



THE SOCIAL MOBILITY SUMMIT

Report of the Summit held at the Royal Society

London 21-22 May 2012

The Social Mobility Summit: Report of the summit held at the Royal Society, London 21 – 22 May 2012

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Foreword – Sir Peter Lampl

I am passionate about social mobility. Educational opportunities propelled me from where I started as the son of a Viennese émigré who grew up in modest circumstances in Yorkshire to running my own successful business in the United States.

I am also aware of how few those opportunities are for children growing up today. It was this that prompted me, 15 years ago, to set up The Sutton Trust to improve social mobility through education.

When I returned to Britain in the mid-nineties after 20 years in the United States, I was shocked and appalled at what had happened to opportunities for bright children from non-privileged backgrounds. I visited my old school, Reigate Grammar School, which was a private school where all the places were free, funded by the State. It was now charging full fees with virtually no funded places. So it occurred to me that most of the children who were there when I was there, including myself, would now be excluded on financial grounds.

I discovered this had not just happened to my school but to all the private schools which were funded by the State in my day. In fact, we've done some historic research since then and up until 1976 a staggering 70% of private day schools, which actually means most of the private school in the countries, were principally State-funded through the direct grant scheme and other local schemes of which my school was part of.

At about this time my college at Oxford discovered I'd made some money so I received an invitation to have lunch with the President. In my day the college took a number of students from south Wales, all working class, most of them brilliant. The President, who was Welsh himself, told me it had not taken any Welsh students for the last ten years.

Further research showed me that in the 1970s two-thirds of the entry to Oxford was from State or State-funded schools and by 1997 it had dropped to 46%. We had gone backwards big time. The opportunities for bright children from non-privileged backgrounds were poor and had got worse. That's why I set up the Sutton Trust out of a sense of outrage at the waste of talent in this country.

Since then we've worked on improving social mobility by funding research, policy work and practical projects which we evaluate very carefully and scale up if they work. We call it 'a do tank approach'. Our work has included summer schools at seven top universities in the UK for over 1,000 students, a project now being expanded to Yale for low and middle income British young people.

We've published over 100 research studies which have profoundly affected the education agenda and hundreds of thousands of children and young people have benefited from our scaled up projects. These range from parenting programmes in the early years, initiatives in primary and secondary schools, access to universities and access to the professions.

All this work is underpinned by a landmark piece of research commissioned from the London School of Economics in 2005. The study showed, shockingly, that social mobility in Britain has declined significantly

over the last 30 years. We also asked the LSE to undertake a comparative study which showed that we in Britain, together with United States, have the lowest level of mobility of any developed country for which there is data.

Put simply, it is more difficult for children from less privileged backgrounds to move up in society than it used to be. These findings have had a great impact on the political debate in Britain, placing social mobility high up the agenda of Government and Opposition.

But there is still too much talk and too little action. That's why we joined with the Carnegie Corporation of New York to host a social mobility summit at the Royal Society in May 2012.

The summit brought together politicians and academics to discuss the reasons and solutions, particularly in education and family policy, for poor social mobility in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Our focus was on research from four Anglophone countries, with differing levels of social mobility. We looked at what is happening in Canada and Australia, as well as in our own countries. On various measures, Canada and Australia do better.

The conference provided leading UK politicians with an opportunity to say what they are doing to address social mobility. The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, used the summit as an opportunity to publish an update of progress on the coalition government's social mobility strategy. The Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, argued for more focus in the debate on apprenticeships and skills. The Education Secretary, Michael Gove, highlighted the impact he hoped his school reforms would deliver.

Ground-breaking research led by Miles Corak from the University of Ottawa was accompanied by thematic examination of early years, schools and higher education policies by leading UK and US academics. The summit was both an opportunity to consider the research and share ideas, but also to develop policy propositions.

This report details the proceedings of the summit and highlights the proposed solutions. The Sutton Trust will look further at these ideas, using cost-benefit analyses and considering which might be the most suitable for further work.

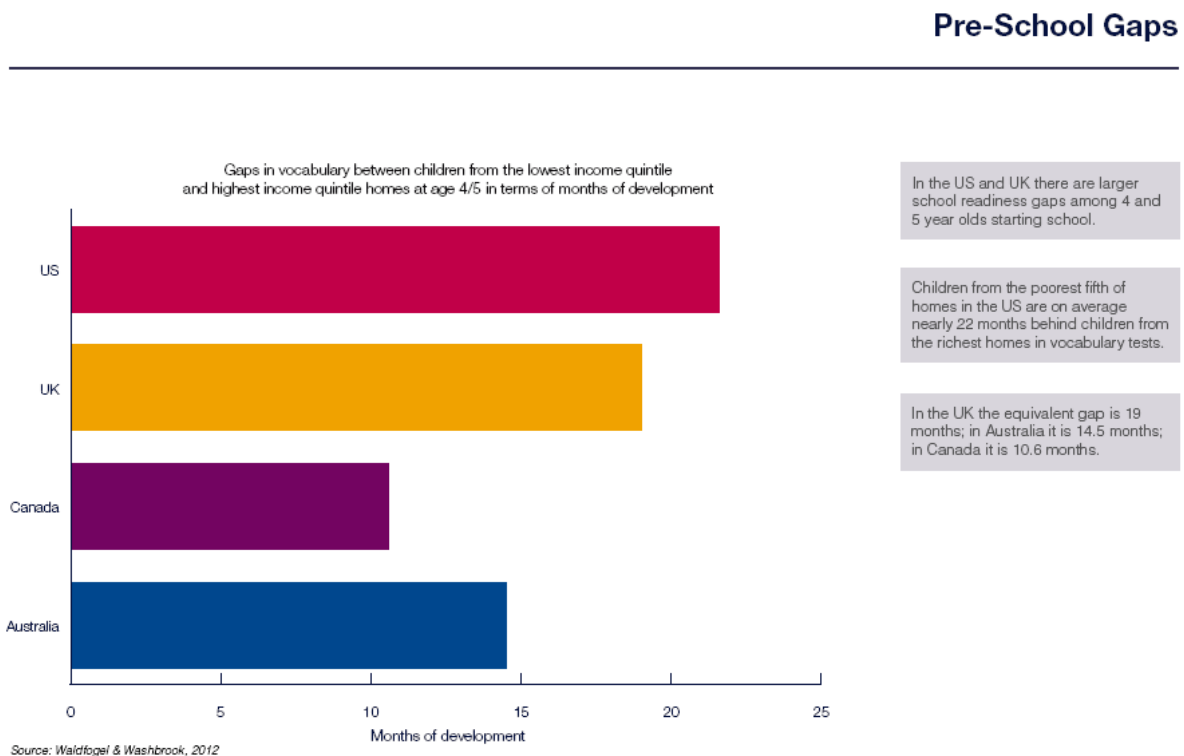
The Transatlantic dialogue that underpinned this conference highlighted the shared nature of many of the issues facing our two nations, as well as the potential for developing shared insights and ideas that could be applied – albeit in very different systems – on both sides of the Atlantic. We are very grateful to all those who attended and spoke at the Summit.

The Research: Trends in Social Mobility

The summit was provided with research on overall social mobility trends showing that, despite having similar levels of inequality, Canada and Australia are significantly more mobile than the UK and the US.

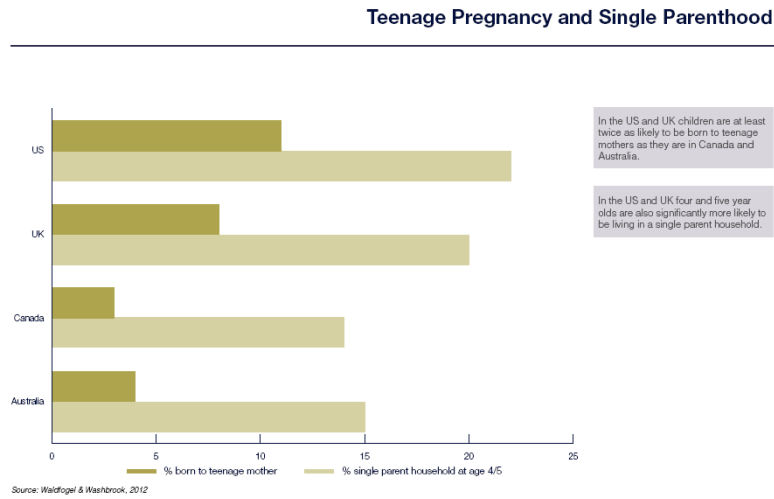
In particular, as Chart 1 shows, there are much wider gaps in levels in school readiness amongst 4 and 5 year olds in the UK and US than there are in Canada and Australia. Using vocabulary tests, The US gap is 22 months, while that in the UK is 19 months, compared with 10.6 months in Canada and 14.5 months in Australia.

Chart 1: Pre-school gaps across the four nations



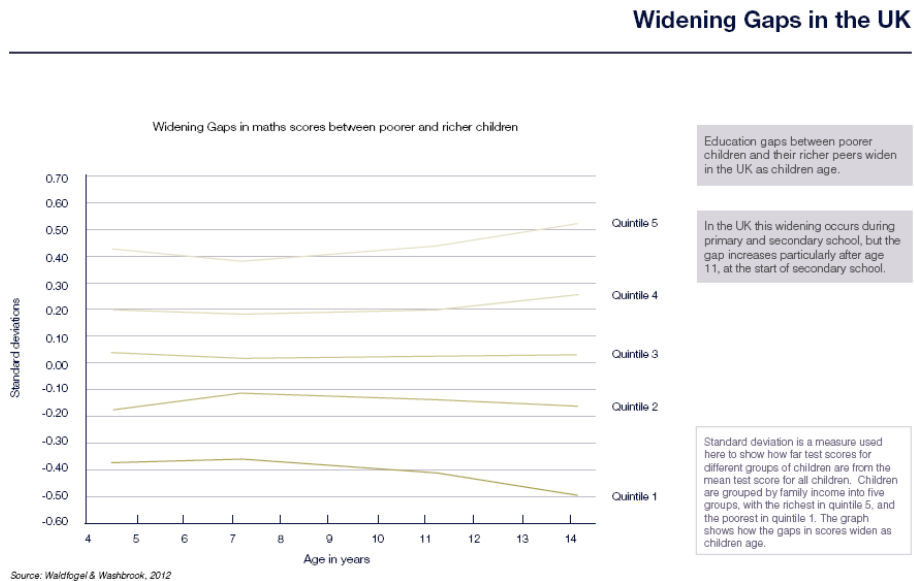
This is despite significantly higher spending on early childhood care and education in the UK than in the other countries. And, as Chart 2 shows below, US and UK children are also twice as likely to be born to teenager mothers as their Canadian or Australian counterparts, while around 1 in 5 four and five year-olds in the UK now lives in a single parent household.

Chart 2: Teenage Pregnancy and Single Motherhood across the four nations



The developmental gaps seen in early childhood become significant education gaps as children get older. As Chart 3 shows, in the UK, the gap accelerates at 11, when children start secondary education.

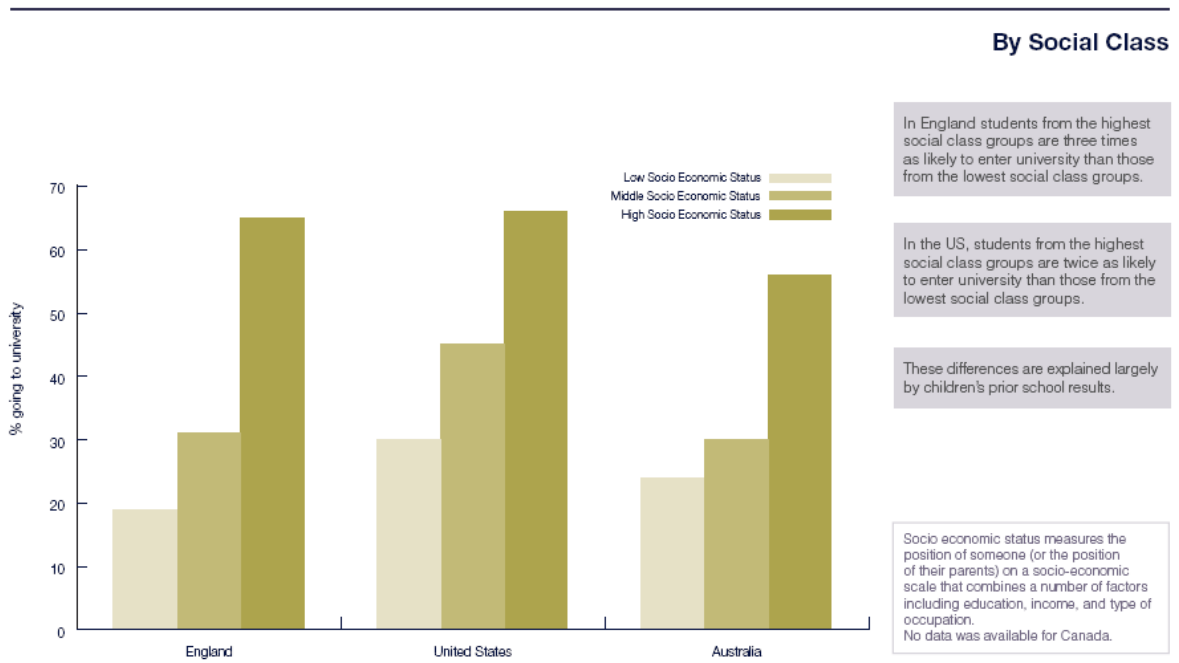
Chart 3: Widening gaps in the UK as children get older



All of this has a profound impact on university entry. In England, students from the highest social class groups are three times more likely to enter university as those from the lowest social groups. In the US, they are twice as likely (though dropout rates are higher). In England, these differences are largely explained by children's prior school results.

