Committee in the Board of Education

On 12 July 1900 the journal *Nature*, in an article, entitled “The Board of Education and its Consultative Committee”, reminded its readers that the Education Act which had passed into law in the previous year, had required that such a committee should be formed. The tasks of the committee were firstly to set up a register of teachers, and secondly to advise the Board on any other matter referred to it by the Board, and therefore the setting up of the committee was described as “of considerable public interest and importance” (*Nature*, 1900 (62). p. 248). Six members of the Bryce Commission were among the first members appointed to the Consultative Committee.⁹ In surveying the roles played by Michael Sadler on both the commission and the committee, Grier described how the reports of the committee did “much to revive the findings of the Commission on Secondary Education [Bryce], which had not been implemented” (Grier, 1952, p. 37).

Brehony has described how a proposal for an educational ‘Advisory Council’ from Matthew Arnold had been taken up by the Taunton Commission (Brehony, 1994). This was raised again in the conference in Oxford in 1893 which was originated by Michael Sadler, at which Temple described the issue in the following terms:

Who are to be the real authorities who are to govern the whole of this system of education? The teachers should have, not merely a consultative, but a decisive voice in setting what is to be done (H. Steedman, 1969, p. 77).

The intentions of the proposal were to give educationalists, including teachers, LEA and university officials, a voice in the development of education policy, and to give the

⁹ Dr. Sophie Bryant, Henry Hobhouse M.P., Sir Richard Jebb M.P., Hon. Rev. Edward Lyttleton, Very Rev. Edward McClure, Eleanor Sidgwick.

government the benefit of advice and support from those experienced in the field. The Bryce Commission proposed an “Advisory Council” because it believed,

that the unwillingness which doubtless exists in some quarters to entrust to the Executive any powers at all in this branch of education would be sensibly diminished were [the Minister’s] position at once strengthened and guarded by the addition of a number of independent advisers (Bryce, 1895, p. 258).

Between the way the Bryce Commission had described the proposed work of the body which it recommended and the description of such a body in the 1899 Act, the concept underwent a significant change, not least from being called an “Advisory Council” in the Bryce Report to a “Consultative Committee” in the Act. The hopes of some of those who supported the original idea included the possibility that this council would have the power to develop and institute policy.¹⁰ The Duke of Devonshire, President of the Council on Education as the Act was passing through parliament, insisted that the “committee” should only advise on topics it was asked to advise on, as it must be the case that final authority over educational matters rested with the person who had to account for the work of the Board to parliament (Selby-Bigge, 1927, pp. 203–204). The Bryce Commission had also asserted this.

Brehony concluded from Sadler’s description of how the committee was set up and how members were replaced when they stepped down, that its management was a matter of contingency rather than “administrative rationality” (Brehony, 1994, p. 192). Though the official line was that the committee was not a representative body, offers of membership were a means by which the Board of Education sought to balance the interests of different groups, a system of “corporatist or functional representation” (ibid. p. 185). Brehony did not, however, comment on Acland’s significant role on the Consultative Committee (he was a member continuously for 15 years, nine of them as chairman), nor on the committee’s work on examinations, and the point that I make below about the reorganisation of the committee in 1907 suggests that there was greater strategic import in the making of appointments to the committee than Brehony suggested. See Tables 1 and 2 below.

¹⁰ A section in The Bryce Report which could certainly lead the reader to such an interpretation argued for the need to “secure for the Minister the advice of persons not under his official direction” (Bryce, 1895, p. 258). These advisers could address issues that were “distinctly judicial rather than executive”, work which might be judged to be “so purely professional as to belong rather to an independent body than to a Department of State”. The imprecision of these statements, with their implication of independence from the Minister, was problematic since it was not intended that such a body could become a focus for alternatives to a Minister’s chosen policy.

The article in *Nature*, referred to above, first complimented the Board of Education for ensuring the representation of a significant range of “bodies interested in education” which was “likely to command the public confidence”. However, it concluded that “the list of the proposed committee is seriously incomplete” since it should be made up of people

conscious of the defects of our present system, and who are concerned more with its due expansion and its fulfilment of high national ideals than the conservation of any traditions and interests, however important and deserving of respect (*Nature*, 1900, p. 249).

After the issue of the registration of teachers,¹¹ *Nature* nominated “the examination and inspection of schools” as “one of the most important questions which will in due course demand [the committee’s] attention.” Later appointments to the committee show that a preference for ‘reformers’ was being followed.¹² On the retirement of the first chairman, Hart-Dyke, Acland was voted in as chairman in 1907, with ten new members joining the committee that year.¹³ The new members were to enable the representation of a broader spectrum of experience of the national education system as it affected both elementary and secondary schooling (Board of Education, 1907, p. 23). Morant, who agreed that membership of the Committee should be more broadly based, discussed the 1907 appointments with Acland and, despite his complaints elsewhere about Acland’s single-mindedness, agreed to Acland’s suggestions.¹⁴ Thus several close associates of Acland joined the Committee, notably Reichel, Mansbridge, Sadler, Hibbert and Sidgwick and in consequence it became a body more likely to support Acland’s radicalism. (See Table 2 below.) After the failure of the committee’s first examination report in 1904, Acland certainly needed to draw in more support if his proposals for examinations were to be addressed again.¹⁵

¹¹ When the committee failed to resolve the issue of Teachers Registration to the satisfaction of Morant, the relevant Section of the 1899 Act was rescinded in 1907 (Daglish, 1991, p. 30).

¹² See Table 2. The years given refer to the titles of the Board of Education’s annual reports. From 1907/08 the year of the reports’ publication was the year after the reported period.

¹³ Harry Reichel, Marshall Jackman, Isabel Cleghorn, R.T. Glazebrook FRS*, Albert Mansbridge, J.L. Paton, Michael Sadler, David Shackleton M.P.*, Henry Hibbert, Arthur Sidgwick*. (* Left the committee before 1911).

¹⁴ Morant, 11th December 1906, letter to Acland. (TNA: ED 24/195). Brehony (ibid., p.186) suggested that Morant was responding to mounting pressure from teachers’ organisations. Acland believed that wider consultation would increase support for progressive policies.

¹⁵ During Acland’s chairmanship the committee also considered, School Attendance of Children Below the Age of Five (1908); Attendance at Continuation Schools (1909); and Practical Work in Secondary Schools (1913).

The composition and enlargement (in 1907) of the committee carried a particular significance because Bryce's recommendations had raised expectations among organisations that represented local government and teachers that they would exercise considerable influence over national policy. An indication of these raised expectations was that whereas the Bryce Commission had envisaged a Council of 12 members, the Headmasters Conference in 1898 had proposed a Council of 72 (H. Steedman, 1969, p. 75). Sadler was prepared to see a Council of up to 40,¹⁶ though the final number for the first committee was 18. Gorst's comment on these numbers was that those advocating them were proposing "a parliament of school-masters" (Brehony, 1994, p. 183), a comment that alluded to the administrator's traditional concern that at some time talking must end and someone must make a decision. The expectations of greater influence lingered on, despite the restrictions placed on the Consultative Committee's fields of interest, and those expectations account for later assumptions about the extent of the Secondary School Examinations Council's remit in the next decade.

¹⁶ Steedman suggested that Sadler's support of the public school headmasters' view of the teachers' role on the council was one reason for him falling out of favour with the Board of Education and thus not being considered as the first Head of the Secondary Branch when it was formed in the new century.

Table 1: Consultative Committee members, 1900 - 1912

Years	1900-02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/ 10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Command		1763	2271	2783	3270	3862	4566	5130	5616	6116	6707	7341
Page		p.97	p.96	p.69	p. 92	p.25-6	p.118-119	p.184	p.131	p.153	p.149	p.198
Chair	Hart-Dyke	HDyke	HDyke	HDyke	HDyke	HDyke	ACLAND	Re-elected	Acland	Re-elected	Acland	Acland
	Acland			R & Re						EXAMINATIONS		
	Anson	Warren		R & Re		R	Sidgwick, A.	Smith		Cookson		
	Armstrong			Wells		R	Glazebrook			Fitzpatrick		
*	Bryant					R & Re	Bryant			Bryant		Douglas
	Hart-Dyke	R & Re				R		Sharples		Sharples		
	Foster					R		Chapman		Chapman		
	Gow			Went			Went			Easterbrook		
	Gray	R & Re					Gray	Durham		Durham		
*	Hobhouse					R & Re	Hobhouse		R	Turnor		R & Re
	H-Owen	R & Re			Died		Reichel	R & Re		Reichel		
*	Jebb			R & Re	Died		Jackman			Jackman		Goldstone
*	Lyttleton	R & Re			Benson		Benson	R				
*	Maclure				R		Cleghorn			Cleghorn (Re)		
	Manley					R & Re	Manley		Died	Robertson		R & Re
	Sandford	R & Re					Sandford	Clay		Clay		
*	Sidgwick,E			R & Re			Sidgwick, E.	Tuke		Tuke (Re)		
	Windle				Moore	R & Re	Moore			Moore		Urquhart
	Waller	R & Re					Waller	R				
							Mansbridge			Mansbridge		Tawney
							Paton			Paton (Re)		
*Bryce Comm- issioner							*Sadler	R & Re		Sadler		Hadow
							Shackleton		Bowerman	Bowerman (Re)		
							Hibbert			Hibbert		Powell

The table highlights the changes in the committee in the year that Acland took over as chairman. Brief biographical notes are given in Table Two.
The table also highlights the effect of those appointments on the composition of the Acland Committee which considered the issue of examinations (1911).
Every two years a proportion of the members retired from the committee (= R). However, members could then be reappointed (= Re.)

Table 2: Consultative Committee, 1900 - 1912

Member's surname, year of joining and biographical notes

Acland 1900*	Consultative Committee (CC) member, 1900 – 1916. Chairman 1907 to 1915 when the committee ceased to meet.
Anson 1900	Sir William; M.P. for Oxford U.; Warden All Souls, 1881-1914. Parl. Sec. to Education Dept. (1902)
Armstrong 1900	Dr. Henry; Professor of Chemistry at City and Guilds Institute; Science educator.
Bryant 1900*	Dr. Sophie; Head North London Collegiate School; Bryce Commissioner; CC member 1900-12
Hart-Dyke 1900	Sir William; M.P. for 31 years; Vice-President of BoE, 1887-92.
Foster 1900	Sir Michael. KCB, M.P. Science and Tech.
Gow 1900	Rev. Dr.; Head, Westminster School.
Gray 1900	Earnest. M.P. Elementary teacher. President of NUT, 1894.
Hobhouse 1900	Henry. M.P. Bryce Commissioner.
Humphreys-Owen 1900	M.P. Wales. died 1906
Jebb 1900	Professor, M.P. for Oxford. Bryce Commissioner
Lyttleton 1900	Canon. Taught at Haileybury. Retired to become head of Eton. Bryce Commissioner.
Maclure 1900	Rev. Dr.; Dean of Manchester. Supported School Boards of England. Bryce Commissioner.
Manley 1900	Lynda. Head of Stockwell Teacher Training College.
Sandford 1900	Archdeacon of Exeter. Church schools. "Never been any use" - Morant. (Brehony, 1994).
Sidgwick 1900	Dr. Eleanor: Principal, Newnham College. Bryce Commissioner. Sister of Balfour
Windle 1900	Professor, FRS.; Retired to become President, Queen's College, Cork. RC.
Waller 1900	Rev. Dr. D.J.; Non-conformist. "Morant dismissive" (Brehony, 1994)
Warren 1902	T. Herbert; President, Magdalen Coll. Oxford; Retired when became V-C Oxford. Friend of Acland.
Wells 1905	Sidney. Principal, Battersea Polytechnic; Secretary of Association of Technical Institutes.
Went 1905	Rev. James;
Benson 1905	A.C.; English teacher at Eton. Afterwards Tutor at Magdalen College, Cambridge & then Master.
Moore 1905*	Dr. Norman M. FRCP. Surgeon. R.C.
Sidgwick 1907	Arthur, Corpus Christi, Oxford U. Friend of Acland.
Glazebrook 1907	Dr. R.T.; FRS
Reichel 1907*	Sir Henry. Principal University College, N. Wales. Later Vice-Chancellor. Colleague of Acland.
Jackman 1907*	Marshall. Head, Michael Faraday Council Elementary School, Walworth.

Cleghorn 1907*	Isabel, Head of girls' dept. Heeley Bank Elem. Sch., Sheffield. 1 st woman president NUT (1911-12)
Mansbridge 1907*	Albert. founder and General Sec. of Workers' Education Assoc.: Co-op colleague of Acland.
Paton 1907*	Mr. J. L. ; High Master, Manchester Grammar School
Sadler 1907*	Michael, Prof. of Education, Victoria U.; Later Vice-Chancellor Leeds University (1911-1923)
Shackleton 1907	David; M.P.
Hibbert 1907*	Sir H.; Chair, Lancashire Education Committee. Bryce Commissioner.
Smith 1909	A.L.; Balliol Coll., Oxford.
Durham 1909*	F. Hermia; Inspector Women's Technical classes LCC. Replaced Eleanor Sidgwick.
Tuke 1909*	Dr. Margaret, Principal Bedford College, London
Clay 1909*	Dr. R.S. Principal Northern Polytechnic, Holloway
Sharples 1909*	George. Former President NUT
Chapman 1909*	Rev. Dr. James; Principal, Southlands Training College, Battersea.
Bowerman 1910*	M.P. Labour. President of TUC 1901, Secretary 1911-1923.
Cookson 1911*	Christopher? Ex-BoE Examiner?
Easterbrook 1911*	James; Owen's School, Islington. Nominated by Teacher Registration Council.
Turnor 1911*	Christopher. Arts and Crafts connection?
Robertson 1911	(from Nov. 1911) Hannah. Leeds U., tutor for women? Colleague of Sadler's
Fitzpatrick 1911*	Rev. T.C. Cambridge Univ. Vice-Chancellor 1915-17
Douglas 1912	Mary; Head of Godolphin School, Salisbury. Replaced Sophie Bryant. Colleague of Sadler's, well-known to Acland.
Goldstone 1912	Frank. M.P. Labour.
Urquhart 1912	Mr. F.F.
Tawney 1912	R.H. "Secondary education for all". CC member 1912-31. Supported Hadow Report (1926)
Hadow 1912	Vice-Chancellor, Durham (1916), Sheffield (1919). Chairman of CC 1920-34.
Powell 1912	Dr. H.A.
* Member of the Acland Commission on School Examinations	

Sources:

(Aldrich & Gordon, 1989); Board of Education Annual Reports: ProQuest UK parliamentary papers; (Brehony, 1994); (N. D. Daglish, 1991); (Matthew, Harrison, & British Academy, 2004); (Goodman & Harrop, 2002)

The Consultative Committee's first examination proposal

The Board of Education's annual report for 1903/4 announced that the committee had made a "long and careful investigation into the grave inconvenience and waste of time caused by the multiplicity of examinations for entrance to the professions" (which was the main requirement of the committee's initial reference) and after over two year's work had come up with "a system of school certificates" (Board of Education, 1904, p. 23). The dates of the committee's work were noted pointedly - "20th March 1902" to "1st June 1904" - which perhaps indicated some disappointment at the length of time it had taken the committee to produce its recommendations. The disappointment may have been heightened by the fact that the committee's report was only three-and-a-half pages long. A short appendix to the Board's 1904 report, from the Consultative Committee itself, noted that the Board's "Reference on the standards of examination questions ... [had been] extended, and the committee was authorised to make the inquiries necessary in order to formulate a scheme for the best method of testing the instruction in secondary schools".¹ The committee's focus had thus been significantly widened.

The Board's officers wanted the multiplicity of examinations being taken as pupils left secondary school to be dealt with, whereas the committee wanted to address the prevalence of examination-taking throughout secondary schooling, a revision which allowed more fundamental criticisms of the examination system to be expressed. The committee had discussed its resultant scheme with six of the universities and with various professional and teachers' bodies, and it trusted "that the scheme of school certificates which they have drawn up may shortly be published" (ibid, p.96). The Board's 1904 Report declared that the Board would give the committee's scheme "its most careful consideration" (ibid. p.23). This unenthusiastic response suggested that the Consultative Committee had gone in a direction that the Board's responsible officers did not support, which became clearer in the following year's Annual Report, when the outcome of the Board's reflections on the school certificate scheme was announced. The Board had,

received a number of criticisms from universities, professional bodies, local education authorities and other persons" [whose opposition to the school certificate scheme was based] "upon fear that the state as a rival and

¹ Board of Education, *Annual Report* 1904/5, Cd. 2788, p.69.

competing agency in the conduct of exams, may ultimately command a monopoly (Board of Education, 1905. p. 69).

This, said the Board's report, needed "careful consideration" as did "the many problems of detail, both administrative and financial,"² arising out of the committee's proposals." The Board concluded that it would not be wise to take action until these matters were solved. The committee's 1904 school certificate proposal was in fact deemed by the Board to be, as Morant was later to tell the then President, "impossible".³ Nearly five years were to go by before the issue of a national examination system was broached again at the Board.

The co-ordinated examination / inspection scheme

At this point a brief description of the scheme that the Consultative Committee had in mind should be considered, the essence of which was that the processes of examination and inspection should be combined, as had been the case in the half century before the SCE was proposed.⁴ The committee's *Proposals for a System of School Certificates* (1904) opposed the setting up of "a single central organisation" to set examinations for the whole country (Section 2),⁵ and advocated the formation of examination bodies that would be controlled by universities, or by universities in collaboration with local education authorities, and these would be bodies that would work closely with teachers (Section 3).⁶ Examination and inspection would be brought together in that the results of required periodical inspections, whichever body had carried them out, would be communicated to the school's chosen examination board (Section 5). The purpose of the inspection, according to the Consultative Committee, was "to enable the examining body to judge whether the school is fitted to be admitted to the benefits of the system", and thus the

² Selby-Bigge was already concerned about the possible costs of running an examination system, which had reached £25,000, and he envisaged further expense. Selby Bigge, 22 November 1912. Letter to Treasury. (TNA: ED 24/1634).

³ Morant, 28 May 1909, memo to Runciman. (TNA: ED 24/212).

⁴ As noted earlier, the phrase "examination *of the school*" was frequently used. This leads to a broader issue, which relates to the issue of how more individualistic attitudes to education were challenging traditional, corporatist attitudes. From the perspective of a late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century educationalist, it would have seemed unrealistic to believe that the performance of individual students could be separated from the performance of the institutions at which they were being educated. Much of today's comment on 'inequality of educational opportunity' would also be alluding to the same point.

⁵ A copy of the report may be found in (TNA: ED 24/212), where it is recorded as being sent out for comment on 1st June 1904. Section numbers in brackets above are those given to the 18 sections in the report.

⁶ The committee referred to the possibility of new, locally-based examination boards being formed, though the national reach already established by London, Oxford and Cambridge was also accepted. Their proposals were "based on the assumption that it will ultimately be best for the secondary schools which are maintained or largely aided by local authorities to look to provincial examining bodies for the organisation of their examinations, and it is not improbable that local authorities may prefer their doing so...." (Section 3).

examining board could refuse to examine a school which it considered was not offering a course of which it could approve (Section 5b).

The committee proposed that schools would communicate their courses of study to their chosen examination board (Section 5) and examinations “should be conducted in each school by **external and internal examiners** [*emphasis in original*], representing respectively the examining body and the school staff” (Section 8). Thus, the examination boards would “understand the aims and characters of the different schools”, and this would “prevent the examination from becoming mechanical and rigid” (Section 5b). The work done by students during their course, recorded and reported on by teachers, would be available to be taken into consideration by the examiner “in any case in which he desires to do so” (Section 9). The examination papers would be set by the external examiner, using information from the school about the courses covered and suggestions from the teachers of what questions might be asked (Section 12). After the examination the internal and external examiners would agree the allocation of the marking to be done, and students near the borderline of a pass would be marked by both of them (Section 13). The system would be coordinated and standardised by a “Central Board” constituted by the Board of Education (Section 6).

Reflecting on the above proposals, which were so briefly presented, does lead one to speculate on why the devisers of this system did not foresee any great difficulties in its implementation. Was it because they assumed that the teachers’ judgements, both in setting questions on the subject matter covered in their courses and in assessing the quality of the students’ responses, would be sound enough to be generally accepted by external examiners? If that turned out not to be the case, the work of the external inspector/examiner could become very onerous, and indeed challenging if a school would not accept a standard which he or she was seeking to impose. The Board’s official conclusion, that there were issues of administrative detail that needed to be considered before they could proceed, was not surprising. What was surprising was that the Consultative Committee had been left to publish such undeveloped proposals, an indication that emphasis placed by both sides on the independence of the committee from the Board had produced a failure to integrate their work. On the Board’s side this neglect may possibly not have been inadvertent, its officers’ difficult relationship with some committee members playing some part. (Acland was referred to in memos from Morant, as cited on pages 76 and 81 below). The delay of four years before the Board considered the issue of school examinations again suggests that the Board hoped that the committee’s

proposals for a co-ordinated system would die by neglect, for its officers already preferred the university-based scheme of external examinations.

Outcomes of the Consultative Committee's proposals

In the north of England, at a conference convened by the Vice-Chancellors of the three constituent colleges of Victoria University on July 21st 1904, it was agreed to set up a “scheme for examinations for secondary schools” under the Joint Matriculation Board “of the universities of Lancashire and Yorkshire” and also of the Local Education Authorities and the teaching profession. In its proposal for LEA and teacher involvement the meeting was endorsing the Consultative Committee’s co-ordinated scheme, which is not surprising since three members of the Consultative Committee, Acland, Hibbert and Paton, were at the meeting and were nominated to a committee to work on the proposal.⁷ Petch wrote that this meeting was a key moment in the formation of the Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board (NUJMB) as a body to conduct examinations for schools (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 54–55).⁸

In the period before and after the rejection of the Consultative Committee’s first examination proposals, Acland was a leading member of the Higher Education Sub-committee in the West Riding of Yorkshire.⁹ Secondary schools came under this committee and he played an important part in helping to develop the secondary system in the county. In this position he was able to support local authority opinion in a continuing campaign for schools to be less reliant on examinations. In a circular letter sent to secondary school governors from County Hall, Wakefield, dated November 1909, an extended case was made for a reformed examination system, of the kind the Consultative Committee had advocated, and particularly for the Board’s policy of eliminating public examinations for students below sixteen. This meant, according to the letter, that the schools receiving LEA grants should by then not be entering students for the Oxford and Cambridge ‘Junior examinations’.¹⁰ That some LEAs were now directing their schools’

⁷ Minutes of Examinations Syndicate meeting, 25 January 1905, item 9. (University of Cambridge library: Minute Book, LES 1/5).

⁸ James Petch worked at a senior level for the JMB from 1927-1967 with J.M. Crofts, Secretary of the JMB from 1919- 1941. Crofts was a long-time member of the SSEC, so Petch had direct access to the whole of the SCE’s history.

⁹ By this time Acland was living in Scarborough. He had been MP for Rotherham until he resigned in 1899. He was co-opted to the sub-committee, whose remit included secondary education, in 1900. He left it in 1907 when he took up the role of chairman of the Consultative Committee (Gosden & Sharp, 1978, pp. 78–84).

¹⁰ Minutes of Examinations Syndicate meeting, 19 January 1910, item 7. (University of Cambridge library: LES 1/6). Though the letter’s comments about its examinations were highly critical, the Syndicate decided not to take any action.

examination policies illustrates the possibility that even local action could be seen as an encroachment into the independence of schools.

After its annual conference in Bath in 1908 the Private Schools Association Incorporated (PSAI), which claimed to speak for half the teachers in private secondary schools in the country, published its reactions to the Consultative Committee's proposals. The Association's chairman, Arthur Sibly, a barrister-at-law, drafted a memorial presenting a strongly-worded argument for the independence of both the schools and the examination system. The Association, he wrote, was opposed to schemes which it saw being put forward by "advocates of this all-embracing state." The document continued: "The nation is being harried into a system under which all schools are to be controlled, not by the practical teacher, but by the officials of the Board".¹¹ This document was discussed by the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate and the Secretary was asked to respond to the Association assuring it "that it is the constant aim of the Syndicate to adopt the best methods of securing to the schools the advantages of external examinations with a minimum of disadvantages."¹² Thus, an already existing examination board was joining the debate about the value and practicality of external examinations and the lines were being more clearly drawn between the Consultative Committee's co-ordinated proposal and the traditional model of external examinations.

In February 1909 Morant asked Bruce, the Head of the Secondary Branch at the Board, to canvas opinions about topics which the Consultative Committee might consider in the future and one suggestion was "the value of examinations".¹³ The same file contains the replies of various senior officers (Bruce, Mackail, Chambers, Fletcher, Pullinger, Ogilvie, Selby-Bigge¹⁴), and their general view was that any important topic should be dealt with by an "office committee" rather than the Consultative Committee. The opinions

¹¹ Sibly, A., Memorial from PSAI, item 5 of meeting held on 21 October 1908. (University of Cambridge library, Examination Syndicate minutes, LES 1/5).

¹² Ibid., 1908.

¹³ This resulted from a query from Runciman, the new President of the Board. Morant, 25 February 1909. Memo to Bruce. (TNA: ED 24/212).

¹⁴ Lewis Selby-Bigge became Principal Assistant in charge of elementary schools in 1908 and Permanent Secretary in 1911 after Morant's departure. Thus he was responsible for the Board during the implementation of the SCE. One possible topic for the Consultative Committee to consider in 1909 was that of examinations in elementary schools. Selby-Bigge was not in favour of the committee being given that brief because change already introduced "had not had time to show its full effects" (17 March 1909, memo to Permanent Secretary. ED24/212). But he was not against there being examinations even for elementary schools, though he admitted to Morant that some of the inspectors would not be happy with him if he said that. He wrote that he had some sympathy with the "Philistine" in a Local Education Authority who "wants to have before him the results of examinations and tests". In this memo he interestingly distinguished between "test by inspection" and "test by examination", leaving unaddressed the questions of testing Who? Or What? On page 3 of the memo he noted that some authorities were "quite loyal to the system of testing the work of Elementary Schools by inspection rather than by examination". He understood the negative reactions to examinations, but it was also clear that he would support a proposal for an external examination system.

of the Board's officers, based on the experience of the past eight years, clearly show that working with the Consultative Committee was now seen by them as a problem. Selby-Bigge added to the discussion issues concerning the practicality of the committee's recommendations:

The zeal of the Consultative Committee may lead them to deal with the question on rather impractical lines ... without sufficient regard to what is financially or administratively possible. [Selby-Bigge was] afraid that the fact that the Consultative Committee were engaged on [a] subject would have a sterilizing and suspensory effect.¹⁵

If the Board wanted to get on with the work, they should not involve the Consultative Committee. The Chief Inspector for secondary schools, W.C Fletcher, put it thus in a memo to the Secretary on 8th March 1909:

As to examinations I am disposed to think that the time has come rather for action than for further advice. We know pretty well what we want and perhaps conferences with the examination boards would be more fruitful than further reference to the Consultative Committee (TNA: ED 24/212).

These attitudes from the Board's officers are in marked contrast to "the collective inertia of the permanent officials ... in itself a force for conservatism" which Sutherland identified in the period 1870 to 1895 (Sutherland, 1973, p. 342). Since that time the Department had continued to select its officers from the elite public schools and Oxbridge, as Daglish has shown (Daglish, 1996), but the new group of officers were imbued with the aim of taking action to improve the education system. Shortly after the passing of the 1902 Education Act Robert Morant was made the first Permanent Secretary of the new Board of Education. Much has been written about his way of working and his willingness to exert pressure to promote what he saw as the Board's (or his) essential priorities. What can be seen in this internal discussion is a group of civil servants who were ready to promote their own policy and, if they felt they had a better solution to the issue in hand, to dispense with the Consultative Committee's advice altogether. However, Bruce, the Head of the Secondary Branch, argued in favour of giving the Consultative Committee another opportunity to consider the issue of examinations. His argument for this was that the first Consultative Committee report (1904) was "published for criticism", and the beneficial result had been that "many interesting and important objections and suggestions were received."¹⁶ Bruce's way of working is evident here. He tried to find out what the different groups were

¹⁵ Selby-Bigge, 17 March 1909, response to Morant. (TNA: ED 24/212).

¹⁶ Bruce, 2 March 1909, memo to colleagues. (TNA: ED 24/212).

thinking, especially those with views which opposed the Board's view, and then organised face-to-face meetings, such as day conferences, to see if he could influence such groups by personal contact.

Morant was important to the nature and tone of this debate. In a memo to the President of the Board (Runciman) about the proposed terms of reference for the Consultative Committee we find his officers' tone amplified. He wrote that when the Consultative Committee last considered examinations, in 1902-1904, their "prolonged deliberations only produced a nebulous scheme which was repudiated as impossible by virtually every interest (educational and other) that would have been affected by it." In this memo he reported that the universities and the Board were coming to an agreement which would be:

productive of much more harmonious results than could be hoped for from any scheme evolved by such a body as the Consultative Committee, and sought to be imposed by this Board or other external Power – particularly as the Consultative Committee are closely associated with strong views (in Mr. Acland) in the direction of bringing the County Councils and County Borough Councils into the machinery for examinations, and this will of course naturally alienate the universities, beside being off lines of the real educational advantages, when it is a question of educational standards, as distinct from the organisation of educational provision.¹⁷

Morant's superior tone and his suggestion that only his proposal addressed the real educational issues, would no doubt have irritated the committee's members if they had been aware of them. His personal mention of Acland was risky as he knew that Runciman was a political ally of Acland's, but this memo is perhaps a sign of increasing confidence within the Board that their favoured scheme, an external examination system which would be simpler to introduce, was gaining favour. As Morant suggested, whatever system came into being there would be some at least who would feel that it had been "imposed" on them by those in power. The more complex the system and the more it demanded of the teachers' administrative time, the less likely it would be to succeed. Secondly, from the Board's point of view it was essential that the universities were kept in the scheme. If they began to withdraw support because they deemed the resulting scheme would not provide the means for university selection (see chapter five), then one of the main aims of having a national scheme, which was reducing the number of examinations students were taking, would have been lost.

¹⁷ Morant, 28 May 1909, memo to Runciman. (TNA: ED 24/212).

It is a significant milestone that by early 1909 the Board's officers had unanimously and openly agreed that the examination system must be given to the university boards and they had made clear to the President their preference for an external scheme. One can understand the thinking in the Secondary Branch of the Board. If it was a straightforward examination system that was being brought into being it could be arranged from within their own branch: if they had to involve the inspectorate, a myriad of problems could arise. It would be even more complicated if the system required the inspectorate to supervise on local lines in collaboration with Local Authorities: the chances of being able to get such a system agreed would be greatly reduced, as Morant had implied. The Board's officers were choosing the simpler system, which also had the advantage of being like the system run by the universities for a significant period of time. Bruce wrote later:

We look to the universities for the examination of secondary schools... because the work is practically in their hands now and will probably be better and more acceptably done by them than by any body or bodies that could at the present time be set up in their place.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in what is possibly an indication of Acland's political influence, the Board gave the Consultative Committee another chance to explain its scheme; thus it was that work on what came to be known as the 'Acland Report on Examinations' began.

The Acland Report

The *Report of the Consultative Committee on Examinations in Secondary Schools* (Board of Education, 1911) presented a sustained argument for the co-ordinated examination and inspection system that had already been described in the committee's earlier discussion paper. It addressed the Board's concerns from 1904 about the administrative and financial questions its scheme raised, but what the committee primarily achieved was a severe critique of external examinations, the Board of Education's preferred system. In his PhD thesis¹⁹ Philip Evans notes the Acland report's radical aim for "A new approach to external examinations" which would "open the way for improvements in the teaching of many secondary schools, as they would give wider scope to the initiative and originality of teachers" (Evans, 1989. p.448). Evans further states that the commissioners wished to challenge a restricted focus on examination success "to the

¹⁸ Bruce, 15 January 1912. Departmental memo, p.5. (TNA: ED 124/1634).

¹⁹ Evans, P.W. (1989). *The contribution of Arthur Herbert Dyke Acland, (1847-1926) to the Education System of England and Wales*. PhD thesis. Manchester University.

exclusion of other aspects of education” and he rightly highlights the issue of external examinations:

The Committee considered that the combination of inspection and examination, which their preferred model incorporated, would be a package of both the general excellence of a school’s work and of the attainment of the individual pupils. The general theme was to cast doubt on the adequacy of a purely external examination as sole evidence of the value of the work which was done by a school (ibid. p.453). However, the Acland Report went further than merely ‘casting doubt’ on the adequacy of external examinations: it aimed to replace them with an internal system supervised by local inspectors.

The distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ examinations is central to this argument. Though the Acland Report refers frequently to “external examinations” its proposals were in fact for an internal system, based on the *Abitur* model, with a significant input into the examining by the teachers and a supervisory role exercised by “interview-examiners”. The intended contribution of teachers is clearly indicated in the words of the report:

We believe that many teachers have come to lean unduly on the support of external examinations. We should not be doing much to make them more self-reliant if we merely substituted one prop for another, and so arranged things that in future the teachers should lean too much on the inspector. This very real danger must be faced from the start. It must be plain from the beginning that when the interview-examiner visits a school for examination purposes, he is there to learn what is being done, and not to dictate or advise (Board of Education, 1911, pp. 113–114).

Evans’ analysis accepts the report’s references to an “external examination” at face value, leading to a position in which Acland’s proposals and the eventual SCE examinations may be conceived as not dissimilar. My position, by contrast, emphasises a fundamental difference between them. The School Certificate Examinations were wholly external and it is this which explains Acland’s deep disappointment with which this chapter began.

The report’s historical survey of the use of examinations in schools stated that, at first, competitive examinations “had in many ways a beneficial influence upon English education” but public opinion came to put an “excessive reliance” on examinations and now they were being given “too large a place in the system” (p.28).²⁰ The report’s second chapter was headed “The present state of things” and the third “The difficulties and

²⁰ The page numbers referred to in this section are those in a copy of the report found on the ‘Education in England’ website: www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acland1911/index.html.

disadvantages of the existing system of external examinations in secondary schools”, but in fact both chapters emphasised the negative experiences associated with the examinations. Chapter two for example mentioned the lack of co-operation between examination boards (p.29-30), the complexity of organising interchangeability of certificates (p.32), the pressure parents put on schools to prepare their children for the multiplicity of exams (p.39), the number of examinations both academic and professional that there were to be taken (p.39-40), and the dominance of the universities over the secondary school curriculum (p.67-69). The points made in the third chapter were even more negative, gathered as they were under the statement that there were “serious defects in the present arrangements” (p.70). There was in the examination system a “lack of elasticity” (p.77); the “examination frame of mind” was injurious (p.88); examinations were “a serious danger to ... the well-being of young girls” (p.95); innovations in schools were constrained by “the shackles of external examinations” (p.100), and it would be helpful if students could work “without the disturbing influence of external examinations” (p. 109).

These negative judgements led to the committee’s conclusion that in order for the “dangers [to be] minimised, such examinations should be subjected to the most stringent regulations as to their number, the age at which they are taken, and their general character” (p.103). The reader would have been left with an impression that an external examination system endangered the good work that the schools wanted to do. That Acland’s committee agreed to a report which expressed this degree of negativity is evidence that such opinions were widespread and, among this group of leading educationists, were strongly held.²¹

The committee’s key recommendation, to minimise the damage done by examinations and to create a force for real improvement in schools, was that the examination and the inspection systems should be brought together. In the report’s fourth chapter, of the three key objectives which were proposed as the “basis of reform”, the first was that “External examinations must be brought into intimate connection with inspection.” This was emphasised:

We attach very great importance to this point, as we believe that it is only by these means that the organic combination of inspection and examination can be secured which, in our opinion, lies at the root of the general improvement of external examinations on educational lines which we are so desirous of promoting (p.105).

The report thus envisaged that the schools would be visited by inspectors who would play a role in the conduct of the school examinations, particularly by conducting oral

²¹ See Table 2 on page 68 for brief biographical notes on Consultative Committee members, particularly those who served on the Acland Committee on examinations.

examinations and observing practical work, but the bulk of the examining work would be done by the teachers. To judge the overall standard in a school the inspector/examiner should be given a portfolio of the year's work done by students (p.114); whole classes and not selected individuals should be presented for examination (p.116); the inspector/examiner should judge their performance against the average attainment for 16-year-olds (p.117) and provide a report for the school, examination boards and LEAs (p.118). It would be up to the examination boards to incorporate the judgements of these individuals into the final examination judgements upon the students' work (p.120). The students should be rewarded with "a certificate showing that they have had a good general education and have reached an average standard suitable for their age" (p.121).

In its final chapter the Consultative Committee described the work of its proposed "Examinations Council". Objections to the 'centralising' implications of their earlier proposals were one of the main reasons for their rejection in 1904, so this chapter attempted to answer these objections. But the committee's adherence to the co-ordination of examination and inspection inevitably gave their central "Examinations Council" greater power. The chapter described how the Council, "one of whose duties would be to co-ordinate the results of inspection with those of examination", would have its headquarters in London "within convenient reach of the offices of the Board of Education" whose inspectors would work "in close co-operation" with the Council (p.133). The Council would thus be an additional central agency, which would have considerable influence over the schools.²² The committee's conflicts with the Board of Education possibly blurred its judgement on this issue, and one is here reminded of the Bryce Commission's ambiguous proposal of an "Advisory Council" with independent powers. A paragraph on page 135 of the Acland Report referred to "the objections which would be felt to placing the complete control of the Secondary School Certificate Examinations in the hands of the Board of Education". But the committee underestimated the possible similar objections to the setting up of another central body, "which would be authorised by the State, representative of educational experience and associated with (though not administratively controlled by) the Board of Education" (p.133).

²² "The function of the Council would be the supervision of all external examinations in recognised Secondary Schools ... no external examinations would be permitted except those held under the authority, or with the approval, of the Examinations Council" (p.133).

The response of the Board of Education to the Acland Report

The observations of the Board of Education's officers on the Acland Report can be found in the National Archive's file ED24/220. Fletcher, the Chief Inspector, in a memo dated 23 October 1911 gave his opinion that the committee was five years out of date. He claimed that in 1911 "There is no excess of examining in many schools": the teachers had taken on the task themselves of reducing dependence on examinations. Heath, Head of the Special Inquiries Department, thought that provincial inspections would be problematic (31 October 1911). Morant was concerned that when the report was published it should be made very clear that the Board was not committed to implementing any of it (12 October 1911). The most subtle, indeed Machiavellian, thought came from Bruce:

It seems to me that the opportunity of getting a moderate and useful scheme through will be facilitated rather than hindered by the character of the committee's recommendations which do not seem at all calculated to attract support from any of the 'interests' (24 October 1911).

Bruce's comments in his memo raised several key points. He firstly examined in detail the proposed work of the Examinations Council and showed that "the size of the job" would make it a significantly prominent central body. Secondly, he questioned the role of inspector/examiners, noting that as inspectors they could hardly be dispassionate about work in schools to which they had made a major contribution. He also emphasised the complexity of expanding and realigning the work of local inspectors. Finally, he foresaw complications in the concept of approving schools to take part in the examinations. How would that relate to the Board's system of approving secondary schools as "efficient"? Might the two systems come into conflict? The committee had suggested that the examinations could be taken by pupils in Higher Elementary Schools, which was a point that Morant foresaw as particularly problematic.

Morant had already gained the support of the new President of the Board of Education, Pease, who had taken office in October that year.²³ In a memo to him, dated 20 November 1911, Morant claimed that the committee had been misleading in how easy it would be to implement their scheme.²⁴ They had done more than they were asked to do and found the task "impossible". He observed that "Mr. Acland and some of the committee may protest", a comment which drew a marginal note from Pease, "I had better see Acland myself about this" (23 October 1911). Pease was irritated by the critical tone which the

²³ Jack Pease, President of the Board of Education from 23rd October 1911 to 25th May 1915.

²⁴ This memo and those referred to in the following paragraphs are in The National Archive (ED 24/220).

committee adopted when referring to the Board's lack of progress on the co-ordination of examination boards and the status of Higher Elementary schools. On the same date he wrote to Morant, "To be expected to publish to the world a censure on ourselves by a committee subordinate to ourselves, and a direction as to what our duty is, is a proceeding which I don't desire to characterise in words." Pease continued to keep Acland informed, on 15 December letting him know that "We are publishing the report but there are 'formidable' difficulties."

