

# THE RESEARCH COMMISSION ON POVERTY AND POLICY ADVOCACY

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A report from one of the BERA Research Commissions

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# THE BERA COMMISSION ON POVERTY AND POLICY ADVOCACY

The first phase of the BERA Research Commission consisted of two seminars held at the University of Exeter. Invited participants included representation from the BERA Practitioner Research SIG, the Association for the Study of Medical Education, the British Medical Journal and Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers and from 3 of the 4 jurisdictions of the UK. The first seminar was held on the 11th February 2016 and focused on 'Using evidence to inform policy and practice in teacher education and medical education' and the second seminar on the 25th April 2016 focused on 'Understanding Cost, Value and Quality in professional education'. The seminars were recorded and working papers to accompany the seminar series were produced. The recordings and working papers are available on the project website: <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/projects/projectlinks/beracommissionprofessionallearning/>

The Commission adopted the structure of a parliamentary select committee by calling upon expert witnesses to outline a case illustrating their approach to the management of questions of cost, value and quality in professional learning. The two seminars were designed to promote the presentation and interrogation of evidence from alternating perspectives; Seminar 1 focused on cases presented by expert witnesses with a background in education and Seminar 2 on cases presented by witnesses with expertise in the economics of education. Each seminar included cases drawn from teacher education and medical education in the four jurisdictions of the UK and questions to each expert witness fled to a community of inquiry involving all participants. The outcomes of the first seminar were captured by mapping the issues and themes and this map was used to guide the proceedings in the second seminar and continues to be used as a reference point for the Community of Inquiry (see Appendix 1). The second seminar concluded with the identification of important areas for further collaborative research and these are shaping the formation of collaborative partnerships and activity in the next phase of the Commission:

- Institutional allocation of academic staff workload hours as a possible way of 'costing up' teaching activities, modules and programmes.
- In terms of recruitment crises and fast track teacher-training programmes, is it possible to evaluate the cost, value and quality of these different routes into training? In other words, to understand the evidence base for political decisions - is it just time taken or particular components of the training? (note literature on development of expertise)

## THE REMIT

This BERA Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy brought together leading academics from across the four jurisdictions of the UK already engaged in work on poverty, education and schooling. The aim of this Commission has been to build a network of research-active practitioners across the UK and internationally to engage in knowledge building about poverty and multiple deprivation as these find expression in education and schooling. This Commission undertook its work by organising five seminars, respectively in Leeds, Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow and Oxford, and a Community Forum in Manchester, between January and July 2016. The primary aim of the seminars was to open up a space for cross nation, cross partnership and cross cultural debate – and to facilitate counter discourses to be voiced and articulated in contrast to the dominant pathologising discourses of poor people and their education.

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In seeking evidence, this Commission sought to be inclusive and to invite a wide range of responses from academics, practitioners, policy makers and young people. The evidence was gathered as part of the seminars and the aim was to draw on local and regional knowledge from around the UK and internationally. We invited participants from a range of fields, disciplines and organisations to contribute. In general, we invited participants to give oral presentations that were video recorded and to contribute two sides of A4 summarising the points they wished the Commission to be aware of. These have been lodged on the BERA website.

This final report draws on these documents and the video recordings to summarise what we have found. We were not commissioned to undertake a literature review on poverty and education and this report does not claim to be systematic or rigorous but rather to reflect the critical debates that took place in the seminars and community forum. Of necessity it is lengthy, such is the importance of poverty in this era of Brexit controversies and negotiations. Its multiple authors not only report on the reconnaissance of research activities across the four jurisdictions but shed light on lived experiences of poverty, dominant discourses and respective governments' extant policies that amplify the necessity for more research-informed policy and practice. BERA has a crucial role to play in line with its Strategic Review. Accordingly this report contains a set of recommendations for BERA on poverty and policy advocacy.