Chart 4: Higher Education Participation Rates by Social Class in three nations

Higher Education Participation Rates

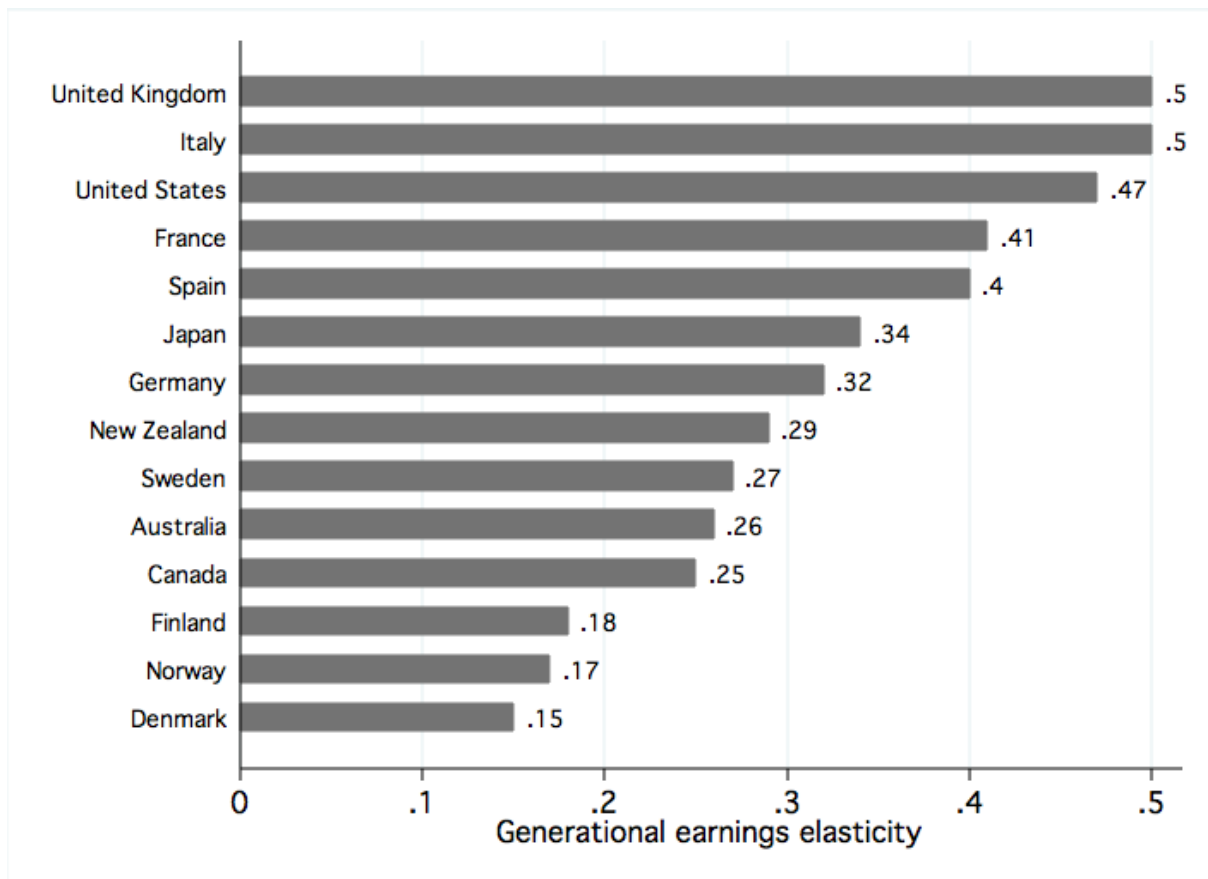


Source: Jemim & Vignoles, 2012

Overall Social Mobility Trends

Professor Miles Corak from the University of Ottawa said there were three issues that arose from the comparative data, as he provided a broad overview of social mobility research.

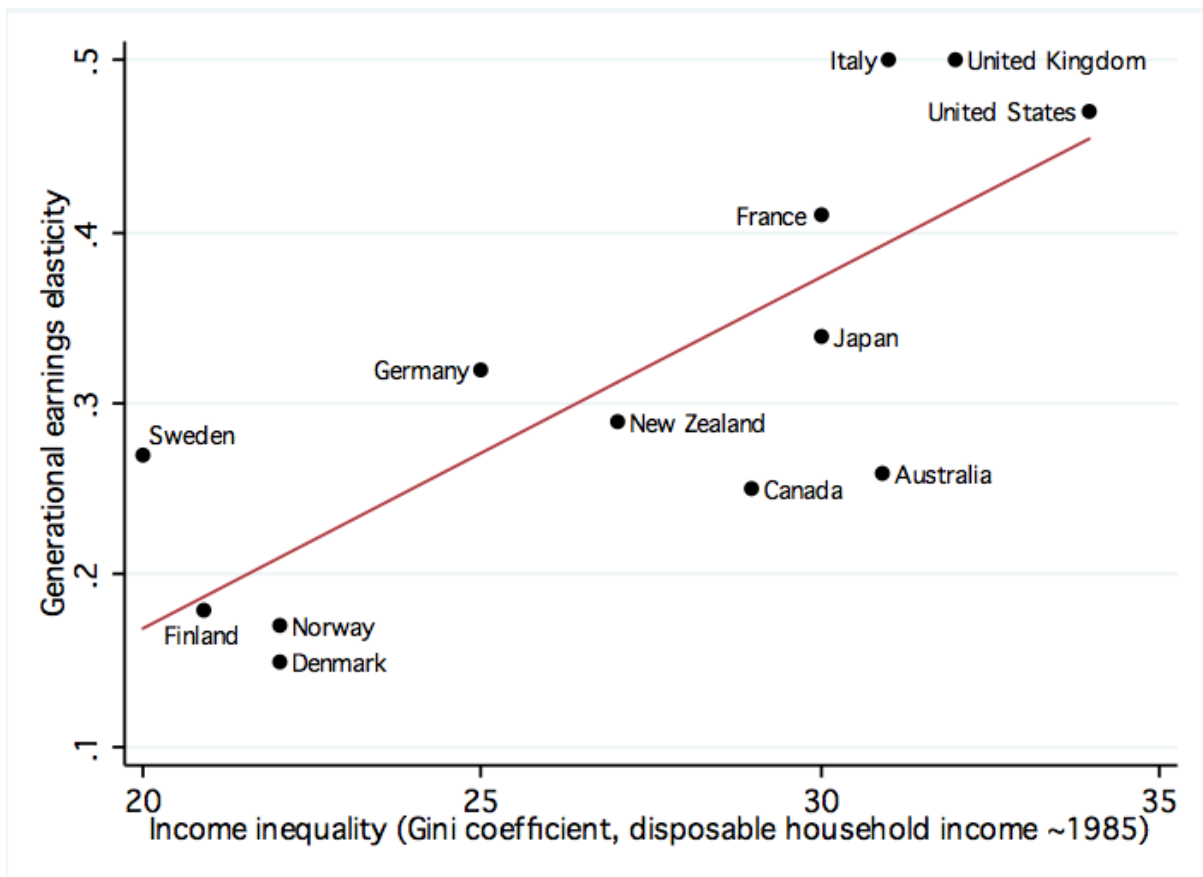
Chart 5: Generational Earnings Elasticity in different OECD countries



Generational earnings mobility varies - the US and UK are among the least mobile among the rich countries, but does this require policy intervention?

Generational earnings mobility varies, as shown in Chart 5 above, and tends to reinforce a good start in life. In the UK, the United States and Italy, having a father who makes twice as much as another father buys you 50% more earnings in adulthood. In Australia and Canada, the uplift is only about 25%. Miles Corak argued that “we should be concerned about these differences and [recognise] that more mobility is better in some sense.”

Chart 6: The relationship between inequality and earnings elasticity



Mobility is lower where inequality is higher: what are the underlying causes?

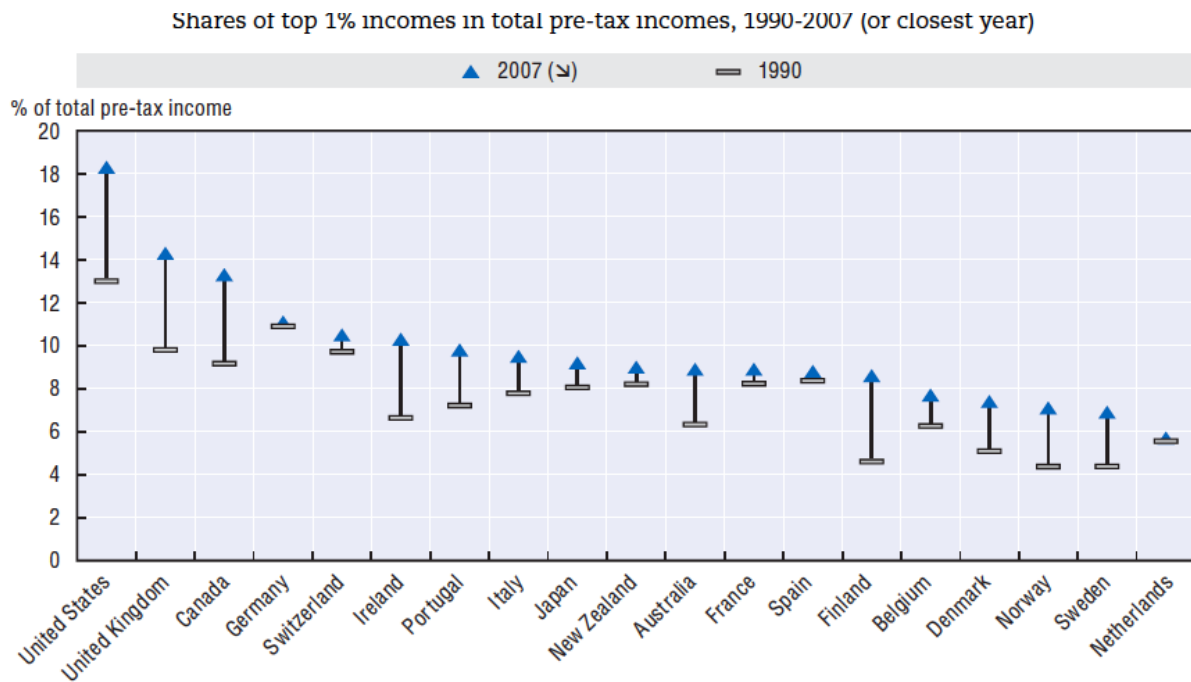
The second issue is about the reasons for variable earnings mobility. It varies systematically with the level of inequality. Along the horizontal axis, countries move from being more to less equal societies. This is what Alan Krueger has called 'The Great Gatsby Curve'. "Societies that are more unequal at a point in time have less mobility over time."

On this measure, the UK and US rank as among the most unequal, while Australia and Canada have middling levels of mobility. While this might suggest that reducing inequality through redistribution would reduce intergenerational inequality, it isn't quite so simple. The underlying causes of this relationship have to do with the way families, markets and labour markets and the State interact.

Inequality has been rising in most countries, and this is because top incomes have increased. Are the societies experiencing more inequality likely to also experience less social mobility?

A third issue is that inequality has been rising in most OECD countries. The Gini coefficient – a key measure of such inequality – has been rising over the last 20 or 30 years, particularly in the US and UK, but also in Australia and Canada.

Chart 7: Shares of top 1% incomes in total pre-tax incomes 1990-2007 (or closest year)



Source: OECD (2011) Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising, page 39.

This rise was largely the result of an increasing proportion of total earnings going to those at the top of the income scale. The share of total incomes going to the top 1% in the United States over these two decades has gone from 13% to over 18%. That trend is also happening in the UK, Canada and Australia. The question raised is whether those that are relatively unequal in increasingly unequal society are likely to experience less mobility.

Prof Corak argued that “inequality forms our social institutions and those are more unequal now [and] will have a more troubling time handling [the economic] storm as it approaches and carries through to the next couple of generations.”

Generational earnings elasticity

While there were some caveats in using generational earnings elasticity as a measure – including limits to cross-country comparisons and the absence of maternal earnings data - the percentage change in a child’s earnings that we can expect for a percentage change in their father’s earnings is the most common indicator of social mobility.

Moreover, generational earnings elasticity is not the same as equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity means that any inequities of outcomes are not defensible when they are the result of different circumstances. So the issue is what is meant by ‘circumstances.’ We could imagine that a Government interested in social mobility could potentially level three different types of playing field.