In the new year Bruce reported that the committee's recommendations were not attracting support because opinion "deprecated the proposal for a Central Authority". Thus, within the Board the officers set up an office committee to plan for an external examination system which reported later that year. Selby-Bigge wrote to Pease that Acland had reported to him "that a great many people had expressed their great admiration of the report and their opinion that it was the most important thing which had been done in education for a very long time."²⁵ He sought to deflect Acland's opposition to the Board's external scheme by suggesting that it would only be possible at this stage to implement part of Acland's vision, thus characterising the Consultative Committee's proposals as an ideal towards which the Board would be working. This was ingenuous, since Acland's committee had asserted that the link between inspection and examination was "the key" to reform of the system. Pease repeated in a letter to Acland the explanation that had been agreed with his civil servants.

I am well aware that our proposals fall a good deal short of the ideal which the Consultative Committee set up, but I feel very strongly that we have a long road to travel before we can get anywhere near that ideal, and we can only get there gradually.²⁶

In this way, the fact that the Acland Committee did not oppose the use of external examinations out of hand allowed the Board of Education to give the impression that it had supported the introduction of the SCE system.

The expectations of 'the state'

In responding to my first research question it must be noted that the Board of Education saw as its immediate aim the reduction in the number of examinations that were being taken by secondary students, as in the reference to the Consultative Committee in

²⁵ Selby-Bigge 16 December 1912. Memo to the President. (TNA: ED 124/1634).

²⁶ Pease, 16 December 1912, letter to Acland. (TNA: ED 24/1634).

1902. In chapter two of its report (section V, pp. 46-59), the Acland Committee reviewed “the multiplicity of examinations in secondary schools” (Board of Education, 1911) reporting, for example, that it commonly heard of schools in which pupils took two separate sets of public examinations in the same year.²⁷ Selby-Bigge later recalled that “the preparation of pupils for miscellaneous external examinations ... had in the absence of any central authority become a serious mischief” (Selby-Bigge, 1927, p. 146). As for Local Authorities which supported the Board’s aim, the meeting referred to above in the north of England also showed that the more adventurous of them could envisage the setting up of provincial examination boards in collaboration with regional universities.

Given the opposition of the Consultative Committee to external examinations, the role of the Board’s officers - Morant, Bruce and Selby-Bigge particularly – in promoting the external examinations stands out, partly because of their determination to see their own policy implemented and partly because they persuaded the political leaders at the time that the Acland Committee’s proposals were problematic. When the Board published its plans for the new examination system in Circular 849 (July 1914) it announced that the new system was to be left in the hands of the very bodies which Acland’s committee had said were too isolated from the schools to manage it properly.²⁸ It would however be reasonable for the outside observer to conclude that the committee had failed to negotiate the deep current of national opinion against centralised power; it was this which Bruce gave as the key reason for the rejection of Acland’s proposals. The officers in the Board, cautious though their preferred model for an examination system might have been, nevertheless envisaged a decentralised system, using the university examination boards to deliver it. Selby-Bigge later judged that the Secondary Schools Examinations Council, which the Board successfully introduced into the space created for it by the Bryce Report’s proposal of an “Advisory Council”, was “a most useful and effective instrument of delegated administration” (Selby-Bigge, 1927, p. 210). The committee’s concerns about the role of teachers in the new system were responded to by decisions that the examination boards should regularly consult teachers; that schools would be offered the option to devise and submit their own examination syllabuses; and that teachers would submit estimates of their

²⁷ An example of the situations that were reported to the committee was of a school where “Each boy took one* of the College of Preceptors examinations in December, after which in most cases he was promoted, and then in the next higher form took one* of the Oxford Locals in July” (Board of Education, 1911, p. 52). * refers to a group of exams rather than just one subject.

²⁸ “The evidence we have heard shows that this isolation of the examining bodies has in many cases had an undesirable effect ...” (Acland Report, p.72).

candidates' likely results which would be taken into account in doubtful cases (Board of Education, 1914, p. ix).

Bruce and Selby-Bigge in particular presented this as a decentralizing policy and this enabled them to take the serving Liberal government along with their proposal, even though Acland and his supporters were against it. Yet, as events developed, whether this really proved to be a decentralising decision remained to be seen. Following the Education Act of 1902 it was Morant that saw that the Board of Education had the opportunity to act directly to carry policies out.²⁹ His colleagues at the Board were in agreement that “absence of any central authority” (Selby-Bigge’s phrase) must be corrected in the interests of focusing national resources on necessary developments. The balancing of forces envisaged by the Bryce Commission, with its emphasis on “elasticity”, was in progress and there was a sense that the situation was by no means static, as indeed was indicated by the promises made to Acland. Morant’s over-bearing nature eventually caused his departure from the Board and Michael Sadler later referred to his “fascist tendencies” (Taylor, 1985). Yet if the heat of the language on this occasion can be overlooked, a two-sided argument about government control emerges: that the examination system should be looked after by the LEAs (promoted by Acland), or by the universities (chosen by the Board’s officers). In some policy decisions there is a clear choice between progressivism and conservatism but in this case it is difficult to identify such clear-cut alternatives.

Marshall Jackman, who in 1911 was both a member of the Consultative Committee and President of the NUT, wrote a note of dissent to the Acland Report. Jackman’s objection to the committee’s scheme was that the proposed School Certificate was to be restricted to those children who had reached the age of sixteen. This failed to take account of the fact that, “the children of workpeople and others, however promising, are, through economic conditions, in constant danger of having their secondary education cut short.”³⁰ Thus the effect of the proposal would be to,

deprive all pupils who have not had opportunities to take this Secondary School Certificate of their chances of entrance into higher schools of education, into professions, or into employments where such a certificate is considered essential (ibid., p.143).

²⁹ In Leese’s opinion Morant and Kay-Shuttleworth were the two truly great servants of education in England. “From time to time in civil as in warlike affairs, situations have arisen when men come to look to one man who by his vigour, clarity and tenacity of purpose, and knowledge of the problems involved, emerges as a natural leader ... ” (Leese, 1950, p. 223).

³⁰ The Acland Report, p.146. www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acland1911/index.html

Clearly Jackman had not convinced the Acland Committee that this argument should be given more weight, and for the time being it was left on one side. The Board however saw the age limit as an element of the committee's proposal that it could support and thus its policy to restrict the taking of external examinations to pupils aged sixteen and over became embedded in its thinking as far back as 1911. The argument that Jackman used, centering upon the widening of opportunity and the recognition of merit, came from within the Union and the Labour movement and it was deployed again thirty years later, and more strongly, in the debates surrounding the Norwood recommendations. (See chapter eight.)

The report of the Acland Committee on examinations came at the end of a year whose early months had been dominated by the debate about the 'Holmes-circular affair'. Holmes' circular was claimed, reasonably, to reveal a class-bias within the Board and the resulting debate both in the press and in parliament was an emotional one (M. J. Wilkinson, 1980). Jackman played a leading part in broadening the criticisms arising from the affair into an attack on the whole management of education by the Board and the Liberal government (*ibid.*, p.33) and eventually, in the affair's wake, both the President and the Permanent Secretary left the Board. In a speech to the House of Commons, in which he read out extracts from the supposedly confidential memorandum, Samuel Hoare, M.P. claimed that the key issue was the local education authorities' belief, "that a certain measure of interference has been going on both with their appointment of local officials, who have nothing whatever to do with the Board, and with their internal policy."³¹ The jealous guarding of local autonomy is striking in this speech. Frank Goldstone, a Labour M.P. who in the coming year was to replace Jackman on the Consultative Committee, made his maiden speech in this debate. His was one of the calmer voices:

Mr. Holmes has shown himself educational in spirit and generous in disposition, but, unfortunately, in a weak moment he has allowed the spirit which has too long animated the Board of Education to break out in hostility to everything which does not emanate from Oxford or Cambridge (*ibid.*, col 297).³²

The Holmes-circular debate illustrated the politically dangerous possibilities of the Board appearing to take over responsibilities which were believed to belong either to local

³¹ *Hansard* HC Deb vol 23 col 276 (21 March 1911) [Electronic version].

³² An example of Holmes' style, which justifies Goldstone's description of 'a weak moment', is, "... local inspection, as at present conducted in the large towns, is on the whole a hindrance rather than an aid to educational progress; and we can only hope that the local 'Chief Inspectors', who are fountain heads of vicious officialdom, will be gradually pensioned off, and that, if local inspection is to be continued in their areas, their places will be filled by men of real culture and enlightenment" (Gordon, 1978, para. 7).

authorities or to schools. This supports an emphasis on the importance of ‘centralisation’ in the national debate about the kind of examination system that England was to have. It is an irony that it was the Acland Committee’s proposals, with their roots in local action, which had raised the suspicion of government domination and that it was the Board’s external examination proposal which managed to offer at least some independence from the state both central and local.

CHAPTER 5 : EXAMINATION BOARDS, THE SSEC, TEACHERS

Role of the universities

Towards the end of the nineteenth century it was expected that school examining was work that, as in London and Oxbridge, all the universities would undertake. For example when the federal Victoria University had been established in 1880 its charter stated that it should provide examinations for schools (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 18–19). New regulations arising from the Board of Education Act of 1899 required inspecting and examining bodies to register and the Board of Education set about encouraging the universities to do so. The university boards appeared to be willing to consider an expansion of their role, as in Cambridge where the minutes of the Examination Syndicate show agreement that the university should apply to be an inspecting body under the new arrangements. Oxford and the Joint-Board were also considering the request favourably.¹ Thus, when the Board of Education began to set up the SCE scheme it invited all the English universities to take part and it would have assumed that there would be an element of altruism in the universities' response. This had been in evidence after the successful completion of the 'Exeter experiment', the predecessor of the Local Examinations of the Oxford Delegacy, at a celebratory dinner on 18 June 1857, in which Frederick Temple HMI had said in a speech, "the universities should be made to feel that they have an interest in the education of all England" (T. D. Acland, 1902, pp. 182–183).²

The Local Examinations came to be seen in all the universities as an 'extension activity' along with their public lectures programmes. In Cambridge the examining body became 'The Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate'. A similar group was established in Oxford and it was in its programme of lectures that Arthur Acland and Michael Sadler began their involvement in the development of the national education system. Durham offered its school examinations initially in collaboration with Cambridge but in May 1895 set up its own board to carry out both the inspection and examination of schools.³ Like Durham, Bristol University directed its aims more regionally: its list of 'accredited schools' in December 1913 comprised schools from Gloucester, Wiltshire,

¹ Minute book of the Examinations Syndicate, 29 January 1902, item 12. (Cambridge University library: LES 1/5).

² *Memoir and letters of the Right Honourable Sir Thomas Dyke Acland* was Arthur Acland's homage to his father.

³ Minutes of the Senate, 21 May 1895. (Durham University library: UND/BA1/8).

Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Somerset and it welcomed requests from LEAs in the South West to examine their students.⁴ Minutes from Victoria University record the inspection of schools in various parts of the country towards the end of the nineteenth century. A more detailed entry outlines the “Annual Examination and Inspection by Victoria University” of Manchester High School for Girls. This process in May and July 1900 included the administration of the university’s “preliminary examination” to the 6th and Upper 5th forms; the inspection of the whole school over a period of three days by Professor Withers, and for one day the inspection of science work and laboratories by Professor Smithells; and finally the administration of examination papers in various subjects, which included setting and marking by the same two professors, to 6th and Upper 5th form students for the award of university scholarships.⁵

It is evident that there would have been some benefit for the universities from examining but the benefits to the universities of running school examinations in England were not necessarily financial. The Vice-Chancellor of Bristol, having noted that income from the 1920/21 session was only about half of its total expenditure on the examinations that year, wrote to the Education Committees of Gloucester and Somerset stating that “the university is considering its policy with regard to the School Certificate examinations” and asking whether those committees might give him an indication of future numbers of candidates from their counties.⁶ Bristol’s losses continued into the 1930s.⁷ Durham as late as 1950, though it made a surplus of £1,391 in that year’s July examinations, had an overall deficit for the year of £2,766.⁸ These two were the smallest of the boards, but the others too aimed mainly to cover the fees of the examiners and the administrative costs of the exercise. When responding to the Norwood proposal to abolish the SC examinations, the Cambridge Examination Syndicate’s Secretary, Nalder Williams, claimed that from the

⁴ Minutes of School Certificate Committee of the Senate, 3 December 1913. (Bristol University library: DM2287/6/9/3/5).

⁵ Minutes of the Examinations of Schools Committee, 1 February 1900? (Manchester University library: FVU/3/3).

⁶ Higher School Certificate Minute Book I, p.50. (Bristol University library: DM2287/6/9/3/3).

⁷ For Bristol University in the 1920/21 examination year, financial results for the SCE were: expenditure: £1338.14.2d and income: £836.6.6d, making a loss of £502.7.8d. For the HSC examinations, expenditure was £694.17.8 and income: £104.0.0d making a loss of £590.17.8d (HSC Minutes I, p.50. Bristol University library: DM2287/6/9/3/6/2). Fifteen years later Bristol still faced losses, mainly because of the Higher School Certificate. In 1934/5 their SCE gained an excess of income over expenditure of £190.2.5d, but the loss on the HSCE was £641.19.8d (School Certificate Committee, Minutes II, 4 December 1935. Bristol University library, DM2287/6/9/3/6/2). In 1937, of sixteen subjects offered for SC, only the top three attracted numbers close to 700. Of the remaining subjects only four managed more than fifty candidates, the other nine reaching an average of only 22 candidates. At HSCE level only five of Bristol’s subjects attracted over forty candidates. (SCE Committee Minutes III, 26 May 1937. Bristol University library, DM2287/6/9/3/6/3).

⁸ School Examination Board minutes, 1946-1950, 31 July 1960. Account prior to audit. (Durham University library, UND/CC2/396b).

beginning the university local examinations “were conducted in an entirely disinterested manner ... it being understood that the fees were to be so calculated as to meet the cost but not to add to University income”.⁹ Until numbers began to increase significantly, the main value to the universities of taking part in the national examination system was reputational whilst the scheme also brought them into contact with schools from which they might attract future students.

Matriculation

When the Board of Education began to approach the universities about their proposal for the SCE examination, the approach in Cambridge was directed to Arthur Benson, who was Master of Magdalene College and Chairman of the ‘Previous Syndicate’. This Syndicate’s responsibility was to set entrance examinations for the university which were called the ‘Previous Examinations’. This illustrates the point that the universities’ first responses to the SCE proposal were to consider the proposal’s effect on their entrance requirements. On this the Board’s approach was both clear and very optimistic: it simply decreed that the new “first examination”, for sixteen-year-olds, was to be suitable for the majority of secondary students. The device that was designed to achieve this was that SC candidates could achieve either an ordinary ‘pass’ or a higher ‘credit’, with the latter qualifying them for matriculation.¹⁰ The fact that the former would, according to Circular 849 (1914), be “somewhat easier” than the latter and that the difference between the two would “not be so great” as to make the scheme impossible, were statements of faith without much evidence to support them. Perhaps the Board should be given credit for this, since any new policy might need to be something of a ‘fudge’ so that the main goal might be attained. James Petch, a contemporary observer of and participant in the working

⁹ Nalder Williams, 3 July 1942. *University Boards and the School Certificate Examinations*. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/3).

¹⁰ This was the main tension that lay at the heart of the SCE scheme, which was set up to accredit, according to the Board’s Circular 849, a standard of work achievable by

“pupils of reasonable industry and ordinary intelligence in an efficient Secondary School. The Form and not the pupil will be the unit for examination, and it is contemplated that a large proportion of the pupils in the Form should be able to satisfy the test. It is therefore proposed that, as is the case in most of the existing examinations, the conditions for attaining a simple pass shall be somewhat easier than those required of candidates in order that the certificate shall be accepted for the purpose of matriculation” (Board of Education, 1914).

The standard for matriculation (for university entrance) was to be given in the SCE results as ‘credit’ in comparison to a straightforward ‘pass’. The percentage of passes that were to be expected was 75%, whereas the target percentage of credits was envisaged to be 50%. Circular 849 optimistically asserted that “the difference between the standard for a simple pass and that required for matriculation purposes will not be so great as to prevent the same examination being made to serve, as the present examinations do, both purposes” (ibid., para. (v)).

relationship between the SSEC and the JMB, amusingly made the same point.¹¹ Given that the problem at the turn of the century was the plethora of examinations for which students were being entered, it is understandable that the Board of Education's officers saw that all the university entrance examinations must be part of their scheme. Each university should accept the others' examinations for the purposes of matriculation and the Board of Education thus eventually deserved credit for managing to persuade all the universities to join in.

The universities had to be persuaded to set a similar standard to each other in the SC examinations, but beyond this they were free to prescribe their own entrance requirements in terms of the number and type of subjects that had to be passed. The discussions within Cambridge show the conflicting issues that were being addressed. There had been a forty-year debate within the university about whether the Previous Examination should continue to include both Latin and Greek (Leedham-Green, 1996, p. 183). For some, particularly those in the traditional public schools, a full classical education was the essence of a broad, liberal education, which was agreed to be the fundamental aim of secondary education. However, after a debate in the University Senate in October 1918 and a questionnaire sent out to Headmasters, Greek was eventually dropped from the Previous examination in 1919.¹² By this time Cambridge was a part of the SCE system which required a pass in only one foreign language for a certificate, but the university was still at liberty also to require a pass in Latin from its own applicants.¹³ Thus a broader discussion about the aims and content of secondary education entered the debate about the relationship between the SCE and Matriculation. In the course of the University of Cambridge debates referred to above, a Professor Conway proposed a motion at a meeting of a committee considering the place of science in secondary education, that education should make a student "not merely a capable worker but an intelligent citizen of a self-governing community".¹⁴ The development of character and the capacity to benefit society were integral to both classical and liberal visions of the purpose of education, and both science and the humanities had a part to play in this. It was this demand for breadth in secondary education that the eventual grouping of subjects in the SC examinations sought to address.

¹¹ "With the [SSEC], as often with English institutions, lack of logic did not mean breakdown and chaos. A degree of haziness in a written constitution does not necessarily hinder the sensible efficiency of the slightly irrational system; it may even help it. And English universities are not on the whole refuges for intransigence, though they may harbour some not altogether ineffective intransigents" (J. Petch, 1953, p. 76).

¹² Report agreed at a meeting on 13 March 1919 (ibid.).

¹³ Latin survived as a requirement for some faculties until the 1970s.

¹⁴ Memo, May 7th 1918. (Cambridge University library: Synd III.61).

The Board of Education's mode of working with the examination boards

The Board's approach to the university examination boards was a combination of both persuasion and pressure. Since the 1902 Education Act, the Board of Education had had the power to prevent unauthorised boards from examining students whose fees were being paid by the state and once the SC examinations were underway the examination boards were from time to time reminded of the possibility of removal of this authorisation. The style of working of Bruce, Head of the Secondary Branch,¹⁵ was to get alongside those who might disagree with the Board's policies and to build a working relationship with them. He had a positive start with A. C. Benson at Cambridge,¹⁶ for Benson, who had previously been an innovative teacher of English at Eton, had been a member of the Consultative Committee in the Board of Education between 1905 and 1907, when Bruce had been Head of Secondary Branch there. Bruce would have known that Benson would be likely to support the Board's policy on examinations. So when, in a letter to Benson dated 14 June 1913, he suggested a "quiet and friendly" private meeting to discuss "the attitudes and fears of some members of the university" Benson responded positively the next day.¹⁷ Benson's reply to Bruce gave an indication not only of his own support for the Board, but also of the tenor of the debate going on in the university, part of which was motivated by a suspicion of government intentions.

On the subject of the government's plans for the School Certificate examinations those seeking to implement the Board's policy saw themselves as reformers. In his first letter Bruce, as well as proposing a "quiet and friendly" meeting with Benson, also suggested a meeting with Benson's colleagues. Benson, who clearly wanted to support the Board's SCE scheme, replied the next day turning down the latter suggestion because of the difficulties he was having with some members of his Syndicate. He wrote:

I do not know how such suspicions arise, but too deliberate an attempt to quiet them often has the contrary effect ... I think that anything done to reassure the Tory element here as to the policy of the Board – and it is not only the Tory element – should be done incidentally – if it is delivered frontally, it will, I believe, lead to still further misapprehension and misinterpretation.

¹⁵ W.N.Bruce in 1886 became Assistant Commissioner, Charity Commission and from 1894-5 Secretary to the Bryce Commission. In 1900-3 he was Assistant Secretary at the Board, in 1903 Principal Assistant, Secondary Schools Branch and thus responsible for the implementation of SCE. He became 2nd Secretary in 1919 (Aldrich & Gordon, 1989, p. 33).

¹⁶ A.C.Benson: Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. 1905-1925.

¹⁷ Letters between Bruce and Benson dated 14 and 15 June 1913. (Cambridge University library: Synd III.5).

It is very difficult to run these suspicions to earth and quite impossible, as I have said, to trace their origin. At the last meeting of my Syndicate I happened to say that the Board, I knew, not only did not wish to control examinations, but encouraged diversity and independence. “At present!” said one of the Syndicate in a prophetic way; and added something to the effect that we might be sure that the ultimate aim of the Board was, or at all events would be, to control all higher education.

I am writing personally and unofficially in this letter.¹⁸

Benson was suggesting that he, being on the side of reform, could not understand how others could fail to take on trust the benevolent motives of the Board, but he must have known that any proposed scheme which might impinge on the independence of the University could create a conservative response. In the ultimate debate on the Previous Committee’s proposals (five years later¹⁹) a member of the university Senate, J.H Gray, spoke about the two characteristics that the Board of Education had so far been “remarkable for ... the extraordinary mutability of their views and the extraordinary vehemence with which they have tried to impose them on other bodies”.²⁰ Benson and Bruce’s correspondence continued in a friendly way, with references to a meeting “at The Athenaeum” on 18 June 1913 and a forthcoming lunch meeting in Cambridge with Benson and some of his colleagues, described by Bruce as “luncheon with reactionary trimmings” (letter dated 7 October 1913). Here we see the newly emerged, ‘liberal’ educational establishment at work, an establishment that now, without being politically radical, saw central government action as essential to social progress and its opponents as either “Tory” or “reactionary”.

Bruce was working hard to get the universities fully behind government policy. One of the proposals that Benson’s early drafts of his report had mentioned had been the amalgamation of the Joint Oxford and Cambridge Examinations Board into the combined “Examinations Syndicate” that Benson had proposed. Bruce was against this as he made clear in a letter at the end of the month. He thought it had been,

remarkable that the Public Schools’ general disposition [is] to come out of their backwater and venture into the broad current of the educational movement. They have received our proposals well, but, they are still nervous about ‘uniformity’ following on ‘state interference’ and all that sort of thing, and I fear might interpret

¹⁸ Benson’s handwritten letter, 15 June 1913. (Cambridge University library: Synd III.5).

¹⁹ The implementation of the Board’s SCE scheme was delayed by the outbreak of the First World War.

²⁰ Report of debate in Senate, 1 November 1918. (Cambridge University library: Synd III.1).

a proposal at the present moment to merge the Board and the Local Examinations Syndicate as a step in this false direction.

Bruce suggested that if such proposals could be shelved until later they might have “a better chance of being viewed in their proper light and proportion”.²¹ This was pragmatic advice on Bruce’s part, given the general level of support for the independence of schools. He was right to say that the Public Schools’ decision to be involved with the SCE was a step towards their becoming more involved in the national system but they should not, he believed, be pushed too far. He knew that the Board’s scheme would fail if the Public Schools opted out of the SCE system, or if any university decided it wanted to continue to set its own entrance examinations, as long as the fee-paying middle and upper classes were prepared to support that kind of independence. This illustrates the success achieved by Bruce in holding together a coalition of those in favour of the SCE scheme, despite the broader opposition to it, noted above.

Thus the joint Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examinations Board was left to become one of the seven SCE boards in England. What immediate effect Bruce’s intervention might have had was indicated at a one-day conference between the Board and the examination boards, after which Bruce wrote to Benson that “We were quite satisfied with the conference on Saturday and only wish the other examining bodies would try not to be left behind by the Joint-Board”.²² “Left behind” is a resonant phrase with its suggestion of the forward movement of government-led progress from which organisations could be excluded because of their own reluctance. The joint Oxford and Cambridge Board at this time was in the vanguard of support for the SCE, perhaps having recognised that their schools could not opt out of a national system of examinations that could have serious implications for the future careers of their students. But later in the SCE period that board became the specific target of Board of Education hostility and criticism. At this stage, the university most likely to have been alluded to negatively in Bruce’s letter above was London.

London University’s matriculation examinations

As has been noted above London University’s matriculation examinations had been taken by applicants to the university since 1836. The introduction of such an examination was an innovation and the university saw it as a reform in the sense that the examination

²¹ Letter from Bruce to Benson, 30 October 1931. (Cambridge University library: Synd III.23).

²² Letter from Bruce to Benson, 26 November 1913. (ibid.)

illustrated the university's determination that the main criterion for securing a place should be demonstrated potential to benefit from a university course. The function of London University itself gave a more fixed existence to the matriculation, since it had been set up as an examining body whose role was to impose a standard on the colleges associated with the university. In this respect "the standard" was both an important aspect of the way the constituent colleges related to each other as well as a statement of the level of preparedness that the university required in a student. This system was already twenty-five years old by the time Oxford and Cambridge entered the field of school examinations.

In November 1940 a senior member of the university, H. L. Eason, in a private letter to his colleague, G. B. Jeffery,²³ looked back and reflected on the importance to the university of the matriculation system. Because of the prevailing wartime conditions there had been a proposal that entry standards for the university should be relaxed, mainly for students from other countries, in view of the general shortage of students. In this context Eason wrote:

After all a matriculation examination is really only to test whether a student is fit to commence a course of study in a university ... The mandarins will never allow such sweeping concessions ... The sanctity of the 'standard' is rooted in the traditions of this university, as the hatred of the game laws is in the peasantry. In the early days of the university the 'standard' was the only virtue the University of London could profess and tradition dies hard.²⁴

Despite an occasionally light-hearted tone, the strength of the terms Eason used stands out: the "sanctity of the standard ... rooted in the traditions". For London University in 1915 it was possible that the suggestion that it might change that historic standard, or accept the standards set by other universities, was asking too much. Eason's reference to "the only virtue" which the university could profess in its early years equates the maintenance of this standard to the existence of London University itself, whose initial examining purpose had been criticised and even mocked.²⁵

²³ Eason was Principal, Royal Holloway College. Jeffery was an eminent Mathematician and held professorships in London. In 1939 he had become Chairman of London's Matriculation and School Examination Council. In 1945 he became the first Director of the University of London Institute of Education. At the IoE he was instrumental in setting up the West African Examinations Council. (Titchmarsh, 1958). In the year he died he was editing *External Examinations in Secondary Schools: their place and function*, which was published in 1958.

²⁴ Eason, 4 November 1940, letter to Jeffery. (London University library: ULEAC files, SE2 Box 449).

²⁵ Roach cited a letter of Professor Karl Pearson from December 1884: "London does not possess any University at all ... To term the body which examines at Burlington House a university is a perversion of language to which no charter or Act of Parliament can give real sanction" (Roach, 1971, p. 263).

Earlier, in an internal paper (1938), Eason had described the special status of the matriculation examination within the country:

[The London matriculation examination has] rendered a great service to secondary school education. It has maintained a uniformly high standard of basic general education and through that standard, a solid rock in the shifting sands of educational theory, has compelled the maintenance of high standards in other equivalent or similar examinations.²⁶

Here Eason claimed the University's matriculation examination as a setter of national education standards at a time when there was little else that provided this stability. The importance of London's examinations was recognised and, it appears, accepted by the other examination boards, so it is not surprising that London would be the board that would find the greatest difficulty in adapting to the SCE.

On 25 May 1917 the Board of Education sent to the university examination boards the formal invitation to take part in the examination scheme and to nominate a representative who would be a member of the Secondary School Examinations Council (SSEC). The invitation and subsequent replies are to be found in the National Archive file, ED12/246. Writing on behalf of the Cambridge side of the Joint-Board, Thomas Fitzpatrick²⁷ asked two significant questions about the co-ordinating role of the Board of Education, (ibid, 1 June 1917) but having received a satisfactory response from Bruce, he replied positively. Positive replies were also received from the Oxford Delegacy, the Cambridge Syndicate, Bristol, Durham and the Northern Universities Joint Board. It is an indication of the importance to the universities of this venture that along with Cambridge, Bristol, Durham and Liverpool (for the NUJMB) nominated their Vice Chancellors to sit on the SSEC.²⁸ However, the reply from London, sounded a note of caution, since it intimated that the University "[did] not commit themselves to the policy of accepting any other examination in lieu of the Intermediate Examinations [equivalent to the HSCE] or the first Examination for medical degrees" (ibid. 22 June 1917). London was reserving to itself the right to make separate judgements about what would be and would not be in conformity with its matriculation standard. This was a stance which London had assumed

²⁶ Eason, 31 October 1938, *The Matriculation Examination*. (London University library: ULEAC files, SE2 Box 449).

²⁷ President of Queens' College, 1906-1931; Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, 1915-17 and 1928-29. Chairman of the Examinations Syndicate, 1916/17. A member of the Consultative Committee under Acland from 1911 to 1915.

²⁸ The Vice Chancellor of Durham University at the time was Dr. W. H. Hadow, who was to have a significant association with the Board of Education.

for some time and it was thus part of the legacy which it and the other boards brought to the scheme.

Examples of the consequences of London's stance for the other boards were frequent. In a letter dated 2 November 1911 the London Board had written to the Cambridge Syndicate to inform it that their Senior Local Examinations might be becoming insufficiently challenging.²⁹ In two later volumes of minutes, covering the years from 1921-1932, there are frequent references to negotiations with London about the standard of individual syllabuses.³⁰ In September 1911 Bristol had been in correspondence about its examinations securing recognition for exemption from the London matriculation. This request was turned down until Bristol had held a further round of examinations but the request was once more declined in 1912.³¹ In 1913 the Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) wrote to London proposing "a complete reciprocity between the two bodies as to mutual acceptance of their certificates." The JMB proposed that a deputation from the JMB be received in London. The minutes of London's Matriculation and Examinations Council record the decision that London's rules for matriculation required a pass in certain subjects which the JMB's scheme did not require, and that therefore "the Board cannot recommend any acceptance, as an exemption from the London University Matriculation Examination, from which the said requirement was absent." This being so "it would not be courteous to put the Joint Matriculation Board to the trouble of arranging a deputation".³² It is with this situation in view that the Board of Education stated in its setting up of the SC Examinations that "it is essential that [the selected Examination] Bodies if they are willing to adopt the scheme at all, should agree to accept as final the verdict of any approved Examining Body that a definite standard has been attained" (Board of Education, 1914, p. 3). There was no more important issue than the overall standard of the examination, a challenge which had historically always been a complex one, but which was rendered yet more difficult when seven boards, with their varying experience and traditions, were being brought together into one system.

²⁹ Letter, 2 February 1910, from London University to UCLES. Minute Book I of UCLES, 1909-1916, p. 50. (Cambridge University library: LES1/6).

³⁰ Minute Books of UCLES, III 1921-1927 and IV 1927-1932. (Cambridge University library, LES 1/8 and 1/9).

³¹ Matriculation and School Examinations Council, London (MSEC), 29 September 1911 and 4 October 1912. Minutes of The Matriculation Board, 1911-1916. (London University library: SE1/1/4).

³² MSEC, 28 February 1913. (ibid.)

Standardising the examination boards

London's attitude during this period was subsequently described (in the Spens Report) as "more than ordinarily rigid" (Board of Education, 1938, p. 259), but the issues it raised, relating to the standard that should be set and the responsibility for setting it, were fundamental ones. At a meeting of the UCLES General Purposes Committee in February 1918 it was reported that Fitzpatrick, Vice-Chancellor and now a member of the SSEC, who had raised the earlier query about where the power should lie in co-ordinating the SCE, informed the Syndicate that it "must not take orders from the new Examinations Council but only from the Board of Education".³³ He was understandably cautious about a possible multiplicity of instructions coming from government departments, but he was also willing to negotiate directly with London University. When the committee met in March it discussed a letter that the Vice Chancellor might send to London "with regard to possible change in our standards for 1919".³⁴ However, at the next meeting the committee was told that "pressure will be brought to bear on London by the Board of Education" and it was accepted that "the new examinations Council will in any case have to co-ordinate examinations some day". In the meantime, for the Syndicate it was agreed "not to raise our own standard to try to fit a new standard which we cannot gauge".³⁵ In the committee's April meeting it was noted that the three Oxbridge Boards were all waiting for direction and in the meanwhile would "Carry out our own scheme and state that we are ready to confer". This policy was affirmed two days later: "The committee think that though the Syndicate's minimum requirements for a Certificate may appear to be somewhat less than those of some other bodies we ought not at this stage to make any change until the SSEC have stated a view".³⁶ This suggests at least a co-operative attitude, and also that the Board might be finding it difficult to set a clear direction. (See quotation from Gray, page 92 above.) The Oxbridge boards recognised the ambiguities of standard setting, and were willing to agree that their examinations were somewhat easier than London's and to do what they could to address the problem, including by modifying their own standards if necessary. Their decision to await the lead of the SSEC showed that they were now prepared to accept the significant co-ordinating role that the Council would need to play within the SCE scheme.

³³ UCLES' General Purposes Committee meeting, 20 February 1918. Assistant Secretary's minute book, Vol.2, p.63. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1 / 2).

³⁴ Ibid., 6 March 1918.

³⁵ Ibid., 15 March 1918.

³⁶ Ibid., 24 and 26 April 1918.

When the SSEC's report of its official investigation into the 1918 SC examinations was sent to the examination boards, whereas Bristol's papers were described as "undemanding", UCLES was told that in some subjects their papers were too hard (unpublished *Report of Investigators*, p. 22).³⁷ In addition London was reminded that these examinations "should not be cramped or distorted in any way by Matriculation requirements and traditions". Durham's examinations were described as "not well managed", because the Board had started on them too late, and the Northern Board was criticised for its organisation of examiners, particularly in regard to the absence of teachers on their marking panel (ibid., pp.19-21). In such comments we see the SSEC endeavouring to impose a uniform standard on the system. This was understandable, as were the difficulties experienced by the examination boards as they struggled to address the challenges they faced, but the comments about standards did not indicate merely a teething problem, as the other negative points might have done. Circular 849 had made it clear that each university would need to accept the standards of the others, and in this respect London was not following expectations, for which they were eventually publicly censured in the Investigation of the 1931 SCE. (See chapter seven.) This discussion has sought to clarify why it was that London found itself in this situation and, though the irritation of the other boards has to be recognised, it must be noted that it was the close link between matriculation and the SCE that was at the heart of these problems. It was not in fact until 1936 that London finally accepted the legitimacy of the SSEC's policy, though by this point the focus had moved from the School Certificate as the vehicle for matriculation to the Higher School Certificate.

The Secondary School Examinations Council

The Secondary School Examinations Council (SSEC) was set up by the Board of Education in 1917 to be the instrument by which the School Certificate Examinations would be overseen. A review of the Council's history by an officer in the Board of Education in 1936 described the SSEC's functions as:

1. to investigate periodically the standards and methods of award of the approved examinations;
2. to keep themselves informed of the scope of the approved examinations, by reviewing regulations, syllabuses, question papers and statistics;

³⁷ SSEC (April 1919). *Report of the Investigators into the School Certificate Examinations, July 1918*. (Cambridge Assessment: SC/GEP 1/1).

3. to concern themselves with negotiations with universities and professional bodies aimed at gaining acceptance of the SC examinations;
4. to advise the Board of Education generally on matters arising in connection with secondary school examinations.³⁸

The Board's Circular 996 announcing its intention to set up the SCE system was sent out in May 1917 with letters inviting selected organisations to nominate members for the SSEC. Seats on the Council were to be allocated to each of the examining bodies, with a place for the Welsh Board and the NUJMB having three places; the Teachers Registration Council was to have four places as were the LEAs, with two places each for the County Councils Association and the Municipal Corporations Association.³⁹ The Council's first Chairman was the Rev. William Temple, who resigned in December 1920.⁴⁰ He was to be replaced by Sir Alfred Dale, who died before taking office, and thus Cyril Norwood was appointed Chairman in October 1921. As a prominent Headmaster (formerly of Bristol Grammar School and, by then, of Marlborough School) he was already chairman of the SSEC's Standing Committee, but the Permanent Secretary did draw the attention of the Head of the Secondary Branch to the issue that Norwood was "Headmaster of a school whose examination problems can hardly be regarded as typical of the great bulk of the schools affected".⁴¹ McCulloch has noted that Norwood was the choice, from among three possible candidates, of Fisher, the President of the Board of Education (McCulloch, 2007, p. 64).

Reactions to the setting up of the SSEC

The allocation of places on the SSEC rapidly became a focus for contention between the Board of Education, the teachers' organisations and the LEAs. In response to the Board's invitation to nominate four members to the SSEC, the Teachers Registration Council (TRC) claimed that four was insufficient and its newly appointed chairman, Michael Sadler,⁴² wrote personally to the President asking him to receive a deputation so that they could press their case.⁴³ Two considerations lay behind this reaction. Firstly, the TRC regarded itself as being the voice of the teachers. At its meeting with Fisher, as reported by Bruce, its delegation declared that they came "to represent the teaching

³⁸ Internal note on the function of the SSEC, June 1936. (TNA: ED 136/642).

³⁹ Letters to selected organisations, dated 25 May 1917. (TNA: ED 12/246).

⁴⁰ Temple was the Headmaster of Repton School, and later Archbishop of York and then of Canterbury.

⁴¹ Memo, 26 October 1921, Pelham to Bruce. (TNA: ED 23/417).

⁴² Elected at a Council meeting on 15 July 1915. Minutes of TRC, 1915-1918. (TNA ED 44/7).

⁴³ Sadler, 24 July 1917, letter to President. (TNA: ED 12/246).

profession as a whole in its common and not its sectional interests”.⁴⁴ Secondly, the TRC envisaged that it would be the SSEC’s duty to set in detail the standards for the examinations, and thus it believed that teachers representing all key subjects should be on the Council, for example a science teacher should be included. The delegation also expressed disquiet about the role being given to the universities since they were seen to be hampered by “personal interest” and a lack of knowledge of the wider education system.

This reaction would not have been a surprise to the Board’s officers. When their initial description of the plans for the SCE, as set out in Circular 849, had been sent out for consultation, the TRC had responded with three main points in a memorandum written by its Secretary, Frank Roscoe. Firstly, the TRC should be allocated half the places on the SSEC. Secondly, there could be places for representatives of the universities, but not of the university examining boards. Thirdly, among the personnel linked to any examining body there should be an “adequate number of representatives engaged in teaching”. In these reactions the TRC demonstrated a belief that the SSEC should take on the aspirations which had motivated support for an ‘Advisory Council’ since the days of the Taunton Commission. The memorandum stated, “The success of the scheme depends largely upon the nature of the Authority which supervises it”.⁴⁵ In suggesting this the TRC was mistaken about the intended role of the Council, for what was envisaged was that the SSEC should be a co-ordinating authority within a devolved system and the Board’s officers had decided that the university boards, working with teachers, would be the locus for standard setting. This was a significant decision because it meant, in the case of the examinations, that teachers would look to the boards rather than the LEAs or other bodies for their lead and support. The Board of Education’s decision was in line with the scheme that the Bryce Commission had envisaged, in which power within the education system was to be devolved, but the TRC was envisaging that this power should be devolved to teachers, which the TRC would represent.

Another Board of Education file, ED12/481, reveals the further consequences of their initial allocation of SSEC places. The Association of Headmistresses passed a resolution on 14 June 1917 that there was not an adequate proportion of teachers from secondary schools on the Council. Together with the other Associations that were to make up the ‘Joint-Four’, it considered that, as it was their members who were actually teaching the students who would be entered for the SC examinations, they should be represented. Having obtained a fifth member, the TRC now pushed for a sixth claiming that elementary

⁴⁴ Bruce, 17 August 1917. Report of meeting between the President and TRC deputation. (TNA: ED 12/246).