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## PART 1: INTRODUCTION: THE SHIFTING CONTEXT IN BRITAIN

Much has happened in relation to child poverty, education and policy advocacy across the life of this Commission. Specifically the political landscape that had contextualised our initial proposal, the austerity politics of the Cameron Conservative government, was no longer the dominant part of the political rhetoric by the summer of 2016. With the shock result that returned a yes vote for Britain to exit the European Union, Cameron resigned and the Conservatives formed a new government under Theresa May in July 2016. The May Government quickly spoke about easing Cameron and Osborne's politics of austerity, yet since then May has indicated that she will abolish the Child Poverty Unit and has so far failed to address the crisis in the NHS which disproportionately affects poor people.

Arguably, Brexit was a jolt to the UK national consciousness which has raised the profile of poverty to unprecedented levels. The Brexit vote was interpreted by some press and politicians as a wake-up call that signalled a growing unrest felt by marginalised groups who were being left behind in the race towards global capitalism. Media cameras turned on desolate high streets, the proliferation of charity shops, boarded up buildings, housing estates with few amenities, food banks, homelessness and zero hours employment contracts. The UK was portrayed as a divided nation in the press, which coincidentally had been anticipated in the State of the Nation Report in 2015 from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.<sup>1</sup>

Paradoxically while a concern for equality has grown to become and will probably remain at the heart of the *raison d'être* of publically funded education (Paquette 1989), levels of child poverty in each of the four jurisdictions of the UK started to rise again in 2013 following a slow but gradual decline over the previous two decades. 2013 was the year when Cameron's and Osborne's austerity politics drastically reduced local council budgets, removed a series of tax benefits that had protected children from the worst effects of the economic down turn and introduced Universal Credit, the new measure for claiming benefits including disability benefits. All these reforms have impacted on struggling families and have pushed more children into poverty.

Two sets of contradictory forces, a political consensus that education should enable all students to access the knowledge to enable them to function and thrive in society, and anxieties around public finances and the declining state of the economy come together in a series of educational reforms that might be said to exacerbate - rather than address - the problems of child poverty.

This BERA Commission has come to recognise that tackling child poverty through education alone is not possible; schools cannot compensate for society (Bernstein, 1970), and further, educationalists require a strong awareness of difference as well as the structural causes of poverty that often requires historical analyses. Anxieties about the growing inequality on the UK has to be contextualised historically, geographically and in terms of the distinct political and socio-economic landscapes in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and this is where our Commission has been able to provide some insights.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2015>

## PART 2: CHILD POVERTY AND EDUCATION IN EACH JURISDICTION

We have found that one of the most helpful ways to examine the role of education in relation to poverty has been through comparing and contrasting education systems and policy regimes across the four jurisdictions. The following sections provide sketches of child poverty and education in each of the four jurisdictions of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### POVERTY, POLICY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN ENGLAND

By way of a preface, data for child poverty in England is similar to figures for the UK as a whole, largely because it contains the bulk of the UK's population. Consequently this section will sometimes draw upon figures for the UK as a whole, though this will always be explicit.

#### Child poverty data

In terms of median household wealth and domestic expenditure, England is the most prosperous part of the UK (see Compendium of UK Statistics: Social Indicators). This does not prevent high levels of child poverty, with acute differences between areas.

Around 20% of children live in relative low income in every Northern and Midlands region, although London becomes the worst for relative poverty once housing costs are taken into account. Poverty levels are particularly high in most of the North East, Lancashire, West and South Yorkshire, Birmingham and Inner London, with de-industrialised areas particularly badly affected.

Extremes of poverty are also an increasingly worrying feature. A recent Joseph Rowntree<sup>2</sup> study found that 300,000 children were in destitution at some point in 2015 (demographically, most will live in England.) The major reasons were: a benefit sanction or delay; sudden high bills; unemployment; or family breakdown. This affected 1 in 20 households in some areas. The Trussell Trust<sup>3</sup> gave out over a million emergency 3-day food packs last year. Only some of this is reflected in statistics of Free School Meal entitlement, around 15% in England, and there are concerns about diminishing claims and take-up.