There may be, for example, a relationship between parent and child earnings across the generations if genetic endowments that is transmitted between fathers and sons. If the labour market values beauty, height or hair colour through time, it wouldn’t be surprising if there were a relationship between parent and child earnings. But we would not necessarily want our Governments to be equalising such

opportunities. At the other extreme, we could imagine a society where social connections and family income determine access to healthcare, education and employment. If the job you get depends on your father's job - nepotism is how the labour market works - most citizens in the rich countries would probably want their Governments to level that kind of playing field.

In reality we are somewhere in the middle. Parents influence skills, beliefs and motivations, > non-monetary investments matter as well as monetary investments. Different societies will have different value judgements about the extent to which we want to get into the workings of the family, and level that playing field.

When this indicator of generational earnings elasticity is related to responses on life satisfaction, there is a clear relationship also with the degree of mobility. In the four Anglophone countries under consideration, despite different degrees of mobility, the proportion of people who say they are 'highly satisfied' with their lives ranges from 57% in the UK to 66% in Canada.

So, there is a relationship between mobility and citizen satisfaction, and this is important for welfare and public policy. "Public policy has a very important role to play in determining the degree of social mobility," he argued. "And public policies that have relatively more advantaged the disadvantaged will promote upward mobility."

The welfare state offers insurance to families and buffers them from both labour market and demographic shocks associated with the disruption of the family and, sometimes, marital breakdown that affects children in important ways. The welfare state not only has an insurance role to play but it also has a role in investing in human capital of the next generation.

If it does this progressively, it will promote mobility. But public policy can also be designed in a way that's of relatively more advantage to the advantaged and it can reinforce market tendencies towards inequality. So there is a social choice to be made here.

But public policy works in conjunction with two other important institutions in determining the degree of mobility. It is the interaction between the family, the market and the state. So families with more human capital invest more in their children; they have more opportunities to do so because they tend to be richer. They also have other forms of social capital to pass on to their children in terms of beliefs, expectations and motivation.

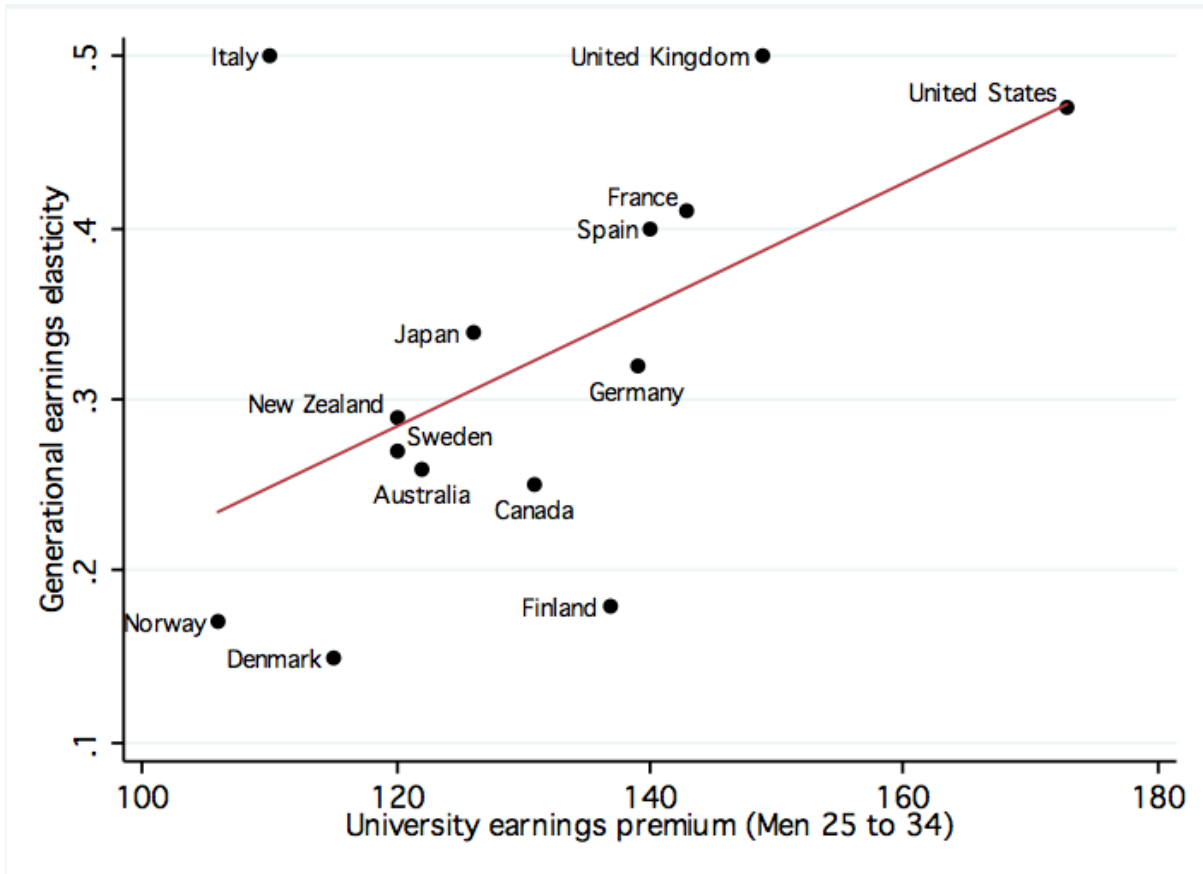
The available non-monetary resources matter to families: those under a good deal of time stress will have difficulty investing in their children. So, families with more children per capita, for example, will invest less in each child. Thus, a two-parent household with a single child will have more investments in that child than a single parent family with a single child. This investment will also be affected by the relative cost of healthcare or education.

Returns to education

However, the return on such human capital is a particularly important distinction between countries. The relative inequality of labour markets depends upon the premium that university education receives in those markets. The US is amongst the least mobile countries but the labour market is also the most unequal in terms of the premium to university education. There is more incentive to invest in education

in the United States. The return to higher education is also relatively high in the UK, but is less in Canada and Australia.

Chart 8: The relationship between the university earnings premium and generational earnings elasticity



All these countries have seen increased demand for higher education as a result of globalisation and technological change. In Canada, the supply of graduate labour has kept track with demand and kept the price of labour lower. This is partly a result of immigration policies, with a focus on attracting more highly skilled immigrants. It also reflects a higher education system producing sufficient graduates. In Canada, even if you have low education levels, your children are more likely to go to university.

In Australia, the labour market is much more structured with strong unions and wage bargaining, so that wages don't get out of line to the same extent that they do in more flexible markets like the United Kingdom and the United States. That's why higher education has a higher return in the UK and US, and that also feeds into levels of social mobility.

There is a relationship between parental education and the length of time their children spend in education. This is greatest in the UK, where the child of a parent with one additional year of education beyond the norm will have six-tenths of a year more schooling than their peers. In other words, the child of a graduate is much more likely to go to university than the child of a non-graduate. Family background matters much more in the UK than elsewhere, including than the United States or Canada.

Further analysis shows that children in the US and Canada tend to be raised in families with lower income than the rest of the population. But there are big differences. If a Canadian child was raised in the American income distribution, it would be much less likely that they would fall into the bottom 10% but also much less likely that they'd be at the top. Most Canadian youngsters would be lower middle class by US standards. There is less absolute deprivation among Canadian children than their American counterparts.

Greater levels of support

Low mobility is reinforced by the support available to those who can afford to pay for extra help. A *Forbes* magazine analysis of the ten new graduate jobs available now that did not exist ten years before includes the job of the education or admissions consultant. Admissions consultants can be paid thousands of dollars to use their skills and personal connections to help parents get their children into the right educational institutions, from the best pre-school to college.

Such gaps are reinforced by gaps spending on books, computers, high quality childcare, summer camps and private schooling between those in the top 20% and those in the bottom 20% in the United States. This has prompted policy efforts to create a more level playing field, which has seen significant improvements at the bottom, but not as rapidly as improvements at the top.

Another measure of the advantages enjoyed by better off children is the extent to which they worked in the same firm as their fathers. There is a correlation between family income and such opportunities, an indicator of available connections. "These kinds of investments carry on throughout life and they help form the interaction with the labour market and the way children search for jobs." This can help determine future employment, and can be another factor that reduces mobility.

Prof Corak also highlighted measures of family stress, including high teenage fertility rates in the US and UK that further contributed to social immobility by reducing labour mobility.

In conclusion, he argued that labour markets are becoming more polarised particularly for the young. Families have adapted and changed as best as they can. The age of first birth and of marriage has risen, and fertility and single parenthood have both fallen. Families are more educated and they're working more intensely. They're more engaged in the labour market, but Government policy has been neutral.

He suggested three directions for public policy. The first is to make work pay at the lower end, to create more pressure for higher wages. The second is to broaden the scope and the nature of family and child care by giving parents more leave and allowing them to be reallocate their time between market and non-market activities. The third is to reduce disparities in the quality of education in a way that promotes more voice (rather than exit) for the most capable parents, broadening educational opportunities for all. These measures should be accompanied by policies to reduce income inequality.

Response by the Russell Sage Foundation

Eric Wanner, President of the Russell Sage Foundation, said that we needed to ask how well mobility enhancing institutions were doing in this period of rising inequality? What effect does inequality have on our mobility enhancing institutions and are some countries doing this better than others?, he asked.

The question is how do we provide enough support for families to create greater equality in what families, can and want to do for their kids, and at the same time strengthen the institutions that try to do what poor families have difficulties doing for themselves even with economic resources?

The Russell Sage Foundation has been working a lot on the effects that rising inequality in the US has had on institutions that try to offset market driven inequalities. Work with the Spencer Foundation had shown that inequality really makes it extremely difficult to operate the US public school system effectively at the lower end [where funding is linked to local property taxes].

It also gives advantaged families every reason to ignore the problem because they live in neighbourhoods where resources for schools are available and social problems posed by students to those schools are so much better. As a result, there is little strong political pressure from those families to improve the system. At the same time schools at the lower end have to cope with crime, student transience, students who don't speak English well and high teacher turnover.

The Foundation has also work on the impact of inequality on the labour market and the political system. There has been political polarisation and gridlock leading to the incapacity of the political system to promote institutional adaptation. This makes it harder to gain political buy-in for ideas to reduce inequality and promote mobility.

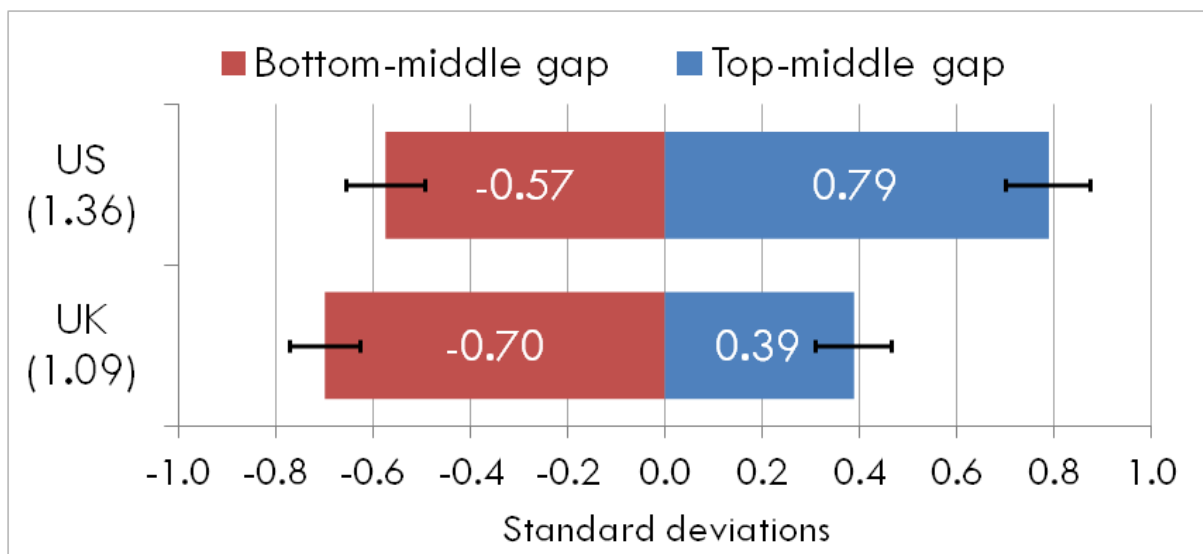
The Foundation launched the book *From Parents to Children: The Intergenerational Transmission of Advantage* at the conference. It is available from <http://www.russellsage.org/publications>. The book studied the impact of mobility enhancing institutions across ten countries, comparing parental advantage and child outcomes. The study found that while no country is very good at reducing immobility, some were better at holding the line than others. This doesn't mean there aren't some particular institutions with the right capacity; it means that no country has put the whole portfolio together.

The Research: Thematic Issues by Phase: Early Years

In the afternoon of Day 1 of the Summit, delegates heard presentations on different phases of the education system and their impact on social mobility: early years, schools and higher education.

The session was chaired by **Naomi Eisenstadt, CB**, University of Oxford, and the key figure in the development of Sure Start in the UK. Research on achievement gaps in childhood: a cross-national perspective was presented by **Dr Liz Washbrook**, University of Bristol. In research conducted with **Prof Jane Waldfogel**, Columbia University and LSE, they examined the gaps in school readiness in the UK and US and what lies beneath them.