⁴⁵ TRC, 31 May 1915, memorandum in response to Circular 849. (TNA: ED 24/1635).

school teachers should also be represented. The NUT sought representation for itself and more teacher members. The Bristol Education Committee thought that there were not enough representatives of LEAs, teachers and the professional bodies. A letter from the architects' professional body made a similar point. The College of Preceptors asked to send a deputation to the Board and another correspondent claimed that science was not sufficiently recognised. Separately the Association of Education Committees had complained that it had not been asked to provide a representative, and it was given a place in addition to the four already allocated to the LEAs. In the background Norwood resisted attempts to increase the size of the Council and particularly to admit representatives of teacher associations and the NUT.⁴⁶

The above discussion goes to the heart of my first research question, which refers to the way the examination boards, the SSEC and the teachers worked together. What I have sought to describe are the positions in which the boards found themselves as they joined this government initiative. No matter how averse to, or enthusiastic for, reform they were, they could do no other than start from where they were. All the boards knew what a complex problem was facing them and this helps to explain their acceptance of London's position and their recognition of the need to do what was necessary to maintain working relationships. However, that it took eighteen years to agree who was finally responsible for the standards to be set in the SCE does seem an inordinate period in which to sort out such a fundamental issue. One is struck by what appears to be the patience of the SSEC and the Board of Education, who allowed the examination boards a good deal of time to sort themselves out, though the Board was certainly under pressure from the teaching profession and the public. But was this flexibility one of the explanations for how rooted the examination system was able to become? A significant aspect of the initial setting up of the system was the independence which the Board of Education said was to characterise its way of working with the SSEC. The then Permanent Secretary, writing to Temple about his new appointment as the first chairman, wrote:

Mr Fisher [the President of the Board] would be glad if you would assure the Council on his behalf that it is his desire to leave them as wide a discretion as possible in dealing, on behalf of the Board as the Co-ordinating Authority, with questions which come before them ... Relations between the Board and Council should be as free and informal as possible.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ All the documents referred to in this paragraph can be found in one National Archive file. (TNA: ED 12/246).

⁴⁷ Selby-Bigge, 26 June 1917, letter to Rev. W. Temple. (TNA: ED 23/417).

Despite the challenges they faced, initially at least, a similar attitude filtered down to the SSEC's relations with the examining bodies. The Bryce Commission had suggested that such flexibility would be essential in creating an environment in which an innovation as significant as national school examinations could become embedded in the nation's education system.

Schools and the examination boards

The universities which had been examining for many years had come to think of a category of "our schools", that is, schools whose pupils were entered for that particular university's examinations. When, after the publication of Circular 849 in 1915, London University was approached by the Board of Education for its response to the proposals, it reacted by sending the circular out to their schools with a request for the Head Teachers' comments on the issues, particularly those relating to the SCE being a "group" examination and the examination of practical (Group Four) subjects. The Heads' responses make up a file of over a hundred letters, mainly from London and the surrounding counties but also from further afield nationally.⁴⁸ These provide insights into the work of Head Teachers at that significant time. On the question of the proposed examinations, the Heads were generally in favour of a group system and of examining practical subjects.⁴⁹ Their further comments reveal the existence of a felt relationship between the examination board and their schools. Mr P.B. Henderson, the Headmaster of the Strand School, Brixton, an LCC school, wrote "I am very much obliged to you for giving me the opportunity of expressing our views on Circular 849"; the Headmaster of The Lower School of John Lyon, Harrow, Mr. E.H. Butt wrote "I should be sorry indeed if any alteration were made in the grouping which is issued by **our** [*my emphasis*] examining body, the University of London". The sense of a positive relationship with the examination board is sometimes contrasted with impressions of the Board of Education. Mr. Butt continued,

Further, the less the London University is affected by the Board of Education the better for Education. This opinion may appear to be tinged by uncharitableness, but

⁴⁸ The file is in the Special Collections, Senate House library, University of London. (CF 1/16/925).

⁴⁹ Considering the criticisms that the group system soon attracted one has to wonder how fully the Heads understood what was being proposed. The Head of Finchley County School wrote on 8 November 1915, "This [group] suggestion would, I think, be beneficial. A considerable number of very good students have failed to gain SSC [London's Secondary School Certificate] owing to inability to pass in one specified subject, although they were good as regards the group". The same criticism was raised under the SCE when a failure in one subject, commonly French, meant a failure in the SCE overall.

it is confirmed by an experience of over forty years of teaching in every grade of school.⁵⁰

Mr. Butt's school was an independent school, but even those schools which now came under a Local Education Authority, such as the Strand School, perhaps had not had long enough to build up links with their Authority locally. Many of the London board's Heads raised issues that were outside the examination board's remit, but it is of interest that they thought the board might be concerned enough to help them. Mr. Henderson argued in his letter that some credit should be allowed to pupils who spent considerable time in the school cadet corps: "The war has forced upon our attention another very big question connected with an outside examination ... We are using every legitimate means to persuade boys to join the cadet corps ... they may spend on it an average of at least 3.5 hours a week."⁵¹ The relationship with an examination board afforded Head Teachers a tangible link to education policy discussion nationally; similar links were also evidenced in their frequent references to the activities of the secondary teachers' professional associations. These links, along with the additional insights into schools which they gave, also backed the examination board officers' claim to know what was happening in their schools, perhaps more so than did the Board of Education's officers.

It was the SSEC's policy to increase the number of teachers involved in examining as a way of responding to the criticism that the examination boards were too university-focused. Indeed, as candidate numbers increased, the task would have been impossible without teacher involvement. The following table shows the number of teacher-examiners in the three most popular examination boards by 1931 (SSEC, 1932, p. 157).

Table 3: Teacher examiners in the three largest boards, 1931

Board	Grade	No. Employed	Teachers	Teaching experience
O & C	Revisers	24	Nil	7
	Chiefs	48	Nil	14
	Assistants	272	3	89
London	Revisers	14	3	4*
	Chiefs	43	6	13*
	Assistants	290	84	129*
JMB	Revisers	17	9	2
	Chiefs	46	6	23
	Assistants	302	77	147

*"So far as is known" [as in original text]. *Investigation of SCE in 1931* (SSEC, 1932)

⁵⁰ Mr. E. H. Butt, 28 October 1915, letter to the London examination board. (London university library: CF 1/16/925).

⁵¹ Mr. P. B. Henderson, 19 October 1915, letter to the London examination board. (ibid.).

The table shows the Oxford and Cambridge joint-board's nearly complete reliance on current or previous university members, though a proportion of these claimed some secondary teaching experience. London and the Northern Board were much further on in the process of appointing serving teachers, though the majority of their work was still done by university appointees and the large majority of chief examiners were either serving or retired university lecturers.

The examination boards' relationships with teachers

The Acland Committee had claimed in 1911 that the university examining boards were isolated from the work of schools and had used this as an argument against their being given the responsibility of running the School Certificate. These examinations were seen as university examinations and the reputations of the universities were bound up with them but inevitably, as the SCE attracted increasing numbers, the boards had to share ownership of the system with the teachers in secondary schools. Throughout the SCE period examiners, whether university staff or teachers, were employed for the task by the universities. A file in Durham University library shows proposed appointments for both examiners and revisers being prepared for submission to the university Senate in October 1941, and the appointments being confirmed by the Acting Registrar two days later.⁵² Appointments of Head Teachers to serve on Durham's School Examinations Board were also approved by the Senate.⁵³ The practice of employing teachers as examiners had actually begun before the SCE system was introduced, though not without its being questioned. A note in the Cambridge Syndicate archive shows the President of Queens' College (Fitzpatrick) expressing the opinion that "too many presiding examiners were not members of the university", a decision which the board's officers had to justify by referring to the number of small centres that had asked to be examined.⁵⁴ On the other hand the JMB was criticised in the 1918 SCE Investigation for having no teachers on the examiners' panel (see page 98 above), though by 1931 the picture was very different, as can be seen in Table 3. Petch comments that by 1950 the JMB was employing 605 SCE examiners, of whom 486 were practising teachers (J. Petch, 1953, p. 128). What can be

⁵² Secretary of School Examination Board (Butterwell), 25 October 1941, memo to Registrar who replied 27 October 1941. Files of the School Examination Board, 1941-1947. (Durham University library: UND/CB1/D4c/2).

⁵³ Memo from Acting Registrar, 5 November 1941. (ibid.)

⁵⁴ UCLES' Syndicate meeting, 28 November 1917. Assistant Secretary's minute book, Vol. 2, p.46. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1/2).

seen during the SCE period is the coming together of the boards and teachers, as teachers became examiners and at an organisational level through the involvement with the boards of the ‘Joint-Four’ secondary teachers’ associations.⁵⁵ Progress on this may have been felt to be slow and the boards may have needed to be pushed by the SSEC, but they came to recognise that establishing formal links with teachers, and with LEAs, was an important part of a defence of their own operations.

In chapter eight of this study I suggest that by the 1940s the relationship between the boards and secondary teachers’ organisations had become an “alliance”. For this to be achieved the university examination boards had to change and, particularly, they had to achieve some kind of independence from their own universities. An example of this is shown in the correspondence that was referred to earlier between Professors Eason and Jeffery at London University. On a particular issue Jeffery had wanted to approach the schools which took London examinations directly, rather than through the usual university channels. Eason, his senior, told him that he must follow established procedures. Eventually the Vice-Chancellor had to be brought in and he judged in favour of Eason. During this discussion Jeffery wrote to Eason as follows:

There is a very widespread feeling that the University of London is the most wooden and least progressive of the eight Examining Bodies. We are rather expected to drag along at the tail and to do the right thing two or three years after everyone else has done it.⁵⁶

Whether Jeffery was right about London’s reputation or not, he was claiming that the bureaucracy of the university was hampering contacts with the schools that the examination board was supposed to be serving. The larger the schools’ examination operation became the more practical this criticism would have seemed. Thus, movement within the universities must be recognised which allowed the examination boards to respond more freely to schools, and this was part of an ongoing change that created links between teachers and the boards.

Stages in the changing relationships between the boards and others in the wider educational community were exemplified in the 1930s and 40s by changes which took place in Cambridge which were similar to those in the other boards. Initially, it was to LEA officers that the board turned for outside support. In 1936 the number of external

⁵⁵ The secondary teachers had begun to co-ordinate their efforts at the beginning of the SCE period as “the Joint-Four” association, which was created in 1919. (Sources in British Political History, 1900-1951, Vol 1. Cook, C. et al).

⁵⁶ Jeffery, 15 January 1940. ULEAC file 1936-1940. Memo to Eason. (London University library: SE2 Box 449).

members on its central governing body, the Syndicate, was increased from four to six and its university members were reduced, which meant its new ruling body comprised a third non-university members.⁵⁷ This increase was reported to be a response to a request from the Board of Education and in making these appointments the board aimed to gain LEA support. During the Syndicate meeting at which this was discussed, John Sargent, Director of Education in Essex who was already a member of the Syndicate, commented that “LEAs were even considering setting up an Examining Body of their own, so strongly did they feel that they were yet to have a voice in determining the trend of the examinations which controlled the curriculum of their schools”.⁵⁸ An additional Joint-Committee met for the first time on 1 March 1937: present for LEAs were Percival Sharp (for the Association of Education Committees), Davies (who represented City Councils), Hughes (affiliation unrecorded) and Henry Morris (Chief Education Officer for Cambridge). For the university were Grose (a member of the Syndicate), Nalder Williams, Roach (Assistant Secretary), and the Chairman of UCLES (Ramsey⁵⁹). This meeting gave those present the opportunity to exchange views on the SC examination system generally and to broach possibly contentious issues.⁶⁰ Grose asked the group “whether universities did wrong in accepting the School Certificate?”. Various answers were given. It was the Board of Education which made the mistake (Sharp); no-one could foresee what would happen (Hughes). The increase in the number of schools had altered the position (Davies) and the situation was improving because secondary school leaving ages were more standardised and it was “now possible to speak of a secondary course” (Hughes). Morris pointed out that more children were staying on at school until the age of 18; Davies noted “the freeing effect” that could be brought about by abolishing the group system. Hughes suggested that as the “vast majority of secondary pupils do not go to university ... universities should ask a much higher standard than School Certificate. Schools can easily arrange special post-School Certificate courses for boys [sic] going to university. Secondary schools can look after the non-university type of child if left free to do so”.

⁵⁷ UCLES’ General Purposes Committee meeting, 14 October 1936. Assistant Secretary’s minute book, Vol. 6, p.1. (Cambridge Assessment : C/CB 1/6). Decision confirmed at a meeting of the Syndicate on 28 January 1937.

⁵⁸ Note 8 of Syndicate meeting, 26 November 1936. In October 1938 Sargent was appointed Education Commissioner for India, which was announced at UCLES’ Syndicate meeting, 20 October 1938. Assistant Secretary’s minute book. Vol. 6, p.96. (ibid.). Post-war he was involved in devising what came to be known as ‘the Sargent plan’ that mapped out a vision for the future of education in India (Sargent, 1968, pp. xiv–xv).

⁵⁹ A.B. Ramsey, Master of Magdalene College. Chairman of the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate 1928–1942.

⁶⁰ UCLES’ LEA Joint Committee meeting, 1 March 1937. Assistant Secretary’s minute book, Vol.6, p. 23–24. (ibid.).

The Cambridge board and its supporters

The discussion gave an insight into the thinking of those who were senior in the education system and their choice of the issues on which to concentrate provided some perspective on the challenge to the involvement of the university examination boards in the system. There was unanimity that the main problem had been, and remained, the use of SC level examinations for deciding university entrance. None of those present said that the university boards should not be running the system and the Syndicate's officers might have taken comfort from this. However, some of the group's points would later be used against external examinations when the Norwood Committee looked into the future of the system. Percival Sharp, who became a member of the Norwood Committee, particularly saw himself as ensuring that the university boards should not be allowed to blow the Norwood proposals off course.⁶¹ The Syndicate's officers concluded they should not rely too much on LEAs, a reaction strengthened as they realised how teachers saw the involvement of LEA representatives on the board. Notes of a meeting held later in the year record that Davies reported that the members of the Headmasters' Association "strongly deprecate the appointment of Directors of Education to examining boards"; such appointments should be drawn from "members of Education Committees".⁶² This presumably meant that the examination boards should consult those more closely involved with schools and teaching, and not senior administrators (like Sargent). At a later meeting of the UCLES' General Purposes Committee, Assistant-Secretary Roach who had attended the Joint-LEA meeting, "sounded a warning ... concerning the need for a close front between schools and universities to maintain the independence and integrity of the examining system".⁶³ This was an admission that a combined defensive stance against the Board and the LEAs was necessary. When the examination boards realised in the early 1940s that they were under pressure from the Norwood discussions they moved even further towards embedding teachers in the management of the examinations. A School Examination Committee was

⁶¹ See the minutes of the 103rd meeting of the SSEC on 19 November 1943 in NA file ED136/131. Also, Peter Fisher cited a memo to Sharp from Williams, Head of Secondary Branch at the Board, that was designed "to see that Sharp would lead the LEA and teacher representatives in making sure that the examining bodies would be 'faithfully put in their place' if there should be any attempt to sabotage the [Norwood] proposals" (Fisher, 1982).

⁶² UCLES' LEA Joint Committee meeting, 22 November 1937. Assistant Secretary's minute book, Vol.6, p. 55. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1/6).

⁶³ UCLES' General Purposes Committee meeting, 13 October 1938. Assistant Secretary's minute book, Vol. 6, p. 91. (ibid.).

set up in Cambridge in July 1943, which was given the oversight of the SC and the HSC.⁶⁴ On the committee would be eight university representatives and eight teacher representatives, two from each of the Associations of the Joint-Four. Their responsibilities were to include the appointment of Chief and Assistant Examiners. A decision was specifically taken that LEAs “should not be represented directly on the School Examination Committee” since its purpose was “to draw the schools into as close a relation as possible to their examination system.”⁶⁵ The reference to “their” system was a significant reflection of the way ownership of the examinations was by then being seen, at least by the boards.

In a document which he prepared for the Norwood Committee in 1942, Nalder Williams summarised the progress that he saw as follows:

the schools have been working more and more in harmonious partnership with the university examining boards, both in direct relation of a school to its examining body and through the direct representation of teachers on the actual boards ... with further direct representation of the secondary teaching associations on joint-examination committees ... The result has been an increasingly fruitful partnership which, in my experience, has become a factor of real value in the development of secondary education.⁶⁶

This was of course a one-sided opinion, though supported by Nalder Williams’ colleagues, and it was part of an attempt to defend the examination board’s work, but it was not a conclusive argument that could settle the question about the benefits of the university examination boards’ involvement in the SCE. However, from the material reviewed in this chapter, it can be seen that at least Nalder Williams could point to evidence that his claims about progress were based on changes that had been achieved.

⁶⁴ James Petch’s history of the JMB illustrates that board’s work with teachers’ organisations and schools, and the way teachers had been involved in its examining from early on (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 123–131).

⁶⁵ UCLES’ Committee on examination reform, 8 July 1943, Assistant Secretary’s minute book, Vol. 6, p. 283. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1/6).

⁶⁶ Nalder Williams, 3 July 1942. *University Boards and the School Certificate Examinations*. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/3).

CHAPTER 6 : THE CAMPAIGN FOR NEW EXAMINATIONS

The initial opposition to the Board's decision to set up the SCE system can be characterised as broadly political since it emerged within the context of the debate about who should be in control of the secondary curriculum. This chapter turns to review other strands of that opposition, which I suggest were academic or empirical in their approach. From these emerged alternative schemes of examining, some of which were promoted by newly emerging groups of educational psychologists working in LEAs or universities and which are germane to my third research question. Because the early empirical work on examinations came to focus on the reliability of examiners' judgements, the examination boards and the Board of Education were faced with a serious challenge. Teachers who were in favour of reform to the examination system took up the proposal that a thorough 'scientific' investigation of it should be carried out, on the assumption that it would lead to radical change. This chapter discusses both the proposals made by academics, whose empirical work on examinations came to be co-ordinated by Philip Hartog, and the opinions of progressive teachers associated with the New Education Fellowship (NEF) who called for research which was less clearly scientific.

Philip Hartog and a 'scientific approach' to examining

In the year that the SC examinations were introduced a book was published which challenged the external examination system upon which the Board of Education had embarked. The book was *Examinations and their relation to culture and efficiency* (P. Hartog, 1918). The volume grew out of an article written by Hartog for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edition) and a paper read at a meeting of the RSA in 1911. Over the next thirty years Hartog became the leading proponent and exponent in England of a more scientific approach to the study of examinations. His book was dedicated to Michael Sadler. Both men had been involved with the external lectures programmes at their respective universities, Hartog at Victoria University and Sadler at Oxford (M. Hartog, 1949, pp. 42–43) and a further interest which linked them was the issue of examinations.

For Hartog education was made up of two main strands. Culture was the pre-eminent one, being "Activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and human feeling ...". This, however, was "that vital part of education which cannot be tested by the ordinary written examination", for examinations and tests were only capable of assessing "technical efficiency" (P. Hartog, 1918, p. xv). In this distinction can be seen a similarity

to Sadler's differentiation between the 'mechanics' and the 'art' of education (see page 127 below) for what both men advocated was an education of young people into a broadly-defined culture.¹ Hartog made two proposals for what he called "correlative reforms". The first was that "examinations should be made much more real and drastic tests of technical efficiency than they are at present"; the second that "a large portion of the educational field should be entirely freed from their [examinations'] influence" (*ibid.*, p. xv). Having emphasised the importance and extent of the theme of culture, the remainder of Hartog's book focused on his thoughts on assessing efficiency. The questions about examinations that Hartog believed needed to be answered were challenging, but they did not present a fundamental challenge to traditional examinations, rather to their exclusive use. He focused on such issues as the need to clarify the purposes of examinations, to define what exactly they were assessing and to consider more carefully the style of questions used. Further matters he felt should be addressed related to issues of reliability and the standardisation of marking, whether grades or marks were preferable, what exactly an order of merit meant, how far chance influenced examination results, the effect of nervousness on students' performance, and fairness in the administration of examinations. It is noteworthy that Hartog was not proposing the extensive use of objective questions which dispensed with the need for examiners to make judgements. Writing before 1920, he stated: "It is possible that the whole system of examinations may be ultimately transformed by the use of ... quantitative methods: but the matter is still in a rudimentary stage" (P. Hartog, 1918, p. 78). This is an interesting contemporary reference to psychometric approaches which had been in their infancy in the first decade of the twentieth century and which made significant advances during the First World War (Sutherland, 1984, pp. 128–133). A 'science' of educational measurement was coming into being, but at this stage Hartog was advocating the need for a careful analysis of examinations, a study of the evidence and the use of that evidence to improve the system.

¹ Hartog, who was a trained scientist, had written reports for Sadler when the latter was at the Board of Education. When Sadler resigned from his position there, it was Hartog who proposed him as the part-time Professor of Education History at Manchester. Then when Dr. Frank Heath left his post as Academic Registrar of London University to take the post in the Board of Education vacated by Sadler, Hartog was appointed Registrar in London. Examination reform was only one of the fields of education in which Sadler and Hartog worked together. From 1917 to 1919, while Sadler was Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University and Hartog still Registrar in London, they worked on a government Commission to plan the setting up of universities in India. From 1920 to 1925 Hartog was the first Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University and then spent another five years working for the Indian Civil Service Commission. From 1923 to 1934 Sadler was Master of University College, Oxford. Hartog returned to England in 1930 and for the following decade was the "part-time" (though working full-time) Director of the International Institute Examinations Inquiry in England (M. Hartog, 1949).

The educational measurement movement was soon to make more far-reaching claims about traditional examining as it began to look closely at the reliability of examiners' judgements in the search for an explanation for why the broader aims of education were 'not assessable' in examinations. Fuess, in his history of the first fifty years of the College Board in the U.S., shows how in the period from the First to the Second World War the battle lines were drawn between those who sought to retain essay-style questions in their college entrance examinations and those who wished to dispense with them altogether because of their reliance on "unreliable" marker judgements (Fuess, 1950). Once these judgements became the focus of attention and criticism, scientific approaches to examining did present a challenge to the existence of the kind of traditional examinations which made up the SCE system. We shall look in more detail at this issue below but first it is necessary to consider the impact of Hartog's main proposal.

Other jurisdictions now exist, for example in The Netherlands and the USA, where school and external assessments of secondary students are combined in some way. The current debates around the strengths and weaknesses of these systems are not relevant to this study, but it would be true to say that if Hartog's proposed reforms had been more seriously taken up, the system in England and Wales could have been less reliant on external examinations. In considering my third research question two further questions thus arise: Why was the fully external examination model followed in preference to Hartog's? And, once this choice had been made, why was it so hard to change it? Conceiving of education as having two distinct parts, one believed to be assessable and the other not assessable at least by traditional means, was a notion which affected the way the SCE was set up. In his paper for the Bryce Committee about the *Abitur*,² Sadler had pointed out that only five school subjects were examined by means of an externally moderated written examination (Sadler, 1936, pp. 146–147). Other subjects, for example geography and religious knowledge, were assessed from the pupils' coursework and possibly an interview. Hartog also suggested that subjects like history and literature required too broad a cultural view to make them easily assessable in a written examination (P. Hartog, 1918, pp. 25–26). These examples reveal the difficulty of a dual system of external and internal examination, for there will all too easily be an assumption that the subjects which are externally assessed are those which are important. The School Certificate scheme, in its attempt to define a broad, liberal education for secondary students, proposed three main 'examinable' groups of school subjects: English studies,

² Reproduced as chapter seven in *Essays on Examinations* (Sadler, 1936).

Languages, and Science and Maths. Beyond these was a fourth group, comprising Music, Drawing, Manual work and Housecraft which, the Board initially asserted, were not “in the same way as the others, capable of being tested by a written examination” (Board of Education, 1914. para. vi). However, these subjects are closely linked to Hartog and Sadler’s desired concepts of ‘culture’ and the ‘art of education’, so it is unsurprising that as soon as the SCE scheme was introduced teachers’ groups began to argue that Group Four subjects should be given equal status by counting towards a certificate. This pressure produced incremental changes to the rules over the next thirty years. The SCE was a system based on external examinations and it seemed that professional opinion at least was not convinced that a combined system gave equal status to those subjects which, because they had a wider cultural reference, should be examined internally.

Measurement rather than examination

Hartog’s comment above alluded to the development in the first two decades of the twentieth century of more scientifically rigorous, psychometric approaches to educational measurement. Wooldridge has described the empirical uses in England of such testing by such prominent educational researchers as Charles Spearman, Cyril Burt and Philip Ballard.³ The importance of this work for the SCE was not only that it claimed to be ‘more scientific’ but that it was clearly recognised as “a devastating assault on the established system” (Wooldridge, 1994, p. 222). Burt wrote confidently,

The psychological test may be regarded as a special form of examination, but it has refined the devices of observation, report and experimental testing until now they have an objective value and scientific validity (in Sadler, ed. 1936, p. 107).

One must notice in Burt’s sentence above that the new tests had had to be “refined” so that they could have “an objective value”, and that process would by no means be insignificant if it included in its own way a narrowing of the curriculum being tested. That the scientific study of a phenomenon such as the ability of children required it to be ‘made measurable’ was an understood and contested concept. Sutherland’s *Ability, Merit and Measurement: Mental Testing and English Education, 1880 – 1940* showed how research on educational measurement began with identifying children with special educational needs and then developed into the task of selection for special places in secondary schools. In her chapter

³ Cyril Burt, Professor of Education at University of London and London County Council (LCC) psychologist; C.E. Spearman, Professor of Psychology, University of London; Dr. P.B. Ballard, LCC school inspector. In his book *Mental and Scholastic Tests* Burt notes that in 1913 he was the first psychologist to be appointed to work for the LCC (Burt, 1921).

“Measuring normality” Sutherland concluded by returning to the work of Binet, noting that he was sceptical about a trait such as Spearman’s ‘general intelligence’ and was inclined to stress the complexity of each individual’s intellectual profile. His measure of normality was for him essentially a rough-and-ready device for identifying those children who might need special help, not a definitive judgement, not a tool to discriminate between one ‘normal’ child and another (Sutherland, 1984, p. 127).

Sutherland’s analysis of the reports of the Consultative Committee – that on the use of psychological tests in the education system published in 1924, the Hadow report on the education of the adolescent (1926) and the Spens report on Secondary and Technical Schools (1938) – showed how they hesitated on the subject of objective testing of secondary students. They focused on the issue of pre-secondary selection, and only tentatively followed the first of those reports which also suggested, more controversially, that such tests could be used to “differentiate between normal children and adolescents in educational classification and selection, and in vocational guidance” (ibid., p.151).

Sutherland suggested that decision makers in England came to believe that the system did not really need psychometric tests because they were comfortable with the system’s “elite” ethos and they felt they knew how to administer selection for secondary schooling without extensive testing (ibid., pp. 283–285). Academic and political opposition to its methodology and to the very concept of ‘general intelligence’ was increasingly voiced in the 1930s and 1940s (Thom, 2004). Key groups in the system could not agree within their own organisations about a common position on such testing, for example the National Union of Teachers (Sutherland, 1984, p. 272) and the Association of Education Committees (ibid., p.281). Sutherland concluded that decision makers inclined to the opinion that, “the extra refinement of the [examination] process which the inclusion of an intelligence test might bring, was not worth the labour and expense, and perhaps delicate negotiations, which it would entail” (ibid., p. 262). Thus, the fact that objective approaches to examining were first implemented in selection tests for secondary schooling, meant they were less likely to be introduced in the SCE for sixteen-year-olds.

The New Examiner movement

The academic community’s focus on the credibility of the examiners’ marking intensified during the 1930s. A significant critique was published by Valentine, and later Hartog and Rhodes published their influential *An Examination of Examinations* (P. Hartog & Rhodes, 1935) and *The Marks of Examiners* (P. Hartog & Rhodes, 1936). Valentine’s

work demonstrated the “arbitrary nature of some [grade] awards” of the SCE but his main concern was the “variability and unreliability of marking in the examinations themselves” (Valentine, 1932, p. 26) particularly in questions requiring essay-type answers (*ibid.*, p.167). The work on examinations done by this group was supported by three conferences organised by the International Institute Examinations Inquiry (IIEI), involving U.S assessment experts and representatives from various European countries.⁴ Commenting on the first conference C.H Judd, from the University of Chicago, noted that the English group was “many years behind the times ... They are evidently in the first stages of scientific thinking...” (M. Lawn, 2008, p. 45) The resulting work of the English group, mainly done by Hartog and Rhodes, reinforced findings that examiners varied widely in their judgements on the same answers and that they could even vary significantly from their own marks when presented with the same answer scripts at a later date.

In his introduction to his early volume, *Mental Tests* (1920), Philip Ballard had referred to the claim of the US psychologist, Edward Thorndike, that “Everything that exists, exists in some amount and if it exists in some amount it can be measured” (Ballard, 1920, p. 2). He described the basis of the problem with judgemental examining in this way:

it is almost impossible to find different examiners of the same scripts arriving at the same marks. They form different estimates because they attach different values to the component factors (Ballard, 1920, p. 213).

Ballard and his colleagues were right to point out that marking essays was by no means the reliable process that examiners might have wished to claim it to be.⁵ His next publication, *The New Examiner*, was a concentrated attempt to show how his thinking should be applied to examinations at the end of secondary education. By 1949 the book had been reprinted thirteen times. Early in the book Ballard committed the new examiner to setting large numbers of short questions and to taking away the marker’s “discretionary power and [binding] him down to a rigid scheme of scoring” (Ballard, 1923, p. 23). He recognised

⁴ The Inquiry was funded by the Carnegie Foundation and held its first conference in Eastbourne in May, 1931. Its aim was to consider new approaches to examining and Hartog, Sadler and their colleagues all agreed that significant change was needed. Lawn has usefully categorised the participants in these conferences, and in the British delegations, as “comparative educationists”, such as Sadler and Hartog; “educational scientists”, such as Spearman, Ballard, Burt and Godfrey Thompson; and “progressive educators” (mostly with links to the NEF), such as Boyd (from Glasgow), Percy Nunn, Zilliacus (Finland), and Bovet (Geneva) (M. Lawn, 2008, p. 23).

⁵ A quaint change of vocabulary in the early days of the local examinations indicates the dawning of this realisation. In the first couple of years of the Cambridge Local Examinations examiners were described as “looking over” the students’ completed scripts, but very soon the word used for this examiners’ activity was changed to “marking”. The implication of the earlier phrase was that the examiner could quickly identify the overall quality of the work. The later choice of word, with its overtones of ‘read, mark, learn’, suggested that at the least the scripts had to be carefully read (Watts, A. in Raban, S., 2008, p. 37).

that what happened in some assessments was evaluation rather than measurement, but he asserted that even scales of value can be objective. Providing it was possible to conceive of “more or less” of some attribute it would still be possible to measure it. Or, the examiners should do all they could to make it measurable.

It should be the aim of all those who would advance human knowledge to press the possibilities towards the objective end of the scale – to extend as far as may be the application of exact measurement, and to eliminate as far as may be all those subjective factors that prevent us from seeing things as they really are (ibid., p. 51). The confident, empiricist assumptions that lay under the statement about “seeing things as they really are” were soon to be challenged, not least by teachers. Ballard returned in his eleventh chapter (“Flecks and flaws”) to the criticism that the new examinations would not test “the mind’s capacity to cope with big things” (ibid., p.122). He answered this by asserting that what was being assessed in any test was “the ability to think to good purpose” and that this was what was tested in a short, objective question just as it was in an essay. “The examined products are different, but the evaluated processes are the same” (ibid., p.123). It was this conclusion that was not convincing to the wider community of educational policy makers, examiners and teachers.

The second half of Ballard’s book provided advice to subject teachers who wanted to put into practice the techniques of the new examining in English, Mathematics, Geography and so on. The chapter on History recognised the subject’s interest in “big ideas”: how it sought both to report and to explain events; how it reflected on causal relationships; and how “To the difficulty of choice and emphasis is added the difficulty of interpretation – of drawing sound inferences from the events that are studied” (ibid., p.221). After such a broad, and sound, summary of the subject’s aims at the secondary level it was disappointing to see the many short questions, focused on small chunks of factual information but capable of being objectively marked, which Ballard proposed. Popular though Ballard’s book was it failed to persuade its readers that its proposals should result in a radical overhaul of the examination system and the introduction of a “new examination”. Teachers adhered to a wider view of the task of education, and they thus resisted the idea of ‘making things measurable’, as we shall see as we look at the discourse about examinations within the New Education Fellowship.

The New Education Fellowship

The New Education Fellowship (NEF) was, according to the *Journal of Education* in March 1917, “an international fellowship of teachers interested in the new ideals of

education necessary for the new age” (Brehony, 2004, p. 736).⁶ The Fellowship was concerned with any matter which might be termed ‘progressive’ in the field of education, and school examinations were only one, though a major one, of its concerns. As an organisation that initially had roots in Theosophy the first of the NEF’s published principles gave an indication of what was sometimes referred to as its “faith”: “The essential object of all education should be to train the child to desire supremacy of spirit over matter”.⁷ A special edition of *New Era*, published in 1925, was given entirely to examinations and its front cover announced its radical approach with the question, “Should the present examination system be abolished?” The leading article, under the heading “The Outlook Tower”, stated that the next step in reform would be to replace external with school examinations and school records, “the scholars being classified by the persons who know them best”.⁸ In 1929, at a meeting on 19th August during its annual conference in Elsinore, the NEF set up an Examinations Enquiry Committee. The tone of the event was described in this way:

The overwhelming majority [of those who were present at the meeting] were strongly critical of the existing [examination] systems, many representatives feeling that any real educational advance will be difficult, if not impossible, until existing examination systems are abolished or reformed.

This announcement was followed by the setting out of seven principles which were supposed to guide the enquiry:⁹

1. examination systems interfere with education
2. there is a need for a thorough enquiry into the working of examinations
3. teachers should play an active part in examination reform
4. the enquiry should include consideration of the “scientific measurement movement”
5. the impact of examinations on the health of candidates should be considered
6. decisions about entry to university should be based on examination results and other information from within schools
7. examinations hamper a “creative, spiritual, active and responsible approach” to education.

⁶ Brehony’s paper focuses on the NEF’s seven international conferences held in Europe between 1921 and 1936 and regional conferences in South Africa (1934), New Zealand and Australia (1937).

⁷ *New Era*, 1925, vol. 6, No.21, backcover. *New Era* was described as “the organ of the NEF” and was published in English, French and German.

⁸ *New Era*, 1925, vol. 6, Special Edition, p.2.

⁹ *New Era*, October 1929, vol. 10, p. 216.

The contradictory nature of these principles indicated how difficult it was going to be to reach an agreed way forward. It is thus not surprising to find in the special edition of *New Era* (1925) that though the Fellowship supported a scientific investigation of examinations it had reservations about intelligence tests which, according to the leading article, could not “measure emotional reactions” or “the quality of the personality”. What was needed, continued the leader, was “something that will reveal what we may best describe as the voltage power of the soul” (ibid., p. 3). Given the NEF’s principles, Brehony found the trend within the NEF’s towards positivism and empiricism “surprising”, but he also associated Sadler with that emphasis,¹⁰ citing his preface to the proceedings of the 1929 Conference (Brehony, 2004. p.743). Sadler’s views would, however, have been less empirical and more similar to those of a Mr. J. Russell, another contributor to the 1925 Special Edition, who described himself as ‘an examiner’ and who made a distinction that Sadler would have made: that examinations were “tests to some extent of raw knowledge, of conformity to old types, not of original vision and spiritual adventure” (ibid., p.7).

Strongly polemical though some of the writing in the special edition was, two of the main articles put an opposite point of view. Firstly, Geraldine Coster, a teacher, argued in the following way: elementary education was, she wrote, fundamentally concerned with “analysis” and secondary education should be concerned with “synthesis”. For her, therefore, tests of elementary school children *could* be of the objective type proposed, for example, in *The New Examiner*. But when it came to assessing the older students’ powers of synthesis “Dr. Ballard’s scheme seems to break down completely” (ibid., p.14). In a school leaving examination she argued there must be a test of student’s ability “to handle a subject”. So, she concluded,

I cannot see that the intelligence test system of examinations as we understand it at present can be of any great use in the scholastic world, beyond the age of twelve or thirteen (ibid., p.14).

Ms Coster then went on to give credit to the Local Examinations which her school took (provided by the Oxford Delegacy). “The first public examinations (School Certificate) are on the whole reasonable and well-devised (ibid., p.15)”, she asserted.

This article was followed by another, written by J. H. Badley who, as founder of Bedales School, had a significant claim to progressive ideals. He also rejected intelligence tests as a replacement for the existing examination system. Provided schools were offered

¹⁰ In 1929 Sadler was President of the NEF English section. His presidential address on the theme of examinations is referred to on page 127 below.

a good choice of subjects, a chance to submit their own syllabuses and that the examination questions tested “intelligence, knowledge and ability”, Badley concluded,

Such an examination to be taken about the age of sixteen, I should wish to retain, and I doubt if, for the majority, it could be usefully replaced by any system of intelligence tests (ibid., p.19).

On the other hand, the final article in the series, from the Headmaster of Tiffin Boys’ School, again proposed that “external examinations should disappear” (ibid., p.26) and that a combination of internal school examinations and intelligence tests should replace them (ibid., p.27). In this sequence of articles we can recognise the emotional energy that drove some educationalists in their opposition to examinations but we can also see that when the debate was joined by classroom practitioners and head teachers the demand for the abolition of external examinations was not uniformly made. In addition, for some members of the NEF, more focus on “scientific” examining came into conflict with their emphasis on the education of the spirit.¹¹ When we consider why in England psychometric methods of assessment did not sweep away traditional examining we may conclude that teachers and others did not ultimately believe the more extreme claims about what such tests were capable of. Brehony proposed as “a clue to why [the NEF’s early] psychoanalytic approaches to education became subordinated to the psychology of mental differences and mental testing” that the latter at first appeared to offer solutions to the practical problem of secondary school selection, but these solutions later came to be thought of as “spurious” (Brehony, 2004, p.746).

While mental testing was treated with caution by the profession, the proposal of Hartog and others that what was needed was careful scientific study of examinations was accepted and eventually acted on. However, in the 1920s and 30s their proposals contained within them the weakness that they did not approach the task with scientific objectivity. Only if the study led to the destruction of the traditional examination system, destroyed by a “battering ram of facts” in Philip Hartog’s phrase,¹² would it have reached a conclusion

¹¹ Another noticeable feature of the writing in this 1925 publication is the facility with which the writers talked of “types” of pupils, as though it was easy to categorise them. The leading article even reported research from the United States that “a new race” was emerging as the result of modern education, a race which was “particularly characterised by their powers of intuition”. These children, said the leader, were “very clearly of the non-examination type” (ibid. p.6). Such certainty was given support by the confidence with which ‘scientific’ tests, which claimed to test personality, were advocated. In another of the articles in this special edition Charles H. W. G. Anderson from Newcastle wrote on ‘Measurement in Education’. He echoed statements by Thorndyke and Ballard when he claimed as the third of four fundamental theses that “Measurement in education is, in general, the same as measurement in the physical sciences and approaches the same order of reliability” (ibid. p.9).

¹² Referred to by Lawn in *An Atlantic Crossing: The Work of the International Examination Enquiry, its Research, Methods and Influence* (Lawn, M., 2008., p.39).

that satisfied progressive opinion in the NEF. This weakness in Hartog's proposals was exacerbated when they became linked to the campaigning rhetoric in which Ballard excelled, some of which decried judgements made by examiners and teachers. In the introduction to *The New Examiner* Ballard described the fundamental weakness of examinations as being "uncertainty – a capriciousness in the working and lack of steadiness and accuracy in the results." His aim, he wrote, was "To make examinations less precarious – less dependent on human variability" (Ballard, 1923, p. 6). Though Hartog was envisaging that the issue of "efficiency" could be dealt with by questions whose marking did not overly rely on examiners' judgements, that still left what he claimed was the "vital part of education" to be assessed, presumably, by those teacher judgements towards which so much criticism was directed. This argument was coming close to a conclusion that it was impossible for anyone to make valid judgements about what were claimed to be the most important outcomes of education. The polemical tone, to be heard in the rhetorical fireworks¹³ that were a cultural feature of the writings of these otherwise mild-mannered English gentlemen, had been a problem when the English NEF had approached the Carnegie Foundation for funds. Their approach was seen as "unscientific", as well as unproductive because it was alienating the other actors involved in the running of the national examination system (Lawn, 2008, p. 43). However, faced with the IIEI's challenge to the external examinations, the SSEC and the Board had to support them. Kandel¹⁴ recorded a comment from Cyril Norwood¹⁵ to make which Norwood, in recognition of the amount of pressure the system was under, must have suppressed his doubts concerning external examinations. We may note here the considerable irony that this "devastating assault" on traditional examining played an emphatic part in its survival.

Investigating the reliability of examination marking

Durham University was the first to have taken part in a publicised experiment to ascertain the reliability of examiners' marking.¹⁶ Thus, when Hartog approached the

¹³ Fireworks lit with an ironic twinkle, which could have indicated they were exaggerating and did not really mean it. The reports of the Inquiry's meetings show the Americans having to come to terms with the implications of the British delegates' habit of ironic self-mockery (Lawn, M., 2008, pp. 45-46). How seriously were they to take these people?