#### Other factors affecting education

All of these poverty statistics sit within international data on income differences, which have a major impact on health and wellbeing (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Examining the income of the richest 20% as a multiple of the income of the poorest 20%, Wilkinson and Pickett found that the UK is one of the most divided societies (a multiple of 7, almost twice as large as Japan or Scandinavia). Dorling (2011) has also demonstrated how localised the spatial patterns of poverty and wealth can be and how closely they are associated with educational achievement.

Given that economic differences impact on children's development and education indirectly as well as directly, it is significant that the proportion of adults with degree-level qualifications is substantially

higher in the South East than the North and Midlands. Indeed, 60% of adults living in Inner London are graduates compared with around 30% in each Northern or Midlands region. This provides a more convincing explanation for the small differences in attainment than the official focus on 'ineffective schools'.

Given the tendency for poorer children with strong attainment in primary schools to fall behind in secondary, it is also important to consider perceived and real employment opportunities. At the extreme, Knowsley, the local authority with the weakest Progress 8 scores, sits astride a closed car factory, and with poor job prospects in Liverpool, the only city within easy commuting distance. Rural child poverty is also a significant factor in England. Whilst the proportion of poorer children is statistically smaller, these children and their families often lack access to the appropriate support systems. Indeed the attainment of disadvantaged children tends to be lower where such children constitute a minority of the school population (Strand, 2014).

### Poverty and educational attainment

The attainment gap between pupils with FSM entitlement and other pupils is serious and undiminished over many years. Nationally available data shows that the gap is present when children enter schooling and widens as they move through the school system (Strand, 2014). Educational inequalities surface in the pre-school years (Sylva et al., 2004), but continue to grow in primary (elementary) and secondary (high) school years (Connelly, Sullivan and Jerrim, 2014). The gap exists in almost all schools, even those rated 'outstanding' by England's inspection body, Ofsted (Strand 2014). Pupils with FSM are half as likely to achieve 5 or more A\*-C grades including English and Maths than other pupils (33% of 61% in 2015) (SFR 01/2016)<sup>4</sup>.

This is reflected at other ages, but with complications: (i) when the hurdle is raised, the gap also increases; (ii) the gap tends to increase with age. Some examples:

- The FSM attainment gap in KS1 Maths increased from 8 to 18 percentage points in 2016, when expectations were raised (DfE Statistical First Release).
- Pupils with FSM entitlement have only a quarter the chance of getting A or A\* grades (DfE data)
- Of pupils in the poorest fifth of the population who, against the odds, were in the top fifth of national attainment at age 11, two thirds are no longer in the top fifth at age 16 and only around 1 in 7 proceed to university (Sutton Trust: Waste Talent).
- 24% of young people from the poorest fifth of areas enter university, compared with 60% from the most prosperous (Crawford et al., 2016).

Measurements based on the binary measure of 'attainment gap' (generally FSM vs the rest) only express part of the situation. Attainment tends to increase gradually as we move up the socio-economic gradient, and relative advantage produces and exacerbates disadvantage. A stark expression of inequalities is the data about access to Russell Group and other research-strong universities. 22% of young people from the richest fifth of the population get a place at one of these 40 universities, but only 2% from the poorest fifth (Crawford et al., 2016). At the most extreme, independent school pupils are 100 times more likely to get into Oxford or Cambridge than their FSM contemporaries from state schools.

4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revise-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2014-to-2015>

## Policy concerns

It is an obvious point, but significant, that England is the only jurisdiction where education is governed by the same (UK) parliament / assembly that governs welfare and other policy. This creates an even stronger pressure to develop education policy which shifts blame onto schools and away from government. Moreover, neoliberal school reform has proceeded fastest in England, with quasi-markets of competing schools established in 1988 and subsequently quasi-autonomous 'academies', now entering highly competitive stage of take-overs and empire building. This is a strong example of 'governance by numbers' where test and exam scores are used not only to enhance or exacerbate privatisation via market choice, but also to trigger punitive inspections and sanctions to force academy conversion and transfer to Multiple Academy Trusts.