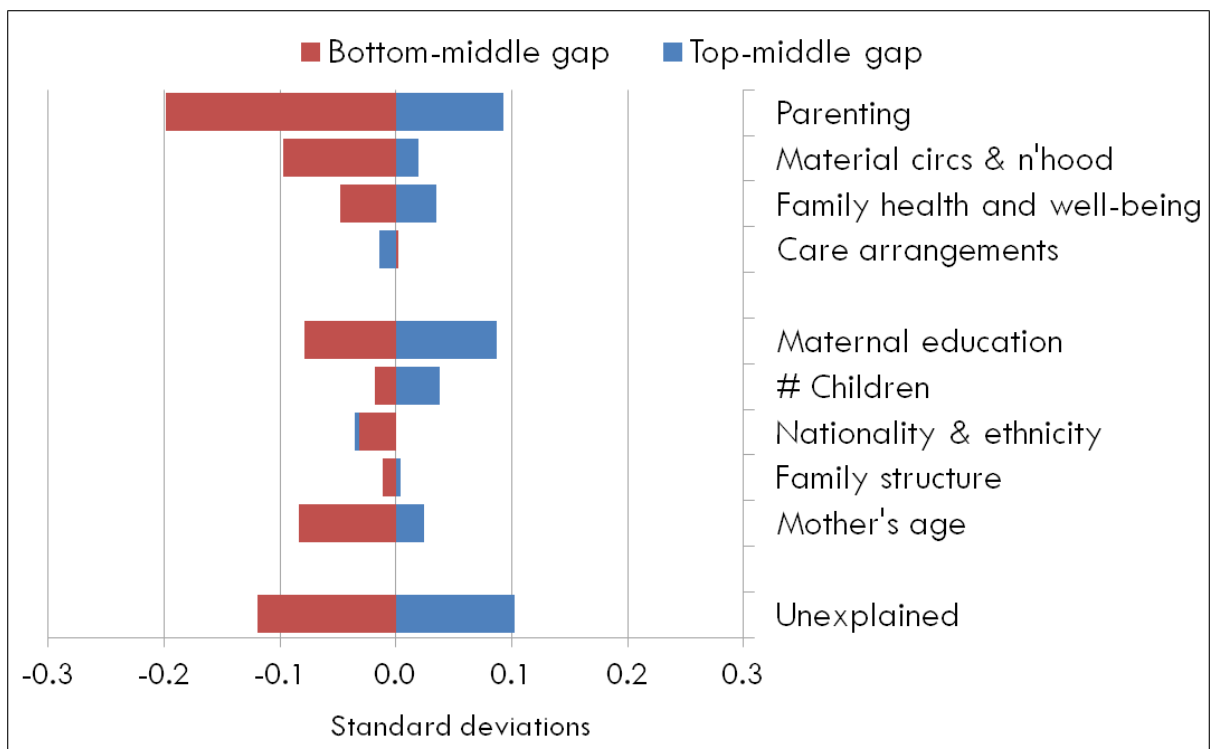
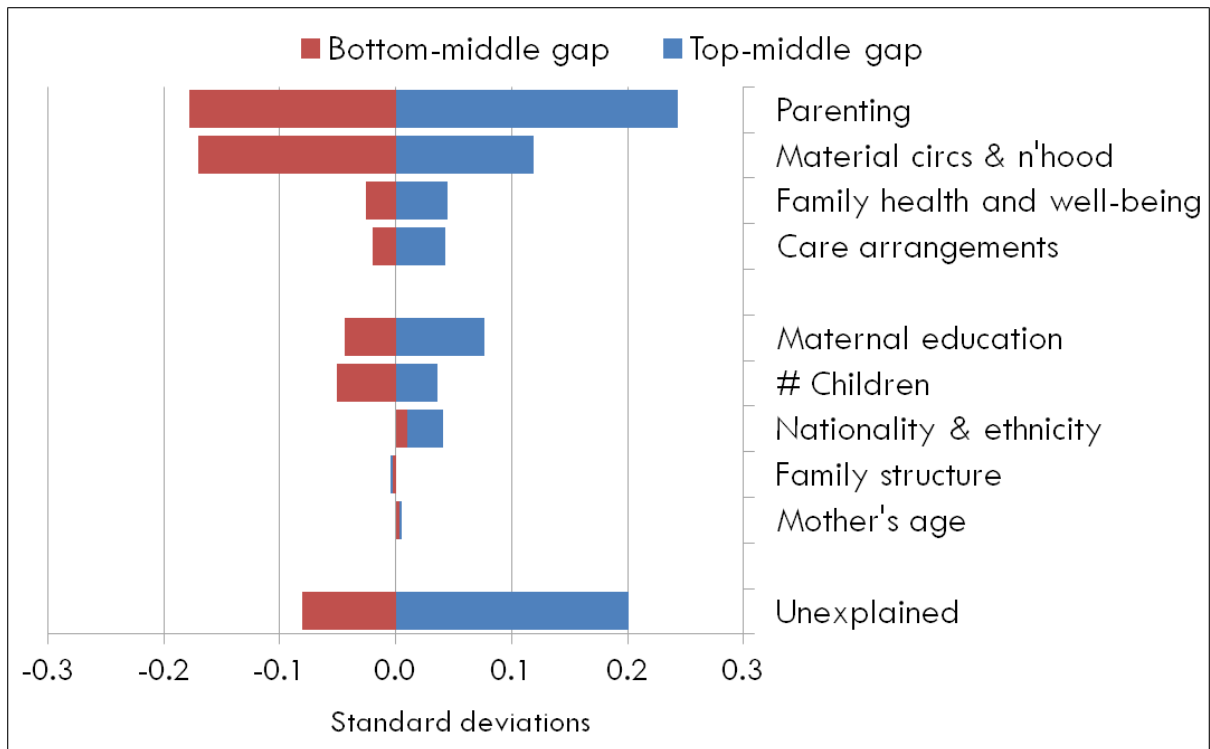
Chart 9: Income gaps in cognitive outcomes at age 4/5



An examination of school readiness levels – shown using standard deviations in the chart above - shows the difference in average scores between the richest and poorest 20% in the two countries. These gaps are large in both countries - anything over a unit of standard deviation would be considered large in this context - but the gap's about 25% larger in the US than it is in the UK. Further examination shows that those at the bottom in the US are nearer the average than those in the UK, and there is a larger gap between those on low and middle incomes than between those on middle and high incomes. But the real differences seem to lie is at the top end of the distribution, with the very richest children pulling away from those in the middle, particularly in the US.

The next question is to understand what lies behind these gaps? What factors are responsible? The researchers used rich cohort data from both countries to find out, comparing factors like parenting, material circumstances, nationality and parental mental and physical health. The first chart below explains the cognitive gaps in the US; the second focuses on the UK. Defining these different contributions depends firstly on how much the factor can predict the cognitive outcomes, holding everything else constant, and secondly, how much it differs between income groups. For something to be significant, it has to be both strongly socially graded and to matter for cognitive outcomes independently.

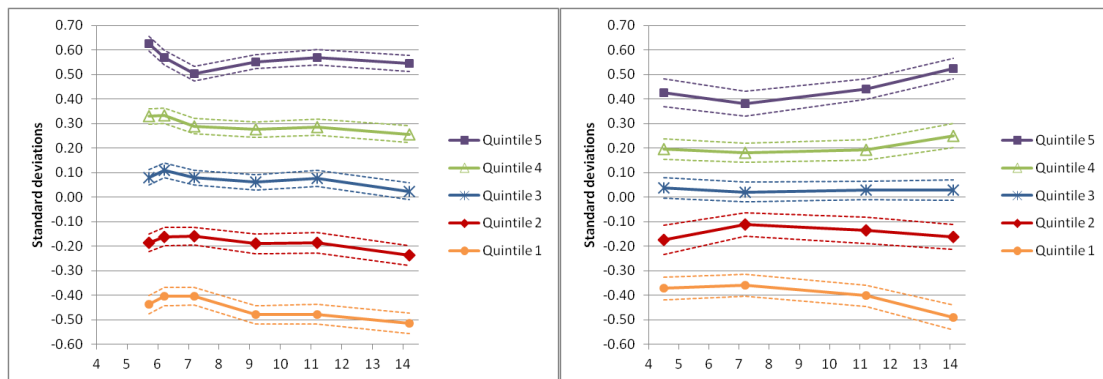
Chart 10: Decomposition: Cognitive gaps in the US and UK



There are many things that seem to contribute to the gaps. Poverty and its consequences are multi-dimensional. There is no single contributory factor. However, the role of parenting behaviours does stand out here as one of the biggest single predictors. This covers things like the frequency that parents

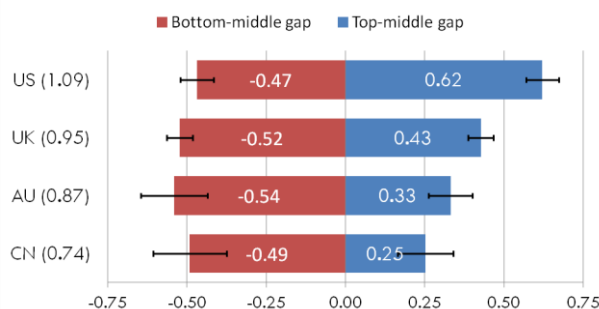
read to their children, and how they set rules and discipline, as well as the warmth and sensitivity of interactions between parents and children. However, material circumstances do come second to parenting in the US (though maternal education is a stronger factor in the UK) particularly at the bottom end of the distribution, in the gap between the poorest and the middle. This covers things like ownerships of books and computers, housing conditions, and neighbourhood deprivation. Although there are some differences in the relative importance of different factors, generally, the picture is very similar between the two countries.

Chart 11: Evolution of Maths gaps in the US and England (Avon)



However, the gaps that exist for 4-5 year-olds persist through school. The researchers followed pupil performance in the US from Kindergarten to 14 (left hand graph). There is some narrowing of gaps in the very first year of schooling – age groups are on the horizontal axis - which may reflect some children who haven't been exposed to formal teaching of literacy or numeracy in their pre-school experiences catching up. But after that first year, things widen out again quickly, and the gaps remain pretty much constant up to age 14. To explore the picture in the UK, data for Avon was examined (right hand graph). There is a different picture here. The gaps are smaller at school entry in England than they are in the States. But there is no evidence of any catching up in the first few years of schooling, and there is some widening of gaps during the junior school years, up until the age of 11, but not much. But the real difference with the US is the amount of widening after age 11, when children make the transition from primary to secondary school in England.

Chart 12: Income gaps in vocabulary at age 4/5: Four countries



Comparisons with Australia and Canada on vocabulary skills (see chart 12 above) suggest similar pictures for the US and UK. But there is a clear ranking and ordering in terms of the size of the total gaps across the four countries, with the US being the most unequal, and Canada the most equal. The gap for the US is about half as large again as the gap for Canada. But the real differences are at the top end of the distribution, particularly in Canada and Australia, where the gap between the richest children and those in the middle is a lot smaller than in the other two countries.

All this analysis shows that achievement gaps at school entry differ across countries, so they're not fixed or immutable. Perhaps tellingly, the magnitude of the early gaps seems to mirror the degree of social mobility that we see in terms of adult earnings and adult incomes. The evolution of the gaps can also differ across countries too. Parenting is really a key factor in explaining the gaps at school entry in the US and UK. But it's not whole story. Other factors, particularly material circumstances, matters too.

Jane Waldfogel looked at potential policy responses to gaps in the preschool years, school readiness and early years' achievement. She said there were three powerful reasons to focus on this age group.

Firstly, socio-economic achievement gaps are growing, at least in the US, and at least half of the gaps that are present later in the poorer pupil's educational journey are present at school entry. The gaps are happening before children even start school. Secondly, all the evidence from neuroscience, developmental psychology, economics, also points to the importance of these years. And, thirdly, the evidence shows that high-quality interventions can make a difference.

There are caveats. Not all gaps are present in the pre-school years. We have to be concerned about which programmes are cost-effective and these early investments don't eliminate the need for later investments. Importantly, to close the gaps, policies must effectively address factors that lie behind the gaps, and they also have to do more to improve the performance of disadvantaged kids than advantaged kids. If you roll out preschool policies that equally benefit both the advantaged and the disadvantaged, that's won't close gaps. So these policies have to be differentially advantageous for low-income kids.

She suggested three different types of policy response. The first would involve policies to improve parenting; the second would be early childhood education policies to improve children's school readiness directly. And third, policies to ensure that gaps don't widen during the primary school years.

Effective parenting programmes not only improve parenting, they improve children's outcomes. Evidence suggested that Family Nurse Partnerships, which started in the US and are now in the UK,

improve parental health, parenting, family functioning and related child outcomes. The Primary Age Learning Study (PALS) in the US improves parents' responsiveness and sensitivity, and related child outcomes. Parents' Early Education Partnership (PEEP) in the UK increases parents' literacy activities and related child outcomes. Incredible Years improves parents' ability to manage behaviour and their child's behaviour. Early Head Start in the US improves parenting, with modest effects on child test scores, behaviour and health. Non-experimental evaluation of Sure Start in the UK found improvements in seven of 14 outcomes at age three and six of 21 at age five.