¹⁴ Isaac Kandel, Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University and member of the International Institute.

¹⁵ Norwood: "Broadly speaking, I should say that the system of examination marking is as accurate as human care can make it. There is not, in any case at present, any practicable alternative" (Lawn, M., 2008, p.53).

¹⁶ Inquiry into the marking of English papers, 1931 (Turberville & Routledge, 1936, n.1, p. 321)

examination boards on behalf of the International Institute Examinations Inquiry (IIEI), Durham agreed to take part in his more thorough study. The same invitation was sent to all the boards and their reaction was to ask the other boards what they intended to do. Bristol University's School Certificate Committee considered a letter from Hartog on 26 October 1932¹⁷ which was sent on behalf of the IIEI. Hartog was aware of the reception his letter might receive and so was at pains to point out that "The [IIEI] Committee do not hold the view that examinations should be abolished, and do not regard them as a necessary evil. They regard them as necessary but they regard scientific investigations as a necessary improvement." A lack of cooperation with Hartog's committee is evidenced by the fact that two years later, on 24 October 1934, the same committee was informed that only Durham had responded to Hartog's request positively and on 5 December of that year, having asked Oxford, Cambridge, London and the JMB why they had not agreed, Bristol also declined to take part (*ibid.*, p. 202). The same request to the Cambridge board had been discussed at a meeting of the Syndicate on 18 February 1932.¹⁸ The chairman, Ramsey,¹⁹ reported on a personal meeting that he had had with Hartog, saying that he felt the IIEI's desire was to "set up an inquisition", however the Syndicate recognised the sensitivity of the situation and Ramsey had discussed the issue with the Vice-Chancellor. More revealing is that at this meeting Nalder Williams, the Secretary of the Cambridge Syndicate, stated that the examination boards had been advised by the SSEC "to decline the request sympathetically". The meeting therefore "unanimously carried that the request, courteously, be not received." The Board of Education's surrogate and all but one of the examination boards were thus united in declining to take part in the International Institute's inquiry, which confirms the context of non-cooperation that Monroe, the International Institute's chairman, had described (in a document dated 7th November 1932). However, this response was coordinated not by the two older universities, as suggested in the Institute's files, but by the SSEC.²⁰

The examination boards and the teaching profession at large were well aware that there was a problem with judgemental marking, partly as a result of the earlier experiment at Durham on the marking of English. The Bristol Committee referred to above had received a proposal from the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters (AMA) on 18

¹⁷ Letter from Hartog 17 October 1932. Minutes of the School Certificate Committee (2) 1929-1936, p.95-6. (Bristol University library: DM2287/6/9/3/6/2).

¹⁸ UCLES' Syndicate meeting, 18 February 1932, item 2. Assistant Secretary's Minute Book, Vol. 5, p.52. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1/5).

¹⁹ A.B.Ramsey, Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge. Chairman of the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate from 1928 to 1942.

²⁰ The reference to Oxford and Cambridge is found in Lawn (2008, p.49).

May 1932 that “a searching enquiry into present methods of examining and marking School Certificate English is urgently necessary” and this was supported by a published article (dated December 1931) by Charles Roberts, an AMA member, on the same subject.²¹ In addition, the AMA was requesting that at least one senior member of each marking team should have recent experience of teaching in a secondary school, and that teachers’ estimates of pupils’ grades should be taken into account in borderline cases. Cambridge too, in response to the earlier Durham study and representations from teachers’ organisations, had been reviewing its co-ordination procedures and was emphasising the need for chief examiners to both co-ordinate and revise markers’ marking. The Cambridge Syndicate and its Awarding Committee were told, in the year following the SSEC’s 1931 Investigation, of work that was being done at the board to make the standardisation of marking more rigorous.²² The examination boards were thus indicating that they were responding already to the problems that the IIEI was intending to investigate.

After the publication of *An Examination of Examinations* (P. Hartog & Rhodes, 1935) a robust defence of the work undertaken by the boards was made by Turberville²³ and Routledge writing in the journal *History* (Turberville & Routledge, 1936). This paper accepted that *An Examination of Examinations* was “disquieting” which, given the newspaper headlines which had greeted its publication, could not be denied.²⁴ However, when its conclusion was that “the examination system is ... most unreliable” the pamphlet (this was the term the writers used about the publication, since it was a shorter version of the later book *The Marks of Examiners*) was in danger of implying that “test by examination is after all little sounder than selection by favouritism and jobbery”(ibid., p.334).²⁵ Given the paper’s authors’ important links to the Joint Matriculation Board, their experience as examiners and the fact that by this date the procedures of the examination boards had been tightened up, this paper was a serious response to Hartog and Rhodes’s criticisms of the examination system. Turberville and Routledge’s main point was that far

²¹ AMA proposal, 18 May 1932. Minutes of the School Certificate Committee (2) 1929-1936, p.89. (Bristol University library: DM2287/6/9/3/6/2).

²² UCLES’ Syndicate meeting, 18 February 1932, item 8, p. 52 and Examiners’ and Awarding Committee, 12 December 1932, p. 105. Assistant Secretary’s Minute Book, Vol. 5. (Cambridge Assessment: C/CB 1/5).

²³ Arthur Stanley Turberville was Professor of Modern History at Leeds University from 1929-1945. He was chairman of the Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board from November 1941 to November 1944 (J. Petch, 1953, p. 9).

²⁴ Lawn cites from the IIEI files the following headlines: “Chance in Examinations”, “Weathercock Minds”, and “Examination Luck”, and the following conclusion from *The Schoolmaster*: “vested interests of a commercial kind have been allowed to grow up around our secondary school examinations” (Lawn, M., 2008., p.52).

²⁵ As one might expect from two historians, the wording here refers to their description of the social context from which public examinations emerged. More audacious was their claim that “the examination system is at least as great a landmark in the history of democratic institutions as the Reform Act of 1832” (ibid. p.324).

from Hartog and Rhodes' study being "an examination of examinations" it had in fact been "an examination of examiners". Their argument was that the research left out of account the fact that examiners did not work on their own but as members of teams, and that processes of training and supervision were in place to bring examiners into line with an agreed standard. This structure of support was not provided in the research, so the paper claimed, "There is a great deal to be said about the examination system which is not dealt with in this pamphlet" (ibid., p.323). The paper did, though, accept that as a human system it would not be perfect. "The system ... must be worked by human agency" and some individual injustices may result, "but the community is a good deal more important than individuals, and no one is going to propose the abolition of Board of Trade certificates – at least no one who travels by sea – just because of the fallibility of examiners" (ibid., p. 325). But it rejected the suggestion (this refers to Hartog's proposal about only examining 'efficiency') that only knowledge of facts could safely be tested and stated that it would be an "absurdity" to ignore "evidence of imagination ... thoughtfulness ... and power to apply [hard work]" (ibid., p.327). The paper concluded with a description of the processes which had been put in place by the boards to ensure the quality of examination papers and to train and supervise examiners, putting a particular emphasis on the importance of appointing trusted and reliable chief examiners.

Sadler, in a reported defence of *An Examination of Examinations*, claimed that the pamphlet's "disclosures in no way impugned the good faith of examiners or the high integrity of the systems under which they worked": the disclosures should be accepted by the examining authorities as "an invitation to them to test their own methods by investigations not less exact, searching and impartial than those which the committee had employed" (*The Times*, 2 January 1936). But in the event some examiners' work had been held up to public ridicule, so it was not surprising that the boards were reluctant to take part in such studies.²⁶ An indicative examination board response to this may be seen in an irritated draft letter by Shurrock, Secretary of the London University Examinations Council, which noted that the report did indeed "shake confidence" in the examinations, as Sadler had admitted.²⁷

²⁶ It was pointed out at the time that the History examiners were misled into expecting to have to differentiate between the scripts they were given, when in fact the selected scripts "had all been awarded similar moderate marks" (ibid., p.322). However, Hartog and Rhodes denied that the examiners had been misled (P. Hartog & Rhodes, 1936, p. 339).

²⁷ S.H. Shurrock, January 1936, draft letter. University of London, Examinations and Assessment Council, 1936-1940. (London University library: SE2 Box 449).

Experimentation

In 1935 the NEF published a booklet entitled, *The Examination Tangle and the Way Out*, which gave an insight into ‘progressive’ thinking about examinations at the time. Its position on assessment was not a radical one. It acknowledged that “A few new education schools maintain no evaluation is necessary” but the booklet argued that such a view “... not only ignores society but forgets the individual’s dependence on it” (New Education Fellowship, 1935, p. 9). The NEF’s analysis of the contemporary situation recognised the changing character of secondary education and described the underlying challenge as “finding a solution for the intimate contact and immediate intuition possible to small groups, within the large and amorphous communities of which the modern civilised world is composed” (ibid., p. 10). The booklet reiterated the meritocratic aims of a national assessment system, citing approvingly Professor Fred Clarke’s comment on Canadian education with its goal of a “highly diversified Common Good, where each can find both his own special medium of self-fulfilment and the demand for his best services in that medium” (ibid., p.13). The key question the booklet addressed was, “Is there then no way of maintaining the freedom of teaching without submitting to the incubus of external examinations?” (ibid., p.25). Each of the above sentences about the content of the booklet demonstrated a search for balance which would have attracted Sadler’s support.

According to the NEF the way out of the “tangle” was that external examinations should be replaced “by the school record, including internal examinations” (ibid., p.33). Its proposals were similar to what became recommendations of the Norwood Committee, which is an important reminder of the level of support for the NEF’s proposals and that Norwood himself spoke on NEF platforms.²⁸ Of the NEF’s five main recommendations (ibid., p.73) the first four can be clearly related to similar recommendations in the Norwood Report.

- School reports should be used for secondary selection;²⁹
- “abolition of all external examinations” before the age of sixteen;³⁰
- SC examinations should not be used for university entrance;³¹
- school reports should provide more information to employers;³² such reports “might cover the whole of a child’s activities and interests, describing physical

²⁸ E.g., the NEF’s 1937 conference in New Zealand. Chapter 5 of the biography of C.E.Beeby (Alcorn, 1999).

²⁹ Norwood Report, recommendation 5 (Board of Education, 1943, p. 139).

³⁰ Norwood Report (ibid., p. 45) and recommendation 11 (ibid., p.140).

³¹ Norwood Report (ibid., pp. 27-28) and recommendation 12 (ibid., p.140).

³² Norwood Report (ibid., p.48) and recommendation 18 (ibid., p.141).

development and family history, enumerating special interests and hobbies, and making some evaluation of creative and social activities” (ibid., p.70).

Three of the above Norwood recommendations were presented as calls for further investigation, and a willingness to experiment with different assessment methods was a positive feature of work in schools in this period. Various experiments in devising school records had been conducted during the previous twenty years, such as that developed by the Industrial Health Research Board with the LCC, which Burt had helped to devise (Dale, 2012). Objective tests were also tried out in schools, which some teachers thought useful for vocational guidance and providing evidence to support their judgements of the abilities of pupils. Norwood himself introduced the use of IQ tests in his last year as headmaster at Harrow: the results were published, with a discussion of what might be learned from them, in the school magazine.³³

Experimentation was a concept which attracted teacher support. In the 1940s the Norwood Committee commented favourably on the evidence given to it of the women’s associations’ willingness to consider new methods: in comparison the men’s “attitude throughout was somewhat conservative”.³⁴ In her retrospective account of the work of the Association of Assistant Mistresses, Olive Hastings recalled the demands for a major effort “to free the curriculum from domination by the examination syllabus or to allow examinations to follow the curriculum, with prolonged discussion and experiment on internal tests and internal assessment by teachers ...”.³⁵ A report for the Headmistresses’ Association similarly insisted that the Board’s later seven-year delay in replacing the SCE should be a time when “various kinds of experiments will have to be tried, but they should be experiments made with an open mind”.³⁶ However, the Board of Education came to think that willingness to experiment alone would not prove sufficient when decisions had to be taken about how the national assessment system might actually be reconstructed.

³³ *The Harrovian*, 31 March 1934, vol. 47, issue 2, pp. 39-44.

³⁴ Minutes of 15th Norwood Committee meeting, 22/23 January 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

³⁵ Hastings, O. April 1978, pamphlet *In retrospect or reminiscence*, p.8. (Modern Records Centre, Warwick University: MSS59/4/7/15).

³⁶ Minutes of Education Committee, Association of Headmistresses, 9 March 1945. (Modern Records Centre, Warwick University: MSS188/1/5/1).

Michael Sadler

Michael Sadler was one of the major educationalists of this period³⁷ who consistently represented a “commitment to Liberal thinking” (Lowe, 2004),³⁸ beginning with his contribution to the work of the Bryce Commission. About the examination system Sadler’s belief was that it was necessary but it needed to be radically reformed. “Let us cherish the hope”, he had said in a lecture to the Ruskin Society of Birmingham in December 1899, “that the future may see some limits set to the idolatrous worship of certificates, and to the tyranny of examinations” (Sadler & Higginson, 1979, p. 40). He was in favour of a scientific investigation of examining, but his vision for education was much more to see it as an art, or a spiritual journey, than a subject ‘made measurable’ for scientific analysis. In relation to the three groups of actors of my title, Sadler, who had contacts in all sections of the education service, was most closely related to the ‘the state’, though more specifically to the regional branches of it. After leaving his post as Director of Reports and Special Enquiries in the Board of Education he was part-time Professor of Education at Manchester University from 1903-1911. During his time there he wrote influential reports for a number of Local Authorities to assist their planning for secondary education in their areas (Grier, 1952, p. 133). Though he was willing to co-operate with it, he did not abandon his concerns about the examination system. He joined the Consultative Committee in 1907 and he was therefore a member at the time that the Acland Report was produced. As Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University (to which he was appointed in October 1911) he was a member of the Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board from 1912 to 1920 (Petch, 1953, p. 23, footnote).

On several occasions the possibility of his filling a central government position was discussed³⁹ but his role remained that of an independent thinker rather than a member of the central authority. Of particular interest to this study is that, when his possible invitation to join Lloyd George’s government was rumoured, in private letters to his family he characterised himself as “practically the leader of the teaching profession” (Sadler, p.274), a claim based on the fact that he was by then Chairman of the Teachers’ Registration

³⁷ In the preface to an extensive bibliography of Sadler’s published works, Marriot noted that he was “in the estimation of many of his contemporaries, the country’s foremost authority on education” (Pickering, 1982, p. xii).

³⁸ R. Lowe on Sadler in the Dictionary of National Biography. (Matthew, Harrison, & British Academy, 2004, p. 563).

³⁹ There were early discussions about his becoming an MP with Joseph Chamberlain (Sadler, 1949, p.66), being Permanent Secretary in the Board of Education when Morant left (*ibid.*, p.216) and about being asked to be President of the Board of Education in Lloyd George’s government in 1916 (Dean, 1994, p. 60).

Council (TRC), which had been reconstituted in February 1912.⁴⁰ Sadler and his colleagues on the TRC were ambitious to see their organisation develop into a teachers' body equivalent to the General Medical Council, thus gaining an increased status for the teaching profession in society. In the List of Registered Teachers, 1917, the first published by the reconstituted TRC, an Official Statement, dated March 1915, was printed, claiming:

The Register itself is but the beginning of a movement towards the promotion of self-government and self-organisation such as will place the work of teaching on a truly professional basis (Teachers' Registration Council, 1917, pp. 28–29).

As far as national examinations were concerned, this statement envisaged that the Council would take an active part in developing policy by holding places “on the official advisory body to be instituted in connection with the suggested scheme for the co-ordination of examinations as outlined in Circular 849 of the Board of Education”.⁴¹ Sadler's more general ambitions for the TRC were not to be fulfilled. Despite Secretary Roscoe's attempts to encourage teachers to register and official support from the NUT, in the eyes of many teachers there seemed to be little advantage in being on a register (Lawn, 1987, pp. 66–71). In addition, the influence of teacher unions, the NUT and the Joint-Four, was increasing and they were being “drawn into closer relationships with the Board [of Education] and the Local Education Authorities, and the desire to create a self-governing profession dwindled” (Baron, 1954, p. 142). Importantly for this current research, Baron could also have added other bodies to which the teachers' organisations were moving closer, namely the examination boards.

Sadler on the future of examinations

Sadler's consistently ‘Liberal’ vision was that a balance had to be achieved between the uniform focus of a state system and the individual freedom of independent enterprise. He frequently referred to the “two-mindedness” of English education which

⁴⁰ The continuance of the first Teachers' Registration Council, had become a struggle between Morant and the NUT, as the former did not have any “sympathy for ... that section of opinion that sought to make teaching a self-governing profession” (Baron, p.138). Yoxall, an M.P. and General Secretary of the NUT, saw Morant's actions as manoeuvres “to reduce teaching to a State function and teachers to State functionaries” (ibid., p.140). Towards the end of Morant's time in the Board of Education, he performed a surprising *volte face* and agreed that a reconstituted Professional Council might be set up, which was effected by an Order in Council dated 29th February 1912. The TRC was eventually disbanded by an Order in Council in 1949.

⁴¹ Teachers' salaries and pensions would also be considered by the Council, it would play a part in representing teachers' views to the public, and it would organise “systematic research into educational problems and so play an important part in the development of a true science of education...”. The Register would provide reassurance to the public that those appearing on it were fit and proper persons to be teachers. “The proper test of this fitness is one devised and applied by the recognised representatives of the profession itself” (Teachers' Registration Council, 1917, p. 29).

hesitated between these two points of view (Grier, 1952, p. 120). In January 1929 two significant articles about examinations by Sadler appeared in different journals. In them he perceptively described the place of examinations in English education at the time and he also looked ahead to where the system might be leading.⁴² At the annual conference of the English Section of the NEF in London on 5 January 1929 Sadler had delivered the presidential address entitled “Examinations”. In it he suggested that examinations had been a useful device to protect the independence of schools “from the threatened monopoly of an unintelligent and one-sided state control” (*New Era* 1929 vol.10 p.10). Sadler recognised how deep-rooted examinations were in the English system. “Examinations are the English destiny” (ibid. p.12) was one of his memorable phrases in this paper, which acknowledged that given the nature of English society there could be no dispensing with them. He was more perceptive than some of his contemporaries in seeing the way that education was developing with “more and more English boys and girls [having to] pass examinations as part of the routine of their existence” (ibid. p.12). A recognition that examinations responded to a demand from society that individual students should leave with some recognition of what they had gained from their schooling could help us to account for the examination system’s ability to endure, despite the serious charges levelled against it. But, though Sadler was willing to work to help examinations to continue, he returned to his view that being educated involved elements of both a “mechanical” process and “an art” and thus, “For the mechanical purposes of education, the examination system is rather a good device. But its effects on education as an art are devastating” (ibid. p.13). In this paper he reiterated his proposed elements of a reformed system: that an examination should be merely “a qualifying test” that is, it should not grade pupils but simply attest “the ripeness⁴³ of the successful candidates for a further stage of study” (ibid. p.17), and there was a need for a thorough-going investigation of examinations of which there has been “too little scientific observation”. He had in mind the man who should lead such a study and informed readers of his article will have known that he was referring to Hartog (ibid. p.19).

In the same month another article by Sadler was published in *The English Review*. This also linked the issues of education and examinations to the nature of English culture: it was entitled, “The Education Needs of England”. Here he baldly stated that examinations

⁴² One can also reasonably see the appearance of these and other articles on the same subject in one month as indicative of the New Education Fellowship’s search for international funding for its proposal of a significant study of examinations in England (M. Lawn, 2008, pp. 42–43).

⁴³ The concept “ripe” here (or, mature) is a reference to the German *reife* that was used in the *Abitur* to signify a pass, or preparedness of the student for the next stage of education.

“are poisoning education” (*The English Review* 1908-1937, January 1929, p.36). Sadler began the article by noting that education in England had been less organised than in Scotland, France and Germany and he proposed greater government expenditure on education, giving as an example of an innovation that promised educational advance the founding of the Village College in Sawston, Cambridgeshire. This illustrated his vision for collaboration between government and local communities to improve themselves. Variety should be valued and government funds should support voluntary groups, which could make a contribution to his broader view of education. Schools should not merely be institutions for the delivery of a process of education: “their influence is only part of a more circumambient influence in which spiritual forces move unseen and, for good or ill, affect our feelings and our senses” (ibid. p.32). This broader view of education, linked as it was to different rich strands of English culture, was very much Sadler’s own. A mechanical view was its enemy, and it was the mechanism and restrictiveness of examinations that he warned against. “Mass methods of examination raise new problems of marking and of judgement ... there is growing uneasiness about the effects, direct and indirect of examinations, especially in secondary education” (ibid. p.37).

The above articles stressed the need for balance, between ‘art’ and ‘mechanism’, between freedom of the spirit and organisation. Such a balance responded, Sadler suggested, to the nature of English culture and one could see its outworking in political decisions and structures. In a paper given nearly twenty years before to an international congress on the administrative sciences⁴⁴ he had described two currents in English society, that of “collectivism” and that of the desire for “intellectual and religious freedom” (ibid., pp. 337-338). Both of these forces had had a profound effect on education in England, and they needed to be kept in balance in order to ensure social stability. The desire for freedom was a “safety-valve” which protected against too dominant a collectivism. Writing as he was just eight years after the 1902 Education Act Sadler saw the balance achieved between local and central government as an example of the way to resolve national reluctance over centralisation.

The central government cannot go far beyond the limits set by local feeling, while on the other hand, the local authorities cannot fall far below the standard imposed by the common will as interpreted by parliament and the central authorities. The existence of the local authorities prevents the development of bureaucratic supremacy in English affairs (ibid., p. 347).

⁴⁴ Sadler’s paper, “Increase of the Powers of the State and of the Local Authorities in English Education (1850-1910)”, was published in the report of the congress (M. Harris, 1911, p. 335).

Sadler's description in these articles of the place of examinations within the English educational culture is persuasive, but his call for a scientific inquiry does not seem to be an adequate response to the issues he raised. In that we may see part of an explanation for Sadler's proposals not getting further towards being implemented: the fundamental issue was still unresolved. Where was 'the national standard' to come from? In 1930 he responded to an invitation to give a series of talks to students at the Teachers' College, Columbia University and in the second, entitled "Youth and Tests", given on March 28th, he continued his search for "some new synthesis". It was as though he was handing over the problem to a new generation of teachers.⁴⁵ Sadler hoped, for the newly established secondary extensions to elementary schools, that the introduction of external examinations might be deferred until other possible alternatives had been tried out. But "sooner or later, some examination there must be in order that those who leave school may have accrediting certificates which will be acceptable to employers ..." (ibid. p.161). Sadler's focus here is notable: he locates the importance of examinations in what they give to individual students rather than as a means of inspection of the schools. Furthermore, he notes that the decision will have to be made about whether to have "certification by the headmaster of the school in which the pupil has completed his course; [or] examination by an independent authority awarding its results on a comparison of the attainment of pupils from a large number of schools" (ibid. p.162). He could not "believe that any such arrangement will in fact supersede the method of external examination by an independent authority ... Certification upon the authority of the headmaster alone is, I fear, impracticable".

Do these comments, which could be used to defend traditional systems of external examinations, betoken a change from Sadler's stance when he recommended the *Abitur* as a model for England's school leaving examination? 'Alone' in the above quotation is perhaps the key word. In the *Abitur* model there was a significant role for local 'inspectors' and Sadler could here be asserting that role to be of prime importance, in contrast to the proposals of others who envisaged the handing of examining authority completely to teachers, which seemed to promise a less standardised system. For Sadler the two-mindedness in an English view of the system, in this case concerning who would have the

⁴⁵ "There is an element of danger in any great extension of governmental control over schools ... It is desirable, therefore, to seek some new synthesis between State supervision and educational freedom, especially in the spheres of primary, secondary and higher education alike" (Sadler & Higginson, 1979, p. 161).

final say - the teachers or the inspector/examiners, was still to be resolved. More work needed to be done, but that was for a new generation.⁴⁶

In his personal memoir of his father, Michael Sadler promised that Sadler's public achievements "will, when chronicled by Miss Grier, be on record for all to read" (Sadler, 1949, p. 187). However, when Grier came in *Achievement in Education*, her professional biography of Sadler,⁴⁷ to his contributions to the English examination system, she chose to omit Sadler's "constantly recurring activity" because "the main impetus came from Hartog, and an account of the work and Sadler's share in it is to be found in Lady Hartog's excellent memoir of her husband" (Grier, 1952, p. 202). For one engaged on a study of the English examination system this is disappointing and, on reflection, it needs to be explained. For Grier does write quite fully about Sadler's reactions to "the evils of the throttlehold of examinations" on Indian universities and on education in India generally (ibid. p. 206-211).⁴⁸ That showed a return to the rhetoric of the Acland Commission, but it was the easy part of a critique of an examination system. The harder option, which Sadler did choose in his professional life, was to propose practical solutions to such problems and it was this area of his work which Grier left to Lady Hartog to describe. But it should be clear from the preceding pages of this study that it is neither adequate nor accurate simply to conflate Sadler's work on examinations with Hartog's, close though their collaboration was. It has been a deliberate decision here to present their work separately because their approaches were different. Hartog, as a trained scientist, advocated empirical research on examinations, following a scientific method.⁴⁹ Sadler on the other hand, when he called

⁴⁶ Sadler's work with the International Institute's Examination Inquiry was still to be done, but Lawn's perspective is that Sadler's important contribution there was in establishing a methodology for international dialogue, research and collaboration. After the second IIEI conference in 1936 there was a sense that the proposals from the English group for the reform of the examination system had already been made. Having reached the age of 75, and his wife having died, Sadler had retired from the Mastership of University College, Oxford two years before. In *Essays on Examinations* (Sadler, 1936), in which Sadler's name appears as the main author, the essays make little contribution to new thinking about examination reform. Sadler's long first essay on the history of scholarships could have been material for his history of education in England on which his son said he was working at the end of his life (Sadler p.399). His choice of topic, scholarships to pay for students' secondary education, was soon to become of historical interest only. The contemporary situation is only mentioned in a few overly optimistic paragraphs at the end of the piece, which create a sense that Sadler was no longer energised by the task. Other essays by members of the IIEI English Committee again advocated more scientific study of methods of assessment. Three essays on the examination system in Germany are a reminder of a world that had by then tragically passed. Discussions within the IIEI broadened out usefully into the place of research into education generally and, with the appointment of Fred Clarke to the Committee, the focus moved to links with the Institute of Education in London and the establishment of the National Foundation for Educational Research in Slough (Lawn, 2008. p.56-57).

⁴⁷ Sadler refers to Grier anonymously on p.282 of his volume as his father's "Educational Biographer".

⁴⁸ His opinions were based on evidence gathered for the Commission on Calcutta University which Sadler chaired from October 1917 to April 1919.

⁴⁹ Hartog's wife, citing comments by Ballard, noted "He naturally had a scientific mind and looked upon accuracy of measurement as an essential part of the scientific method" (M. Hartog, 1949, p. 137).

for more research, was thinking of the kind of descriptive and qualitative work with which he had addressed other educational topics. His contribution was to describe the place of examinations in the expanding education system and the dilemmas to which examinations had given rise, and thus he was able to champion a workable alternative in the National Certificate system.⁵⁰ Yet he saw that the dilemmas about what to do with examinations remained. Between them neither Hartog nor Sadler, nor the International Inquiry Committee, had found ‘the right way’ to go, but they had each in their different ways contributed to a fuller understanding of the challenges to, and possible direction for, any further development of the examination system.

⁵⁰ In his address to the annual meeting of the English section of the New Education Forum on 5th January 1929, Sadler returned to the Prussian model of examining which he had described to the Bryce Commission. He reiterated the proposals that the system should “take into account the teachers’ judgement of each pupil” and that the “inspection of schools should be closely bound to the examination” (*New Era*, January 1929, volume 10, p.16-17). He then cited the Board of Education’s still running scheme for National Certificates, in which the key elements of the combined examination / inspection model had been implemented. That Sadler, forty years after proposing such a scheme to the Bryce Commission and later to the Acland Committee, could still be advocating it, suggests that Morant’s dismissal of it as “impossible” was at the least superficial.

CHAPTER 7 : CONTESTATION

Examinations and the Inspectorate

An external examination system was introduced in England despite the antipathy felt towards such examinations, but the antipathy did result in the Board of Education adopting a robust policy of restricting the amount of examination-taking in schools, a restriction that aimed to reserve public examinations for those who completed a full course of secondary education. Cyril Norwood went further than this by publicly expressing the opinion that eventually external examinations for students under seventeen should be phased out. An alternative way of expressing his view was that examinations were not appropriate “for the average boy or girl”.¹ By the 1930s the perception that school inspectors already had of the negative influence of examinations coalesced with their criticisms of the work of the examination boards, and led in the 1940s to the transformation of the Board’s ‘restricted-examinations’ policy into a ‘no-examinations’ policy. This became government policy in the later 1940s, which is surprising since today external examinations are as much a part of the lives of British sixteen-year-olds as they ever have been. To account for the early stages of this survival is the challenge of my third research question.

The Board’s policy was initially stated in 1904 as a regulation that “Scholars in the first or second year of [a secondary school] course may not, except by the express permission of the Board, sit for any external examination, except one which comprises the whole school [*presumably for the purposes of an inspection*], or one held solely for the award of scholarships, or exhibitions”.² By 1909 a similar prohibition referred to “pupils under 15 years of age”.³ The Regulations for Secondary Schools in 1918, the first year of the SCE, announced that the Board would only pay the examination fees “for forms or

¹ Norwood was a life-long but partial supporter of the external examination system. While he was Headmaster of Bristol Grammar School (1906 -1916), he was the representative of the Headmasters’ Association on the SCE committee of the University of Bristol schools’ examination board (Minutes of the SC Committee of the Senate, 3 December 1913 and 18 December 1917. Bristol University library, DM2287/6/9/3/5). However, McCulloch quotes a minute to the school’s governing board from June 1909 in which Norwood questions the value of examinations for students under 16-years-old and argues for a significant role in the assessment of students for their teachers (McCulloch, G., 2007, p. 52). In a paper for the Journal *Nature* in 1928 Norwood wrote: “I believe, though the time is not yet, that the right course will be to abolish all external examinations for the average boy or girl, though leaving it as the avenue to the universities and the professions” (Norwood, 1928). This is the proposal that he advocated in the Norwood Report fifteen years later.

² Board of Education, 1904, Regulations for Secondary Schools. Cd. 2128, p.19. London, HMSO. [My italics.]

³ Board of Education, 1909, Regulations for Secondary Schools. Cd. 4691, p.8. London, HMSO

pupils presented for a recognised First or Second Examination”, these being the terms used to refer to the SC and HSC examinations. The Board’s overall policy was forcefully expressed:

It is the Board’s policy to discourage, and so far as necessary to forbid, the use of examinations prematurely or in such a way as to allow preparation for them to interfere with the wider educational interests of the pupils ... For presentation of any pupils, whether under or over 15 years of age, for an examination of a general character (that is, covering the main substance of their education) which is below the standard of the First Examination, express permission must be previously obtained from the Board; and the Board will not give this permission without good reason being shown for this exceptional treatment.⁴

Precedents were created on the basis of this regulation to which the Board’s officers referred when they were making decisions about allowable examinations in schools. It is significant that all the Board’s officers who were to hold senior posts over the next twenty-five years were either already in post or newly appointed when this policy was being established.⁵ Not only did they adhere to the policy, they believed in it, influenced as they were by the educational debates which we have reviewed in the preceding chapters. They saw themselves as defending the concept of a general course of secondary education, from which more narrow vocational elements should be excluded. They were also working to establish in parents’ minds the importance of their children completing four years of secondary education, at a time when children were not required to stay at school after the age of fourteen.⁶ It was a rational policy but, as we shall see, it was based on presumptions about secondary education that were to be undermined by the changing developments in the education system.

Leese, writing in 1950, argued that experiences with the Revised Code in the nineteenth century had embedded in the culture of the schools’ inspectorate a negative view of examinations, a view shared by the inspectors at both the elementary and

⁴ Board of Education, 1918, Regulations for Secondary Schools. Cd. 9076, p.10. London, HMSO

⁵ Names of civil servants, their positions in the early 1940s and the dates of their joining the Board: M. Holmes, Permanent Secretary, 1909; R.S. Wood, Deputy Secretary, 1911; H.B. Wallis, Principal Assistant Secretary, Technical Branch, 1909; W. Cleary, Principal Assistant Secretary, Elementary Branch, 1910; R.H. Charles, Chief Inspector, Elementary Schools, 1906; F.R.G. Duckworth, Senior Chief Inspector, Secondary Schools, 1920; S.H. Wood, Principal Assistant Secretary, Teacher Training Branch, 1910; G.G. Williams, Principal Assistant Secretary, Secondary Branch, 1919 (Gosden, 1976, pp. 434–442).

⁶ The National Archives file ED22/132 illustrates the inspectors’ preoccupation with the issue of encouraging students to stay longer at secondary school. In a memo (no. 506, 1928) to the then Principal Assistant Secretary, Holmes, Stead reported a study in Lancashire of the 711 students who had been awarded free place scholarships in 1922. 61.7% of these had eventually passed their SCE; 10.4% had completed the five years and then failed the examination; but 27.9% had dropped out before reaching the examination year.

secondary levels. He claimed that relations between the inspectors and the examination boards deteriorated in the early 1900s, alluding to “the lack of co-operation between the Board’s Inspectors and the University Examiners” (Leese, 1950, p. 281). He referred to the Secondary Section of the Board of Education’s Report for 1913, in which it was stated that examinations had “led to cram, bad work and over-pressure, set the wrong ideals before the schools and pupils, and by their syllabuses and papers were often a grave hindrance to an improvement in method” (ibid., p.42). The possible depth of opposition to school examinations among inspectors became evident after the retirement in 1910 of the Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools, Edmond Holmes. The publication in the following year of his volume *What Is and What Might Be* (Holmes, 1911), “took the educational world by storm” (Gordon & White, 1979, pp. 194–195) and provided the progressive education movement with one of its most influential texts. In his autobiography *In Quest of an Ideal* Holmes described in vivid terms his experience of joining the Board: “The iron of Whitehall entered my soul” Holmes wrote (1920, p. 66). This happened as “I learned to examine and I learned to inspect” (ibid., p.69). He was a published poet and an advocate of the importance of literature in children’s education and thus he made a vivid contribution to the discourse about inspection: “The Education Department scourged the teachers and the children with whips. The local inspectors scourged them with scorpions” (ibid., p.119). As for examining, “An examination is at best an upas tree, whose shadow poisons whatever it falls upon” (ibid., p.63).

Holmes’ views played an important role historically in the campaign for progressive education both in Britain and internationally, not least in the setting up of the New Education Fellowship (Gordon, 1983, p. 22). His ex-colleagues would certainly have remembered the departure of Holmes and its consequences (as described above in chapter four) and also would have been aware of the wide influence of his writings. Though they may have felt that Holmes ‘went too far’, they shared with him the belief that significant change was needed in teaching if schools, both elementary and secondary, were to provide a creative education for their pupils. Holmes’ son, Maurice, who eventually became a respected Permanent Secretary at the Board, must have drawn some lessons from this father’s career: McCulloch wrote of Maurice,

He generally preferred the role of the board itself to be developed, and in fact strengthened during this period, out of the public eye rather than as part of a political debate (2008).

Though he was keen to avoid controversy,⁷ he cannot have failed to be influenced by the emotional currents which continued to press upon the Board's examinations policy.

The state of affairs referred to by Leese in the Board's 1913 Report was, however, likely to have been influenced as much by the overuse of internal examinations by teachers as by any final examination taken by pupils at the age of sixteen and there is evidence which contradicts Leese's "lack of cooperation" between the inspectorate and the examination boards at this early stage. Reports by the Chief Inspector(s) during the early SCE period suggest that the SC examination system was being accepted and its teething problems were being sorted out. In 1924 Chief Inspector W. C. Fletcher informed the Permanent Secretary, Henry Pelham, that "with certain exceptions the Inspectors think that the examination system is working well, that schools are getting used to it, that they are in general satisfied with it and do not really want to change". He did not though overlook the fact that there were imperfections: "The Examination Boards make mistakes and hard cases occur, due sometimes perhaps to rigidity in examination regulations."⁸ Fletcher reported the same judgement in a departmental memo the following month, which explained that he was summing up opinions heard at Divisional conferences which had been held in preparation for the investigation of the 1924 SCE. The question of whether the examination boards were setting too high a standard in French had come up at those meetings and a Mr. Howick had claimed that examinations were "cramping the schools". However, Fletcher noted, "His views met with little sympathy and the general view is that good teachers go their own way without regard to examinations and get good results."⁹ It was, however, later claimed that at the inception of the system, when there were fewer candidates, the overall quality of the work was inevitably higher and therefore the system seemed initially to be working well. In 1926, as the inspectors prepared for a second investigation into the Higher SCE, the new Chief Inspector, F. B. Stead was more prepared to address potential problems and he pointed to the issue of the rising numbers of candidates. In 1920, when the HSC was first investigated, the number of candidates was 3201. In 1925 the number had risen to 7026. Stead concluded that "The problem of Secondary School Examinations is not what it was in 1920 when these examinations were mainly thought of as applying to a comparatively limited class of real ability."¹⁰ This

⁷ Comments were made in parliament about the secrecy with which he surrounded the production of *The Green Book*, which he described as "a highly confidential document". Holmes, 16 July 1941, letter to Wood. (TNA: ED 136/217).

⁸ W.C. Fletcher, 29 September 1924, memo to PS. (TNA: ED 12/256).

⁹ W.C. Fletcher, 14 October 1924, memo to Inspectors. (TNA: ED 22/128).

¹⁰ F. B. Stead, 4 October 1926, memo to Inspectors. (TNA: ED 22/130).

statement prefigured what we saw above was also Norwood's opinion, that only students of "real ability" should be entered for examinations.

The issue of "less academic" pupils

The inspectors' concern about the preponderance of examinations in secondary schools was focused in the 1920s on their campaign to prevent government-aided schools from entering students for so-called 'Junior', 'Preliminary' or 'Lower' examinations. The examination boards could do no more than go along with the policy, though it meant the end of some of their examining activities.¹¹ In a memorandum in May 1927 Stead underlined the Board's policy on junior examinations by referring to a case brought to Philippa Fawcett, a Principal Assistant at the London County Council, by a Headmistress at a London School.¹² The latter had asked for approval for her Form V Commercial group (ages 15-16) to take some RSA 'Stage 1' examinations. Her request was backed with detail about the nature of the course and the examinations. As well as general subjects like English, Arithmetic and History, the students could elect to take Commerce, Book-keeping, Shorthand-typing and Science and Maths. The examination, it was agreed, was "at a lower standard than London's general School Certificate", but the standard of that examination was described as "beyond their girls". The girls' parents would pay the examination fees. The matter was referred to the Board of Education's School Advisory Committee which recommended that the request be refused "on the ground that the examination was below the stage of an approved First Examination". The LCC then followed up the issue in a letter dated 13 October 1927, but the Board reiterated its policy that it was "not prepared to approve generally the entry of pupils in a secondary school for an examination of a lower standard than the School Certificate". A suggestion was made that the school might consider entering the students for the RSA's Stage II examination, by which the Board felt it had 'bent' a little. The importance of this case is that it shows how determined the Board was to limit examination taking, even though aspects of it pointed to deficiencies in the secondary curriculum for those students not suited to academic courses.

¹¹ Petch commented: "... the abolition of external examinations for the junior forms of secondary schools ... entailed serious injury to such a pioneering body as the College of Preceptors, the "Junior Locals" of Oxford and Cambridge suffered an almost mortal blow so far as English schools were concerned ... and the JMB's own "Junior Certificate" was a minor but fatal casualty" (Petch, 1953, p.74). A pamphlet published for the Oxford and Cambridge Joint-Board's centenary noted: "At the request of some schools for an 'examination of the lower forms' the Lower Certificate was retained, and lasted until 1939" (Mowat, G. 1973, p.9). The Board of Education had no power to prevent a board from providing examinations for pupils in the fully independent schools from which the Joint-Board's candidates came.

¹² Memo to inspectors from F. B. Stead, dated 18 May 1927. (TNA: ED 22/131).