This process particularly affects schools with low-SES populations: secondary schools with low prior attainment tend to get worse Ofsted gradings<sup>5</sup> and even the new Progress 8, intended to be fairer in terms of context, has not solved the problem, particularly for schools in mainly White working class areas. 'Value-added' measures signally fail to take into account the deterrent effect of poor employment prospects, or of covert selection following the 2006 Act.

DfE data has been refined in recent years to provide more detail on disadvantaged pupils, and the introduction of the Pupil Premium provides additional resources, though partly offset by falling school budgets and a focus on performativity and sanctions for 'failing' schools. It is unclear how effectively the Pupil Premium is being used by schools (Burn et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2013), or how success will be measured given the Government's abandonment of the 'contextual added value' which was a statistical comparison of a child's performance with children with similar prior performance and circumstances. The Education Endowment Foundation commissioned a 'Toolkit' to identify evidence-based interventions, but, in addition to some general design problems, little of the research it draws upon relates to pupils in poverty.

The consequence of all this may be to make matters worse by triggering responses designed to pass the next test but which do not assist young people's long-term cognitive development or emotional wellbeing. Major structural issues go largely unquestioned (e.g. setting and ability grouping) and 'pedagogies of poverty' are reinforced (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). Rare examples of successful high-poverty schools are used to claim that low achievement is the fault of teachers, without examining their specific circumstances (e.g. covert selection), and to reinforce the doxa of differential 'school effectiveness'.

The recent policy shift (September 2016) towards opening new grammar schools sits within a wider use of 'social mobility' as a distraction from increasing economic inequalities. As a strategy it was quickly exposed, since grammar school selection acts as a further barrier to FSM pupils. Regional differences are used to reinforce pressure on 'the North' and Midlands, ignoring economic factors in the London Challenge success and the demoralising effect of poor employment prospects in former industrial areas.

Major policy initiatives in England are incoherent and distorted by a neoliberal mind-set (performativity, human capital, sanctions to force academisation) and deficit models which blame both those living in poverty and the teachers who teach them rather than providing adequate



resources. Thus there is little follow through to early education (itself marketised and with Sure Start family centres being closed) in terms of homework support, school holiday activities, youth work and university access programmes. The parlous state of vocational education and apprenticeships contributes to the demoralisation of many young people.

### Policy implications

Addressing the inequality gap in England will require a major policy shift despite the fact that it is already a high-profile policy issue (see DfE, 2010<sup>6</sup>). Researchers in England (e.g. Dorling, 2011; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013; Thompson et al., 2015) have pointed out the dangers of deficit models where perceived shortcomings of the poor, rather than structural inequalities, are used to explain why children who live in economic disadvantage more often than not have poor educational outcomes. Negative stereotypes about impoverished children based on deficit assumptions can perpetuate inequality (Cummings et al., 2012). Researchers have also pointed out the need to replace sanctions with redistributive policies where extra money is spent on schools serving disadvantaged communities (e.g. Beckett, 2016). Exhorting schools to do more without providing the necessary resources only increases the pressure on disadvantaged children.

Another policy implication is the need to reduce the high stakes testing in English schools that it is intended to hold schools and teachers accountable (Furlong, 2013; Furlong and Lunt, 2014). One of the consequences of this pressure is a restriction of the curriculum for disadvantaged children. There is a policy need to reduce competition between schools and increase cooperation in order to broaden and enrich curricula including high quality apprenticeship schemes and vocational education (e.g. Pring, 2013).

Finally, government needs to heed its own advice about acting on research-based evidence when creating and implementing educational policy. For example, Sylva et al. (2004) found that high quality pre-school provision, whilst not eliminating differences in social backgrounds, can help to reduce disadvantaged children's experience. They also found that disadvantaged children do better in pre-school settings with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds rather than in settings catering mostly for children from disadvantaged families. Well-qualified staff with good pedagogical skills also made a difference. Yet pre-school provision remains uneven, staff are often poorly paid, and more organised and effective child care is far more likely to be used by families with higher incomes (Simon et al., 2015). Rather than cutting preschool provision, or relying on the marketised sector, it should be government policy to provide high quality pre-school provision for all.