On early childhood education, Prof Waldfogel said that the evidence from small-scale model interventions shows conclusively that early childhood education can improve school readiness, and is particularly effective for disadvantaged children. The challenge has been to deliver these programmes to scale, and to document longer-run effects on kids' school achievement. We know these things work in the hothouse programmes in the short run, but do they work in the longer run, and can we deliver them at scale?

There is new evidence from Chris Ruhm and Jane Waldfogel (in press) that government policy can effectively move more children into such programmes, and that they can help close gaps in the long and medium terms, as well as the short term. Their review showed the evidence was very strong that expansions of early childhood education yield benefits at school entry, in adolescence and in adulthood. There are particularly favourable results for disadvantaged children. So they close gaps.

This new evidence confirms earlier studies in Denmark, Norway and France that showed similar long-term gains – into adulthood - for disadvantaged children who had benefited from pre-school education. Medium-term gains – into adolescence – were previously demonstrated in many studies, which showed particularly strong benefits for children from immigrant or low income families. Short-term gains – better school readiness – have been shown in studies of pre-Kindergarten expansion in the US. Such publicly-funded programmes now serve a quarter of US four year-olds, though their expansion has been slowed by spending cuts. Studies of these programmes showed strong effects on cognitive outcomes, which were larger for the disadvantaged. A random assignment study of Head Start also found modest gains in cognitive development, behaviour and health. And recent expansions of nursery education for three- and four-year-olds in the UK will have raised school achievement and narrowed gaps, but they are very hard to evaluate, because it is universal.

Policies to ensure that gaps don't widen in the primary school years are also important. Early Years policies, however good they are, may not fully eliminate gaps in school readiness. They also can't guarantee that gaps aren't going to widen after kids start school. In the US the first few years of instruction are equalising, especially for children of immigrants. But then things fall apart after that and schools become less equalising. In the UK, kids attend pretty equal primary schools; the gaps aren't really opening up. But once they make the move to secondary school, that's when things fall apart. To make sure that gaps don't widen, we now have a much stronger evidence base than before on effective teaching practices, and especially practises that promote achievement for low-income children. The challenge is to make sure that schools are aware of best practices that raise school achievements especially for the disadvantaged.

There is a particular concern about 'summer loss' in the United States, where children lose track during the long summer holidays. Higher income parents can use the time for summer camps, enrichment activities, travel and tutoring, but these are largely denied to low income families. There's a lot of

interest in the US in programmes to address the summer learning gap, from giving kids books, or incentives to read books, to summer schools, summer camps, or summer enrichment programmes.

To conclude, in all four of the countries examined there are sizeable gaps in early childhood, before children even start school. They are smaller in Canada and Australia than in the US and UK, but are still sizeable. We now have evidence that some parenting programmes are pretty effective at improving parenting and child outcomes. We also have very strong evidence that pre-school can help close gaps. And we have growing evidence about effective teaching practices and out-of-school programmes to narrow gaps. But these should be complemented – as material circumstances matter too – with policies to raise income at the bottom.

In the discussion, Liz Washbrook explained how they arrived at the weighting of the different factors. The influence of parenting was measured through questionnaires and some videotape evidence of parental interaction. She said it was right to distinguish between parenting and maternal education (two separate factors in the analysis) although there was a lot of linkage between the two as more highly-educated mothers, even separately from income, engage in practices that are associated with better cognitive outcomes.

Asked about the ideal length and structure of pre-school programmes, Jane Waldfogel said that the evidence showed that school or centre-based care, especially at age three and four, and probably as early as age two, does much more to promote school readiness than family-based care or informal care. The strongest evidence on quality has to do with provider education. Having a well-educated caregiver has a huge influence on quality, and having a teacher with a high level of education herself, who's using a lot of vocabulary, who's reading books with the kids, doing what highly-educated mothers would do, is crucially important. The quality of the teacher can be more important than the pupil:teacher ratio, especially with older infants, though a teacher's aide can make a big difference. On the ideal number of hours for pre-school education in a week, she said there was no evidence that going from say, four hours to eight hours would double the impact.

Prof Waldfogel clarified that she wasn't advocating programmes that were focused only on the disadvantaged, but ones that were more beneficial to disadvantaged children than to others. However, where resources were limited, some programmes could be rolled out first to disadvantaged children and then to others. Pre-K in the US, and free early years' education for two year-olds in the UK, are examples of such 'progressive universalism...'

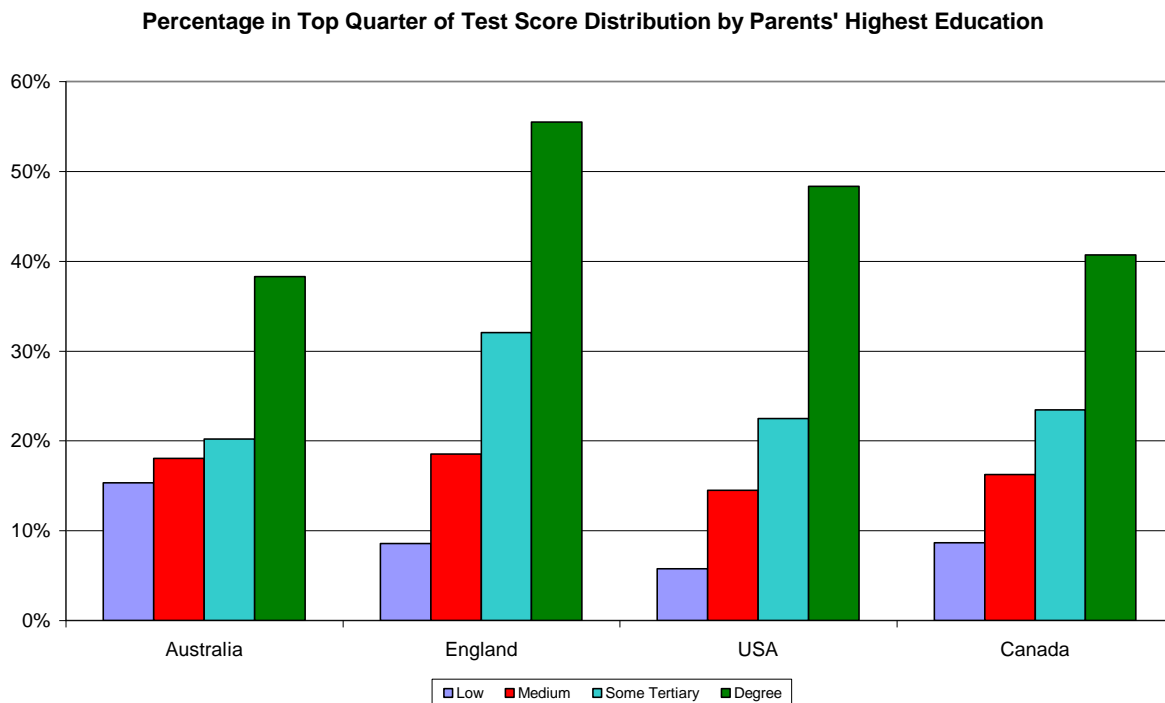
It was pointed out that gaps in behaviour were larger in the UK than the US. This could be explained by US low income parents having an overly rosy view of their children's behaviour. Naomi Eisenstadt said their behaviour may be just as bad, but they're not reporting it that way. Another view would be that UK parents at the bottom have a pretty accurate view of their kids' behaviour, and when they're reporting a lot of behaviour problems, there really are a lot of behaviour problems. This will be an area for further research.

The Research: Thematic Issues by Phase: Schools

Michelle Cahill, vice-president for national program, Carnegie Corporation of New York chaired a session on schools where **Professor John Ermisch**, Professor of Family Demography at the University of Oxford, presented findings on inequality in achievements during the school years.

Prof Ermisch looked at cross-national comparisons in school education and the role of schools in the evolution of inequality in England during the school years, particularly during primary and secondary school. The main variable he used for comparison was parents' socio-economic status. Available data allowed comparisons between English Key Stage 3 results at 14 and the average of maths and verbal reasoning tests for 15 year-olds (PISA) in Canada and Australia and for 13-16 year-olds in the US.

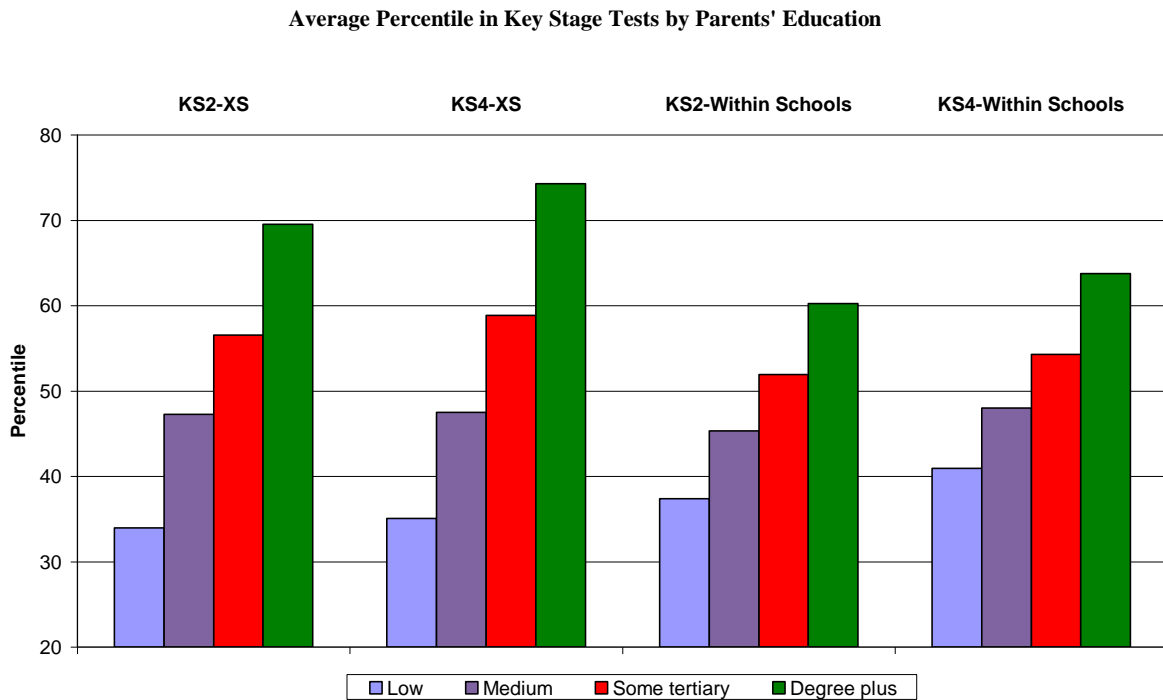
Chart 13: Percentage in Top Quarter of Test Score Distribution by Parents' Highest Education



To compare the four countries, parental education (the higher level of the two parents) was used as the indicator of socio-economic status. This is also the best indicator available across countries. Chart 13 shows the proportion of students in each SES group who score among the top 25% in test scores. It shows that children of graduates score highest in all countries, but the gap is widest in England and the US. The odds of being in the top half of the distribution test scores, when we compare children of graduates with others, in England, are, 3.7 times larger, compared with a ratio closer to 2:1 in Canada or Australia. This suggests that Australia and Canada have educational institutions – from pre-school to secondary education - that seem to provide a more equal quality of opportunity in the adolescent years.

In England, there is a particular issue around sorting into state schools. Inequality within the state school system is affected by sorting based on parental education background. Data from the *Longitudinal Study of Young People in England* focused on ages 11 and 16, the end of primary and the end of compulsory schooling, and on children born in 1989 and 1990.