Cyril Norwood, as the independent Chairman of the SSEC, was able to go further than the Board's officers in suggesting publicly ideas for a renewed examinations policy. Like others he saw the main issue as being the increasing range of academic ability of pupils in "modern schools" and he responded by arguing for greater differentiation in the secondary curriculum, not only for pupils of different abilities but also for boys and girls (Hunt, 1991, pp. 86 ff). His aim was to protect "the general education of the school certificate and the specialised education of the higher school certificate" which he claimed, for example in a speech to the British Association in Glasgow in 1928, produced "as high a level of intellectual excellence and training" as that in any country (Norwood, 1928, p. 447). The examination system was widely seen as constraining experimentation by teachers:¹³ a more adventurous approach to both teaching and examining would, Norwood believed, encourage schools to devise their own responses to the varying needs of their pupils. He identified for the future two groups of pupils, one "sitting for the school certificate awarded as it now is, and the other for a general certificate which shall show that they have made good use of a good and sensible type of education" (ibid. p.447, col. 2). Norwood would thus have regarded the LCC's case above as support for his proposal that, while the SCE should be reserved for the more academic pupils, a lower-level "General Secondary Certificate" was needed to cater for the increasing majority.

Norwood's proposal was considered to be premature by the officers at the Board. Firstly, the issue of how far the curricula for boys and girls should be different was a contested area, with a strong body of girls' teachers arguing for similar treatment for all pupils (Hunt, 1991). Secondly, the Board's official line about the SCE was that it was an examination for the 'average' secondary pupil, so to introduce another examination would be an admission that the original policy had already failed. Thirdly, Norwood's proposal flew in the face of the Board's 'restricted examinations' policy, particularly when its officers were putting so much effort into limiting the use of 'junior' and 'preliminary' examinations. In this respect the Board was at this time the prisoner of its own policy. Furthermore, one officer, Richards, noted that to introduce a new level of examinations would require "all the prestige of a fresh and living attempt to focus the work of the new schools", a major undertaking.¹⁴ Having met with opposition from the Board's responsible officers Norwood withdrew the proposal, but continued to believe in its premise. The

¹³ As part of a survey of inspectors' perceptions, HMI F.R.G. Duckworth, who became the Chief Inspector in 1933 and Senior Chief Inspector in 1941, revealed his own attitude at the time, reporting that there was both a "fear" and a "worship of examinations" in the country. 4 January 1924, internal note. (TNA: ED 12/215).

¹⁴ Richards, 26 March 1928, internal memo to Permanent Secretary (PS). (TNA: ED 12/255).

officers' responses to Norwood's proposal seems to have been limited and unimaginative, and curiously personal, especially as the issue of examinations for less academic pupils was being considered by others, not least by the President of the Board.¹⁵ Holmes thought Norwood was "acting strangely" and Richards described Norwood's proposal as conflicting with agreed policy and presented "rather contemptuously".¹⁶ Such negative responses to Norwood himself, which might have indicated the limitations of his capacity for building support for his ideas, perhaps should also have alerted Norwood himself to the way radical proposals needed to be worked out and presented if they were to gain widespread support.

The Board's campaign against Junior Examinations

After becoming Chief Inspector in October 1933, Duckworth wrote a memo to inspectors instructing them to take, during their visits to schools, a strong line against 'Junior Examinations': they should aim to "dissuade Head Masters".¹⁷ In so doing he cited Article 8(a) of the *Regulations for Secondary Schools, 1933* which had repeated the prohibition of 1918. Inspectors throughout the country raised this issue with Head Teachers and sent to the Board not only information about how many aided schools they found to be in contravention of the regulation, but also the comments of the Heads who very often had good reasons, as they saw it, for entering pupils. Non-aided schools, however, could continue to enter fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds for such examinations, despite the Board's pressure and, as the legal school leaving-age was fourteen, some Head Teachers believed they could attract fifteen-year-old students to remain at school by offering the possibility of their taking an early school leaving examination. Duckworth had, though, suggested that such Heads might also be 'persuaded' to desist from entering pupils, implying that it could be a reason for such schools not to be found "Efficient". The Board thus received letters of protest from the College of Preceptors and the Independent Schools Association (ISA) both of which claimed that the Board was interfering with their independence. Holmes, as Deputy Secretary, had to become involved and, rather than back

¹⁵ Percy, 25 July 1928, letter to Miss Lowe, President of the Headmistresses Association. (ibid.).

¹⁶ Holmes, 20 March 1928, memo to Permanent Secretary with note by Richards (ibid.). The Permanent Secretary, Symonds, agreed with Percy that he should meet with Norwood.

¹⁷ Duckworth wrote: "It has always been our policy to discourage all kinds of Secondary Schools from submitting pupils for these [Junior Oxford and Junior Cambridge Local] Examinations." Regarding grant earning schools they [the inspectors] were in a "strong position". However, with independent schools classified by the Board as 'Efficient' "... we can only do our best to persuade, though in extreme cases we might threaten to withdraw recognition or refuse to accord it." The HMIs' concern was particularly focused on the serious cases "in which syllabus and organisation in one or more forms are specially adapted to the requirements of the examination." Memo dated 18 December 1933. (TNA: ED 22/137).

down, he wrote to the College of Preceptors agreeing that unaided schools were free to enter pupils for such examinations but also pointing out that “cases have come to [the inspectors’] notice where the taking of these examinations has unfortunate effects upon courses of work by constricting them at the points where freedom from external influence is most desirable”. In such cases, he wrote, “H.M. Inspector is bound to warn the authorities of the school that if this state of affairs continues the recognition of the school as a Secondary School will be endangered”.¹⁸ A similar letter was sent to the ISA.

Duckworth wrote an internal memo in June of the same year to his colleague, Assistant Secretary Bosworth-Smith, based on the reasons that Head Teachers had given for entering students for pre-School Certificate examinations. The reasons were:

- The pupils needed the examinations as an objective and stimulus to work
- Parents wanted to see evidence of their children’s progress
- Such examinations gave a reliable test of the standards being attained
- For Head Teachers they were a useful check on the work of their staff
- These examinations would be a dress rehearsal for the SCE
- The pupils were entering a world which demanded examination passes.

The large Board of Education file which contains the memo above¹⁹ and the inspectors’ responses to Duckworth’s original memo, illustrates both the force behind the inspectors’ campaign and the Head Teachers’ demand that they should be free to make such decisions.

At the inspectors’ two-day, annual conference in Malvern held on 16 and 17 July 1935 the issue of Commercial courses was again raised. A report of the discussion at the conference noted that Duckworth stuck to the agreed line, saying that “curriculum in S[econdary] Schools must remain general: i.e. it must not prepare for any particular occupation”.²⁰ Two women inspectors, no doubt reflecting the concerns felt in girls’ secondary schools, clearly had argued on behalf of those schools that sought to run courses and examinations in commercial subjects. Another dimension was added to the discussion by HMI Roberts from the north-east, who “claimed that in some Durham S[econdary] Schools half the children were unsuited to S. Education. What was to be done?” Duckworth responded, “Civilise the area”. Roberts’ implication was that secondary schooling by its nature was not suited to a significant proportion of children who were already there, thus revealing the limited but widely-held perception of ‘secondary

¹⁸ Holmes, 27 April 1934, draft letter sent for comment to Duckworth. (TNA: ED 136/639).

¹⁹ Duckworth, 18 June 1934, memo to Bosworth-Smith. (TNA ED 12/259).

²⁰ Minutes of Inspectors’ Conference in July 1935, agenda item 5. (TNA ED 22/139).

education' as being unsuited for the 'average' pupil. Duckworth's response resonates back to Morant, even to Matthew Arnold, and their promotion of what they perceived as the civilising benefits of a traditional, literary curriculum (Whitbread, 1984).

Changing attitudes in the Board of Education

In 1930 preparations were underway for the next investigation of the SCE (to be held in 1931).²¹ Inspector Duckworth, wrote to Chief Inspector Stead and the Permanent Secretary observing that "the actual machinery of the examinations is now running smoothly" but there is "general criticism ... of the uses to which the examination is being put".²² This made a similar distinction to Fletcher's in 1924: fault might be found with the way examinations were administered and used alongside acceptance that the actual papers and examination procedures were satisfactory. In the file containing the above memo there is a cutting from *The Liverpool Post* which reported from a headmistresses' conference that there had been protests at the "insane craze for matriculation". The conference had proposed that only those students aiming to go to university should matriculate, and that not at the age of sixteen. Such students should "pass their School Certificate and then produce other evidence of approved 6th form and other work".²³ Using Duckworth's term, it was *the use* of the SCE for matriculation that was the widely addressed issue in the early 1930s.

In the above memo Duckworth also noted some new emphases that would guide the 1931 Investigation in which the panel intended to examine how far the examiners were bearing in mind the purpose of the examination as a test of the average secondary pupil of sixteen (ibid., 1930). The Board of Education had made a number of stipulations to ensure that the examinations might cater for secondary students generally, the first of which was, "the standard for a pass will be such as may be expected of pupils of reasonable industry and ordinary intelligence in an efficient Secondary School" (Board of Education, 1914). These stipulations suffered from a good deal of ambiguity and were an example perhaps of the necessary use of "elasticity" when policies are implemented. However, if this was initially a necessity, there would inevitably have to be a later stage at which ambiguities must be addressed and by the end of the 1920s the Board of Education recognised that that stage had arrived.

²¹ The first investigation of the SC examinations was carried out in 1918 and the first investigation of the HSC examinations in 1920. The subsequent HSCE Investigations were carried out in 1926 and 1937 while SCE investigations were conducted in 1924 and 1931 (Petch, 1953, p.77).

²² F. Duckworth, 7 November 1930, memo to Chief Inspector. (TNA: ED12/256).

²³ *Liverpool Post*, 26 June 1931. (ibid.).

The overall judgement of the SSEC's investigators in 1931 was that "there is a tendency for papers to be on the hard side, owing either to their length or to the inclusion of questions which demand more from the ordinary candidate than is necessary or desirable" (SSEC, 1932, p. 58). They thought that one cause of this was the policy of some boards to award not only a Pass and a Credit, but also Distinction and Honours, an inheritance from the days when the examinations were more closely linked to university practices. This policy had been criticised in the previous investigators' report (in 1924) after which two boards had declared that they opposed such awards, though four boards had continued to award both Distinctions and Honours asserting that they were supported by teachers' associations. The Board did not feel it was in a position to insist on its policy in this matter, offering a clear example of what it would have seen as the weakness of its position. In a letter to the then Permanent Secretary, Pelham, Norwood made a revealing comment on the extent of the SSEC's authority. He wrote that the teachers and LEAs "seem to think that the SSEC has more power than it actually possesses: it is, as you know, co-ordinating and advisory only." He linked this with the issue of matriculation which was "the jealously protected preserve of the universities" which had "all along tied their [the SSEC's] hands".²⁴ In this letter Norwood was welcoming the proposal to add new teacher and LEA members to the Council, but he did not think that the universities' control of matriculation could be limited. He offered in the same letter to stand down as chairman, which offer Pelham rejected. With the benefit of hindsight it seems possible that Norwood's disenchantment with the examinations and his inability, or unwillingness, to give more time to his role as chairman of the SSEC were significant in the confrontation that developed between the Board and the examination boards in the next decade. Alternatively, Norwood's disenchantment might have been with the Board of Education's failure to take a stronger line with the examination boards and with the fact that, in his position, he was not able to change the situation.²⁵

It has already been noted that during this period the inspectors were claiming greater influence over the secondary curriculum and the impact of the examination

²⁴ Norwood, 2 July 1934, letter to Pelham. (TNA: ED 136/639).

²⁵ The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) described criticism of the Board's management of education generally as widespread during this period. "It is widely felt that the unsatisfactory state of progress in the last twenty years owes much to the tentative and even negative spirit in which major issues have been handled by the Board of Education. The Board has been chary of interference with the independence of backward LEAs but has not hesitated to check the zeal of the most progressive ones." WEA, 17 November 1941, report on the proposals in the "Green Book", p. 24. (TNA: ED 136/218).

system.²⁶ Once the SCE system had been introduced the inspectors had become involved in the investigations of the examinations and thus in some searching criticism of the work of the examination boards. The investigations were elaborately organised and thoroughly carried out, so the work demanded a lot of the inspectors' time. For example, in a note to the inspectors concerning the investigation of the 1924 SC examinations, Fletcher had written that,

The proposed investigations are taking practically the whole of two vacations, i.e. December 19th to January 24th, and April 4th to May 2nd, as against Christmas only in 1918.²⁷

For the 1931 Investigation, of the 23 investigators, nine were HMIs one of whom was the Chief Inspector, Stead. The remainder of the 1931 panel was made up of nine Head Teachers or ex-Head Teachers, four teachers and one LEA Assistant Director (SSEC, 1932, p. 4).

The pressure on the inspectors was not ameliorated by the examination boards' negative reactions to the criticisms of their work from the investigation panels. The 1931 Report referred to an undercurrent from previous years which it saw as non-cooperation by the boards: "There have been occasions when the advice of the Council, given after full discussion, has not been followed by particular examining bodies ..." (SSEC, 1932, p. 20). By 1939 an agenda item for the SSEC Standing Committee recorded that "HM Inspectors ought not to be asked to deal direct with examination boards with the inevitable risk of having their criticisms rejected".²⁸ A number of unhappy memories were recollected on behalf of his colleagues in a comment by G.G. Williams in December 1940 during an exchange concerning a possible revision of the SSEC's remit. He wrote that in its dealings with the examination boards the Council "had had such miserable experiences in the past that [it] could not relish renewal" of the present administrative structures.²⁹

In another of its areas of responsibility, the inspectorate had also been working during the 1920s on the issue of entrance tests for secondary schools and had been seeking to understand and advocate improved machinery for the running of objective selection tests (Sutherland, 1984, p. 162). But, as Sutherland pointed out, in the post-1902 devolved system the inspectors did not have the power to require the implementation of a uniform

²⁶ As in the example of French given above, the inspectors were having increasing influence on the way subjects were taught through their conferences for teachers.

²⁷ Fletcher, 18 June 1924, memo to Inspectors: Investigation into the SCE. (TNA ED 22/128).

²⁸ Agenda of 97th Meeting of SSEC Standing Committee, Appendix 2, Notes on procedure. (TNA ED 12/532).

²⁹ G.G. Williams, 23 December 1940, memo to Permanent Secretary and President. (TNA: ED 138/16).

standardised testing regime in all the LEAs, which they believed was necessary. This, as Gosden noted quoting a memo by Deputy Secretary, R.S. Wood, had the consequence for the SC scheme that the Board came to emphasise the need “to assert itself and to offer active leadership” in order to ensure “that there would be more purposeful national planning in education” (Gosden, 1976, p. 240). In seeking to regain the initiative the Board’s officials sought to reduce the influence of the examination boards. Leese described what he saw as a long-running struggle:

If in some schools the curriculum became over-academic the causes lay mainly in the requirements of the universities and their examining bodies ... the inspectorate was a constant bulwark against the bad effects of external examinations (Leese, p.296).

Leese, however, overlooked here the fact that the universities’ role in external examinations for schools, against the bad effects of which he claimed the inspectors were a bulwark, was supported by a wider constituency than just the universities themselves. In crediting the HMI for the stability of the system he also underestimated the fact that the Board’s officers generally, not just the inspectors, worked to overcome the unresponsiveness of the examination boards and also that there was some movement within some of the boards to address such problems.³⁰

The 1931 Investigation of the SCE

The SCE 1931 and HSCE 1937 Investigation Reports were particularly significant because they were issued for publication. The theme that the boards should work more closely together, and more closely with the SSEC, ran through the recommendations of the 1931 Report and this was seen as a public rebuke to the boards. Differences between the boards were well illustrated in a pull-out page on which the different regulations for an SCE ‘pass’ were laid out: each board was shown as having slightly different requirements. The reason for the differences was that the system had to incorporate the different universities’ matriculation regulations. So, for example, the Bristol, Cambridge, Durham and Oxford boards required a pass in five subjects in order to award a pass certificate, whereas the JMB and London required passes in six subjects (SSEC, 1932, p. 153). The schools were free to take the examinations of the board which best suited their students and, initially, allowing such differences between the boards may have been seen as leaving

³⁰ Petch was in agreement with this view when he noted that Leese had credited the inspectors with a reform in 1931 which the JMB had instituted before that date (J. A. Petch, 1953, p. 198, fn.13).

them free to maximise their strengths. Thus, London offered examinations in more science subjects than the other boards; Cambridge offered more languages, and the Welsh board offered more Group Four, practical subjects. The report stated that the investigators supported the continuation of the independence of the examination boards but also indicated their joint responsibilities: "...knowledge gained [from the experience of examining] should be brought into the common stock, and all possible steps should be taken to promote a frank interchange of ideas and experiences among the separate bodies" (SSEC, 1932, p. 20). London's adherence to its own matriculation requirements was described (*ibid.* p.51) and the university was informed that its behaviour was not in the spirit of the original plan for the SCE. All this signalled the SSEC's intention to require that the examination boards give up some of their freedom to arrange things as they chose.

Further comments had been made in unpublished reports sent to individual boards, and the Oxford Delegacy in particular took exception to these.³¹ A letter was sent by W.C. Burnet³² to Norwood, asking that his complaint be made known to the Council. Burnet's letter was referred to in the minutes of the 88th SSEC Meeting; it claimed that publication of the 1931 Investigation Report had led to uninformed criticism of the board's examinations. However, Burnet was mainly concerned to preserve what he saw as the value of the boards' independence: "I feel keenly the need to maintain the interest and sense of responsibility of those upon whom the efficiency of the examinations must ultimately depend." It was a significant argument for the benefits of independence in the delivery of complex, professional work. Putting the same point negatively he noted, "I am afraid of anything which seems to suggest that their [the employees of the examination boards] function is merely to act upon the opinions of others." This statement linked the dangers of a trend towards 'centralisation' to a potentially negative impact on the running of the SCE system. Thus, after the publication of the 1931 Investigation Report and specifically by early 1934 there is clear evidence of the gap which had opened between the SSEC and the examination boards, with a key issue between them being the level of central control that the Board now seemed to be favouring.

Prior to the next investigation, developments occurred which further affected the SSEC's relationships with the examination boards. In 1936 the President of the Board of

³¹ For the following discussion it is necessary to bear in mind that Oxbridge contributed three separate examining bodies to the SCE system. There was an Oxford board (or Delegacy) and a Cambridge board (a Syndicate) and separately a Joint-Board, which had its own Oxford and Cambridge secretaries and chairmen. Confusingly, the two parts of the Joint-Board were also referred to as a Delegacy and a Syndicate.

³² W.C. Burnet, Secretary to the Oxford Delegacy for Local Examinations. Letter to the SSEC, dated 28 March 1934. (TNA: ED 12/532).

Education approved an increase in the number of LEA and teacher representatives on the Council.³³ Thus each group, the examining boards, the LEA representatives and the teachers' organisations had ten members, a total with the chairman of 31.³⁴ This change would increase the influence of the LEA representatives and the teachers if they worked together, and this they did, bringing pressure to bear for changes to the examination system. At the 90th SSEC meeting, a memo from the Joint Advisory Committee of the Association of Education Committees and the Joint-Four outlined their demands that the recommendations of the 1931 Investigation Report should be followed up. Among their proposals were assertions that the SCE should not be used for university entry; the group system should be abolished; 50% of those setting papers should be individuals who had taught within the previous 12 years; and the examination boards should publish accounts, thus declaring their financial interest in the examinations.³⁵ The Council did consider these proposals, especially the abolition of the group system, but the Board suggested that since the Spens Committee³⁶ was by then considering the future of examinations for secondary students, it would be prudent to wait for that commission to report.

On the issue of detaching the SCE from matriculation, Petch noted that it had always been the policy of the JMB and that its earliest regulations had allowed candidates with a combination of School Certificate and Higher School Certificate passes to matriculate. This had set a precedent for matriculation to be achieved later in candidates' school careers and within a two-stage process (J. Petch, 1953, p. 190).³⁷ However such flexibility was easier for the JMB to achieve because it was both an examination board and the matriculation authority for its parent university (Montgomery, 1965, p. 137). The 1931

³³ Draft report tabled at 89th SSEC meeting held on 13 February 1937. (TNA: ED 12/532).

³⁴ Under pressure from the Joint-Four in 1928 Eustace Percy asked his officers why the Teachers' Registration Council had been asked to nominate SSEC members rather than the teachers' organisations. Cookson, secretary to the SSEC, in a memo dated 27 June 1928 wrote that Norwood had been opposed to any Joint-Four representation. Percy "with some regret" gave in to Norwood's "strong opposition" (TNA: ED 12/482). The issue was raised again by Pelham in 1933 and it received the same response from Norwood (Norwood to Pelham 21 July 1933. (TNA: ED12/482)). The Joint-Four and the NUT were eventually asked to nominate Council members in mid-1936. At the 90th SSEC meeting on 9 October 1937 it was announced that G.T Giles had been appointed to the SSEC on the recommendation of the NUT (TNA: ED 12/532). Norwood later opposed his appointment to his committee because of his communist sympathies. Memo, 18 January 1941, about the make-up of the Norwood Committee, refers to Norwood's rejection of Giles and his preference for Edward Bonhote, the Master of Haileybury, who also was not selected. (TNA: ED 12/478).

³⁵ Memo to the SSEC from a meeting of the Joint AEC and Joint-Four Advisory Committee held on 19 March 1937. (TNA: ED12/532).

³⁶ *Commission on Secondary Education, with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*, chaired by Sir Will Spens, appointed in 1934 and reported in 1938.

³⁷ This perception of the School Certificate, and later of the General Certificate of Education, is in contrast to the present understanding of GCSE and A level as two separate examinations. For the School Certificate the 'first exam' (for 16-year-olds) assessed the stage of general education and the 'second exam' (post-SC) assessed a stage of specialist study. Initially the distinction in terms of academic demand was not made as explicit as it is in the present day.

Report made the point that there was in fact “no necessary connection” between the SCE and matriculation and that the intention of the SCE was “to provide an adequate test, at the ‘Fifth Form’ stage, of the course of general education pursued by pupils attending Secondary Schools, and it is by their suitability for this primary purpose that the examinations should be judged” (SSEC, 1932, p. 46). The report described the situation in which Matriculation Certificates (which were then issued by some examination boards in addition to SCE Certificates) had come to have a value divorced from university entrance because they were asked for by employers and thus parents were demanding that schools should enter their children and prepare them for matriculation, even though they had no intention of applying to a university.³⁸ The report therefore proposed that separate Matriculation Certificates should cease to be awarded (*ibid.*, p.51), that a combination of SCE and HSCE passes should be accepted for matriculation, and that only genuine candidates for university should be allowed to take the Matriculation Examination after they “have reached the age of at least 17” (*ibid.*, p.69).

Such proposals show that the 1931 Report was an analysis of the entire SCE scheme and it can be seen as a forerunner of the report of the Norwood Committee in terms of its scope, proposals and style. Norwood’s personal involvement was noted in the report’s statement that he was “Chairman of the panel of Investigators and took part, like his colleagues, in the whole series of investigations” (SSEC, 1932, p. 6). This did not necessarily mean that he visited examination boards, but the report makes it clear that the findings of all the different teams of investigators were discussed with “the whole body of Investigators” and their recommendations received their “general endorsement” (*ibid.* p.7).³⁹

The SSEC and the Oxford and Cambridge Joint-Board

The report of the 1937 Investigation of the HSC was tabled at the Council’s 97th meeting, held in February 1939. Three Appendices were sent out with the agenda, the third of which addressed the report which had been published the previous month.⁴⁰ In separate preparatory notes written by G.G. Williams, Head of Secondary Branch, for Norwood,⁴¹ he

³⁸ The report calculated that it was “probably” true to say that “not more than one in four of the pupils in State-aided schools who ‘matriculate’ actually proceed to university” (*ibid.*, p.48).

³⁹ That this was planned to be a watershed moment was indicated by the fact that Norwood requested from the governors of Harrow School, two periods of two weeks leave for himself in December 1931 and March 1932, in order to take part in this investigation. Minute of meeting held on 20 May 1931, Governors’ Minute Book 1926-1934, Harrow School archive.

⁴⁰ Appendices with the Agenda of the 97th SSEC meeting, held on 11 February 1939. (TNA: ED 12/532).

⁴¹ Notes for chairman in preparation for the 97th SSEC meeting, written by G.G. Williams (*ibid.*).

noted that “most heat [is] likely to be generated” by a proposal which was headed “Abolition of Oxford and Cambridge School Examinations Board”.⁴² The reasons given for this proposal were 1) that the “conduct of the [HSC] examination is open to criticism”,⁴³ and 2) “The [Joint-Board’s] exam is redundant: the situation it was originally designed to meet no longer exists”. Before the meeting, T. G. Bedford, the Cambridge Secretary of the Oxford and Cambridge Board, had written to Duckworth protesting about the paragraphs in the report (nos. 54, 55, 59 and 143) which referred to their board.⁴⁴ It was therefore agreed at the meeting that Norwood should send a letter to the Joint-Board explaining the reasons for the Council’s proposal.⁴⁵ It is notable that Norwood’s letter does not address the issue of why the board’s work was judged to be “redundant” which, since it prided itself particularly on its relationship to its schools, was an omission that weakened the SSEC’s response.⁴⁶ What was highlighted in Norwood’s letter was the administrative duplication and possible lack of coordination arising from there being two centres from which the board was run. As the Joint-Board had two part-time Secretaries, both of whom held other posts, sometimes quite senior, in their respective universities, the investigators had proposed as an alternative that one full-time Secretary should be appointed.⁴⁷ Williams had noted that “Much of what is wrong is due no doubt to the two Secretaries and these are very shortly retiring”. In fact, Bedford did not retire until 1944 and Wilkinson, the Oxford Secretary, only retired in 1947. Williams may well have been right about Bedford’s personal contribution to the strain in the relationship with the SSEC, as Howat records that Bedford was remembered as someone who “found difficulty making decisions” (Howat, 1973. p.22). The remainder of Norwood’s letter recited detailed instances in which the procedures of the board were said to have fallen short leading, Norwood wrote, to a finding that the board’s certificates had been “quite often ... obtained much too easily”. Despite

⁴² The use of the word ‘abolition’ by Williams began a trend which became frequent in the heightened atmosphere that the Board of Education was now creating. Legally the Board of Education had no power to abolish an examination board, though by its use of regulation it could drive it out of business in England.

⁴³ Some of the evidence for this did not appear in the general report but in the “Special Report” sent privately to the board.

⁴⁴ Bedford, 20 January 1939, letter to Duckworth. (TNA: ED 12/532).

⁴⁵ Norwood, 2 March 1939, letter to Bedford (ibid.).

⁴⁶ The setting up of the Joint-Board coincided with the founding of the Headmasters’ Conference (HMC) and both were a reaction to The Taunton Commission’s proposals that were seen to threaten the independence of second-tier private schools. The Joint-Board thus represented special treatment for an already privileged sector, and Norwood particularly would have thought that it, and the HMC, should work with a broader range of schools (McCulloch, 2007, p. 109). It is worth noting, however, that bringing the schools and examiners closer together was an important theme of those arguing for reform to the examination system and that objective would have been strongly supported by the Joint-Board’s schools.

⁴⁷ Reading Howat’s brief account of the Joint-Board in the inter-war years one wonders how it managed to work at all. Howat comments that after full-time Secretaries had been appointed in the later 1940s, “Leisurely practices disappeared: no longer did Secretaries arrive after taking a tutorial and disappear early in the day (as part-time appointment permitted)” (ibid., p.22).

this serious analysis of the fragility of the administrative structures in the board and its doubtful results, it took eight more years before both sides of the Joint-Board had full-time secretaries, thus only partially fulfilling the SSEC's requirement.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that the Board of Education became impatient with such delays in responding to the challenges that the system faced, but doubts can be raised about its chosen strategy for dealing with them. Whether a more private series of negotiations could have achieved the amalgamation of the Joint-Board with its fellows in their two distinctive universities is an unanswerable question, though we noted in chapter five that such an amalgamation had been discussed within the universities themselves three decades before. The events surrounding the 97th meeting of the SSEC illustrate what was a very likely response to the more forceful methods of the Board, namely resistance, and a question thus hangs over the effectiveness of its chosen way of addressing the problems it faced.

A response to Norwood's letter, written by Hamilton McCrombie, Cambridge chairman of the Joint-Board, raised the rhetorical temperature as he claimed that "Recently the Council has assumed powers which may almost be described as dictatorial." He cited Circular 1463,⁴⁹ concerning which the "Joint-Board [was] given no opportunity of seeing and discussing the suggested proposals", proposals that, according to Petch, "virtually abolished the group requirement" (Petch 1953. P. 90-91). Avoidance of 'specialisation' was a major preoccupation in the running of the SCE and thus McCrombie was not just protesting at the manner in which the Board of Education was now working. He concluded that "the Joint-Board is forced to regard the recent menacing situation with serious disquiet".⁵⁰ Holmes, who had been Permanent Secretary since May 1938, brusquely responded that the changes to the system had been discussed over a 6-month period and "your representative was at the meetings [and] he should have made sure the [Joint] Board was informed".⁵¹ The intervention of Holmes was a clear indication that the SSEC and the Board of Education were presenting a united front: there had to be a limit to the amount of consultation that could be undertaken. But the Joint-Board maintained its point that getting an institution's representative to agree to a proposal was not the same as getting the

⁴⁸ Howat pointed to recognition within the Joint-Board that change was necessary: "The pressure of events, not least the report of the Investigators into the Higher School Certificate in 1937, had shown the need for a fuller commitment" (ibid., p.21). Despite this recognition, the reference illustrates this board's failure to act.

⁴⁹ Circular 1463 (18 July 1938) was described by Barrow, the Secretary to the SSEC, as introducing "radical changes to the group system": Appendix 3 to Agenda of the 102nd SSEC meeting. (TNA: ED 12/532).

⁵⁰ McCrombie, 17 June 1939, letter to Board of Education. (TNA: ED 12/482).

⁵¹ Holmes, 26 June 1939, letter to McCrombie. (TNA: ED 12/482).

agreement of the institution itself.⁵² The running of the Norwood Committee in the next decade has been described as high-handed: there was evidence of this tendency in the running of the examination system, and in its consequences, in the previous decade.

Formation of the Norwood Committee

The Board of Education and Norwood decided that the way to deal with the continuing contention was for SSEC meetings not to take place at all. It remained for one more meeting to agree the formation of a sub-committee, which was to become the Norwood Committee, and thereafter for meetings of the full Council to cease, using the war as an excuse.⁵³ At the same time, Holmes was leading a small group of senior colleagues in secretly planning for the education system once the war was over (Wallace, 1981), the deliberations of which were set down in a document that came to be known as “The Green Book”.⁵⁴ It was necessary to find a means of bringing the examination system into this thinking and in preparation for the 102nd meeting of the Council a brief paper was written by the Council’s newly-appointed secretary, HMI R.H. Barrow, on the subject of “Future Policy of School Examinations”.⁵⁵ The Council was asked to “indicate in general terms what, if any, problems of a major character in the organisation of school examinations call for attention in any discussion of educational policy” and to authorise the Chairman to discuss with the Board how such a discussion might proceed. After the completion of the Norwood Report it was clear that the Council had believed that this was *their* sub-committee, but Norwood claimed it to have been the President’s sub-committee which thus relieved him of the need to consult the full Council about his proposals. In his important 1981 paper Wallace reported that he had interviewed one of the members of the Norwood Committee, A. W. S. Hutchings of the Assistant Masters Association who, despite his admiration for Williams, had “noted his ruthlessness and willingness to manipulate the committee” (Wallace, 1981. p. 284). In this respect Williams can be seen to have worked together with Norwood and Barrow.

⁵² A further letter from the Joint-Board, this time from their Oxford Chairman, reminded the Board that “The Joint-Board is of the opinion that before changes of such magnitude are again introduced, it would be reasonable that the views of the various Examination Boards should be formally sought and considered. This was not done in 1938”. The final sentence is a reference to the changes announced in Circular 1463. The letter advocated extended canvassing of views just when the Board was seeking to limit it. Memo from V.J.K. Brook, (All Souls’ College, Oxford), Oxford Chair of the Joint-Board, to the SSEC, dated 14 March 1940. (TNA: ED 12/482).

⁵³ See Barrow’s note discussed below. The Council did not meet again for nearly three years.

⁵⁴ Board of Education, *Education after the War* (London, 1941). A copy may be found in (TNA: ED 136/214).

⁵⁵ Note by the Secretary of the Council, Appendix 3 to the Agenda of the 102nd meeting, to be held in Oxford on 14 December 1940. (TNA: ED 12/532).

Norwood's Committee was appointed in early 1941 by the then President of the Board of Education, Herwald Ramsbotham, to deliberate on the shape of the examination system. The committee was made up of members of the Secondary School Examinations Council.⁵⁶ On 20 July 1941 R.A. Butler became President of the Board of Education, and he decided he would bring forward an Education Bill which addressed the issue of secondary education (Wallace, 1981, pp. 289–290). In his planning for this policy he agreed with Norwood an extension to the remit for his committee that would take it beyond simply the issue of school examinations. The revised reference required the committee, “To consider suggested changes in the Secondary School curriculum and the question of School Examinations in relation thereto” (Board of Education, 1943, p.iv). Norwood was very willing to go along with this widening of the focus (he proposed the changed wording to the reference in conversation with Butler)⁵⁷ since he had well-developed views on what was needed in secondary education generally. He was convinced that centralisation of the control of the examination system was necessary and he acted to achieve this, strengthened in his determination by a perception that he was working personally for the President of the Board of Education.⁵⁸

Butler's decision to leave the contentious issues of the Public Schools and of the secondary curriculum and examinations in the hands of the Fleming Committee and the Norwood Committee respectively has been interpreted as a clever ploy. His vivid remark about the issue of the Public Schools “being shunted onto an immense siding” could to

⁵⁶ Membership of the sub-committee of the SSEC: (Board of Education, 1943, p.iv)

Chairman: Cyril Norwood

Examination Boards: Mr W. Nalder Williams, (Secretary of the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate); Mr S. Shurrock (Secretary, Matriculation and School Examinations Council, University of London); Dr J. E. Myers (formerly Chairman, NUJMB).

LEAs: Dr P. Innes (CEO Birmingham); Prof J. Jones (Chairman, Brecon Education Committee); Sir P. Sharp (Secretary of Association of Education Committees).

Teachers: Miss O. Hastings (Secretary, Association of Assistant Mistresses); Mr A.W.S. Hutchings (Secretary of the Association of Assistant Masters and Joint Hon. Sec. of Joint Four Committee); Mr E. Naisbitt (member of NUT Executive Committee).

Head Teachers: Miss M. Clarke (Headmistress, Manchester High School for Girls), Dr T. Thomas (Headmasters' Assoc., Headmaster of Leeds Grammar School).

Board of Education: W.J. Williams and G.G Williams (BoE, Secondary Branch, assessors); F.R.G.Duckworth (senior chief HMI); HMI. R. H. Barrow (Secretary to the Committee).

When the membership of the committee was first announced the secretaries of the committee of the “Joint-Four” teaching organisations wrote to the Board pointing out that only one teacher and one woman had been selected (Letter dated 26 May 1941. NA ED12/478). In reply G.G. Williams for the Board wrote that a small committee had been wanted with equal representation of each of the “main interest groups” which were, Heads/teachers, LEAs and examination boards. Each were allocated three representatives. The membership had been “considered by the Chairman in consultation with the Board's officers” (Letter dated 7 June 1941, *ibid.*). In response two additional teachers were invited, thus giving membership to all five teachers' organisations.

⁵⁷ Norwood, 20 September 1941, letter to Butler. (TNA: ED 12/478).

⁵⁸ Norwood had been Head of Marlborough College when Butler had been a pupil there. This may account for Norwood's letters being addressed to “Dear Butler” rather than the more formal “Dear President”.

some extent also be applied to the thorny issues that would have arisen if the curriculum and examinations for the proposed new secondary schools had become part of the debate, an interpretation suggested by Barnett⁵⁹ and Gosden (Gosden, 1995, p. 201) among others. The result of this decision was that the examination system was barely referred to in the Education Act of 1944. Gosden himself suggested that it was the war which produced a crisis of management in the Board of Education that created a determination to take back the control it felt it had lost in previous years, citing Wood's opinion that there had been a "general policy to belittle the power and position of the department".⁶⁰ But it must be noted that Wood traced a loss of influence back to the time of Eustace Percy's Presidency⁶¹ and this study has shown that the Board and the SSEC in their dealings with the examination boards had been seeking and implementing a more robust management regime throughout the previous decade. The Board's examinations plan can be seen as part of this bigger strategy and the effects of it came fully into view in its management of the Norwood Committee.

The extent of Butler's support for examination reform

In a paper published in 1984, Jeffereys sought to rebalance academic understanding of the relations within the Board of Education by challenging the claims of Wallace which gave prominence to the work of civil servants on the 1944 Education Act (Wallace, 1981). Jeffereys achieves this by demonstrating the importance of the work of Butler and particularly of Chuter Ede in gaining political support for the Act (Jeffereys, 1984, p. 429). However, concerning the examination system there was a fundamental difference between the thinking of the politicians and the civil servants.⁶² The civil servants and Norwood saw their recommendations about the examinations as a major piece of reform and they determined to advocate it even though it was not initiated by their political masters. The key group of civil servants which was promoting this new examinations policy comprised: G. G. Williams, Head of Secondary Branch; F.R.G.Duckworth, Senior Chief HMI; and HMI R.H. Barrow, Secretary to the Norwood Committee. They had much in common with Norwood. They were all classicists, and Williams and Duckworth had both taught at Public Schools before joining the Board of Education. They were strongly in favour of

⁵⁹ Concerning the Norwood Committee's report: "Butler used it as a device for side-tracking away from his White Paper the potentially awkward question of the purpose and content of education" (Barnett, 1986).

⁶⁰ R.S.Wood, 8 November 1940, memo to Holmes. (TNA: ED 136/212).

⁶¹ It was Percy who decided to hand control of the teaching curriculum to teachers (M. Lawn, 1987b).

⁶² Chuter Ede's diaries indicate that he did not involve himself in the work of the Norwood Committee or with the subject of examinations (Bailey, 1995).

maintaining the place of grammar schools in the system, as was Norwood and, all three had been involved in an effort to raise support for the Public Schools when the financial strains of the war began to affect them (Hillman, 2012). McCulloch points out, particularly in reference to Norwood's key work *The English Tradition of Education* (1929), his two grand aims for secondary education: to preserve the traditional sixth form and to bring together the Public Schools and the Grammar Schools by removing the barriers between them (McCulloch, 2006). In this latter opinion Norwood was radical in his own way and he believed that the traditional Public Schools had had their day. But his radicalism consisted in extending a Classical curriculum to a larger group than that in the elite private schools, so that a more widely selected elite of leaders might be educated for their future roles. A quotation from Plato, in Greek, on the title page of the Norwood Report reflected this group's shared, conservative concerns:

Nowhere must we hold education in dishonour ... If ever it leaves its proper path and can be restored to it again, to this end everyone should always labour throughout life with all his powers (Board of Education, 1943).

What Butler wanted from Norwood was a clear statement in favour of the tripartite system, which he knew from the responses to the Spens Report⁶³ would have enough political support to be accepted. He had told Spens in a discussion in March 1942 that "I had every desire to get as much out of Dr. Norwood as I could, and that I thought he might present a useful report."⁶⁴ As for Norwood's radical proposals about the examination system one must conclude that Butler was unconcerned about them. Butler reported in May that year that Norwood had told him that "he was not clear what results the committee would reach about the examinations, but that he would attempt to alter the system". This claim came within what Butler called "a direct onslaught upon the teachers" from Norwood, and a statement that "we must reform the teaching profession". It is noteworthy that Norwood did not attempt to conceal his opinion of the members of the teaching profession (suggested by the word "onslaught"), who needed to be reformed in order to become more professional. To the question of what this might indicate about Butler's

⁶³ The 21 members of the Spens Committee made up the Board's Consultative Committee. They were appointed in 1934 and met for four years. Some members of the Spens Committee did not fully agree with its conclusions (Simon, 1977a; Simon, 1977b). Board of Education opinion was that the Spens committee was too large to reach clear agreement, so the Norwood Committee was made up of only 12 persons selected from the SSEC.