## POVERTY, POLICY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN SCOTLAND

### Child poverty data

The Scottish Government has adopted four income-based measures of child poverty: relative poverty; absolute poverty; combined low income and material deprivation and persistent poverty (Scottish Government, 2016a). These are going to be used for the new Child Poverty Bill targets. According to the figures for 2014/15, 17% (160,000) of children in Scotland were in relative poverty before housing costs (an increase from 14% from 2013/14) and 22% (220,000) after housing costs (equal to 2013/14). In terms of absolute poverty, the figures for 2014/15 were 16% (150,000) before housing costs (an increase from 14% in 2013/14) and 21% (200,000) after housing costs (decrease from 23% in 2013/14).

6. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf)

While there has been an encouraging decrease over the last ten years in absolute poverty before housing cost (23% to 16%), the decrease in figures after housing costs is much less reassuring (25% to 21%).

Child Poverty (after housing costs) is highly prevalent in areas such as Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and the highest level is in the largest city, Glasgow. Glasgow, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple deprivation, records seven of the ten most deprived areas in Scotland.

On the 5th of February, 2015, the Scottish Government introduced free school meals for all children in primaries 1 to 3 in all schools in Scotland. There has been a successful result in the free meals initiative - records demonstrate that 81.7% of the children eligible have taken the free meals in schools. Nevertheless, there is an alarmingly high use of food banks in Scotland, probably the highest rate of use in the UK per head of population. The Trussell group reported that the figures for Scotland in 2016 included more than 43,960 children.

### **Other factors affecting education**

There are a number of key issues concerning the readiness of children from disadvantaged backgrounds for school education and their ability to engage with school education (Sime et al., 2015). These include: the importance of high quality early years interventions to support the most vulnerable; ensuring the quality of the home learning environment; identifying those children affected by poverty and a greater understanding of the challenges they face on a daily basis; and greater access to out-of-school learning activities for all.

The Scottish Government has been committed to ensuring that young people leaving school are entering into positive school leaver destinations and produces regular statistical evidence to track progress (Scottish Government, 2016b). Positive destinations includes Higher Education, Further Education, employment, training, voluntary work or activity agreements. The most recent figures demonstrate that in March 2016, 92.0% of school leavers who had left school approximately nine months previously, were in positive destinations (Scottish Government, 2016c). An analysis of the differences between the data on the initial destinations and the data from nine months later reveals an interesting trend since 2010/11. In each of the periods there is a slight drop after nine months in those attending Higher and Further Education and an increase in those in employment. There are serious questions to be posed, however, about the quality and the sustainability of some of the employment opportunities that are available to young people, especially those from deprived backgrounds (McKinney et.al., 2013).

There is an urgent need to recognize the experience of rural poverty and the implications for the futures of young people. One of the key issues is the high cost and lack of availability of public transport (Scottish Government Social Research, 2009). This can prove to be detrimental to accessing employment opportunities and educational opportunities.

### **Poverty and educational attainment**

There remain serious concerns about the attainment of children and young people who are from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. Sosu and Ellis (2014) point out that the attainment gap needs to be

addressed from an early age. They indicate that there is a gap of 10 months between children from higher and lower income backgrounds by the age of five.

Interestingly some recent research indicates that while there is a direct correlation between poverty and disadvantage and attainment, this is not necessarily the case for initial positive school leaver destinations and some schools provide examples of high success rates for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (McKinney et al., 2012, 2013).