Chart 14: Average Percentile in Key Stage Tests by Parents' Education

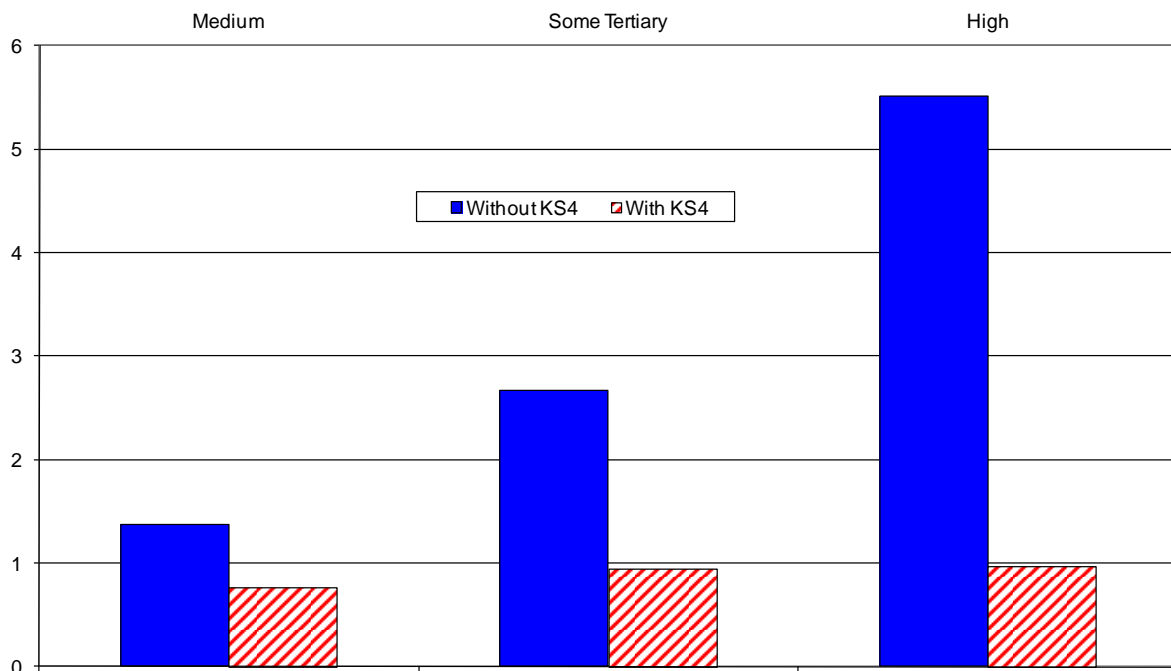


The first two sets of data in the chart above use percentiles¹ to show that the gaps increase between Key Stage Two and Key Stage Four, ages 11 to 16. At age 11, the average percentile score for children whose parents had a degree is in the 70th percentile, compared to the 50th percentile on average, while at the bottom end of the distribution, the average child is in about the 35th percentile. The gradient increases between 11 and 16, and the gap widens. The second set of bars shows that there is a gap within schools too, though it is not as large as between schools. This suggests that the children of better-educated parents go to better schools. Even when we take out the school effect, parental background makes a big difference. So even if you could get everybody in the same quality school, you'd still have a lot of inequality within the school, based on parental background.

Do these GCSE students catch up later? While the members of this survey are still too young to have completed university, we do know what they were doing at age 19; whether they are enrolled or not. So do GCSE results affect the proportion of children enrolled in university around the age of 19? In Chart 15 below, the blue bars show the odds of attending university at 19 by parental education. All of this is relative to the low education group. So, educated parents are 5.5 times more likely to have their kids enrolled at university at 19 than the low education group. Even the medium educated group are 1.5 times more likely than the low education group.

¹ Percentiles range from 1 to 100, so a score of 80 would mean that 80% of children score lower than this particular child.

Chart 15: Odds of Attending University at Nineteen by Parents' Education Relative to Low Education Group, Without and With Control for KS4 Results



The candy-stripe bars control for GCSE results. There, the gradient goes away completely. This suggests that it makes a big difference what happens during secondary school, with respect to getting young people into higher education. Fairer access to university requires interventions well before GCSE or age 16.

This analysis suggests that more equal access to good schools could make some contribution reducing inequality. But, while there's a large variation in school quality, it will be a very limited contribution, because more affluent parents can afford to locate close to better schools. A reduction in the variance of schools, making them more equal in quality, could help. But, it still would not eliminate the effects of parental background on performance in school.

This all raises the question of what makes a good school? Is it the teachers? Is it the headteacher? Is it the parents themselves? Is it the quality of interactions between pupils, or between pupils and teachers? Or, is it the performance of the pupils' peers? Are there peer effects, and if you get to go into a school with better pupils, do you benefit as well?

In the discussion, it was pointed out that there is a lot of US research on the differences between and within schools. One big issue explaining differences is teacher quality. The second is the curriculum offered to students: students of colour are less likely in the US to attend schools that offer physics and calculus, for example, and high achieving fourth graders are less likely to get algebra by eight grade, because their school doesn't offer it in the middle grades.

John Ermisch said there was some evidence that schools with sixth forms were better in England and had a richer curriculum as they taught A levels. There was also plenty of US evidence that disadvantaged children were additionally disadvantaged where they had poor teaching: this was reflected in within

school variations in the UK, as highlighted by Ofsted, and in difference in the quality of Maths teaching between schools.

Sutton Trust research had shown that grammar schools still outperform other schools, but have only 2% of pupils on free schools. There are two types there of non-selective school that have unequal intakes. One is where parents buy houses in well-off areas and send their kids to well-off comprehensives. The second is the faith school effect. If you take the top 8 or 9% of non-selective state schools, so you've got 7% private, 4% grammar, you take the rest – the bigger group are in fact faith schools, and they have a free school meals entitlement of 5% in areas roughly average 15%.

There was discussion about admissions policies, and the use of random allocation or lotteries. John Ermisch pointed out that the use of lotteries in Brighton and Hove had not had much impact on the socio-economic background of intakes. He said it was difficult to 'trample on parental autonomy'. Another participant noted the importance of high expectations. Prof Ermisch said that there was evidence that parental aspirations were related to parental education.

The importance of accountability was also raised. It was argued that if accountability focused more attention on what schools were doing to raise standards for the disadvantaged, this could have an impact.

The Finnish example was cited as a country with high performance and less inequality. The Finns focus on having a good school for everyone, and they have a strategy that focused on student learning with the right support. Choice and accountability are less important in these systems. Instead, there is a strong focus on teachers, and on instruction and learning.

It was also pointed out that there had been big improvements in London schools over the last twenty years. Yet similar approaches that worked there were not more widely applied. This was a good example of the need to build on what was known to work. Measurement is less about accountability than showing other schools what the best similar schools can do, promoting continual improvement.

The Research: Thematic Issues by Phase: Access to Higher Education

Prof Anna Vignoles, Professor of the Economics of Education, at the Institute of Education, University of London, presented research that she had conducted with **Dr John Jerrim** and **Prof Miles Corak** on higher education across Anglophone countries. The research is funded by the British Academy.

She said it was important to think about the role that higher education policy might play in bringing about, lower levels of social mobility in the US and the UK than in Canada and Australia. Higher education policy is likely to be part of the story because much of the story about inequality is about the graduate end of income distribution pulling away from the rest. Yet, in fact, higher education policy is not as important as we might think.

There are policy differences in higher education institutions and structures across the four countries. They all charge significant tuition fees, though there are differences: in the US, the level of fees is higher, but it does vary hugely by background as to what students actually pay. Canadian fees are lower, but vary by province. When the study was done, English fees were just over £3000 pa - from September 2012, they rise to £9000 – similar to those in Australia. England and Australia offer income contingent student loans; the US has mortgage-style loans; while Canada has public loans.

But in England and in Australia, and to a lesser extent in Canada, a significant part of the risk of higher education is borne by the state. In England, for example, when tuition fees rise, the student borrows that money from the state and only repays that money once they've earned over a certain amount. This transfers the risk from the individual to the state.

This is not to suggest that one could keep increasing tuition fees and not affect the participation of poorer kids. But the repayments are contingent on graduate income. By contrast, in the US, most student loans have to be repaid regardless of one's success in the labour market. This is an interesting difference between the UK and US: policies are very different, and there is more redistribution.

So the better question is not, 'Why are we like the US?' but 'Why are we not more like Australia and Canada in terms of our level of social mobility given the policy environment in which we're working?'

The study is particularly focused on access to the most elite institutions; those that determine access to the top professions. For the purposes of the data elite institutions are defined as the Russell Group in the UK and similar type groupings in the other countries.

The key question is from my achievement in secondary school, what is my chance of going to university, what is my chance of going to the most elite selective university, and how does that vary by my socioeconomic background? PISA data from state schools is used to compare secondary achievement in the US and UK. All these countries have relatively high enrolment rates, and while HE participation is highest in the US, so is the dropout rate.

The policy issue should focus less on getting poor students to university, and more on their graduation rates, particularly on whether they graduate from particular types of university.

Chart 16: Probability of going to university by SES group

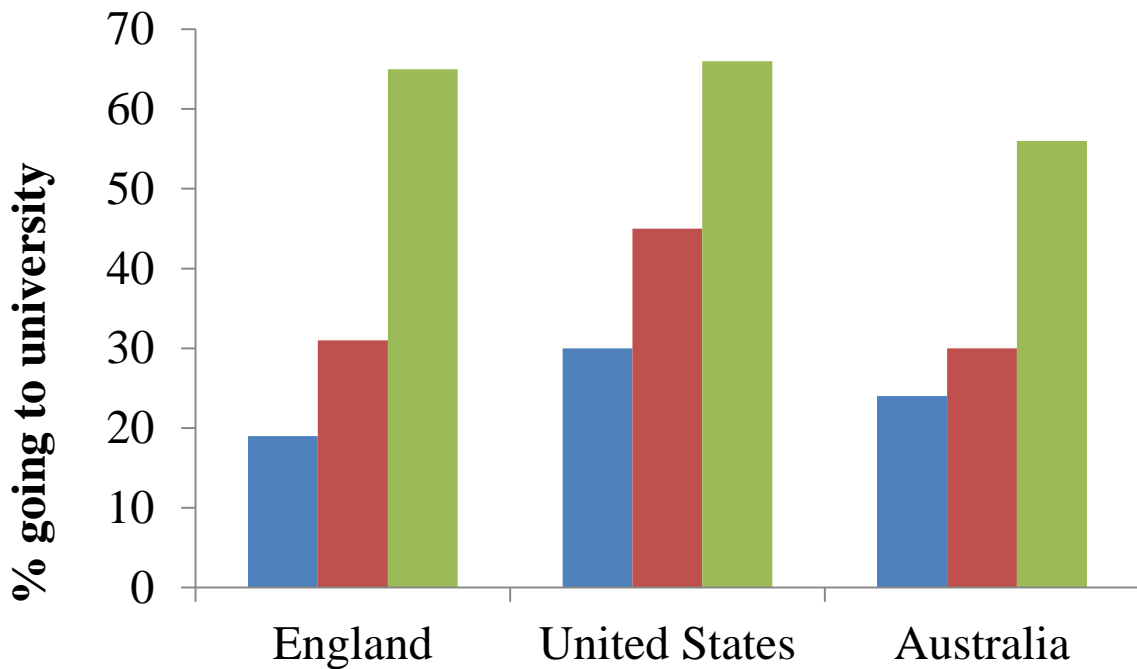
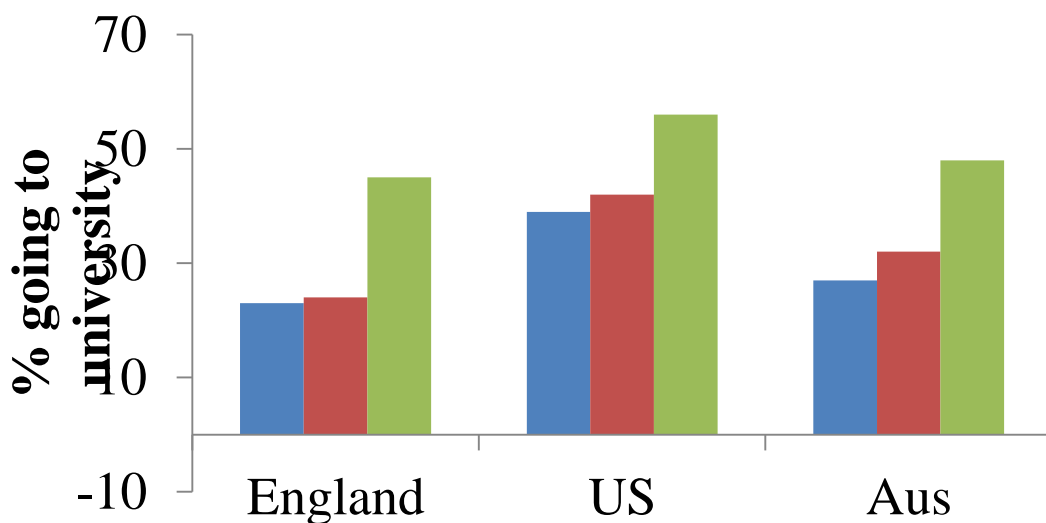


Chart 16 shows the likelihood of going to university in England, the US and Australia, with the blue bar showing students from low socio-economic background, red the middle and green, the most advantaged. All three countries display a strong correlation between socio-economic circumstances and the likelihood of going to university. But the gap is greatest in England.

However, most of the gap is explained by prior school achievement, as seen in the chart below. “So a lot of the explanation as to why there is a massive gap in the likelihood of going to university between rich and poor students is that poor students don’t get off the starting block,” she argued.

Chart 17: Probability of going to university for a child of average prior achievement



This picture would suggest that policy has to focus on facilitating achievement in secondary school rather than necessarily directing policy towards universities and which ones might or might not be admitting students from low and poor backgrounds. Nevertheless, even the second chart shows that there are still significant gaps, though these reflect the use of PISA scores. When GCSEs and A levels are used instead, the gaps become much smaller.