⁶⁴ Butler's record of meeting, 20 March 1942. (TNA: ED 136/131).

attitude to examination reform, his response to Norwood was clearly significant. “I said that I must leave the matter to him.”⁶⁵

What Norwood considered to be the most radical aspect of his eventual report was, for Butler, a subsidiary matter that might be considered later. A letter to him from teachers at a school in Nottingham (dated 18 December 1943) which stated that they regarded the committee’s internal school examination proposal “with more than suspicion” received the following reply from Butler:

As I understand the recommendations of the Norwood Committee, there is no proposal to convert the School Certificate into an internal examination at the present time: this suggestion is to be considered at a later date in the light of the evidence then available.⁶⁶

Further evidence of Butler’s attitude emerged after the Education Act had been passed, when the education correspondent of *The Daily Mail*, Montague Smith, had interviewed him about the Act. When a draft of *The Mail*’s article was sent to the Board, Smith noted that there was no reference in it to the future of examinations because the Board had not responded to his question on that subject. He helpfully wrote: “I am not pressing these matters if replies at present are inconvenient.”⁶⁷ Possibly they were not convenient, because in the final article, under the headline “Mr. Butler Means Business”, examinations were not mentioned (*The Daily Mail*, 22 November 1944).

The Board’s proposed policy

An analysis of the minutes of three early meetings of the Norwood Committee reveals what it was that the Board’s officers were proposing for the examination system.

Norwood Committee’s first meeting: 18 October 1941⁶⁸

On the issue of the future of the examination system the minutes reported Norwood as saying that what had to be protected in the future, in what would be a wide diversity of schools, was “their individual character. Freedom was essential”. So he did not envisage a common exam for all schools at the end of secondary schooling, but for entrance to universities, training colleges and the professions an entrance exam “would, perhaps, best be given at 17+ ... A higher standard of [those] examinations would be needed ... [and] ...

⁶⁵ Butler, 28 May 1942, record of meeting. (TNA: ED 136/681).

⁶⁶ Butler, 5 January 1944, letter to High Pavement School, Nottingham. (TNA: ED 12/484).

⁶⁷ Montague Smith, 14 November 1944, letter to the Board. (TNA: ED 121/202).

⁶⁸ Minutes of Norwood Committee meetings are kept among Nalder Williams’ papers. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

Another examination of scholarship standard might follow”. Also to be discussed was the question of who was to conduct the examinations, and if it was to be examination boards how many should there be? And with multiple boards “was uniformity of standard possible?” Following this statement the minutes state that “no detailed account of views put forward by members is given” though various topics were discussed by them. The suggestion that an examination at 17+ should be used for university entrance was reported as accepted but the comments of the committee on this were also not recorded. By starting with issues around matriculation the Board and Norwood had focused on suggestions which had been advocated by teachers’ organisations in the previous few years. However, the suggestion that there should be separate scholarship as well as university entrance examinations had not been discussed with teachers or examination boards and this was a proposal that would run into difficulties later on.⁶⁹

Norwood Committee’s third meeting: 5 - 7 January 1942

Section four of the minutes of the third meeting of the committee records a focus on: “The advantages and disadvantages of an external examination, the possibility of reliance on internal examinations, with or without external assessors, the demand of parents, the need for more inspection if examinations were abolished for the majority of pupils.” All these topics were considered and “no decision was taken”. The minutes here do give some opportunity to hear the committee members speaking for themselves. Some spoke in favour of a subject (as opposed to group) examination; Nalder Williams believed that History and English Literature had proved unsuitable subjects for external examination; Myers (from the JMB) spoke in favour of a combined external examination and teacher estimates; Duckworth, the Chief Inspector, said that teachers wanted “greater control of [examination] arrangements and more freedom of syllabus, and boys also wanted an external assessment”; Miss Hastings was opposed to external examinations but Mr Thomas was against imposing a new scheme on the public. Both Nalder Williams and Myers believed that improvements in examining had been made and Nalder Williams said that the present schemes of “compensation” had “entirely abolished ‘groups’” and,

⁶⁹ In a report for the Syndicate the eventual irritation felt by the university is seen in the following use of the word “chaos” which survived several drafts. “It is typical of the existing chaos that it should have been possible for [the Norwood] Committee to put forward proposals for a radical change in the Higher School Certificate Examination without having consulted the Universities or the Colleges on a matter so closely affecting them.” ‘Amended report of the special committee on examination reform’, para. 13. 24 November 1943. Addendum to minutes of UCLES’ Syndicate meeting, 2 December 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: EX/S 4/1).

referring presumably to the moderation of internal assessments, “he did not see how external assessors could have a common standard”.

One can begin to imagine here the difficulties that committee members would have had if they had wanted to press an opinion which was contrary to the plan that was being presented to them. The experience of Nalder Williams which would come to light in the fourth meeting, shows that membership of the Norwood Committee was putting committee members in a difficult position within their own organisations.⁷⁰ Williams was conflicted as to whether he owed his loyalty to the Cambridge Syndicate or to the committee. Norwood had never been willing to treat SSEC members as representing their institutions⁷¹ and the Board now cast an air of caution around how far it was appropriate for the members to discuss the committee’s deliberations with their colleagues.⁷²

Norwood Committee’s fifth meeting: 26 and 27 June 1942

In the fifth meeting the subject of the School Certificate was on the agenda (item 6). The minute about this began with a lengthy report of the chairman’s statement on the subject. The teaching profession needed to be “free of controls and inhibitions which hampered its work.” It was a significant argument, and one that Norwood personally put very strongly. An improvement in the quality of teachers was, he said, still necessary but improvement could not take place if secondary school teachers were tied to an external examination. A critical moment had occurred for the teaching profession; were teachers to stay where they were at the moment or to advance to real control in education? From the point of view of curriculum there was no doubt that many subjects would flourish best without the influence of an external examination.⁷³ Thus the proposal was put to the meeting that for a period of perhaps five years the SCE would become a subject examination in which English and four other subjects would be taken. “After that period internal examination, with external assessment [meaning presumably moderation], should take the place of the present external examination.” The

⁷⁰ Nalder Williams had to report that, regarding responses given to a questionnaire that had been sent out (see chapter eight), “the evidence submitted by the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate was prepared by a small sub-committee appointed by the Syndicate and not by the Syndicate as a whole”. Minutes of 4th meeting 12 and 13 June 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW/2/1). He was required to make this retraction by the Syndicate’s Chairman.

⁷¹ See fn. 34 on page 145 above.

⁷² At Bristol it was reported that it was allowable “to communicate in confidence with their colleagues about possible proposals of the Norwood Committee” (SCE Committee minute book 3, p.200. Committee meeting, 27 January 1943. Bristol University library, DM2287/6/9/3/6/3). Cambridge was told that “various topics and proposals can be freely discussed if they are not associated with Sir Cyril Norwood’s name or with his committee”. (UCLES’ Syndicate meeting, 28 January 1943. Assistant Secretary’s minute book, Vol. 6, p. 269. (Cambridge Assessment (C/CB 1/6)).

⁷³ Minutes of 5th meeting of the Norwood Committee, 26 and 27 June 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW/2/1).

minutes of the meeting conclude with a paragraph supposedly about the discussion which ensued, but which in fact only reported what must have been Norwood seeking to “remove misconceptions”. The external assessment (moderation) of the internal examinations would be undertaken by teachers “in other areas”, i.e. not by inspectors; it would be an assessment “not of individuals but of the work of the school and it would not aim at securing ‘equivalence’ among schools”. Such proposals went back to the examination / inspection model that had been contemplated by the Bryce Commission with, however, the difference here that the external examiners would be teachers rather than inspectors. Going even further back, this was to be an examination of “the degree of success that the school achieved” not of the achievement of individual students. This outline, as it is given in the minutes of the meeting, describes the undoing of the system which had become familiar in the SCE. The committee’s proposals readily came to be described as the “abolition of examinations” for students under seventeen, a dramatic though misleading headline since internal examinations were still envisaged. The minutes of these meetings also illustrate the strategy that was to be used to get the new system approved, that is to say, imposition from the centre. This strategy is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8 : THE NORWOOD REPORT

The report of the Norwood Committee, published in 1943, envisaged the ending of the School Certificate Examinations, so it is appropriate at this stage of my study to review the state of the management of the national examination system at that time. This chapter therefore concentrates on the work of the key actors in the early 1940s in terms of the issues foregrounded by the study's research questions: their contributions to the progress of the SCE system and how their roles had developed; the issue of centralisation and how far the greater central control being exercised by the Board was being accepted; and the question of the abolition or survival of a system of national external examinations in the light of the Norwood Committee's criticisms of them. In what follows, the management of that committee and the part played by Cyril Norwood will be regarded as an aspect of the state's contribution, not least because Norwood personally supported a high valuation of the work of the inspectorate in the Board of Education (Board of Education, 1943, pp. 50–54).¹

“Malcontents”

When he stood down from the SSEC Norwood wrote that the boards were, more and more declining to co-operate with the Ministry, or its Inspectors, or the SSEC. I should specify London University [and] the Oxford and Cambridge Joint-Board as conspicuous in their failure to co-operate in the past, and the Local Examinations as likely to add themselves to the malcontents in the future.²

We have seen in earlier chapters of this study why it might have been that Norwood had a negative opinion of both London and the Joint-Board. His comment about the Oxford and Cambridge Local Boards arose from the fact that they were currently opposing the Norwood Committee's proposals. McCulloch has described Norwood's internal examination proposal as part of a larger “struggle for control” (McCulloch, 1993a, p. 132) and he singled out “W. Nalder Williams, secretary of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, [who] was especially prominent in challenging the line that Norwood asserted as chairman” (McCulloch, 1993b, p. 178). The following analysis of that view begins with a closer look at the part played by Nalder Williams, and then at an

¹ Duckworth told Butler that Norwood wrote his report's positive chapter on the inspectorate. See page 172.

² Norwood, 7 January 1945, letter to Butler. (TNA: ED 12/484).

example of the way the examination boards' contributions to the Norwood Committee had been managed. The review of Nalder Williams' reactions to these events leads to a wider consideration of why it was that Cambridge University, and the other universities, did not support Norwood's proposals, particularly that for the ending of external examinations for 16-year-olds.

McCulloch's observation above referred to the situation at the point when the committee's work was drawing to a close but, in a wider timeframe, the evidence may suggest other interpretations. Thus far in this study the impression received of Nalder Williams is that he seemed willing to go along with what Norwood was proposing. He had, for example, been quoted in the minutes of the third meeting as agreeing that two important subjects were not examinable. It would be more accurate to say that, rather than Nalder Williams, it was the University of Cambridge itself which challenged Norwood's plans, though other institutions did also. By the time the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate had seen the Norwood Report and formulated its considered and hostile response,³ Nalder Williams was being more closely supervised. A recommendation to the Syndicate meeting in October 1943 stated that "since the Secretary of the Syndicate is committed as an individual to the recommendations in the Norwood report, the Syndicate [should] take the advantage of the Chair of the SSEC's offer to allow a second representative to attend the next meeting of the Council with Nalder Williams to express the views of the Syndicate."⁴ This is the meeting which took place on 19 November 1943, at which "C.W. Crawley of Cambridge University" spoke on behalf of the University to request "that nothing would be done to carry out the proposals of the report until the University of Cambridge had an opportunity to express its views."⁵ In the indirect language of the time this can be seen as a clear statement that the university disagreed with the committee's proposals and it was preparing a high-level response to tell the Board so. At length, as noted below, the views of the Cambridge Senate were sent directly to Butler. It would therefore be misleading to identify Nalder Williams himself as especially prominent in challenging Norwood. This study concludes that what happened after the report was published was a process of the unravelling of the alleged support for Norwood's examination proposals because key bodies represented on the SSEC, such as the

³ Final draft of *Response to the Norwood report* was agreed at UCLES' Syndicate meeting, 2 December 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: EX/S 4/1).

⁴ Report to the UCLES' Syndicate for a special meeting held on 14 October 1943. (ibid.).

⁵ Minute of the 103rd meeting of SSEC, 19 November 1943. (TNA: ED12/480).

universities, felt that their points of view had not been fully addressed by the committee. This is the conclusion that Gosden also reached (1976, p.383).

Nalder Williams did not play a wholly passive role on the Norwood Committee, even though he accepted the report's conclusions eventually. On the one hand, a minute from the committee's eighth meeting stated that "each member of the committee spoke provisionally on the proposal to replace the external examination by an internal examination with external assessment; all expressed opinions in favour of such a change provided safeguards were devised and operated".⁶ Nalder Williams was present at that meeting. On the other hand, Nalder Williams had taken a much more critical line in a four-page paper which he finalised after the 5th meeting and then sent to the committee. He wrote that he was not "prepared to accept [the] assumption" to be found in the Board's proposals that "an external examination for the rank and file of Secondary School children, whether at 16 or at any other age, is bad for Secondary Education". He went on to suggest that he would "welcome a more elastic scheme of examination under which a reasonable freedom of experiment can be allowed both to examining bodies and to schools".⁷ Given his views as expressed in this paper, it is surprising that he felt he could later agree to the changes that Norwood was proposing, and from a reading of his notes written in the course of the committee's meetings, it seems we must imagine him keeping his critical thoughts to himself rather than expressing them.⁸ This may reflect Nalder Williams' personality or the committee culture of the day, particularly in meetings with Norwood in the chair and senior civil servants taking notes. Nalder Williams' document above, however, is also evidence that there were opinions within the examination boards in favour of less reliance on external examinations. If that was the case, the Board's centralising strategy was

⁶ Minutes of 8th Norwood Committee meeting, 4 September 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

⁷ Nalder Williams, 3 July 1942. *University Boards and the School Certificate Examinations*. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/3).

⁸ During the Committee's fifth meeting, Nalder Williams wrote a number of notes in pencil on scrap paper. These included the following comments (my lettering) made as Norwood was explaining the Board's plan:

- a) "?Determination of syllabuses and preparing of question papers"
- b) "SC. What is my position?"
- c) "Stimulus".
- d) "Faults in existing system (BoE)".
- e) "Defence of Examining Bodies who have been carrying out BoE's requirements"
- f) "Serious step contemplated if BoE action to be over-turned".

These comments are a mixture of notes of what Norwood was speaking about, and Nalder Williams' own concerned reactions, see especially notes b), e) and f). Nalder Williams, 26/27 June 1942. Handwritten notes taken during 5th Norwood Committee meeting. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/2).

creating an unhelpful conflict of interest between the committee members and their institutions, a reflection which is relevant to any answer to my first research question.⁹

Norwood Committee's eleventh meeting: 16 – 17 October 1942

Nalder Williams wrote brief penciled notes which give some insight into his thinking during the meetings. At the eleventh meeting, Senior Chief HMI Duckworth reported on the attitudes of the inspectorate to the proposed internal examination scheme. Nalder Williams wrote as Duckworth spoke and we therefore have the opportunity of comparing his record with that of the official minutes.¹⁰

Table 4: Notes written in 11th meeting of Norwood Committee

Nalder Williams' notes, written in pencil	Official minutes
<i>Internal exams? HMIs divided. Bare majority pro; but a 1/4 definitely con.</i>	A bare majority of Secondary School Inspectors approve in principle the proposal for an internal examination. A quarter of the total number are in strong opposition.
Objections: <i>a) standard - how to equate</i>	Those agreeing in principle see the following difficulties: 1) uniform standard
<i>b) machinery - how to vet thousands of syllabuses</i>	2) assessment of syllabuses
<i>c) varying experience etc. of teachers: assessment?</i>	3) task of syllabus making an imposition on teachers
<i>d) dishonest or over-scrupulous teacher, e.g. relation of question papers to work recently done</i>	4) dishonest or over-scrupulous teachers
<i>Moderation: Teachers ought to take a lot of the responsibility. Otherwise too much would depend on HMI</i>	Schools to be encouraged to submit own syllabuses. At present they are reluctant because of "fear of unsympathetic examiners"
<i>- District Inspectors preside over managing Cttee which will consist mainly of teachers</i>	Source: Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Norwood Committee, 16/17 October 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW/2/1)

The two versions give a broadly similar view of the opinions of the inspectors. Nalder Williams' notes reflect an understanding of the work that must be done: he used the technical term "equate" and emphasised the amount of work required in vetting the

⁹ The volume *The case for examinations*, by J.L. Brereton, one of Nalder Williams' Assistant Secretaries who opposed the Norwood proposals, nevertheless provided evidence of more flexible thinking and willingness to consider reform of the examination system within the examination boards (Brereton, 1944).

¹⁰ Nalder Williams, 16/17 October 1942. Handwritten notes taken during 11th Norwood Committee meeting. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW/2/2).

schools' syllabuses. In reference to the teachers he saw the problem of varying teacher experience of examining, whereas the minutes mentioned the demands that the system would make of them. Nalder Williams' notes assist the reader to understand that what both records were referring to in terms of "dishonest or over-scrupulous teachers" was the way in which such individuals might seek to balance their responsibilities as teachers with their responsibilities as examiners. The records then diverge. Nalder Williams heard in Duckworth's presentation a concern about the amount of work which might be created for inspectors, whereas the minutes state that schools were at the time unwilling to take on responsibility for creating syllabuses because of the attitudes of examiners. Nalder Williams presumably would not have seen the latter as a valid concern. Finally, Nalder Williams showed that he was comparing the new system with the current one. His underlying question was: Who will take on the responsibilities for standards that are currently carried by the examination boards, their staff and senior examiners? The answer, which was presumably given in Duckworth's presentation was, "District Inspectors" who would lead committees of teacher assessors. The official minutes are probably a reasonable summary of Duckworth's main points, but Nalder Williams' notes drew attention to the difficulties of putting the internal examination proposals into effect, particularly in relation to the role envisaged for the inspectorate.

It was doubts about the practical outworking of the internal examination proposal that were uppermost in Nalder Williams' thinking and it was therefore a misjudgement of the situation to claim that the Oxford and Cambridge Local Boards were belittling the committee's proposals merely from "motives of self-interest", as Norwood later did.¹¹ At the next three meetings (12th to 14th) the "machinery" of the proposed internal examination scheme was discussed. What was being looked for by the Board was "[A] simple form of assessment ... [to] give the necessary safeguards and a rough degree of equivalence without too complicated machinery".¹² Twice the committee sent the proposals back for more work (Minutes of the 12th and 13th meetings) for in that short sentence lurked a complex brief, since simplicity and lack of complication are not features which associate naturally with safeguards and equivalence in a national examination system.

¹¹ Norwood, 10 November 1943, note to Williams. (TNA: ED 12/480).

¹² Minutes of 13th Norwood Committee meeting, 13/14 November 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

The SSEC's questionnaire

The sending out in February 1942 of a questionnaire about the issues discussed by the Norwood Committee was an illustration of the Board's more robust management strategy, but it also showed that the strategy was suspected and resisted. The full questionnaire comprised 35 questions which focused both on the nature of the secondary curriculum and on the examination system. The Board however did not send all the questions to all respondents; the questions posed, according to Norwood, "included all that we thought could possibly be of interest to our several correspondents."¹³ This decision produced a letter of protest to Butler from Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC, who complained about "the way your committee on Curriculum and Examinations is proceeding".¹⁴ Norwood's response to this, given in the letter to Butler referred to above, on the one hand dismissed Citrine with the comment "What little things upset an apple cart", and on the other called the letter "an attack on our competence". Here we see two aspects of Norwood's way of working. The arguments of those who opposed his ideas could be trivialised with the implication that they had not understood the issues, and at the same time Norwood could take any disagreement with his ideas as a personal attack on himself. Neither of these qualities made him a good leader of a task that required consensus building, if that was what was wanted.

It is necessary to bear in mind the way that the Norwood Committee had been set up. It did not enjoy the same independence as the Consultative Committee, but the Board's officers still had to allow Norwood a measure of independence, not least because of the personal way in which he had received his commission from Butler and the frequency with which he reported directly to Butler. At the end of the process, Williams maintained that the Norwood Committee should report to the SSEC but Norwood insisted that was not necessary because the committee had been set up by the President.¹⁵ The existence of a relationship between Norwood and the President that sometimes by-passed the Board's officers is attested by the fact that when Citrine protested about the committee's questionnaire, it was Norwood who had to answer for it and he did so directly to Butler. The President then detailed the civil servants to rectify the situation.

¹³ Letter from Norwood to Butler, 6 March 1942. (TNA: ED 24/1226).

¹⁴ Letter from Citrine to Butler, 3 March 1942. Citrine's main concern was that Norwood was going to revisit the ground covered by the Spens Committee. Citrine was not entirely reassured by Butler's response to his complaint. "I am still not quite easy in my mind on this point and hope that the Committee will not be found to have wandered too far afield when it presents its report." Letter from Citrine to Butler, 7 March 1942. (TNA ED 12/478).

¹⁵ Norwood, 10 November 1943, letter to Williams. Williams, 11 November 1943, reply to Norwood. (TNA: ED 12/480).

The TUC was not the only organisation that protested about the way the Norwood Committee's questionnaire was managed. Initially, of the thirty-five questions, only four were sent to the examination boards. Critically, two of the questions which were not sent to the examination boards were:

Q.28: Do you consider that the abolition of external examinations for the majority of pupils in secondary schools is:

- a) practicable?
- b) to the advantage of education as a whole?

Q29: Could the place of external examinations in secondary schools be taken by:

- a Head Teacher's signed certificate of attendance;
- internal examinations arranged by the teachers themselves with or without the assistance of external assessors?

These questions were not referred to the boards on the basis that they would not be "of interest" to them. Even the mild Nalder Williams reacted negatively: "I had rather expected that questions of wider import might be put to us about the functions professional and actual of the examinations which we conduct".¹⁶ It was not surprising that one effect of the distribution of this questionnaire was to heighten suspicion of Norwood's intentions. Later that year, A.B. Ramsey, Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge, and Chairman of the University's Examinations Syndicate wrote to Nalder Williams seeking to know the Syndicate's responses to the questionnaire. He was worried that answers might have been given with which the university would not agree and he broadened his reasoning in the following statement: "I want to be as certain as possible, especially as the preoccupation of the war is being used in some quarters as an opportunity for damaging our system of education".¹⁷ Nalder Williams sent to Ramsey a copy of the Syndicate's answers, adding that he had informed the Norwood Committee at its recent meeting (the fourth) that there were differences of opinion within the university about the proposals for university entrance. He was thereby admitting that he should have been more careful in what he had sent to the committee. What may also be noted in Ramsey's comment is his belief that a deeper, more damaging movement was now in train in the management of the education system, under the cover of the war. If 'centralisation' was indeed an outcome to be feared, then Ramsey was right to be concerned.

¹⁶ Nalder Williams, 18 February 1942, letter to Barrow. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW2/2). With a note dated 11 March 1942 Barrow sent Nalder Williams a full questionnaire and the Board's explanation for not sending it earlier. This was a consequence of Citrine's letter to Butler.

¹⁷ A.B.Ramsey, 12 June 1942, note to Nalder Williams. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/2).

Examination board responses to the Norwood proposals

In November 1943, the Oxford Delegacy's response to Norwood's proposals was sent to Butler, who replied immediately.¹⁸ The final page of this document was an extended complaint about the way the committee's work had been managed which, referring specifically to the sending of the questionnaire, regretted that the examination boards' input had not been fully invited. The Cambridge Syndicate's formal response was finalised in December, rebutting many of the claims of the Norwood Report and concluding, "Our general view of the relevant proposals of the Norwood Committee is that they do not offer a satisfactory basis for re-shaping the school examination system."¹⁹ Later the Cambridge University Senate's views, dated 6 July 1944, were sent directly to Butler, noting the pressure that would be put on the inspectorate if it was to take over the role of the examination boards:

an internal examination would make it almost, if not quite, impossible to maintain an even standard of performance ... throughout the country, unless the proposed increase in the Board of Education's inspectorate enabled it to exercise a control over the examinations similar to that exercised at present by the examination boards.²⁰

In October 1944 Nalder Williams up-dated a record of the responses of the examination boards.²¹ The Oxford Delegacy had sent out a questionnaire to its schools and of the 200 responses 87% were "emphatically" against the internal examination. Bristol University made no comment on the issue of an internal examination, but Durham reported that the university "looked with disfavour upon a purely internal SCE". The JMB noted that under the proposed internal scheme, "School Certificates would no longer be accepted as in any way satisfying the Board's entry requirements". The Welsh Board reported that as all of the Welsh branches of the Joint-Four teachers' associations did not approve of the internal examination, it could hardly be put forward as an agreed scheme. London University believed that an "internal examination would not be accepted by employers as authoritative" and that "for the present" its Matriculation and School Examinations Council was "of the opinion that the [SC] examination should continue to be conducted by

¹⁸ Oxford Delegacy, November 1943, report to the Board. Butler's reply, 30 November. (TNA: ED 12/480).

¹⁹ UCLES' response to the Norwood proposals agreed at a Syndicate meeting, 2 December 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: EX/S 4/1).

²⁰ University of Cambridge, 6 July 1944, report to the President. (TNA: ED 12/480).

²¹ Nalder Williams, October 1944. Compilation of responses to the Norwood Report from other awarding bodies. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/3).

the university examining bodies, with such improvements and modifications as it may be possible to devise".²² In the light of such comments, Norwood's dismissal of the opposition to his proposals as the work of a few "malcontents" must have been, in the eyes of the political leadership of the Board, unhelpful to his case.

The reactions of teachers

Norwood believed that a reliance on external examinations was reducing teachers to "the rank of journeymen" rather than raising them to the level of other professionals such as doctors and lawyers.²³ In a revealing comparison Norwood suggested to his committee that "Just as the universities must be free to conduct their own teaching and research within their own domain, so must the school teachers be free in theirs".

McCulloch concluded that the eventual failure of this proposal was due, partly, to the resistance to taking on professional responsibility by some in the teaching profession (McCulloch, 1993a, p. 137) as well as to the examination boards working against it. It has been suggested above that the universities' opposition to these proposals could be attributed to their not being convinced about their practicality. The following paragraphs consider teachers' responses to the proposals and the reasons given for them at the time.

In their meeting with the committee the Headmasters' Association described the abolition of external examinations as "neither practicable nor desirable": they believed that "greater association of the teaching profession with the examinations was being achieved and should be carried further, and the co-operation of the schools and universities was valuable".²⁴ They doubted whether an internal examination system would in fact raise the status of teachers. In the opinion of the Assistant Masters' representatives, "An internal examination would not win public approval, the assessment would be complicated and cumbrous", and teachers would find it "distasteful" to be marking their own pupils' examination scripts.²⁵ They concluded that "the present situation was preferable, provided the teachers gained more representation on the examination boards and greater control of policy."

²² London University Matriculation and School Examinations Council, ?May 1944, response to the Norwood Report. (TNA: ED 12/480).

²³ Norwood, 1 September 1942. Paper 35, *The internal examination*, tabled at the 8th Committee meeting. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

²⁴ Minutes of 15th Norwood Committee meeting, 22/23 January 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

²⁵ Minutes of 17th Norwood Committee meeting, 19/20 February 1943 (ibid.). "Distasteful" is a curious choice of word, which presumably was the one used by the witnesses. It suggests a negative social, or even moral, action within a situation in which one is required to act: a "distasteful task".

Nalder Williams would have been aware of the line the Assistant Masters' intended to take as their representative on the committee, A.W.S. Hutchings, had been in touch with him. In September the previous year Hutchings had written to the Cambridge Syndicate stating his hope that,

the committee will recommend that teachers should be allowed to play an ever-increasing part in the conduct of the external examinations. If this policy were carried out sufficiently thoroughly it should remove much of the sting from the argument against 'external' examinations and give us, eventually, an 'internal' system associated with reasonable safeguards which would be necessary to ensure a wide acceptance of the new certificate.²⁶

There is an interesting expansion of the terms 'internal' and 'external' in this letter, in which Hutchings implied, by putting the words in inverted commas, that internal might mean 'carried out by teachers' and not just by the candidates' own teachers. He recognised the need for "safeguards" to boost public confidence, which, he suggested, would be provided by association with the universities. As the male teachers' organisations both noted, the involvement of teachers in the work of the examination boards had been increasing and it was possible to envisage that teachers could soon be running the examinations in collaboration with their particular university. Norwood had suggested to Butler that opposition to his ideas was mainly to do with the ill-will of Cambridge,²⁷ but in suggesting that he ignored the negative reactions to his proposals from at least two of the secondary teachers' associations. The letter from Hutchings was significant, for in it he portrayed the link with the university examination boards as being a means to enhancing the professional standing of teachers, which is what Norwood was claiming the internal scheme would achieve. This perspective challenges a conclusion that teachers were reluctant to take on their professional responsibilities.

The committee's discussions with the two secondary associations for women in the 16th and 18th committee meetings produced more support for the internal examination proposal. The representatives of the Assistant Mistresses thought that "The SCE had been a false hall-mark, giving an inaccurate assessment over a very narrow field." They were in

²⁶ A.W.S. Hutchings, 9 September 1942. Letter to Nalder Williams. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/2).

²⁷ "We have to recognise that there is a definite attempt in progress on behalf of the Oxford Locals, the Cambridge Locals and the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board to sabotage the report and to throw the old universities into strong opposition. It will not succeed at Oxford, but I am afraid it has done mischief at Cambridge." Norwood, 19 November 1943. Letter to Butler. (TNA: ED 12/480).

favour of the “use of school records in conjunction with an internal examination.”²⁸ The Headmistresses also voiced this opinion saying that a record of achievement “based on school career and a final examination would give room for greater freedom of treatment of curriculum subjects”. However, they acknowledged that opinion in their Association was divided and mentioned the value of external examinations as “compensating for over-conscientious marking by teachers”. This might refer to the amount of time which marking would take for the conscientious teacher, or to the situation in some schools where the teachers might set too demanding a standard for their pupils. The Headmistresses concluded that their impression was that “a strong section of their Association is in favour of change”.²⁹ One could interpret this as a somewhat weak endorsement of the proposals since everyone, including the keenest supporters of the SCE, was in favour of change.

Like the proverbial straw, a letter from Miss O.M. Hastings, who was still representing the Association of Assistant Mistresses, caused deep irritation at the Board nearly two years later. This was sent a month after the Board had published its plans for the new examination system in Circular 103. Writing to the new Minister of Education, Ellen Wilkinson, Miss Hastings stated,

We [the Association] feel very strongly that the suggestions made by the Norwood Committee, of which I was myself a member, opened up discussion and full consideration of the whole problem [of alternative suggestions in respect of the present SCE] and did not in fact put out recommendations which could be regarded as final or decisive.³⁰

In a memo to G.G. Williams, Barrow, the ex-Secretary of the Norwood Committee, wrote that “This letter plunges me into the profoundest gloom ... I do not see that it is the slightest use for you to send a reasoned reply”. His colleagues’ notes on this memo show they shared his irritation, and his condescending attitude. “She wants the new SSEC [to travel] over the whole ground of the Norwood Committee once again”; “Tell her the policy has already been decided by the minister”.³¹

Opposition to Norwood’s proposals from the committee

The only opposition to his proposals that Norwood publicly acknowledged was that of Dr. Terry Thomas, of the Headmasters’ Association, who eventually declined to

²⁸ Minutes of 16th Norwood Committee meeting, 5/6 February 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

²⁹ Minutes of 18th Norwood Committee meeting, 5/6 March 1943 (ibid.).

³⁰ Miss O.M. Hastings 14 June 1946. Letter to the Minister. (TNA: ED12/480).

³¹ Barrow 19 June 1946 memo to Williams (ibid.).

approve the proposal for internal examinations. This had to be recorded in the report itself (Norwood 1943, p. 142). Norwood was scornful about him: “As our minds have been running in this direction for the last twelve months he is somewhat belated in the discovery of his own mind... We need not be troubled by his defection.”³² Against that can be put Thomas’s own description of why he reached his decision:

I was told I was wrong, that I was trying to prejudge the issue. I felt, when ‘ultimate objectives’ and words of that type were used, I was committing myself to the internal examination, which I was not prepared to do at this stage.³³

Thomas here reflected the pressure that the committee was under to reach a rapid, clear and, as he saw it, a premature decision. He also spoke as though his decision was a personal one, which may reflect the fact that he was following the Board’s steer that he was not to act as a representative, though Norwood was right that Thomas was reflecting opinion among the headmasters.³⁴ However, Norwood’s word ‘defection’ suggested a personal betrayal that was not appropriate, for Thomas’s decision was consistent with the evidence given by his Association to the committee in its fifteenth meeting.³⁵ Thomas’s report also raises the question of whether he had discussed his decision with other members of the committee.

If any other committee member could be said to have instigated opposition to Norwood, it would be Hutchings whose letter to Nalder Williams in the previous year (page 166 above) had signalled early exchanges about what their different organisations should be aiming for. There is clear evidence from the following year that the three examination board members of the committee and Hutchings were planning to record their opposition to the internal examination proposal. On 27 April 1943 Nalder Williams sent a draft letter to Hutchings, Myers (of the JMB) and Shurrock (of the London Examinations Board). He wrote that, if they agreed, he planned to have the letter “duplicated here above our four signatures and to post it to Barrow on Thursday [*this would have been April 29*] if possible, and in any case not later than Friday giving him enough copies for the whole

³² Norwood, 23 June 1943, letter to Butler. (TNA: ED 136/681).

³³ Thomas, 6/7 January 1944, Report to the HMC 71st Conference. Joint-Four minutes October 1943-December 1946. (Warwick University, Modern Records Centre: MSS59/6/2/7ii).

³⁴ In a debate at the HMA Annual General Meeting on 2-3 January 1945 a motion opposing the introduction of internal examinations was carried by 90 votes to 32. *Review* Vol. XLV, No. 132, April 1945, p. 45-50. (Warwick University, Modern Records Centre, 58/4/8/7).

³⁵ In handwritten notes for a talk which Norwood was to give after his retirement he refers to Thomas as “a rat”, a term which one presumes was not to be used in the talk itself. Norwood, 1947, notes for talk. (Norwood Papers. University of Sheffield library, MS230/7/1/1).

committee”.³⁶ He was thinking that the letter could be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the committee on 7/8 May, but it appears that the final letter was neither written nor sent and at that meeting only a letter from the Headmasters’ Association was read out.³⁷ The planned letter was an extended and forthright rejection of Norwood’s proposals for the SCE, which began, “We regret to have to inform our colleagues on the Committee that we cannot see our way to allow our names to be associated with the proposal to substitute for the SCE an internal examination.” The letter went so far as to focus its dissent on Norwood personally:

There is, in our view, no basis for any assumption that the rank and file of the teaching profession would welcome the supposedly enhanced prestige which our Chairman expects to result from the shouldering of the examination burden.³⁸

Not only was Nalder Williams’ letter a blunt rejection, Myers too had written a densely typed and reasoned opposition to Norwood’s plan which he also intended to send to Barrow. He argued that this was not a way to resolve the tension between the two goals of “greater freedom for the schools” and a system that would have “a wide currency”.³⁹ It is clear that such issues needed to be more thoroughly discussed by the committee. Shurrock wrote that he was prepared to go along with whatever the others decided (29 April): Hutchings too was in support and he said he would sound out Miss Clark, Miss Hastings and Thomas, the other Joint-Four nominees (30 April). This suggests that up to this point the committee members had not been discussing tactics among themselves and that at the end of April Hutchings did not know what Thomas had in mind.⁴⁰ However, we have already seen that Miss Hastings later retracted her Association’s support for the internal examination scheme, so eventually half of the committee’s members had expressed their opposition in one way or another.⁴¹

One has to conclude that those involved in these discussions were not very effective plotters, for it seems likely that time caught up with them. Communicating by post, they were not able to agree a common text to send. Somebody, probably Nalder Williams, would have kept Barrow informed about what was happening, who would in

³⁶ Nalder Williams, 27 April 1943, note and draft letter to Hutchings. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/2).

³⁷ Minutes of 22nd Norwood Committee meeting, 7/8 May 1943. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

³⁸ Nalder Williams, 5 May 1943. Letter [2nd draft] sent to Myers, Shurrock and Hutchings. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/2).

³⁹ J. E. Myers, 29 April 1943. Discussion paper on ‘Reform of the School Certificate Examination’ (ibid.).

⁴⁰ Thomas’s decision was acknowledged at the Board in a memo from Williams, 18 June 1943, to Barrow. Norwood wrote about it to Butler on 23 June. (TNA: ED 136/681).

⁴¹ Miss Clark was Headmistress of Manchester Girls High School and a prominent supporter of the JMB. Both she and Myers were co-opted to the English Language Committee in September 1935 (AQA archive, Manchester, box J/7/15). Naisbitt, the NUT representative, was apparently not involved in these discussions.

turn certainly have made his colleagues and Norwood aware of what was happening. They had agreed in the previous month that the examination boards should be told that it was too late to change the report, and it must be left to the Board to decide what was to be done.⁴² By the beginning of June, Butler had read and approved the report, the final celebratory meeting of the committee was held on 23 June and the report was published on 26 July in time, as Butler wished, for the debate about his Education Bill in parliament.⁴³ Norwood had led his committee to work quickly, meeting as often as twice a month (in war-time) with a minimal number of witnesses being invited to give evidence. In a letter to Butler, Norwood wrote of “my attempt to hurry” to defend himself against the criticisms of those who felt that they had not been properly consulted.⁴⁴ His over-riding aim of meeting Butler’s deadline had proved more influential on him than the need to achieve well thought-out and supported proposals for change.

The leadership of the Board of Education

The Norwood Report gained immediate positive headlines⁴⁵ and, as Butler hoped, this helped to create around his Act the aura of a bold, progressive stage in the country’s education history.⁴⁶ But Butler, having got what he wanted from Norwood, was able to leave aside some problematic examination issues for the next President (or Minister) to deal with. Negative reactions to Norwood’s proposals were being sent directly to him and in the following year he admitted, in a lengthy letter to Dr. Weitzman, “I must confess that [Norwood’s] report has not been very well received”.⁴⁷ Butler does not mention the report or examinations in the remainder of this letter, and neither does he do so in the chapter on the Education Act in his political autobiography, *The Art of the Possible* (1971).⁴⁸ To emphasise the Board’s interest Sir Maurice Holmes had attended the 14th meeting of the committee and stated that he was “in general agreement with the proposals submitted to

⁴² Barrow 15 March 1943, note to G.G. Williams. (TNA: ED 12/484).

⁴³ Butler, memo, 21 May 1943. (TNA: ED 136/681).

⁴⁴ Norwood, 19 November 1943. Letter to Butler, (TNA: ED 12/480). See the addendum to this chapter.

⁴⁵ Contemporary newspaper cuttings are filed in (TNA: ED 136/681).

⁴⁶ Presenting the White Paper on Education Reconstruction in the House of Commons Butler stated: “It is desirable that there should be a proper measure of independence in all these types of secondary school, not only in regard to the administration, but also in regard to the thralldom of examinations. If you free yourself from too much administrative interference, it is no good at the same time subordinating your curriculum to the supposed needs of universities or business. That is what happens if you subordinate the whole of your curriculum to examinations imposed from outside. The Government, therefore, welcome the appearance of the Norwood Committee’s Report, which will have careful consideration” (Hansard: House of Commons Debate vol 391 column 1831. 29 July 1943). To this *The Times* added that there were “Cheers” (30 July 1943).

⁴⁷ Butler, May 1945, letter to Dr Weitzman. (TNA: ED 136/612).

⁴⁸ Norwood himself only appears in the book on one page, as becoming Head of Marlborough when Butler was a pupil there and having made it “a very good school of its type”.

him". He was in favour of "limiting the spread of examinations" and believed that "the SCE was cramping teaching and denying to teachers the freedom which would make them masters in their own house".⁴⁹ However, his comments also noted that the new system would have a large effect on the work of inspectors. It appears that Norwood believed that the Board was supporting his radicalism, but he also needed to recognise in Holmes' statement a serious practical problem for which the committee needed a convincing solution to ensure Holmes' wholehearted support.

The Board of Education's handling of this situation has been described by (J. Petch, 1953), (Fisher, 1982) and (Gosden, 1995) amongst others. The consequences of control from the centre were becoming apparent, as checks and balances inherent in the devolved system were dispensed with and previously responsible groups were disempowered. Much was now dependent on Norwood and on the personal circumstances and idiosyncrasies of a handful of the Board's officers. Holmes and Duckworth were shortly to retire. Williams, the senior officer responsible for secondary examinations, insisted to his colleagues and Norwood that the full SSEC had to meet and be given a chance to comment on the report.⁵⁰ In some revealing notes to Norwood, briefing him before that meeting, it is clear that Williams expected Norwood to ask for the Council's approval of the Norwood recommendations and he appeared to assume that this could be obtained. In Williams' view, three main proposals were to be discussed:

- The School Certificate examinations: whether they should be a 'subject examination' and whether, within seven years, they should be reconsidered as an internal examination;
- A leaving examination at 18+;
- Examinations for university entrance.