There have been two recent major Government initiatives to address the attainment gap (the second is discussed in the section on policy). The first was the School Improvement Partnership Programme (2013-2016) that aimed to develop capacity and support sustainable work across classrooms, schools and local authorities to tackle educational inequality (Chapman et. al., 2016). The collection of data and collaborative enquiry were used in the process and the individual projects were evaluated by the Robert Owen Centre, University of Glasgow. A number of the projects were highly innovative and focused on key issues such as: gathering data to understand patterns of underachievement; enhancing practice in nurture groups; using data to evaluate initiatives in schools. The challenge for the schools and collaborative projects across local authorities will be sustaining the impetus and the work without the support of the government funding.

### **Policy concerns**

The second recent government initiative was the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge launched in February 2015 (Scottish Government, 2016d). This seeks to target and improve literacy, numeracy and health and well being in specific areas in Scotland. The Attainment Challenge is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education (Scottish Government, 2016e). The key priorities of the 2017 Improvement Plan of the Framework are: improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy; closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children; improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing and improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people (Scottish Government, 2016f). The government states that it will introduce, as one of the measures of assessment, national standardized assessments for key stages in August 2017 for greater consistency in assessment and to help identify the size of the attainment gap. There have been some very mixed responses to the introduction of standardised assessments from academics, teaching unions, parent bodies and Head teachers.

The publication of the *Annual Report for the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland 2016* was produced in advance of the proposed Child Poverty Bill for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016a). The consultation process for this Bill was completed in late 2016 and examined three major themes: enshrine in legislation the ambition to eradicate poverty; reinstate statutory income-based targets to reduce the number of children living in poverty and the duty for Scottish ministers to develop a Child Poverty Delivery Plan and an annual report on progress. Most of those who responded to the consultation exercise agreed that 2030 was a reasonable time line for the realization of the targets. This report provides evidence that the government is aiming to address the issue of poverty and educational attainment within the wider issues of poverty and the effects of child poverty.

## Policy implications

The Annual Report for the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland 2016 is a very useful document and has identified two areas where there has been a downturn since 2014: the percentage of children from the poorest households who agree pupils in class accept them (71.1% to 62.6%) and percentage of P7 pupils from the most deprived areas performing well in numeracy (61.4% to 54.3%) (Scottish Government, 2016a). However, the report merits close scrutiny and there are other areas that will need to be addressed. The figures for children from the most deprived areas performing well in reading and writing have remained relatively unchanged between 2014 and 2016, but nevertheless present serious challenges for the government. The figures for performing well in reading are 81.6% (2014) and 81.4% (2016) and for performing well in writing are 60.9% (2014) and 56.3% (2016). This means that approximately 18% of the children from the most deprived areas are not performing well in reading and this has not improved and approximately 46% are not performing well in writing and this has not improved. Similarly, there has been no change in the completion rate of Modern Apprenticeships – 77% in 2014 to 76% in 2016. This means that approximately 24% (almost a quarter) of Modern Apprenticeships are not being completed.

The main teaching union in Scotland, the EIS, was recently prompted by the increase in the challenges faced by school children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds and produced a document entitled, *Face up to Child Poverty* (2015) (Educational Institute of Scotland, 2015). The document discusses many of the practical challenges faced by the children and their families (e.g. uniform and equipment costs) and provides action points for teachers/lecturers in schools/colleges to facilitate local interventions, including how to detect signs of hunger. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland also produced a report in 2015, *The Cost of the School Day* (Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, 2015). This report outlined many of the hidden costs of daily life in school that provides barriers to some children fully participating in the academic, social and sporting activities.

## POVERTY, POLICY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN WALES

### Child poverty data

Wales suffers from significant levels of poverty. Approximately 23% of the population lives in permanent income-related poverty (a figure that has changed little in the last decade) and perhaps another 20% of the population live close to the poverty line and move above and below it over a period of years. Whilst there are large concentrations of people living in poverty caused by unemployment in the post-industrial communities of Wales, there are more poor people outside of those areas, scattered across Wales and often in some form of work. Approximately one third of children in Wales live in poverty and this figure is growing again (Adamson, 2008; Welsh Government, 2013 and 2014; New Policy Institute, 2013; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014).