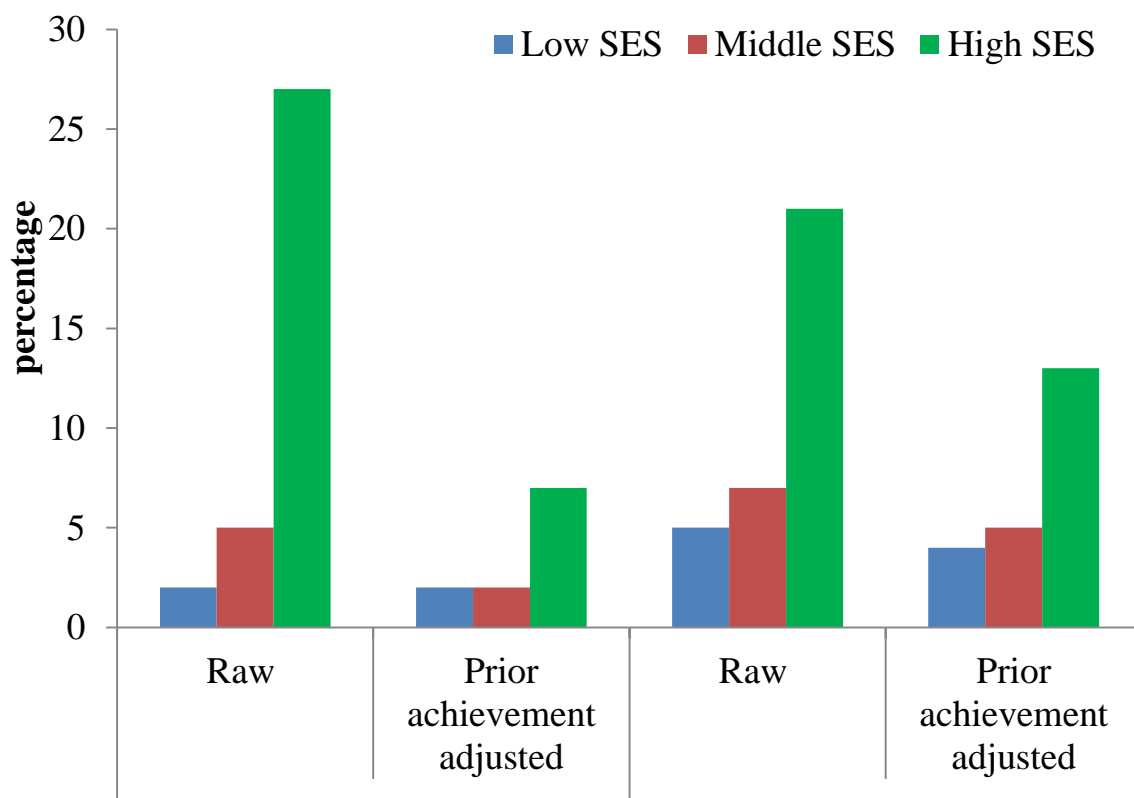
This shows that as young people progress through the school system, their chances of going to university are more and more determined by their achievement. By the time they get to A levels in England, there is very little difference in your chance of going to university that relates to your socioeconomic background.

This doesn't mean, however, that there's no role for higher education in improving the chances of young poor people having social mobility. But it means that we need to think about the timing of our interventions and ensure that they come soon enough.

Admission to select universities

This is where it is particularly useful to look at access to the most select universities. Here, there is only data for England and Australia but it does suggest a startling gap. Your chance of going to the most select institution is massively higher if you come from a more advantaged background. And the gap is much greater here in England than it is in Australia.

Chart 18: Probability of going to a selective university



However, once one allows for prior achievement, the gap gets much smaller and the actual percentage point difference is not huge. If we added in other measures about the family, that gap would largely disappear. This tells us that access to the most elite institutions is heavily determined by the prior achievement of the child, which though unsurprising, is important from a policy perspective because it requires us to decide what kind of higher education system we want.

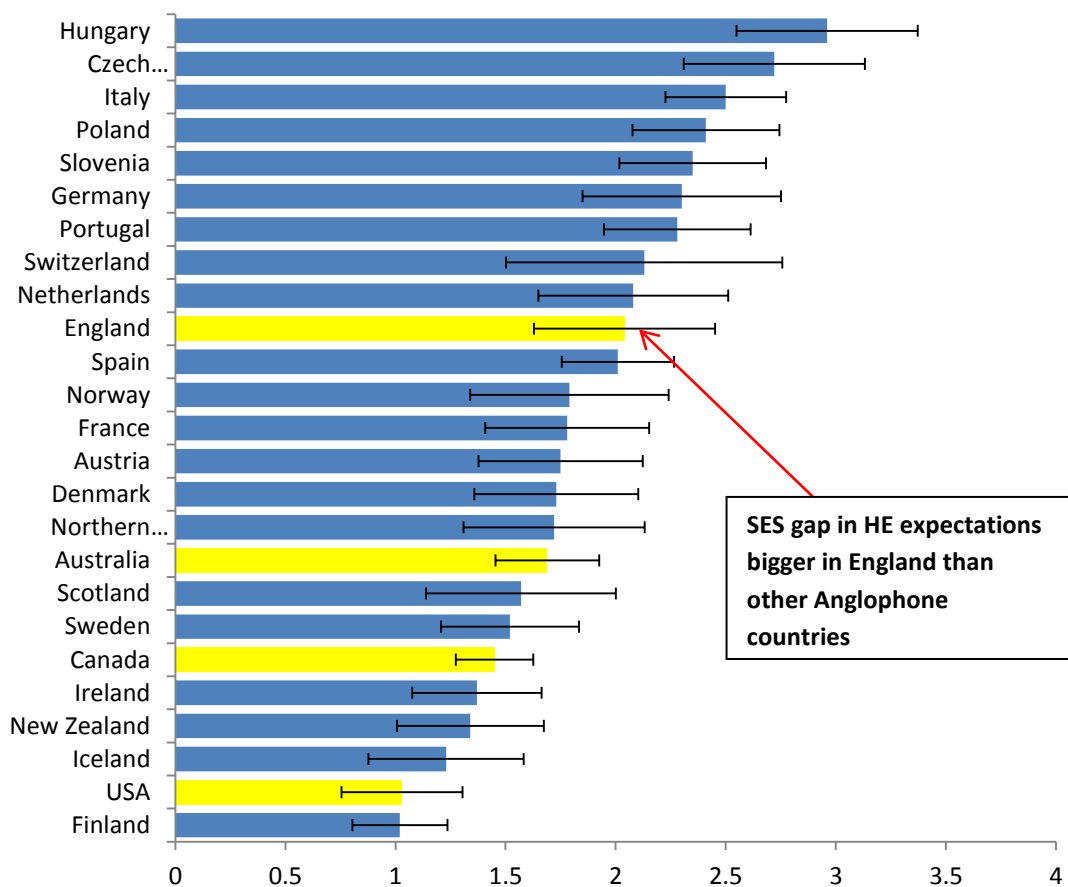
Do we want a system where we don't admit as many pupils but their admittance is very closely tied to their prior achievement, or do we have a system that is more inclusive at the point of entry, but accepts higher dropout levels? A perhaps more important point is that those gaps get disproportionately smaller for England compared to the other countries. This tells us that, in England, there is a much more unequal distribution of prior achievement: in the school system, poor pupils do relatively worse than in other school systems.

The role of aspirations

Given that there is a huge policy effort to try and prevent this in England, the issue is not one of political engagement but making social mobility happen, and making it happen in schools and in families. Aspirations are a particularly important part of the story.

Chart 19: Social class differences in HE aspirations

0 is a small SES gap in HE aspirations, 4 is a high gap



Internationally, gaps in aspiration are relatively modest. There isn't a huge gulf in aspiration between children from lower and higher SES groups. England may have a larger gap than the other Anglophone countries, highlighted in yellow, but those differences are not great.

But that isn't the whole story. The chart focuses on students who are low achieving, as measured by their PISA test score, and they are from lower socioeconomic group backgrounds. These are working class kids with low achievement. And there is a much bigger gap in England between aspirations and actually going to university. It suggests aspirations may be being raised in England that are not achievable with the current higher education system. The policy challenge is twofold: to think about changing aspiration and the culture of schools where we expect everybody to try and succeed at some level, but also thinking about how to raise achievement in schools so that these pupils stand a genuine chance of going to university. England is unusual in having GCSEs – key state exams at 16 – and this may be discouraging more post-16 achievement. With the participation age being increased to 18 by 2015, it is important either to place less emphasis on GCSEs or to allow pupils to improve their qualifications between 16 and 18.

The other policy lesson is that we may need to think more about graduation than participation, and that schools think about what they can do to build on the increased focus that they had in recent years on widening participation.

Discussion

In discussion after the presentation, chaired by **Prof Steve Machin** of the LSE, it was pointed out that many of those who graduate in Canada do some from two year community college courses rather than four year university programmes. This is particularly important for high achieving low income students and low achieving high income students. College also provides a second chance for those who dropped out of school early.

Although there is little average income uplift from community college in the US or further education college in the UK – aside from some vocational degree courses which could have a greater pay off than some Bachelor's degrees - there is some income uplift after college in the US, though it is significantly less than that from going to university.

There was some further discussion of the curriculum for 16-18 year-olds and whether there was enough opportunity for young people to learn work-related subject skills. Anna Vignoles said that, despite Alison Wolf's report on vocational education, there hadn't been enough discussion on the issue, particularly on what to offer those who were already less engaged by an academic curriculum.

There was some debate about the relative importance of participation and graduation. Peter Lampl argued that participation could be a good thing, even if students didn't graduate. Rowntree-funded research of university dropouts found that most had left for personal reasons, but nearly all found it a good experience and expected to return to finish their degrees. John Jerrim said that IS evidence suggested such students had some extra income return on their experience. Anna Vignoles said there needed to be a closer examination of the returns and the costs involved, though she agreed that it would be beneficial to have a US-style credit transfer system.

There was discussion about the benefits of living away from home for three years, while at university, something likely to be reduced with higher tuition fees. However, Anna Vignoles argued that work experience was likely to be valued more by employers.

Steve Machin said that the returns on a university education were still holding up, because demand for graduates continued to outstrip supply, as reflected in wage levels. He acknowledged however that the returns are different for different types of degree and for different subjects.

A government adviser pointed out that tuition fees had not had a disproportionate impact on students from lower income backgrounds. He also raised the issue of different data for different Russell Group universities. John Jerrim said that looking at the top five showed limited differentials in A level achievement. He said that the research hadn't considered ethnicity across countries because of different definitions in different countries.

The Political Response: Ed Miliband

The Leader of the Opposition, **Ed Miliband MP**, opened the summit with a call to place vocational education and advanced skills alongside university entry as important goals for social mobility policy. It's great to be here at the Sutton Trust's conference on social mobility.

He paid tribute to the work of the Sutton Trust. "You have done so much to help understand and advance the cause of equal opportunity, social mobility and tackling inequality," he said, explaining that the foundation of his politics is "a belief in the equal worth of every citizen."

Ed Miliband said that some progress had been made under the last Labour government, but that in future, governments must intensify and broaden their approach to social mobility, by improving it for those who don't go to university, as well as for those who do.

"I also want to challenge some of the assumptions about social mobility. A few months ago I met a group of apprentices working at Jaguar Land Rover. They told me how lucky they felt to be working on racing car prototypes. They had found a path into a really exciting job: one where they would be trained, stretched and expected to make use of their talent.

"They were at the beginning of a career; one which will lead to better wages, better prospects and a better life than perhaps their parents had. But, they told me they felt they were the lucky few. Most of their friends haven't had chances like that. That represents a route to social mobility which is different from higher education.

"I believe in expanding access to higher education. But the question we must all answer is what happens to those who don't go to university?," he asked. "We must reject the snobbery that says the only route to social mobility runs through University."

"In Germany, middle-class parents boast about their kids doing great apprenticeships. But in Britain, too often people think that if they don't go to university, they are written off by society."

He said it was important to treat vocational education seriously. "Britain needs 2.2 million engineers over the next 10 years if we are to compete with the rest of the world," he said, criticising the coalition for its approach, and for abandoning Labour's Diplomas. "We need to start celebrating success in all its forms. Ministers should show as much respect for young people whose skills secure them an apprenticeship as those who win places at university."

"We need to ensure vocational education is seen as just as much of a gold standard as academic education," he said. "And that there are good opportunities to switch between the two. That should be one of the central objectives of the Government's curriculum review. "

Ed Miliband said the social mobility debate also needed to reflect what is happening in the economy. "There's a hard truth here: it doesn't matter if people have the skills if there aren't good jobs for them to go into. At the moment our economy is just not providing enough of them. The immediate problem is the double-dip recession, but it's a much longer term problem than that.

“Not enough jobs offer training, a chance to develop skills and potential. More than four out of ten jobs don’t offer training at all. Only 8% of companies offer apprenticeships, and even among our largest companies, only 1 in 5 offer them. That is an economy not training people to the best of their talents. We need a modern industrial strategy to help our firms and sectors compete on the basis of high-value, not low pay.”

He said that a Labour government would both respond to employers’ concerns that they don’t have enough influence over the training that young people receive in schools or college and look at the support and incentives given to employers to compete on the basis of high wages and high skills. “Any company that wins a major Government contract must provide apprenticeships to the next generation of people,” he said. “We’ve got to change the culture on apprenticeships which mean four out of five of those employers don’t employ training.”