Williams' note goes on "1 and 2 [as above] go together and are intimately the concern of the SSEC". Therefore they are "to be discussed by SSEC and, if approved, detailed arrangements worked out". So, Norwood was given the following procedure to follow:

Discuss the proposals and if they are accepted,

⁴⁹ Addendum to minutes of 14th Norwood Committee meeting, 27/28 November 1942. (Cambridge Assessment: PP/WNW 2/1).

⁵⁰ Williams, 11 November 1943, told Norwood in a memo that the Council should have been given a chance to express its view, "as it was clear in setting the Norwood Committee up that they were led to expect that". In a later memo to Norwood on 13 May 1944 he wrote that "consultation with Local Authorities and teachers and probably also the examination bodies" was essential. (TNA: ED 12/480).

2. Pass a resolution accepting and communicate that to the Board
3. Consider changes to the SCE and the setting up an 18+ examination, with reference to - dates, who should be informed and what consultation with other bodies is desirable.⁵¹

The agenda for the meeting, sent in advance, had warned that the meeting might last for two days, but Norwood quickly saw that Council members intended to air their criticisms and he “unceremoniously dismissed them after only two hours” (J. Petch, 1953, p. 165). Norwood had decided that there was no possibility of obtaining the Council’s approval of the committee’s proposals, and therefore it was preferable not to consult them.

Factors other than the procedural may have been in play to create this breakdown and I would argue that Norwood was not in a fit state emotionally to chair this important meeting. A description of the events of that day is offered in an addendum to this chapter.

Duckworth was another advocate for caution but he was shortly to leave the Board. While he was committed to the Board’s policy to restrict examination taking, he did not go along whole-heartedly with Norwood’s plans, which is further evidence that in the opinion of the Board Norwood was going too far. In a memo sent to Butler’s PA for the President’s information, Duckworth made four comments which distanced himself from the Norwood Report.⁵² First, he revealed that the chapter in the report about the inspectorate was “drafted by Norwood himself”. This implies that Duckworth, as the Senior Chief Inspector, had limited influence over the text of the report even when it referred to the work of his own department. It is further evidence that the Board’s officers believed they had to allow chairmen of such committees their independence (possibly taking the lead from Butler). Alternatively, one may also note the usefulness (learned perhaps from Morant) of being able to claim afterwards that the recommendations were Norwood’s and not the Board’s. Secondly, Duckworth commented on the issue of school reports which the report had advocated as a replacement for examinations. He claimed that “Norwood has been too optimistic about the possibility of producing reliable records in a form which would enable them to be used for selection [for secondary places]”. He also foresaw problems for teachers who could be “open to attack by disappointed parents” and he forecast that training teachers to write good reports would be “a long and tiring business”. Thirdly, he commented on the proposal for internal examinations. “The machinery proposed for the assessment proved so complicated and cumbrous that the committee felt that they could

⁵¹ Williams, 19 November 1943, chairman’s notes with agenda of 103rd Council meeting. (TNA: ED 12/532).

⁵² Duckworth, 28 June 1943, memo to President’s Personal Assistant (Miss Goodfellow). (TNA: ED 136/681).

not recommend it.” The claim that the committee could not agree a plan for implementation of this key proposal was a damaging reflection on the report’s overall trustworthiness. Finally, Duckworth suggested that it was possible “but not probable that the public will accept an unassessed internal examination”. So, Duckworth implied, leaving the new system in the hands of the teachers alone was not to be recommended. Given his close association with the Norwood Committee and his responsibility for the inspectorate’s work this advice would have increased any caution Butler already felt about the implementation of Norwood’s examination plans.

Duckworth retired at the end of 1943 and Martin Roseveare was appointed Senior Chief Inspector in April 1944 to replace him.⁵³ In a memo, written shortly after he was appointed, Roseveare made a first attempt to suggest a way forward for the problems of “internal Examinations and School Records”. He wrote that these two themes were “irrelevant and confusing the issue”. The schools should sort themselves out and not “lean” on the School Certificate, “the internal examinations and the records being nothing more than possible means to an end”.⁵⁴ This memo may be said to describe a policy which was simply that ‘the schools must devise their own examination schemes’.⁵⁵ Roseveare enthusiastically set about re-establishing, as he saw it, the primacy of the Board and the inspectors.⁵⁶ After a year in his post he responded to a suggestion from Williams that the Board should clarify the situation for the schools. Roseveare wrote, “if the Ministry can take the bull by the horns and stand up to [a] policy (and I hope it can) let us be quite honest about it and come out at full blast in the form of a Circular”. With this note he attached his “very crude attempt” at a circular saying they would not know the answers “until we force experiment in this way”.⁵⁷

Separately, on the same day, Roseveare argued that the Board’s failure to champion its no-examination policy was “too lily-livered and cowardly”. He again argued that a circular should be sent out: “The policy crux ... [is that which] ... aims at the slaying of

⁵³ Lawton and Gordon note that he moved straight from School Inspector to Senior Chief Inspector (having omitted Chief Inspector) and, aged 46, was the youngest to hold the post. He had at first worked at the Board of Education as an inspector for mathematics but during the war he was loaned to the Ministry of Food where he devised and ran the national rationing system, for which he received a knighthood (Lawton and Gordon, 1987).

⁵⁴ Roseveare, 15 May 1944, memo to Williams and Chief Inspector Charles. (TNA: ED 12/480).

⁵⁵ Claiming the support of both the contemporary *TES* and *The Beloe Report*, Brooks described this as a “dereliction of duty” by the Board of Education (Brooks, 2008, p. 458).

⁵⁶ Roseveare 3 August 1945 memo to Williams and Barrow about SSEC membership: “as a general matter of principle I feel this sort of membership (i.e. ‘representation’) and constitution belongs to past history wherein the Ministry decline [sic] to take its proper responsibility and love [sic] to shelve it on others”. (TNA: ED 47/133).

⁵⁷ Roseveare, 11 May 1945 memo to Williams and Barrow. (TNA: ED 147/134).

the School Certificate”.⁵⁸ Chief Inspector Charles agreed and Barrow was full of admiration for this robust proposal, risky though it was.

You have turned this opportunity to brilliant account: it is a most audacious attempt, and I only hope it will succeed, for if the Ministry were once committed in this way there would be no turning back ... You will have won a notable victory if you can push this through.⁵⁹

After Labour formed the post-war government at the end of July 1945, Roseveare, with the new Permanent Secretary, Maud, was influential in briefing the new Minister, Ellen Wilkinson, who soon found herself under some pressure from within the Labour Party for a contrary examinations policy that would give all secondary students an opportunity to show what they were capable of.⁶⁰ She therefore wanted to look for an alternative to the line that the civil servants were advocating.⁶¹ Roseveare’s attitude, which cannot have been helpful to Wilkinson, was that “Gradually I think we have begun to train our masters to the thought of abolishing the School Certificate”.⁶² Roseveare’s more experienced colleagues might have thought that he was being fool-hardy rather than bold and he himself had on one occasion to bow to Williams’ greater experience.⁶³ On another occasion he suggested that the Minister might have seen the internal examination proposal as his personal “mad stunt”.⁶⁴ The inexperience of Roseveare and his gung-ho attitude were significant in this period of change, given the departure of key people who had been looking after the SCE system. This was particularly so since Duckworth, Williams and Butler had all come to the conclusion that delaying decisions about the examination proposals for a few years would be the wisest plan.⁶⁵

The Board’s activity resulted, in May 1946, in the publication of Circular 103 which described the proposed seven-year period of experimentation in secondary technical and modern schools and the revised SCE system for grammar schools, after which there

⁵⁸ Roseveare 11 May 1945 to Chief Inspectors Charles and Richardson. (TNA: ED 147/134).

⁵⁹ Barrow *post*-11 May 1945, memo to Roseveare (*ibid.*).

⁶⁰ Williams heard in early April 1946 that the Minister had met with the Labour Party Education group which had expressed concerns. Barrow in a memo to Williams was horrified that there was some pressure to “have examinations for all schools”: 6 April 1946 (*ibid.*).

⁶¹ Minister, 4 November 1945, annotation on a memo from Williams to Holmes: “I should like to see if a new approach [to this] problem is possible.” (*ibid.*).

⁶² Roseveare 21 March 1946, memo to Williams (*ibid.*).

⁶³ “I expect GG [Williams] is right and that my flash in the pan based on inexperience is wrong. I am ready to accept his version”. Roseveare, 3 August 1945, memo to Barrow about Circular 103. (TNA: ED 147/133).

⁶⁴ Roseveare 6 April 1946, memo to Maud. (TNA: ED 147/134).

⁶⁵ Roseveare was Senior Chief Inspector for over 13 years, during which time he played a significant role in setting up The Associated Examining Board (1953). In his biography *Joys, Jaunts and Jobs* he refers to the Norwood proposals in one sentence, reporting that the new SSEC “recommended that the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate should be discontinued and replaced by the General Certificate of Education” (Roseveare, 1984, p. 51).

would be internal examinations for all except university applicants. Next came Circular 113, published in June the same year, which described the regime in which the Minister of Education would take full responsibility for examination policy and delivery, relying on “the co-operation of the approved examining bodies to carry out the work of the examinations”. A system which had depended upon institutional relationships was now giving way to one over which the Ministry of Education was taking control. Petch, in his record of his experiences of these events, wrote two pages of scathing comment about both documents that the Board produced. Circular 103 was, for him, “a tendentious account of the development of the SC and HSC Examinations”, while Circular 113 was “an example ...of the preference by government departments for dealing not with members of local bodies but with their [the government’s] own servants” (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 165–167). Petch held the view that examinations needed to be conducted by bodies independent of the government, though the JMB had continuously shown its willingness to collaborate with the Board of Education on the SCE. To be losing the support of even the JMB in these circumstances would seem to have been a major error by the Ministry of Education.

Simon’s generally accepted view of the Norwood Committee’s work was that it “produced the ideological underpinning for the tripartite system” (B. Simon. 1986, p.39) and that, because of its focus on the curriculum of grammar schools, it was responsible for the continuation of an elitist education system in the country.⁶⁶ What is much less commented on is the fate of Norwood’s proposals for the national examination system, which for the next eight years governed the Board of Education’s policy on examinations (Brooks, 2008). In his paper mentioned above, Simon gave only four lines to a factual report of Norwood’s examination proposals. Correlli Barnett, who described Norwood’s report as “a failure to exploit a unique opportunity for radical change across the whole front of Britain’s crippling weaknesses in education and training” (Barnett, 2001, p. 300), did not mention examinations at all. On one issue it is necessary to correct Simon’s account of the Board’s decision to confine the taking of examinations only to pupils in grammar schools. He noted that “The whole issue appears to have reached a sudden crisis in the early summer of 1946” when requests from secondary modern schools to take SC examinations “suddenly, and clearly unexpectedly, reached the ministry” (B. Simon, 1991, p. 111). From the perspective of the arguments developed in previous chapters in this study, we must conclude that reactions to the Board’s proposals on examinations would not have been unexpected, at least to those who had been involved with the Board’s

⁶⁶ “The new order in English Education, celebrated by Dent and many others, turned out to be the old order in a new disguise” (Simon, B., *ibid.*, p.41).

“restricted examination” policy over many years. The Board’s refusal of support for schools which wished to enter 15-year-olds for vocational examinations (see chapter seven above), may be compared to a similar instance which occurred in 1946 when the East Midlands Education Union approached the Board with a proposal to set examinations for 15-year-olds in the new secondary schools. Chief Inspector Charles, following Duckworth’s precedent, determined that the schools should be protected from the “the contamination of the EMEU”. After a meeting with representatives of the Union he noted that he had stressed,

the importance of Modern Schools working out their own destiny, untrammelled by external examinations, and was afraid that if permission to take the EMEU examinations were given, the virus of external examinations would spread.⁶⁷

This retreat into inflated metaphor, which was now embedded in the inspectorate’s discourse, suggests an unreasoning obsession that was seriously unhelpful, since it was preventing policy makers from responding creatively to the challenge of secondary education for all. On the specific point of Simon’s comments above, it is clear that given the history of the Board’s long-standing examination policy, it was entirely predictable that the Board’s decision to implement Norwood’s no-examination proposals for the newly emerging secondary schools would be contested. If centralisation had come in practice to mean control by a small, unaccountable group of civil servants, then the negative aspects of ‘central control’ were being exemplified as the SCE system was brought to its end.

Conclusion

This chapter, and particularly the latter half of it, has indicated a different interpretation of the events surrounding Norwood’s examination proposals than that presented by McCulloch in his volume *Educational reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the twenty-first century*.⁶⁸ On the underlying issues there is no disagreement. McCulloch describes the issue as being about “the balance between teachers, examining boards and the State” (McCulloch, 1994, p. 133), which is the key focus of this study. Norwood’s proposals, McCulloch notes, addressed the fundamental issue of teachers’ “involvement in the process of constructing and assessing examinable knowledge” (ibid.,,

⁶⁷ Notes of meeting by CHMI Charles, 15 March 1946. (TNA: ED 147/133).

⁶⁸ In chapter eight of his volume, McCulloch develops arguments earlier set out in his article, ‘Judgement of the Teacher: the Norwood Report and internal examinations’, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 3:1, 129-43 (1993).

p.135).⁶⁹ Norwood's aim was that teaching "might in time become a self-governing profession and be esteemed as such" (Norwood cited by McCulloch, *ibid.*, p.137) thus indicating "an alternative set of priorities and values" (*ibid.*, p.136), particularly when this "professional" form of accountability is compared to the "market" and "managerial" forms described by Willis (Willis, 1992, p. 207). Each of these perspectives can readily be aligned with those taken up by this study. However, a difficulty arises with the allusion to "a key struggle for control" (McCulloch, 1994. p.136) and with the suggestion that this struggle was between the teachers and the examination boards. The evidence from the current study suggests rather that the struggle was the traditional one, between central control and the involvement of other professional groups who might collaborate with the government, as the Bryce Commission had envisaged, to deliver a complex public service.

The study suggests that an implication of the teachers' non-involvement in the assessment of students and an over-emphasis on "the extent of their alienation from this process" (*ibid.*, p.135) should be challenged. McCulloch's chapter rests on the assumption, which this study has sought to avoid, that true professionals would have demanded internal examinations because they addressed "the rights of the teachers" (*ibid.*, p. 135) and answered their desire for influence over "the character of the school curriculum and the civic goals of education" (*ibid.*, p.136). Norwood is portrayed in this argument as the person with "ideals" brought down by a conservative "propaganda war" (*ibid.*, p.141) run by the universities. But, it might be asked, was this how the involvement of the universities and the role of the teachers were generally seen at the time?

Norwood presented the struggle as that of the teachers against the university boards, but such a view neglected the fact that he was closely allied at the time to a dominant group in the Board of Education. It also credits the universities with too much independent influence, for by that time the Board of Education was the dominant partner. Furthermore, though the universities did have a good deal of influence, this influence was not just thought to be negative. The universities were also seen as supporting the professional independence of teachers, a fact which had influenced decisions made about the system since its inception. If one could have asked the universities which form of accountability they would have favoured for teachers it would seem very likely that they, along with Norwood, would have chosen a 'professional' model. The demand for a more 'managerial' form of examination system, with accountability as its aim, was coming from the state, both central and local, with their emphasis on school quality as a focus for

⁶⁹ McCulloch states that internal examination are those over which teachers have control by "setting and marking them within the schools" (*ibid.*, p.135).

examinations. Meanwhile, the Board of Education was struggling to respond to pressure from parents and students who held a 'market' view of education, as suggested by the then Director of Education for Leicestershire (McCulloch, 1994, p. 144).

An argument that somehow the critics of the Norwood proposals were undermining the professionalism of teachers would have to rely on a presumption that the views of a majority of teachers differed from those groups and associations that were supposed to represent them (*ibid.*, p.143-144). The documentary evidence does not support this view. Teachers' organisations had been seeking and gaining more influence in the work of the examination boards and this chapter has demonstrated that three of the Joint-Four teachers' organisations joined the boards in opposing Norwood's "abolition" proposal. The fact that Norwood and the Board of Education had manoeuvred their representatives into appearing to support it only made the situation more fraught when it began to emerge that their organisations did not. What the evidence does show is that Norwood's proposals were seen as not answering the criticisms of those in the boards, among others, that they were impractical. McCulloch's conclusion is that Norwood's failure to enlist teachers' support for internal examinations indicates their "limited ambitions" (*ibid.*, p.143) which he conceives as "teacher conservatism". A charge of conservatism, at least among teachers preparing students for the SCE in grammar schools, is supported by the evidence, but the equation of that charge with lack of ambition remains open to debate. Norwood's aim was that teachers should "themselves be able to work out a scheme of education and to assess it" (Norwood cited by McCulloch, *ibid.*, p.137). When one reflects on the implications of this for the individual teacher it does appear to be an extreme demand for teachers' independence, which would have required a great deal from them. Like the teachers who went before them they were resistant to being told what to do, but they also saw their work with examination boards as a practical means of making their task manageable.

Addendum to Chapter 8 *Final meeting of the old SSEC :* ***“chicanery”?***

The Norwood Report was formally presented to the SSEC at a meeting in November 1943. The agenda paper noted that Item 6 of the meeting was “To receive the report of the Committee of the Council appointed by the President of the Board of Education ... and to consider the report”. Those attending were alerted to the likely length of the discussion by the information that the meeting would take place “On Friday 19th November 1943 at 10.30 and will probably continue on the following day”.¹ Thirty-one people arrived for the meeting, plus Mr Crawley of Cambridge University. Dr. Thomas and G.G Williams, who was ill, sent apologies.²

Norwood later wrote that the SSEC, on which “the teachers are likely to prove inconvenient and the Examination Boards intractable” had “passed its time of useful work”.³ He was suspicious of London University which, he feared, might return to its historic practice of setting its matriculation examinations independently.⁴ He distrusted the intentions of the boards linked to Oxford and Cambridge and before the meeting had written to Williams that the Board,

must not for a moment let the university Examining Bodies get away with the idea that they either represent the universities or the traditional wisdom of the centuries; they need to be strongly reminded that they are servants of the public and not masters of the educational house and above all, they must not be let loose on the SSEC.⁵

Such a whirlpool of distrust was hardly the best state of mind for someone who must lead the Council to agree a way forward. In reply to Norwood’s letter G.G. Williams bluntly told him that it was reasonable for the Council to expect to be able to express its views on the Norwood Report.⁶ Notes with the agenda in the National Archives (see pages 171-172 above), show how carefully Williams had planned the sequence of the discussion and briefed Norwood in order to get them out of this tricky situation. It was up to Norwood to deliver this at the meeting and yet he clearly did not do as Williams had directed.

¹ Agenda paper. (TNA: ED 12/532).

² Minutes of the 103rd meeting of the SSEC, 19 November 1943. (TNA: ED 12/240).

³ Norwood, 11 May 1944. Letter to Williams, 11 May 1944 (TNA: *ibid.*).

⁴ In the same letter to Williams Norwood wrote: “I do not want to see any chance given to London to play a lone hand in the name of freedom” (*ibid.*).

⁵ Letter from Norwood to G.G. Williams, November 10, 1943 (TNA: *ibid.*).

⁶ Letter from G.G. Williams to Norwood, November 11, 1943 (TNA: *ibid.*).

In a letter written to Butler in the afternoon or evening after the meeting, Norwood described the tactics he had employed. See the letter below.⁷ The defensive phraseology of the letter - and even his handwriting, which was not easily readable at the best of times -, suggest he was under a good deal of stress. Petch, who was present at the meeting, noted: “On assembly the members were bluntly informed that their part was to receive and not to question; when it began to appear that considerable comment was likely, the Chairman unceremoniously dismissed them” and he described the running of the meeting as a “perfect example of official chicanery” (J. Petch, 1953, p. 165). One imagines Norwood later in the day, but now in his club, still seething about what had happened, and possibly embarrassed by his own behaviour, scribbling his letter to his ex-student the President of the Board of Education. Far from wondering where he might have gone wrong, he lashes out in several directions, ending by sweeping away one of the seven English examination boards as being undeserving of any place in “our system”.⁸ I find an element of personal tragedy in the contents of this letter, which is paralleled in McCulloch’s judgement of another letter that Norwood wrote at this time: “There was in this [reply] a note of frustration that reflected a rapid fall from hubris to nemesis” (McCulloch, 2007, p. 151).

Historians must be wary of attempting amateur psychological analyses of the historical figures they present. Nevertheless, Norwood’s character and his behaviour at this meeting are of some significance historically and to the focus of this study. If we can agree with him that his proposal to abolish examinations for sixteen-year-olds was one which might have marked an improvement in the English education system, then we must seek the reasons for the proposal’s failure to attract sufficient support to lead to its implementation. The strategy that Norwood believed was necessary to bring in this reform was based on an assumption that such an outcome would never be widely agreed to and it could only be introduced by decisive action. This strategy became a reason in itself for those whose support Norwood needed to distance themselves from his proposal.

Norwood joined in enthusiastically with discussions within the Board about dispensing with the SSEC and the Consultative Committee, two key elements of the Board’s structure which were supposed to guarantee democratic participation in education policy making.⁹ He had worked with the examination boards for over twenty years, but

⁷ Letter from Norwood to Butler, written from The Athanaeum, 19 November 1943. (TNA: ED 12/480).

⁸ The Oxford and Cambridge Board survived for another fifty or so years.

⁹ As the Board deliberated on how to react to the response to the Norwood proposals, much of it critical, Norwood wrote to Williams on 11 May 1944 saying that the SSEC was too large and dominated by “vested interests”, notably the teachers and the examination boards, with the implication that they should not be

Williams noticed an animus towards them, particularly those from Oxford and Cambridge, which he found puzzling.¹⁰ Norwood's reference to "masters" and "servants" in the correspondence with Williams a week before the meeting may give a glimpse into what might have been happening. McCulloch has argued that Norwood, though he had headed two of the foremost public schools of the day and an Oxford College, never felt fully accepted into the top flight of society (McCulloch, 2007, p.156-7). The anger which emerged when he was faced with the 'effrontery' of Oxbridge was perhaps because their representatives were behaving as if they were "masters". They must be made to see that they, like Norwood himself, were in fact "servants". (His nickname at Harrow was "Boots" (Tyerman, 2000, p. 508)). Furthermore, in treating his proposals dismissively, they were in Norwood's eyes implicitly claiming a special link to the "wisdom of the centuries", a treasure that was most precious to Norwood, a devout classicist and traditionalist.

In thinking back to the fears about 'centralisation' which so preoccupied those who hesitated in the previous century to support a role in education for the government, there is a tragic element in the outcome that Norwood, an advocate of 'reform', had undermined his own advocacy in a display of the kind of over-bearing authority towards which such earlier fears were directed.

Overleaf:

Figure 3: Norwood's letter to Butler, 19 November 1943. (TNA: ED 12/480).

consulted on what to do next. Williams' reply on 13th May stated that "the carrying out of policy in this matter must be done in consultation with Local Authorities and teachers and probably also the examination bodies." Again, Norwood was being brought into line by Williams. (TNA: ED 12/480).

¹⁰ Williams wrote that he could not understand Norwood's animosity towards the examination boards. Minute on 15 May 1944 (ibid.).

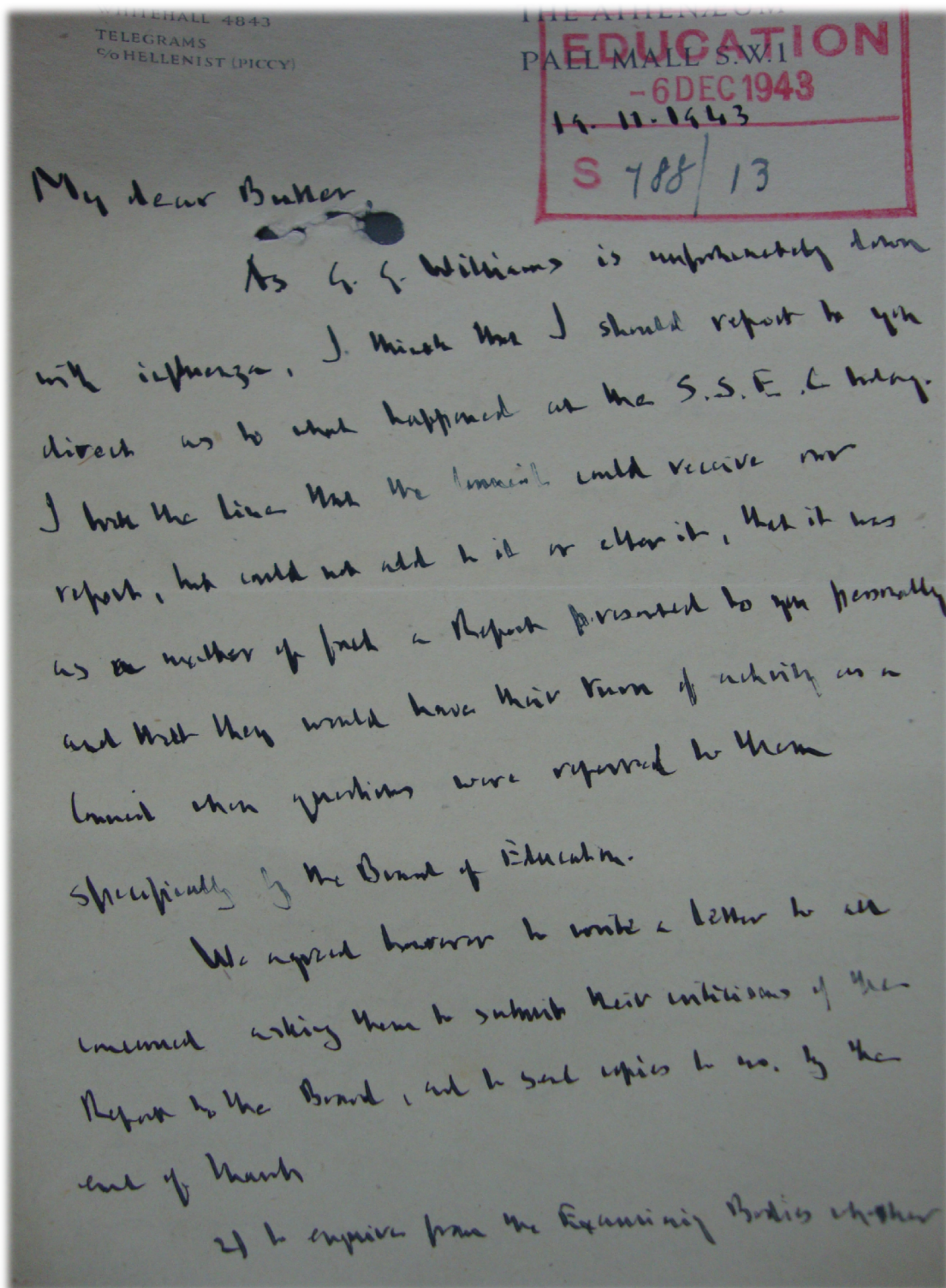


Figure 3: Norwood's letter to Butler, 19 November 1943. (TNA: ED 12/480).

Sent from the Athanaeum Club, Pall Mall.

They saw my difficulty in converting the Schools
Conference into a Subject Examination, and
3) to give authority to the ~~Secretary~~ and myself to
make a better report on the 18+ examination
and circulate this before the end of the year

I do not think that anything can be done
until all those concerned have said their say
without being able to allege that they have been
misled. We have to recognise that there is
a definite attempt in progress on behalf of the
Oxford Locals, the Cambridge Locals, and the O & C
Joint Board, to sabotage the report, and to throw
the older Universities into strong opposition. It will
not succeed at Oxford, but I am afraid that it
has done mischief at Cambridge; it carried no
weight with the Examiners Council this morning

TELEPHONE
WHITEHALL 4843
TELEGRAMS
%HELLENIST (PICCY)

THE ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL S.W.1

The atmosphere was at times stormy, but
I deliberately ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~to~~ be so, because I wanted
the representatives of the Locals to realise that
they were playing a dangerous game which was
resulted in social questions. The Secretary of
the Executive side of the O.C. Joint Board had
the opportunity to state that our efforts he rich
revised - this after offering to give evidence, or
to answer our questions. But this Board has long
ceased to play any useful part in our system.

I hope that you will not think that
we are being slow, but any attempt to hurry means
the ruining of the way 'we have not been
consulted'. And it is a fact that most of the

Transcription

My dear Butler

As G. G. Williams is unfortunately down with influenza, I think that I should report to you direct as to what happened at the S.S.E.C. today. I took the line that the Council could receive our report, but could not add to it or alter it, that it was as a matter of fact a Report presented to you personally and that they would have their turn of activity(?) as a Council when questions were referred to them specifically by the Board of Education.

We agreed however to write a letter to all concerned asking them to submit their criticisms of the Report to the Board, and to send copies to us, by the end of March (?);

2) to enquire from the Examining Bodies whether they saw any difficulty in converting(?) the Schools Certificate into a Subject Examination, and

3) to give authority to the Secretary and myself to make a fuller report on the 18+ examination and circulate this before the end of the year.

I do not think that anything can be done(?) until all those concerned have said their say without being able to allege that they have been rushed. We have to recognise that there is a definite attempt in progress on behalf of the Oxford Locals, the Cambridge Locals, and the O and C Joint Board, to sabotage the report, and to throw the older Universities into strong opposition(?). It will not succeed at Oxford, but I am afraid that it has done mischief at Cambridge; it carried no weight with the Examination Council this morning.

The atmosphere was at times stormy, but I deliberately let it be so, because I wanted the representatives of the Locals to realise that they were playing a dangerous game which also resulted(?) in several questions. The Secretary of the Cambridge side of the O and C Joint Board had the effrontery to [vote? ask?] that our report be not received – this after refusing to give evidence, or to answer our questions. But this Board has long ceased to play any useful part in our system.

I hope that you will not think that we were being slow but my attempt(?) to hurry means the raising of the cry 'We have not been consulted'. And it is a fact that most of the educational world thought that they were going to get a soporific and platitudinous report and now find that they have actually (?) got to read it.

Yours sincerely,
Cyril Norwood

CHAPTER 9 : SURVIVAL OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINATION SYSTEM

The title of this thesis refers to the “formation and maintenance” of an examination system and my third research question suggests that the system ‘survived’ which, in an obvious sense, the SCE did not.¹ In a lecture given in the autumn of 1956, which looked back on the happenings of the late 1940s and early 1950s, John Wolfenden, by then Chairman of the SSEC, chose to emphasise the newness of the GCE and the word he used to characterise the new regime was “freedom”.² He argued that grammar schools were by then free of the SCE’s group system, free to decide whether pupils would take examinations at ‘O’ or ‘A’ level and when they might take those exams, within some limits, and individual students could thus be free from regularly taking examinations, since what mattered was their combination of results at the end of their sixth-form courses. He portrayed the GCE examination system as enabling what the Norwood Committee had intended, a “radical change of outlook and practice” (ed., Jeffery, 1958, p. 25). But Wolfenden also acknowledged “the reluctance of some teachers to accept the gift that was offered to them” and his speech was a challenge to the profession to make the best of the new system. What he did not mention in the lecture was that the new system was not the internally controlled system that Norwood had envisaged. His proposal that public examinations for students below the age of seventeen should be abolished altogether was the most radical of a sequence of attempts to replace them.³ But, in the guise of the GCE, the national system was still an external scheme and in that sense the SCE system had survived. Of my three research questions the third therefore supersedes the other two, for this survival is historically the most challenging aspect of my research.

¹ The Ministry’s Circulars 103 and 113, published in the early summer 1946, announced the replacement of the SCE. A reconstituted SSEC, on which the examination boards were no longer represented, produced proposals for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) in *Examinations in Secondary Schools* (H.M.S.O., 1947).

² Wolfenden, who was at the time Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, became Chairman of the SSEC after Holmes, who followed Norwood after his retirement from the Board, and Philip Morris. Wolfenden’s lecture was titled, “The SSEC and the Evolution of Policy on External Examinations” and it linked decisions made at the first meeting of the reconstituted SSEC to the situation in the early 1950s in grammar schools particularly.

³ Only on the outer fringes of the New Education Fellowship was the final “progressive” step proposed that there was no need to examine pupils in schools at all. The NEF’s Commission on Examinations commented: “Such a view is one-sided ... since it not only ignores society but forgets the individual’s dependence on it ... [The child] must be able to compare his capacities with those of others in the group” (New Education Fellowship, 1935, p. 9).

A key distinction throughout this study has been that between external and internal examinations, but it concludes with no preference for one of them. This chapter therefore summarises the reasons apparent at the time for the choice of one system and the rejection of the other. A procedural observation made by C. Wright Mills describes its approach:

Rather than ‘explain’ something as ‘a persistence from the past,’ we ought to ask, ‘why has it persisted?’ Usually we will find that the answer varies according to the phases through which whatever we are studying has gone; for each of these phases we may then attempt to find out what role it has played, and how and why it has passed on to the next phase (Mills, 2000, p. 154 paperback).

Research Question 1

- What expectations did the key actors in the School Certificate Examination (SCE) system (examination boards, teachers and state) bring to its development?

This question refers to what key groups of actors in the SCE system brought to the scheme and how they adapted to the reality of their roles. Of these actors, the examination boards were the most homogeneous group since they were engaged in a common task, but the size of the boards’ candidatures and their years of experience were very different. All the boards were in transition from being independent to becoming part of a national system in which their freedom to act would be constrained. The teachers too were in transition, not least because they were hoping they would have considerable influence over the emerging national examination system, though such hopes were complicated by the systemic question of who could legitimately speak for them? Was it to be the General Teaching Council which was initially given favoured representation on the SSEC? Was it the burgeoning National Union of Teachers? Or the four organisations, working together as “the Joint-Four”, that claimed most support from the secondary teachers? The state too was itself in transition, since central and local government bodies were in the process of clarifying their different responsibilities. Chapter three described the educational environment as in a continuing state of flux and this illustrates how, when it comes to making decisions about policies, judgements have to be made about the extent of support that different alternatives might attract. For example, decisions were later made about the new GCE system that detached matriculation from the first examinations, abolished the SCE’s group requirements and gave greater flexibility about when external examinations might be taken. These changes, it appeared, were enough to secure both professional and

public support for the new system, even though the long-campaigned-for, internally-based examination system had not been achieved.

It may be tempting to characterise this situation as a power-struggle but the felt weakness of the positions of the different actors is what is apparent in the archives. The Board's officers felt themselves unable to insist on actions by the examination boards. However, the influence of the examination boards was quite easily reduced when the Board set its mind to it, because the government was paying the fees of the candidates from government-aided schools. The teachers did not get the representation on the SSEC that they thought they should have until the mid 1930s, and only slowly did the examination boards facilitate the integration of teacher representatives into their committees. Some LEAs were continually at odds with the decision to entrust the examination system to the university boards. Such struggles were seen to be not about competition for influence but about institutional identity and reputation. The Board of Education suffered from a reputation for inaction, the LEAs were seen as very variable in their effectiveness and, in seeking to improve their conditions of work, the teachers struggled to decide whether to depend upon the strength of their professional identity or upon union influence. The universities were brought into the examination system because their reputations would give the system credibility but they remained concerned about the effect of the school examinations on their public standing. The Board of Education, the SSEC, the LEAs, the examination boards and the teachers' organisations were all seeking to establish and maintain a legitimating integrity in the eyes of the profession and the public.

The way the SCE system was set up, on a plan set out by the Bryce Commission which aimed for 'elasticity', was significant. I have suggested in chapter three that this was a 'liberal' project, not only because much of the impetus for more active involvement in secondary education came from within avowedly Liberal party circles, but because the flexibility desired seemed to be a core feature of English liberalism. Morley's guidelines for compromise, between situations bequeathed by history and progressive policies for national development, were a description of an approach which can be applied to the setting up of the SC examination system. Hughes' discussion of this historic stage in the development of Liberal Party education policy described a more general readjustment from Benthamism to Collectivism, "from being chiefly concerned with removing the shackles on the free actions of individuals" to "the use of legislation to benefit the poor, even at some sacrifice to individual freedom" (Hughes, 1960, p. 112). Such incorporation of two sides of a question required a detachment from party politics, according to Hughes, a

position exemplified by Forster - who saw into law the Education Act of 1870 against some Liberal opposition - and Haldane - who supported Balfour's Act of 1902 though his party opposed it.

A difficulty which comes if a politician is willing to forgo the great rewards of politics and become an educational expert, is that he will have to become a non-party man at the same time, in thought if not in name (ibid. p.118).

This describes the position of Michel Sadler who, as we saw in chapter six, did not fit easily into the world of party politics though his inclinations were distinctly 'liberal'.

Sadler, who had such influence on education policy for 40 years, often wrote of the "two-mindedness" of British culture and saw himself as working towards a resolution within the education service of that tension. It was the vision of the Bryce Commission that relationships between the interested bodies would offer the means to finding solutions to complex problems in a changing situation. Detailed plans and laid-down policies were not seen as the way to achieve such an organic harmony. The formation and maintenance of the examination system may thus be seen as reflecting larger political trends in its recognition of the need to steer between institutional individualism and state domination.

Hughes also noted that the contradictions within the two minds of the Liberal Party eventually made way for the predominance of the Labour Party on issues of change and reform. He cited Sidney Webb's assertion that,

the trouble with Gladstonian Liberalism is that, by instinct, by tradition, and by the positive precepts of its past proponents, it 'thinks in individuals' ... No leader will attract the mass of unpolitical citizens ... without expanding his thesis of efficiency into a comprehensive and definite programme (ibid. p.123).

Influenced by a similar recognition, committed reformers like Arthur Acland came to support Labour rather than the Liberals. But Popkewitz has warned that the historian should beware of a presumption that whatever happened next was an advance on what had happened before.⁴ Towards the end of the SCE period W.O. Lester Smith⁵ wrote in *To Whom do Schools Belong?* (1946) about "the English compromise" which he traced back to the 1870 Education Act. He was well informed about the thinking which led to Butler's Act, and he believed that it continued in the spirit of the English compromise, but his book was a warning that governments are capable of over-reaching themselves and without care

⁴ He noted the simplistic presumptions of historicism: "Society, the family, the child, and community are also placed in systems whose parts interrelate through processes whose past become the precursors and mediators of the present and, if properly understood, provide direction for organizing the future" (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 8).

⁵ Lester Smith was Chief Education Officer for Manchester from 1931 to 1949.

state schools could come “to be used for propaganda” (Lester Smith, 1945, p. 19). (A quotation from Adolf Hitler is one of those given in his frontispiece.) His one comment about the examination system showed that he was both accepting of what had been achieved thus far and yet aware of its negative possibilities. In writing about state intervention he observed that, “in the secondary school world the only feature which bears any resemblance to despotism is the School Certificate examination: that certainly has for years had a profound influence on the curriculum” (Lester Smith, 1945, p. 146). This study has sought to distinguish between the existence of an examination system and the ways it was managed over time; in describing the changes brought about in the balance of influence between the SCE’s partners it has noted the Board’s tendency to undermine some of the democratic structures that had been legislated for it at the start of the century.

The reactions of the Board of Education in the 1930s and 40s demonstrate a change from its initial acceptance of what has been called a “pluralist” model of education policy. Gewirtz and Ozga have argued that in England this has been less of a partnership than has been claimed for it and that a more accurate perspective would be that the system was “statist or state-centred”.⁶ Their argument did not refer to the examination system but it described well the tensions and reactions noted in this study which developed within that system in the 1930s and 40s:

the idea of indirect rule, or of partnership used as a form of control is an exemplary case of the unmanageable contradictions faced by the state in managing the education system. Direct rule provokes resistance (political problem) and is inefficient (economic problem), indirect rule fosters feelings of independence and becomes unmanageable (Gewirtz & Ozga, 1990, pp. 40–41).

In summing up their argument for a “statist” explanation of policy making, Gewirtz and Ozga propose that a first step would be “to concentrate on understanding partnership in ideological terms, and to interpret its primary function as that of control” (ibid. p.47). Chapter seven above has shown that the Board of Education came to think that it needed to take control (Gewirtz and Ozga emphasise the memo written by R.S. Wood that was referred to in that chapter) but this puts in perspective the thinking of the Bryce Commissioners which was not focused on control but on innovation and development. Their proposed Board of Education was given the task, the direction and the partners with which it might create a new system. However, having been set up, the Board quite quickly decided that more central control was necessary (a perspective first associated with

⁶ “An essential element of pluralism is that power is distributed, and that politics is a process of bargaining between interest groups and government” (Gewirtz & Ozga, 1990, p. 38).