### Poverty and educational attainment

By the age of seven nearly 89 per cent of children from more privileged backgrounds achieve 'expected levels' in reading, writing, number and other aspects of their curriculum, but by comparison only 72 per cent of children from the poorest backgrounds achieve these outcomes. At the age of eleven whilst nearly 90 per cent of none FSM children reach expected levels, only 72 per cent of FSM children do so. By the age of 14 the respective figures are 86 per cent and 62 per cent. When young people take their GCSEs, whilst 62 per cent of those from more affluent backgrounds get at least five

passes that include English and Mathematics, only 28 per cent of those who live in poverty achieve this benchmark.

Thus, by the age of seven, just over a quarter of children from Wales' most disadvantaged homes and communities are **not** achieving outcomes that suggest they are capable of realising their potential. By what might be the end of their educational journey at the age of sixteen, this has risen alarmingly to three-quarters of young people from low-income families and communities not achieving results that will provide them with a good chance of ultimately achieving an apprenticeship, a place in higher education or some form of well- paid and secure employment (Egan, 2016).

Put starkly the education system has not provided these young people with the wherewithal to become economically and socially mobile and to move themselves, their future families and their communities out of poverty. The extent of unfulfilled potential and the dark consequences of their continuing inurement in poverty is nothing less than a human and societal tragedy. In the words of the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission they have been 'failed by the system' (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014).

There is of course much greater complexity to the ecology of low achievement associated with poverty than is allowed for in these headline figures. This includes the very welcome trends whereby for all age-groups achievement of both FSM and none-FSM children is improving and for most age-groups the gap between the relative achievement of FSM and none-FSM children is actually reducing. This has to be tempered, however, by the fact that it is not reducing at the age when GCSEs are taken and when success at this level is so strongly associated with future employment and education prospects. At the current rate of progress, it would be another 60-plus years before all of Wales' FSM students achieved their full potential at the age of fifteen (Welsh Government 2014a and 2015a; National Foundation for Educational Research, 2014).

There are also important variations within this overall picture. Girls generally do better than boys, but this should not mask the low achievement of many FSM girls. Some ethnic minority groups do far better than others and given the remarkable extent to which this appears to have been a factor in the recent success of London schools, Wales needs to know far more than it currently does about the achievement of ethnic minority groups within its education system (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2014; Welsh Government, 2015a).

### **Policy concerns**

During the period of the last Welsh Government (2010-2015) a holistic all-portfolio strategy was developed to tackling poverty led by a designated Minister and team of officials. During this period the policy narrative that was followed moved increasingly away from mitigating the impact of poverty (important though that was in the face of the Westminster Government's continuing programme of austerity and 'welfare reform') to the prevention of poverty through a focus on early years, early intervention and improving the employability of the most disadvantaged (Welsh Government, 2013).

Education policy had an important place within this overall tackling poverty strategy, with reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement being one of the three stated top priorities (improving literacy and numeracy were the others) of the Education Minister and his department.

Education policy in this area was set out in a strategy document entitled *Re-Writing the Future* with its focus on early years' education, improvements in learning and teaching, raising aspirations and family/community engagement (Welsh Government, 2014). The strategy has been supported by a range of interventions including the Pupil Deprivation Grant and the production of some very well regarded resources on family and community engagement. These have contributed to progress that has been made in the educational achievement of disadvantaged children, although this falters through their timespan in education with progress between the ages of 14 and 16 being the weakest.

### **Policy implications**

Whilst these policies have been progressive and generally empowering for schools, avoiding the worst excesses of the 'failing school' and 'problem children' paradigm in England, there continue to be pressures on schools and teachers which deflect them away from supporting the most disadvantaged children as much as might be possible. Since 2010 politicians have become obsessed by a narrative - mainly inspired by PISA outcomes but also comparisons with England, particularly London- that portrays the Welsh educational system as 'lagging behind' other UK and international systems. This has led to the return of high-stakes assessment, school league tables by another name, several levels of accountability and consequentially low levels of teacher morale (Egan, 2017).