Ed Miliband said that he believed inequality and social mobility were linked, and that both are the product of an education system and an economy which works for too few. “So, if we are serious about creating new opportunities for all the working people of this country, then we must be serious about inequality itself. We must promote a living wage, create better jobs, train and develop our people better, and make sure that pay is fairer at the top. That’s the only real way to ensure that the opportunities there are in this country are genuinely open to all, that there are more of them, and that they are fairly shared.

While the focus of his speech was on the 50% who don’t go to university, responding to questions, Ed Miliband said that a Labour government would cut the maximum university tuition fee from £9000 to £6000 a year, if it were in power now. This would be partly funded through an increased graduate contribution.

On vocational qualifications, he said that Labour’s Diplomas had been “trying to establish in people’s minds and in the minds of employers, a set of qualification which have some kind of equal status with A Levels.” But the issue is “not just about qualifications, it’s also about the culture of a country and what the country celebrates and what it doesn’t celebrate.” He said that STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) could bridge the vocational-academy divide.

Reflecting on the social mobility debate, Ed Miliband said it is important that the equal opportunity is not unequal. “In other words you don’t just want to say to some kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, ‘Well you can rise to the top of this incredibly unequal society and, by the way, there’s going to be a whole set of other people who are left behind.’ I both want a more equal society and I want people to have chances to get on.” He also argued that, on some indicators, there had been improvements in social mobility under the last Labour government.

Asked about Finland, Ed Miliband said that the lesson he found most interesting was that only one in ten applicants to teaching in Finland was successful. “Therefore, if it is the most exulted and one of the most difficult to get into professions, it’s just going to make an enormous difference to the kids.”

The Political Response: Michael Gove

The Education Secretary, **Michael Gove MP**, spoke after the summit dinner. He said that the Sutton Trust had achieved something hugely significant, uniting all three main UK political parties in putting social mobility at the heart of what they are offering. He said that there was no country other than the US where parental circumstances determine your future so decisively.

He said that not nearly enough had been done to address social mobility in Britain. He was pleased that the Government was extending the previous government's commitment to 15 hours of free early years' education for three and four year-olds to the poorest two year-olds. "I know some argue that it takes the fun out of being a toddler," he said. "I think that's nonsense. Children of high cognitive ability from poorer backgrounds do less well than better off children of low cognitive ability, and it only gets worse as they go through the school system."

Michael Gove said that it was strange that this was not regarded as "one of the greatest injustices that we've allowed to fester over the last 40 years." There had been more investment in education, but the gaps continued to grow as children got older, making them seem unbridgeable by A-level. "Every other nation recognises that unless it makes use of all its talents, it will be unable to grow, innovate and ensure good things for all citizens," he added.

The Education Secretary said he had been impressed by a primary school he had visited that morning where 10 year-olds, many from immigrant families, where children were familiar with Shakespeare and Keats. "The biggest barrier to progress is lack of expectation on the part of the state education system, and lack of support for good teachers," he said.

He cited research for the Education Endowment Foundation which showed that there were 440 schools where pupils on free school meals matched or exceeded national GCSE results. He said academy chains like Ark and Harris, as well as other schools doing well for their poorer pupils, recognise that well-led teachers with a clear vision and a determination to introduce children to their intellectual heritage can smash any barriers. The key was supporting great teachers and great teaching.

In questions, he said the key to having more good schools was for other schools to ask the best what they are doing that they are not. This applied also to learning from successful independent schools, where the difference is made not by class sizes or selection, but by the expectations of parents and the quality of teaching. He said it was important that the right people were attracted into teaching.

Questioned about gender gaps, Michael Gove said it was important to look underneath the data. There were particular problems with white working class boys and with particular parts of the country. A Financial Times analysis had, for example, shown London state schools performing ahead of those elsewhere.

On lessons from abroad, the Education Secretary praised the Sutton Trust analysis for its focus on countries with similar income distribution to the UK. He said he was keen to see if there were lessons from Australia and Canada. But it would be a mistake to pick one country and assume everything is

perfect: it would be better to look at a group of high-performing countries and see their common features. These tend to be school leadership, the quality of teaching and the reliability of data.

The Political Response: Nick Clegg

The Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Liberal Democrats, **Nick Clegg MP**, launched an update on progress to the Government's Strategy for Social Mobility to coincide with the summit. The Government's strategy had been launched in April 2011.² He also announced a new Social Mobility Sector Transparency Board to make better use of official data in tackling social mobility.

He paid tribute to the work of The Sutton Trust. "Your voice and, equally important, your activities, are hugely important to the ambition that you and I share – to allow all our children to fulfil their potential," he said.

The Deputy Prime argued that social mobility is not just a moral imperative, but an economic one, citing figures showing that while one in five children are on free school meals, this is true of only one in a hundred Oxbridge entrants. He highlighted the dominance of independent schools in the professions, and gaps in GCSE performance based on background.

"This is a legacy we cannot afford," he said. "Morally, economically, socially: whatever your justification, the price is simply too high to pay. We must create a more dynamic society. One where what matters most is the person you become, not the person you were born.

"We do need to ensure that our school system as a whole promote fairness and mobility, rather than closing down opportunities. We are committed to narrowing the gap in our school system – state and private – and ensuring that all children are given the chance to rise. The way to do that is to make the state education system better - to level up - and ensure that anyone can get ahead."

The Deputy Prime Minister said there were a number of myths about social mobility that needed to be tackled.

- Myth 1 is that social mobility is simply a sub-set of income inequality.

"The uncomfortable truth is that nations with similar levels of income inequality have dissimilar levels of social mobility," he said, arguing that other factors must be at work other than income inequality. "That is why the Coalition Government is deliberately focusing on the public investments most likely to impact directly on social mobility: especially on closing educational attainment gaps, and improving early years education."

- Myth 2 is that social mobility is a project for economic good times – and when the economy is weak and public spending contracting, it's futile or pointless to pursue social mobility.

"The link between economic growth and mobility is not straightforward. A growing economy will often do a good job of increasing absolute social mobility – simply by making everyone better off than the previous generation. But growth does not necessarily improve relative social mobility, in other words the way your background affects your life chances.

² A copy of the update to *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility* can be read at <http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/opening-doors-breaking-barriers-strategy-social-mobility-update-progress-april-2011>

“Wasted talent is always a moral crime: but it is increasingly an economic crime, too. The Sutton Trust’s own work has suggested that boosting poor educational attainment up to the UK average would increase GDP by £140 billion by 2050, and increase long-run trend growth by 0.4 percentage points. So, social mobility is a long-term growth strategy. So yes, it might be harder to find the money. But, that just means keeping your focus, because the long-term social and economic goals are so clear. He cited funding for the pupil premium and youth employment, in addition to support for pre-school education.

- Myth 3 is that the promotion of social mobility means lowering standards, or somehow ‘dumbing down’, to ‘socially engineer’ a particular outcome.

He said this was “nonsense usually peddled by those who benefit from the status quo – and therefore want to keep things the way they are. Social engineering is what’s happening today: the unfairness in our society, and the system that perpetuates it. Social mobility is all about creating a truly level playing field, and a fair race. That is why, for example, the Coalition Government is encouraging universities to recruit on the basis of objective potential, on the basis of an ability to excel, not purely on previous attainment.

“Far from dumbing down, it’s about increasing opportunity to achieve excellence. A study at the University of Bristol showed that state school educated children with top A-levels were 50% more likely to get first-class degrees than privately educated children with the same grades. So for me this is plain common sense, and a move towards real fairness.”

Nick Clegg said that the Coalition is putting in place ‘machinery for mobility’ to hold governments to account. These included the indicators in the progress report, a cross-Whitehall ministerial group, the establishment of a statutory Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, to report independently on our progress and a new Social Mobility Sector Transparency Board, which will make better use of official data to gain a fuller picture of the levels of mobility in our society.

However, the Deputy Prime Minister warned that class attitudes were still too prevalent. “Class still counts. We are a long distance from being a classless society. And I don’t only mean in the hard material sense - inequalities in income, health and wealth. I also mean in terms of the attitudes and assumptions we carry around in our heads – about ourselves and about others. Eighty years ago, the historian Frank Harris declared that: “Snobbery is the religion of England”. I think that statement still has more than a ring of truth today.

“We need an open society, in which people choose their place. As a nation we have to shake off the outdated, snobbish attitudes of class that are cramping our society and hobbling our economy.”

Questions to the Deputy Prime Minister

Asked about the use of social context in university admissions, Nick Clegg agreed with a questioner that this was common in Ivy League universities, and that this was seen by many outside Westminster as common sense rather than “somehow dumbing down university standards. “

“You know make a judgement about an individual’s future prospects just by looking at a few letters on a CV,” he said. “What on earth is wrong with encouraging universities to try and take a slightly more rounded view of the individual? We all know that you’re not defined forever by the grades you got at A Level.”

He added: “I think it is seeing it exactly through the wrong end of the telescope to regard this as dumbing down. I see it as the way of, of nurturing excellence amongst people whose ability to fulfil their greatest potential is presently being thwarted.”

Asked about plans for a ‘student premium’ similar to the pupil premium, Nick Clegg said that the idea behind the Student Premium - which is not cast in stone yet – is that instead of lots of different pots of money and initiatives all aimed at reaching out to children who otherwise might not go to university, there would be a single straightforward pot. He also stressed that the changes to fees from September 2012 would be better for low income students. “There is not a single reason in this new system why someone from a disadvantaged background who aspires to go to university should not be able to go to university. “

Further details of the Government’s social mobility strategy can be accessed at <http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social-mobility>.

The Policy Ideas

Delegates concluded the proceedings by holding workshops to consider the implications of what they had heard and discussed for policy. Some policy ideas were suggested by several delegates. But all sought to draw on the evidence of what appears to lie behind the disparities in attainment that characterise education in the UK and US. The Sutton Trust will consider all these ideas in greater detail and look at which ones may be most feasible for policy and further research.

Early Years

One of the strongest arguments made was for improving the training and skills of the early years' workforce. This is particularly important in improving the vocabulary and social skills of young children, reflecting evidence showing significant cognitive gaps that widened over time. These concerns lie behind other recommendations around language development and specifications on quality. There was a general wish to see more evidence based programmes, and to have tracking of their impact. A programme that could be scaled up is the Nurse-Family Partnership model that helps mothers of new babies in their first months.

- Improve training for the early years workforce, including up-skilling current employees
- Encourage more entrants to the early years workforce, including through increased pay
- Pilot conditional cash transfers to parents to incentivise participation in evidence-based programmes
- Build on the success of the Nurse-Family Partnership model through a universal programme, with targeting at the most in need
- Insist on tighter specifications around the nature and quality of early years provision
- Prioritise and measure language development in pre-school provision
- Maintain policies beyond the short term to track impact and insist on rigorous evaluation of outcomes

Schools

There was a wide range of ideas suggested for schools, many of them focusing on improving the quality of teaching, which is recognised as the single most important factor in improving attainment for low income children. Other ideas deal with school admissions, improved transition from nursery to secondary school and improved technical or vocational education.

- Introduce a positive feedback system for schools on performance compared to peers, which is also accessible by individual teachers and parents
- Develop a peer feedback mechanism based on observations in class
- Introduce school admissions lotteries within defined geographical areas
- Introduce admissions lotteries for over-subscribed schools
- Ensure entitlement to kite-marked, evidence-based support programmes, initially at ages 6 and 7
- Restrict pupil premium funding in England to a menu of proven interventions

- Roll out schemes to improve the transition from primary to secondary school, including by using the ‘school within school’ approach for new entrants to secondary school
- Raise the prestige of the teaching profession, including through developing links with universities and researchers, and through pay, conditions and incentives
- Use new technologies to improve the information and education available to parents – around issues such as attendance, school-home support and parenting
- Introduce a system-wide approach to transfer resources to poor schools, including the distribution of teachers and school leaders
- Introduce the random allocation of teachers to schools
- Better align the school accountability framework with the challenges of addressing disadvantage
- Offer vocational options for children aged 12 and 13
- Offer an academically rigorous technical education for 11-14 year olds
- Ensure a compulsory focus on literacy and numeracy skills at the end of primary / early secondary school
- Ensure pupil premium expenditure is restricted to the individual pupils entitled to it
- Upgrade education for 11-14 year olds, with a curriculum designed to increase choice and promote an understanding of options and their implications
- Use pupil premium funding to develop models to accelerate performance of those behind in literacy and numeracy
- Introduce a programme to improve the resilience of disadvantaged students

University / Labour Market

The ideas here included an early engagement with students about higher education, with more honesty by universities about their requirements. There were suggestions about more vocational qualifications and the better use of new technology. In the labour market, inequalities could be reduced by making low paid jobs better paid.

- Introduce a work-based training route in further education, designed and funded by employers, with support conditional on outcomes
- Universities to be incentivised to engage with students earlier on, at the end of primary school and start of secondary school
- Improve adult education and training, particularly in the use of information technology, and by harnessing new technologies for delivery
- Diversify the non-university sector to provide higher quality and more flexibility in alternative provision
- Introduce policies to reduce inequality by raising low incomes, but make this conditional on a ‘work pays’ approach
- Higher education to be more transparent about what it requires of applicants and communication with younger pupils to be improved so that there is a clearer pathway to university