Morant), thus providing an example of the process that Gewirtz and Ozga described. My thesis, however, proposes that in that process something vital of the original vision was endangered, which was the capacity to innovate when solutions were uncertain and to maximise the contributions of those who might best deliver such a venture. Such a loss might be thought inevitable because of pressure from actual events but this thesis also supports a view that the running of an examination system, like the management of teaching, needs to take serious account of the independence of those involved. At the heart of examining are judgements made by hundreds of individuals who must be both standardised and empowered to do their work so that valid and reliable decisions about pupils' work are made. A partnership model is therefore particularly important for examining.

A final point, which arises from the above discussion and which relates to both my first and third research questions, is the fact that the key actors in the system were divided about what reforms they would propose and this made it more likely that the Board would favour the external examination system which was already working and familiar. The teachers particularly were divided. We have seen that the Board's initial Circular 849 (July 1914) proposed the setting up of an Advisory Committee to which the teachers' representatives would be recommended by the Teachers' Registration Council (TRC). Conferences were called by the TRC to discuss this proposal in 1916 and 1917 and it was also discussed at meetings of the joint universities.⁷ The TRC argued for more teacher representation revealing what I have described as a misunderstanding of the function of the SSEC. We saw in chapter six that privately Sadler had described himself as "the leader of the teaching profession"⁸ and he played an influential role in joint-university meetings being both Chairman of the TRC and Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University. At the Board, Selby-Bigge, in an internal memo, expressed his displeasure with Sadler for raising the expectations of the TRC concerning the extent of its influence.⁹ The TRC eventually had to agree that the teachers' representatives would be nominated by the NUT and the Joint-Four¹⁰ and the latter particularly followed a more traditional line about examinations than the TRC would have done. There was no clear unity between those who might have

⁷ There are reports of joint-universities' meetings in June 1916 and on 3 March 1917. Most universities looked to the BoE to be the "co-ordinating authority" and were wary of TRC proposals that the SSEC should have power of oversight over the examinations. (University of London library: CF 1/17/925).

⁸ When the TRC was reconstituted in 1912 Acland became its first Chairman and was followed by Sadler in 1915. It was Sadler who requested a meeting with Fisher to put the case for greater teacher representation on the SSEC. The meeting took place on 17 August 1917. Notes of meeting. (TNA: ED12/246).

⁹ Selby-Bigge, 30 April 1917, memo to the President of Board of Education. (TNA: ED 24/1634).

¹⁰ Roscoe, 15 November 1935, letter to Permanent Secretary. TRC later became the Royal Society of Teachers.

supported a more radical approach to examining. A majority of teachers involved with the New Education Fellowship would have favoured “abolition” of external examinations, but the Fellowship’s proposals were strongly influenced by teachers who identified themselves as ‘progressive’ or who taught in experimental or progressive independent schools. It was not unreasonable for the Board to decide to listen to the Joint-Four which particularly spoke for that group of secondary teachers who were actually teaching the students who would be taking the national examinations.

Research Question 2

- How far were contemporary fears of centralisation seen to be justified by the establishment of a nationally-organised examination system?

If a question is asked about the likelihood of a national examination system leading to more central control, the response must be that it was believed to be a likely outcome. The repeated concern that those working in education, including teachers, must be allowed their independence suggests that such independence was vulnerable to overbearing authority. An example of this vulnerability can be found in the comments on the work of local inspectors which appeared in the ‘Holmes-Morant memorandum’. This stated, in Holmes’ high-flown style, that government required inspections were hindering the very education they were supposed to nurture:

we cannot wonder that local inspection, as at present conducted in the large towns, is on the whole a hindrance rather than an aid to educational progress; and we can only hope that the local 'Chief Inspectors' who are fountain-heads of vicious officialdom, will be gradually pensioned off (Gordon, 1978).

This memorandum exemplified the negative impact of inspections on teachers: inspectors who were “fountain-heads of vicious officialdom” were indeed to be feared. But the memorandum also illustrated - and the NUT particularly objected to this - a dismissive attitude in the Chief Elementary School Inspector towards those whose working experience was confined to elementary schools. A different example of the ill-effects of central attitudes and control, as they influenced elementary school teachers, was referred to in chapter five’s discussion of the Higher Elementary Schools, institutions which suffered from Morant’s constrained view of what secondary education should be like (Vlaeminke, M. 2000).

In this thesis two significant statements about the impact of centralisation have been cited, the earlier one from the College of Preceptors and the later one from the Oxford

Examinations Delegacy. They both arose from a perspective that assumed the need for institutional independence and they made similar points. The College argued that,

Central government by removing from locality the power of initiative and the sense of responsibility, tends to destroy interest and take away life from the institution that is created.¹¹

The Secretary of the Oxford Delegacy wrote,

I feel keenly the need to maintain the interest and sense of responsibility of those upon whom the efficiency of the examinations must ultimately depend.¹²

The College claimed that involving those doing the work improved initiative, the Delegacy that it improved efficiency. The Secretary to the Delegacy wrote in his letter that he was “afraid” of anything which would reduce both his colleagues and himself to being mere followers of instructions, and both organisations saw this as leading to working systems that were rigid and inhuman. It is understandable that those within the SCE system in the late 1930s might have used such language to express genuine alarm for it has been shown how the Board of Education’s officers came to believe that involving others in policy making was counter-productive.¹³ As described in chapter eight, the situation that emerged within the Board of Education after Norwood had reported provides examples of the dysfunction that can emerge when institutions lose the will to build co-operative working relationships. Given that the Ministers, Wilkinson and Tomlinson, were so dependent on their civil servants for advice on the shape of the examination system, the planning for the changeover to the new GCE fell into the hands of a few individuals who for different reasons were ill-prepared to carry that responsibility.¹⁴

Wolfenden, in the lecture which was referred to above, described the detrimental effects of the Board’s decision to take control, particularly its decision to exclude the examination boards from membership of the reconstituted SSEC.

It gave the Examining Bodies the impression that they had been thrown off the Council, either without reason or for some reason discreditable to them ... we are only now [in 1956] coming near to a restoration of friendly relations between the

¹¹ *Educational Times*, 1918. Vol. LXXI, 1 February, p.5. (Institute of Education, London: DC/CoP/K1/55).

¹² W.C.Burnet, Secretary to the Oxford Delegacy for Local Examinations. Letter to the SSEC, dated 28 March 1934. (TNA: ED 12/532).

¹³ Selby Bigge, 25 February 1909, commenting on topics for the Consultative Committee to consider, expressed anxiety about “some incautious admission or statement ... which ... might seriously embarrass us”. In a memo to Morant, dated 17 March 1909, he wrote that the Committee might deal with a subject “on rather impractical lines ... without sufficient regard to what is financially or administratively possible.” (TNA: ED 24/212).

¹⁴ Maud took up his post as Permanent Secretary only in April 1945; Roseveare, newly appointed as Senior Chief Inspector, was inexperienced and hasty in judgement; Barrow prioritised his determination to preserve Norwood’s legacy. Williams maintained a steady course by advocating a policy of delay.

examining bodies as a whole and the newly constituted Council (Wolfenden, 1958, p. 21).

Close reading of the Board's files makes it clear that "thrown off" was an appropriate choice of term and that the Board's officers and Norwood advocated such action because they saw the boards as undeserving of credit for the way they had been working. Just as Wolfenden's intention in this speech was to enthuse teachers about the new system and the freedoms which it offered, so he also aimed to draw the examination boards back into the more co-operative working relations which had been abandoned by the Board ten years before.¹⁵ He acknowledged the examination boards' perspective that when the Minister took over responsibility for the running of examinations it seemed to them to represent the building of "a façade of respectability behind which a totalitarian autocracy might operate". The boards were led to think they were being reduced to the level of "mere tools in the carrying out of a policy dictated by the Minister" (ibid. p.23). Wolfenden denied that that was either the intention or the result but he acknowledged that there had been problematic consequences of the Board's decisions and a good deal of time and energy had had to be spent in working out new relationships with the boards.

Research Question 3

- What might account for the survival of the external examination system in the face of radical and well-supported alternatives which were proposed during this period?

Historians cannot avoid attempting to account for the survival of the external examination system because the strength of the rationale, the support and the endurance of the opposition all lead to an expectation that at some point the opposition would win the argument and achieve the consequent outcome - the replacement of the external system. The following discussion will draw attention to aspects of the SCE which enabled its survival, noting the features of the external examinations that were perceived positively and the features of proposed alternatives which were perceived negatively. These features have emerged cumulatively from a close reading of the documentary evidence which has been referred to in earlier chapters of this dissertation. They may be summarised under five headings, which are considered in turn:

- Lack of political support for radical change;
- The unconvincing nature of the alternatives which were proposed;

¹⁵ Gosden referred to this period as a "decade of crisis" (Gosden, P. 1966. p.120).

- The failure of the Board to recognise the function of examinations in the developing secondary education system;
- The culture of the Board of Education;
- Doubts about the Ministry of Education's offer of 'freedom' to teachers.¹⁶

Lack of political support

Support for a national policy must include a willingness to put it alongside other priorities with which a government may be faced, and to place it sufficiently high up the list of priorities to ensure that appropriate action is taken. When Acland's proposal for a combined examination/inspection model was put before the Liberal President of the Board of Education in 1911 that support was not forthcoming. The Consultative Committee had been given a second opportunity to make its case, even though the Board's officers had informed Runciman, the then President, that they favoured an external examination scheme. This indicates the measure of independence that had to be allowed to the committee. Acland, as chairman, had strengthened the committee's support for progressive thinking by ensuring its recently appointed members had a wide range of educational experience in state-supported institutions. His standing with the Liberal government must also have had an effect on the committee's work, as can be seen in the care with which both Runciman and Pease treated him. Nevertheless, when it came to the Board deciding its formal response to the 'Acland Report' its senior officers had little difficulty in persuading the President, who by then was Pease, that the Report's proposals were not workable and that external examinations would be a safer option. Pease wrote to Acland telling him that there were "formidable difficulties" with his report.¹⁷

The next President of the Board of Education to be faced with recommendations about changing the examination system was Butler. Chapter seven has clearly shown that for Butler the issue of examinations could be deferred (for seven years) and only then might the viability of Norwood's 'abolition' proposal be considered. The evidence shows that Butler saw no reason why the proposal should not be left in the hands of Norwood. This indicates that he saw no political imperative for change for he was capable of giving a political steer if he wished, as he did in his instruction to Norwood not raise the issue of Public Schools.¹⁸ There was no deep-seated political support for Norwood's examination proposals from Butler and subsequently, with contention about the age limit for students to

¹⁶ Under the new Education Act, the Board became the Ministry of Education in August 1944.

¹⁷ Pease, 15 Dec 1911, letter to Acland. (TNA: ED 24/220).

¹⁸ Butler 27 November 1941, note of meeting with Norwood. (TNA: ED 12/478).

take 'O' levels becoming a political issue, a new Conservative government backed the heads and teachers who supported allowing to students take the examinations at a younger age, an option which Norwood had strongly opposed (Fisher, 1982).

The examination issue was handed on to the Labour government and to Ellen Wilkinson in 1946. The NUT's responses to the Norwood Report had been sent to the Board in June 1944 and the Union had declared itself in favour of teacher control of assessment but had raised points about examinations for less academic students that needed to be addressed. It noted that an internal examination might "have the effect of robbing children from some schools of an opportunity they now enjoy of showing their relative qualifications when seeking posts".¹⁹ We have seen how the proposal for internal examinations, which we observed had been put forward by men with public school backgrounds, was strongly linked to the idea of the 'reputation of the schools'.²⁰ The NUT also advanced a practical argument against the control of examinations being given to each school; this concerned "the difficulty of evaluating the results in so many different examinations".²¹ This more tentative approach from the NUT stands in contrast to Norwood's sweeping rejection of examinations for other than grammar schools. There is evidence that Wilkinson at least paused in making her decision about whether to support the Norwood plan, and this was because of suggestions from within the Labour party that examinations for all students should be considered.

Eighteen months earlier, the response of the Workers' Educational Association to the Board's Green Book proposals had been an earlier indication of reactions from the left of the political spectrum to the Board's thinking. The response was a densely typed and thoroughly referenced, 25-page critique of developing policies which covered key areas of concern about the future of the education system, from secondary schooling to child health and from the functioning of LEAs to school meals.²² An issue which the WEA's comments did not refer to at all was reform of the examination system and such a striking omission may have reflected the uncertainty felt on the left about the importance of the issue. More generally the uncertainty of the professional and political support for the Norwood proposals was a significant factor. Politicians must have had some awareness of the perception, reported by Norwood, that "most teachers opposed the abolition of the School

¹⁹ NUT, 3 June 1944, response to Norwood Report. (TNA: ED 12/480).

²⁰ A speech in the Education Debate at the Labour Party conference in 1947 by A. H. Jennings reminded delegates: "Let us not forget that the much-abused School Certificate is still the only badge that a boy has to prove his ability independently of the name of the school". Report of conference on 26–30 May, Labour Party Annual Report 1947. (Metropolitan University, London: JN1129LAB).

²¹ NUT, 3 June 1944, Report to the Board of Education. (TNA: ED 12/480).

²² WEA, 17 November 1941 response to the Board's Green Book proposals. (TNA: ED 136/218).

Certificate”.²³ The post-war Labour government’s overall record in education should be seen in the context of the peace-time challenges it faced and of the death of Wilkinson during that government’s time in office.²⁴ Reforming the examination system, which has rarely been high on any political party’s agenda, was in this context a problematic issue which might best have been avoided. The external examination system was at least workable and the examinations were not presenting the kind of immediate crisis to which politicians would feel they had to respond. Replacing external examinations was not a political imperative for the Labour government and so again the examination campaigners could not rely on the whole-hearted support of the politicians.

Unconvincing alternatives

It was noted above that the Consultative Committee’s first examination report was confined to three and half pages. The Board of Education went out of its way to note the length of time it had taken the committee to produce the report, but there were perhaps reasons for this mismatch of expectation and delivery. The committee was legislated for in the Board of Education Act of 1899 and there was a presumption that it should be allowed to develop its reports in its own way. For this report it had spent its time discussing its proposed scheme with various interested bodies, including the universities, and it claimed that these bodies had given positive feedback. However, it was clear that the report was inadequate as a means of enlisting support for detailed plans about how a national examination system might be run. It is a tedious but unavoidable fact about examination systems that they require close administrative attention and a failure to think through procedures can seriously damage the examinations’ reputation. It is well to remember that this was the first written attempt to map out a national examination system, but it seems that the committee had misjudged the audience that it needed to convince and had assumed that there was already a large measure of approval for what it was putting forward. Furthermore, there had already developed some tension between the Board’s officers and the committee, which only intensified when Acland took over as chairman. In 1907 he agreed with Morant an increase in the committee’s membership, but behind his back Morant was complaining that Acland’s determination to pursue his own radical agenda was proving difficult to work with. The committee’s proposals in 1904 needed the kind of

²³ Butler, 28 May 1942, notes of meeting with Norwood. (TNA: ED 136/681).

²⁴ “Even allowing for the scale of problems facing any government immediately after the most destructive war in lives and infrastructure the world had ever witnessed, the record of the Labour government in education was less successful than that in other comparable areas of the welfare state, such as health” (Griggs, 2002, p. 173).

detailed administrative thinking that the Board's officers could have provided, and it may have been that the then chairman assumed the Board's officers would get to work on the administrative detail when the committee had reported. But the officers were already forming the opinion that an external examination would be preferable, and therefore they had little inclination to help the committee's proposals.

The second report which came out in 1911 was more substantial, having been produced by a committee more aware of the educational context into which the examinations would be introduced. But again the report's recommendations were not such as would be persuasive to the detached politician or the Chief Secretary of the Treasury or indeed the educational administrator who must work out how to expand and reorganise the forces of the local inspectorate throughout the country. The report spent a good deal of its time making the case against external examinations but when it came to making the positive case for internal examinations it had firstly to show how a wholly new cadre of local examiner/inspectors would be recruited and deployed, and also had to convince those who worried about increasing government control that the new examination system would not act as yet another government brake on schools' independence. Since it is clear that the Board's officers were already committed to the external examination system, the result does look as though the committee was simply allowed to produce a report that would not, in the event, be accepted. Bruce, who stands out as an astute operator in this environment, described the Acland report as "useful" for the very fact that it would make the external examination option look more attractive. The external examination system was relatively simple to operate, depending as it did on large numbers of pupils sitting the same papers in the same way at the same time. In addition, it could depend on the co-operation of schools to carry out all the work of arranging the collection and sending of examination papers and answer scripts and actually managing their pupils on the examination days. In contrast to that, the committee was envisaging frequent personal contacts with secondary schools by local inspectors which would be likely to result in extended discussions about the setting of papers and the marking of answers. All this was before any thought had been given to how similar standards might be ensured across the country.

It is noteworthy that the Norwood Committee drew very little on what had gone before it. Some thought about the outcome of Acland's internal examination proposals or of the educational writing of Michael Sadler could have alerted the committee to the pitfalls and challenges that they might encounter. It was noted in chapter eight that Chief Inspector Duckworth had reported to Butler that the committee itself was not convinced that a workable scheme had been produced for internal examinations, so the Norwood

proposals for a school-based examination system looked set to fail for the same reason that the Acland proposals failed. Norwood at the end of the process cuts a rather lonely figure, caught between civil servants who deferred to him but muttered that his radical proposal was not workable, and a President of the Board who thought that in supporting the tripartite system he had already completed what he had been employed to do.

The place of examinations in the new secondary system

This discussion must pause here to consider whether the abolition of external examinations was in fact a ‘progressive measure’. From the New Education Fellowship’s point of view it certainly was, for it had been a key aspect of its progressive agenda for twenty years. But when the issue came before her, Wilkinson was also faced with an argument from some within the Labour party that withholding the opportunity to take an examination could appear to be closing a meritocratic door to less privileged children. During the nineteenth century examination systems had emerged out of a concern that aptitude for positions in life should be what counted rather than family background and privilege. But the progressive credentials of national school examinations were more ambiguous, as was the role of Norwood himself in this debate. Norwood spoke on NEF platforms and was seen as ‘a reforming headmaster’.²⁵ However, the Norwood Report was published under a misleadingly general title, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*. The report had three main sections, the second and third of which, it was emphasised, referred only to grammar schools, their examination system and their curriculum (Board of Education, 1943 pp. vi, 26, 55) with a particular interest in the careers of those who were to enter the sixth form. The ambiguity in the committee’s brief was further illustrated by the fact that the committee did nevertheless pronounce on external examinations for non-grammar schools but only to dismiss the need for secondary technical students to enter for them (ibid p.46). The Board and Butler were responsible for this ambiguity and they steered Norwood to focus on grammar schools to avoid an impression that his committee was repeating work recently done by the Spens Committee.²⁶ It was surely not the case that Norwood’s committee members were personally unconcerned about the majority of students who would attend technical and modern schools, but that the committee did not address their interests does give the

²⁵ In a speech to public school teachers in 1938 Duckworth had described a renaissance in national education which “can be traced back to the influence of a line of great headmasters – Thomas Arnold, Edward Thring, Frederick William Sanderson and, in our own day, Cyril Norwood ...” (Duckworth, 1939, p. 63).

²⁶ Butler, 6 March 1942, letter to Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC. (TNA: ED 12/478).

impression that such students were of lesser importance and that a non-examined curriculum was thought to be good enough for them.

The tripartite system, which Norwood strongly advocated, was argued to be aiming for “parity of esteem” among the three kinds of secondary schools that were planned. Norwood wrote that the intention was to provide,

the opportunity to receive the education for which each pupil is best suited for such time and to such a point as is fully profitable for him [sic] (Board of Education, 1943, p. 24).

The certainty by which the types of school could be differentiated and by which pupils could be allocated to them, with the use of objective tests, was immediately questioned (Burt, 1943). Wilkinson and Tomlinson both accepted the tripartite system, for which they faced criticism from those in Labour’s ranks who favoured ‘multi-lateral schools’. Griggs has described as “naïve” their acquiescence - and initially that of the TUC - with the SSEC’s exclusion of pupils under seventeen from taking public examinations. He included the examination system in his description of the way the judgement was weighted against technical and secondary modern schools from the start for it was in grammar schools that pupils “took examinations which provided them with better career prospects” (Griggs, 2002, p. 169). Here we see a crucial difference of opinion about the place of examinations in the education system. The Norwood Report, with the full support of the Board of Education, saw examinations only of relevance to those selected pupils who were heading to a university. This was a historic Board of Education attitude reflected, along with its overtones of irritation and superiority, in the SSEC’s 1931 Investigation Report: “... there is a common tendency to think of the examinations as if they existed for the benefit of individual pupils ... or as possessing a special interest for employers. But this is to misconceive the position” (Secondary School Examinations Council, 1931, p. 47). Attitudes in society were however developing. Michael Sadler had recognised how the examination system had become tied up with pupils’ future employment. Olive Banks’ later study emphasised how SC examinations were seen as offering prospects of a better job (Banks, 1955).

Even the emollient Wolfenden got himself into trouble when he suggested to a meeting of employers that “school examinations existed for the sake of children and schools, not for the sake of employers.” This suggestion “met with blank disbelief” (Wolfenden, 1958, p. 30). Employers were now claiming to have a stake in the examination system and in the conversation with Wolfenden they were protesting at the loss of the overall SC grade, which had been replaced by single-subject “O level”

certificates. Lowe noted the growth in the numbers of students taking examinations, from 70,000 passes at SCE and 14,000 at HSC in 1945, to 605,000 passes in individual subjects at ‘O’ level and 88,000 passes at ‘A’ level in 1954 (Lowe, 1988, p. 186). He observed that the expansion of examination taking was a response to “deep-seated changes in the society [the schools] served”.

“The professionalisation of society, an increase in social mobility and the expansion of a highly stratified system of Higher Education all strengthened the demand for a widely recognised system of external validation” (Lowe, 1988, p. 197).

Whether the Board’s officers should have been capable of greater foresight to see what was going to happen as secondary education for all was made a reality we shall consider below, but it is clear that in the 1940s there was a significant official misjudgement about the place of examinations in the emerging secondary education system.

The culture of the Board of Education

Wright Mills wrote that “rationality without reason” was the major challenge for what he described as the “Fourth (post-modern) Epoch” (Mills, 2000, p. 170 paperback). Rationality, as in Weber’s concept of bureaucracy, was an achieved aspect of the Board of Education’s work in the first half of the twentieth century, but in his critique Wright Mills presented rationality as the enemy of reason: “in the extreme development the chance to reason of most men is destroyed, as rationality increases and its locus, its control, is moved from the individual to the big-scale organisation” (ibid. p.170). He argued that the chance to reason is closely allied to the chance to be free: “freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them – and then, the opportunity to choose” (ibid. p.174). We have seen how the desire to protect the freedom of both schools and teachers affected the Board of Education’s planning of the examination system. Yet a question which the study raises as it draws to its close is, was the Board of Education’s examination policy reasonable?

My answer to that question is that the no-examinations policy was not reasonable, for what reasons could sensibly be given for preventing students, who were to leave school at the age of fifteen, from entering for some public examinations of a suitable type and level, if their schools thought they were appropriate? It has become clear during the course of this study that the policy was strongly influenced by the thinking of that narrow social group from which the Board’s officers were recruited. But the depth of their antipathy towards examinations is difficult to explain: there was something emotional and

unreasoning about it, which nevertheless influenced their decisions. Their choice of language continually suggested this. One may recall Chief HMI Charles' words, referred to in chapter eight, after his discussion with the East Midlands Examining Union about possible examinations for secondary modern schools, when he wrote of "the contamination of the EMEU" and his fear that "the virus of external examinations would spread."²⁷ High-flown rhetoric was a feature of the Board's examination discourse and there is little evidence that they considered the implications of what they were saying. We may assume that Norwood was content for his scheme to be talked about as involving the "abolition" of examinations for sixteen-year-olds and we can recognise some rhetorical purpose behind that exaggerated phrase. But what did Roseveare mean by saying that the aim was to "slay" the SCE? When he came later to write of these events in his autobiography, *Joys, Jaunts and Jobs*, Roseveare referred to the Norwood proposals in one sentence, reporting simply that the new SSEC "recommended that the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate should be discontinued and replaced by the General Certificate of Education" (Roseveare, 1984, p. 51). He did not mention that he had once championed the abolition of the external examination system for sixteen-year-olds, and indeed he highlighted his later role in setting up a new external examination board, The Associated Examining Board (AEB), in 1953. His hostility to the SC examinations appears to have been a passing emotional reaction.

Paul Collier has proposed that, when one seeks to explain the dysfunction of institutional thinking, attention needs to be given to the culture by which shared mental constructs are maintained. So strong is the effect of culture, he has suggested, that an institution will persist with its modes of work, unable to change them, even though the negative results are evident (Collier, 2017). The Board / Ministry of Education appeared in the later 1940s to be in double danger of neither achieving a smooth transfer from the SCE to the GCE, nor of making meaningful progress towards the introduction of internal examinations. The culture of the Board in the 1940s said that external examinations were so harmful to education that they must at all costs be resisted. This was not a sudden decision but had been a consistent policy over thirty years. Examinations were harmful because they threatened the independence of schools and the freedom of the teachers to teach as they wished. And yet, if taking external examinations was going to create such negative results, why were students in grammar schools going to take them when all others were not? Norwood's answer would have been that those in grammar schools were

²⁷ Notes of meeting by CHMI Charles, 15 March 1946. (TNA: ED 147/133).

competing for prizes, scholarships and places in professional employment or further education. This would only make the question ‘Why only them?’ more insistent.

Recognising the Board’s stated policy as unreasonable leads inevitably to a search for some underlying reason for it. In his volume *Who needs examinations? A story of climbing ladders and dodging snakes* John White has supported the view that public examinations were a class-based project which the middle-classes used in the nineteenth century to force the upper-classes to allow them to compete for various desirable positions in the country. Having won greater parity in such competitions, the middle-classes then focused on “the preservation of [their] advantages” and on preventing the working-classes from doing the same to them (White, 2014, pp. 26–27). At the same time White described Norwood as “forward-looking on examinations” and he regretted that Norwood’s plan for internal examinations was defeated by “vested interests” which included “secondary school teachers, employees of exam boards and university authorities” (ibid., p.30). Placing the blame for this rejection on those vested interests overlooks the fact that in addition to them spokespeople for working-class opinion at that time also characterised Norwood’s abolition of examinations as a removal of opportunity. Thus, seeing the examination system as biased in simple class-based terms may not be helpful, though the contest might perhaps more accurately be seen as between the privileged middle-class (represented by Norwood and the Board’s officers) and the aspirational middle-class (represented by the Joint-Four). But, faced with the problem of who precisely might have belonged to each of those groups, a more historically accurate perception might be gained by focussing on the neutrality of examinations (whether or not they are a progressive measure could be endlessly debated) and the effect of privilege on those who were controlling the system.

I thus look for an explanation of the Board’s actions in its culture and in a suggestion that the Board failed to meet the challenges which it faced in the mid-1940s. Wilkinson in a paper in 1962 reflected that the purpose of a public school education was “the output of capable public servants” (R. Wilkinson, 1962, p. 320). By 1880, he suggested, “prefectorial power in many schools had expanded to the point where it really represented an administration, a judiciary and part of the legislature - in conjunction with each housemaster - rolled into one” (ibid., p.322). The school, and the civil service, offered a hierarchical culture and forms of identity into which individuals could fit. Wilkinson commented that “The duties of ‘fagging’ came long before the privileges of being a prefect” (p.321) but ahead lay “a hierarchy of privileges for each age-group” (p.322). Wilkinson regarded the public schools as a good training ground for the civil service but

suggested that when it was faced with an existential threat, such as the sleepwalk towards the First World War or the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, the civil service was too slow to recognise the need for new thinking. An element that held civil servants back, Wilkinson claimed, was loyalty to their group which had become of paramount importance, for on that their professional identity depended. From Wilkinson's perspective therefore the Board's examination failure lay in the culture of "the house" and its prefects, in which the "system will be especially prone to make the aesthetic taste of the group, rather than rational explanation and individual reason, the basis for [student] behaviour" (ibid. p.328).

It is difficult to tell whether Holmes, Williams and Duckworth really supported Norwood's most radical proposal, while Norwood, Roseveare and Barrow forgot that they needed partners outside their small circle. The cultural dynamics of the Board required above all loyalty to each other. The case of Barrow is particularly revealing as he seems to have had 'permission' to write to colleagues in terms that his seniors were careful to avoid. His hostility to the secretaries of the Oxbridge examination boards was openly expressed.²⁸ Once the opposition to Norwood's proposals from Hutchings became clear to Barrow, Hutchings and the teachers he represented were treated with similar hostility. In a letter to Williams, Barrow suggested that Hutchings was acting as the Plebians' "tribune" and that his "motives have precious little to do with the real interests of the schools which he is incapable of seeing." The terms in which he expressed his hostility are most revealing, conjuring up as they do the worlds of classical studies, public school superiority and opposition to democratic participation.²⁹

The Ministry of Education's promise of freedom

It was noted above that Wolfenden, when encouraging teachers to see the advantages of the new GCE system, emphasised the freedoms it offered to them even though Norwood's favoured internal examination system had not been achieved. The two

²⁸ In a number of memos to his colleagues Barrow appeared to be waging a campaign to ensure that the secretaries of the examination boards should not be given places on the reconstituted SSEC. The universities, he wrote on 30 July 1945 (on a memo from Williams dated 25 July), should be represented by "men of wider outlook than the EB Secretaries and men less wedded to old ideas". A month later he wrote that the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford had told him that he "would not dream of sending its Secretary of the [Oxford] EB" to the new SSEC. Memo dated 23 August 1945. (TNA: ED147/133). Barrow lived in Oxford and had contacts there.

²⁹ Barrow, 16 December 1943, letter to Williams. (TNA: ED 147/134). "... we may expect similar opposition on every point which will be put before any meeting of the Council. The tribunician veto, as you will remember, eventually produced dire results; whether he has ever heard of it or not, our friend Hutchings certainly intends to employ it. We must find means of neutralising it. For it all comes to this, that many of the people whose views we are compelled to consider are not of the quality which entitles their views to consideration."

short paragraphs in the Norwood Report which described the “Ultimate objective” of the internal examination scheme had also used the word “freedom” four times in referring to the possible impact on the work of teachers (Board of Education, 1943, p. 45). But the Joint-Four teachers’ organisations turned this offer down. Did that mean, as Wolfenden speculated, that the “props and supports of the old system had been used for so long that the limbs which should have been being supported had in fact atrophied” (Wolfenden, 1958, p. 30)? It had long been the case that, though schools were able to submit their own examination syllabuses for approval under the SCE scheme, very few had in fact done so (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 85–87). Did the teachers perhaps not want that kind of freedom?

Two kinds of freedom have been referred to above. Norwood was describing the opportunity for teachers to have the “freedom” of being in control of the examinations in their own schools. Wolfenden was celebrating a lesser freedom, one offered by a more flexible, but still externally organised, system. As we think over the entirety of this study the importance of the theme of ‘independence’, of which the planners of the SCE system had had to take so much notice, must be remembered. It was because the possible relationships with the university examination boards were seen as a protection of the independence of teachers and schools from a tendency towards state control, that the collaborative model for running the SCE system was devised. This suggests yet another kind of freedom, which was an important factor in the teachers’ responses to Norwood’s proposals. Many teachers noted their growing influence within the examination boards and they did not necessarily see the boards as leading them into captivity but rather as offering them the possibility of professional engagement. In comparison, the Board of Education’s policy of schools “working out their own destiny” could look more like neglect than freedom.³⁰ Brooks concluded, “In retrospect, a dereliction of duty seems to lurk just beneath the surface in this championing of freedom” (Brooks, 2008, p. 458).

Professional freedom in any system will inevitably involve collaboration with other professionals, and of this the Board of Education’s central management of the examination system was becoming a negative example. Norwood’s way of working was to discount any opposition, as he had at Harrow where he had pushed through a reorganisation of the relationship of the boarding houses with the central school administration.³¹ In an article written in February 1941 on “Some aspects of educational reconstruction” he had begun

³⁰ It must be noted that this was before local advisory services had been set up. The Norwood Report had proposed renaming the HMI, “His Majesty’s Educational Advisory Service” (Board of Education, 1943, p. 53) which suggests that the committee had recognised the point that is being made here.

³¹ Harrow School, Governors’ Meetings, 1926–1934. On 4 November 1926 Norwood proposed “a scheme of centralisation”; the details were presented on 23 February 1927. See also Tyerman (2000, pp. 509–511).

with Plato's warning that too much democracy leads to "deadness, loss of initiative, loss of reality".³² He asserted that after the war democracies would not be "free to return to the individual irresponsibility and licence which have marked the past". The way forward would require "planning ... control ... discipline ... public duty".³³ He related the history of the School Certificate to this assertion, claiming that in the SC system "constant pressure [was] being exerted on examining bodies to turn the School Certificate into a test of a sort of course which is not a literary course at all" (ibid. p.111). Norwood was supported by Williams and Duckworth in such conservative opinions, but we have seen that Williams distanced himself from Norwood's way of working and Duckworth from some of his proposals.

There was a lack of reasonableness in the Ministry of Education's "no-examination" policy that became more apparent as the future shape of secondary education became clearer. Brooks' paper (2008) on the policy's impact on secondary modern schools illustrates how badly judged it was. From another perspective, Miss H. Lister, the headmistress of a grammar school, described in a lecture in 1957 the range of ability in her school, which revealed the problems hidden within the easy generalisations about types of schools in the Norwood Report. She said:

The range of ability in most grammar schools is wide ... and it is the duty of the school to provide if possible for all – from the future university scholar to the child who may manage a couple of Ordinary passes; from the one who will have three years in the Sixth to the other who will leave after five years in the school (Jeffery, 1958, pp. 67–68).

This variety of ability led, amongst other problems, to the need to run examination and non-examination classes in the same subjects for students who might remain in school for widely differing periods of time. The problem was that the 'O' level, with its passing grade set at the standard of the old SCE credit and its focus on university entrance, was not a suitable examination for a large number of the students even in grammar schools. 'O' level failures in such schools raised awkward questions about the selection system, as did a growing number of 'O' level passes for students in secondary modern schools (Brooks, 2008, pp. 453–454). In his retirement Norwood was asked to speak to various groups on

³² When Holmes sent Norwood a copy of *The Green Book* he wrote "You will, I think, find nothing in it that clashes with the views you expressed in the *Fortnightly* for February 1941". The Norwood Papers, July 1941. (Sheffield University library: MS230 6/10A/12).

³³ Norwood, February 1941, article in *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. CXLIX, Horace Marshall, London, p.106. The second quotation above alludes to Norwood's known reservations about science education and the education of girls. Girls' schools had pressed for greater recognition of "group four" subjects (J. Petch, 1953, pp. 91–92).

his experiences as chairman of the SSEC and the Norwood Committee. In handwritten notes for a talk on “Educational Provision”, to be given by Norwood as a private person in 1947, he expressed himself perhaps more bluntly than he would have done formerly: “the whole conception of mass examination threatens the standards of secondary education.”³⁴ Norwood’s focus on a restricted concept of secondary education, which prevented him from thinking more widely about the education of the large majority of secondary-age pupils, had become a problem. The same could be said of the Board of Education’s attitudes, as expressed in the policy which it had been imposing on schools for some time.

Conclusion

My three research questions are not just separately interesting: they suggest features of the SCE system that were closely bound together. The Bryce Commission’s sharing of responsibilities among the examination boards, teachers and the state, and its intention to protect the system from too much central control were key components of the system’s ability to survive. A late piece of evidence for the robustness of the SCE system was that it continued for five years after the Board had announced its intention not only to change it significantly but to abolish a major element of it. Despite the uncertainty resulting from these announcements, the annual transactions between the examination boards, the pupils and their schools continued without a breakdown. This was evidence of the flexibility which the Bryce Commission had called “elasticity”. The flexibility enabled the system to absorb the criticisms of those who did not want it to survive. For them the system was too robust, too deeply embedded in what they saw as conservative attitudes to schools and teaching, but this study has suggested that it was those opponents’ failure to build a strong enough consensus for change, not some malign power of external examinations, which aided that survival. For that reason the formation and maintenance of the SCE system is especially worthy of study.

The Bryce Report’s emphasis on the need for “elasticity” in administration and Morley’s metaphor of social structures as part of a “growing organism” have underlain my thinking about the examination system in England throughout this study. (See the diagram, Figure 1, p.40, illustrating the issues which impacted on the new examination system). A recent volume on the issue of examination standards has also proposed that “we need an ecological model” to understand the challenges facing contemporary examination systems. The authors of that proposal assert that “each high stakes, large scale, school leaving

³⁴ Norwood Papers, handwritten notes. (Sheffield University library: MS230 7/1/1).

examination system has to articulate with the education system in which it operates so that the grades are useful to the stakeholders” (Baird, Isaacs, Opposs, & Gray, 2018, p. 291). Looking at the key issues which impacted on the examination system at the beginning of the twentieth century one is struck by their continued relevance and currency. Government control of the education system, now far greater than a hundred years ago, is still contested and resisted. The relationship of inspection and examinations is also still a contested issue, as the examination system becomes more incorporated into an accountability agenda. In addition, the impact on the school examinations of university and other educational or employment requirements is arguably now more intense, since it affects many more students and thus feeds broader currents of competitiveness in the system. Debates about the place of vocational and practical studies within the general secondary curriculum continue to exercise opinion and are still far from settled. The desire to overthrow the external system is expressed as forcibly now as it was a hundred years ago, and yet recent changes have once more put greater reliance on the external administration of the public examinations (Isaacs & Lamprianou, 2018).

A first task for any reflection on an examination system is to identify what issues should be included in an up-to-date, dynamic model of it. One can argue from the findings of this study that it was the failure to include in the Board of Education’s thinking the social and political issue of ‘opportunity for all’ that created serious difficulties for the education system as a whole. An examination system that appeared to favour the top 20% of the ability range came to be agreed to be unacceptable: ‘equal opportunities’ still presents an issue that cannot be ignored, despite its complexities. A second contemporary challenge comprises the inclusion of the examination system in the detailed management of pupils and schools, even to the extent of individual pupils being set annual targets for their grades and the successful achievement of those predictions affecting teachers’ and schools’ reputations. Thus, different problems rise to prominence and then settle as solutions are tried, only to be replaced by others which inevitably emerge within a constantly shifting social and political landscape. In this respect it would seem that the Bryce Commission was justified in not laying down detailed guidelines for the system; rather it envisaged a set of democratic, administrative relationships within which those with experience and expertise might cooperate to find practicable responses to challenges. Here we encounter the importance of the institutions themselves, since they are professional communities in which individuals can find a voice and a sense that their contributions matter. The danger of a centralizing tendency is that, as eloquently expressed by at least two of our historical witnesses, with centralisation comes the undermining of

those institutions that might creatively co-operate if free to do so. Moreover, with any loss of such institutions, individuals, whether pupils or parents or teachers, may come to believe that they no longer count for much.

This history of the School Certificate Examinations tells what happened when a significant new element was introduced into an already existing system and then an even more radical change was proposed. One must admire those who are willing to try something new. But another criticism of contemporary education policy is that government initiatives are too frequent and complicated, with the result that possible consequences are not sufficiently thought through (Isaacs, 2014). In their nature, political timetables tend to operate in the short-term and politicians' pressure for quick and visible results can result, for example, in students feeling that they are pawns in an educational experiment (Barrance & Elwood, 2018). From those managing a complex national education system a longer-term view is required, one which also takes account of the full context in which a policy will be implemented. In a recent letter to *The Times* newspaper, nine prominent historians have declared that "There is no better way for [society's] leaders to approach today's problems than through immersion in the history of political leadership, statecraft, democracy ..." They argue for a focus in the universities on "leadership and strategy" so that future officials should base their decisions on "lessons derived from studying past experience".³⁵ This is a reminder of Skinner's observation, referred to at the end of chapter two, about the importance of the study of choices made in the past and the reasons for them. Educational thinkers, opinion leaders and reformers ardently advocated greater school-control, and even abolition, of the external examination system, but they failed to convince wider society and notably the political leaders who would have had to take responsibility for any major reform, that theirs was the right way. The failure of reforming educators to convince this wider constituency, which included teachers and their organisations, is an instructive part of the history of the School Certificate Examinations. Any future policy maker who is hoping to bring about radical change in a national examination system would do well to consider the story of the SCE and its survival.

³⁵ Black, J., et al. 2018, December 21. Letter to the editor, "Sense of history". *The Times* (Scottish edition).

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