The election of a new Government in 2016 and the arrival of a new Cabinet Secretary for Education, does not appear to be changing the overall direction of education policy, although a further increase in the Pupil Deprivation Grant, including a doubling of the amount attached to 3-5 year olds is encouraging. The on-going commitments to the innovative curriculum reforms resulting from Graham Donaldson's work also offer promise for the future (Donaldson, 2015). Outside of education there has, however, been a major change of policy direction (Welsh Government, 2016). The holistic tackling poverty strategy has been ended and replaced by a greater focus on prosperity, underpinned by an emphasis on the importance of early intervention (particularly during the first 1000 days of a child's life), a significant expansion in childcare opportunities for working parents and much greater focus on employability. The future of the pan-Wales lead tackling poverty programme *Communities First* is in doubt, but there is to be a new *Valleys Strategy* targeted at the post-industrial communities where in 2015 and 2016 traditional Labour heartlands were threatened by the surge in support for UKIP and a majority vote for Brexit. Poverty is now to be the responsibility of all Government Minister's with a lead Minister (the Economy Secretary) coordinating their work. Whilst there is no designated Minister with responsibility for poverty, there is a Minister for Children and Communities and he has recently announced that Wales will set up *Children's Zones*, based on international models such as Harlem in New York (Whitehurst and Croft, 2010), which are intended to bring together all organisations dedicated to improving the lives of children in some of Wales' poorest communities.

Inevitably, political priorities and positioning are at work here. Whilst there is much to be admired about the on-going commitment of the Welsh Government to tackling the incipient poverty that mars the lives of so many children, young people and adults in Wales, judgement will need to be reserved on the overall coherence and effectiveness of these policies. This should include the extent to which they take account of the evidence developed by researchers in this area, such as those who have collaborated in this BERA Commission and the Public Policy Institute for Wales<sup>7</sup>. In relation to education in Wales, it could be suggested that this evidence points to the following as being the likely key components of a strategy that over a reasonable period of time, might transform the educational

achievement of our most disadvantaged children:

- A relentless focus on the importance of high quality early years' education in preventing future low achievement.
- Ensuring that our most disadvantaged schools and communities attract high quality teachers and school leaders.
- An end to the currently oppressive levels of external assessment and accountability and a return to a greater focus on pupil wellbeing, support for teachers, assessment for learning and self-evaluation.
- The creation of genuine community schools within our most disadvantaged communities.
- The greater availability of high quality vocational routes for young people in secondary education providing progression routes of equal esteem to the higher education ones that are currently so dominant.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Politics and Demography of Northern Ireland (NI)

Northern Ireland (NI) is the smallest of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom (UK) and is legislated and governed on all but reserved matters of policy by a devolved government after a lengthy peace process. The population of NI is approximately 1.81million, which constitutes just under 3% of the population of the UK and approx. 30% of the population of Ireland as a whole. The 2011 Census revealed that the Protestant population comprises 48% and Catholic represent 45%, a gap which is narrowing with the number of children (people aged 0-15 years) overall in NI is 379,300 and falling, according to the 2011 Census, although the number of children aged 0-3 years is on the rise (NISRA, 2012)

### Education and conflict

Northern Ireland is a society transitioning from a long period of conflict. Although over 25 years since the peace agreements, NI remains characterized by segregation. For instance, there are few areas of public housing that are shared/ integrated. Additionally, the NI education system remains divided where, for the most part, Catholic and Protestant pupils are educated separately. Government statistics show that 93% of children in primary (age 4-11) and post-primary (age 11-18) schools attend either largely Catholic schools (Maintained) or schools that are largely attended by Protestant children (Controlled). Only 6.9% of NI children attend integrated schools that proactively seek to educate children together by creating a balance of 40% of Catholics and Protestants, and 20% of those from other/no faiths (Borooah and Knox, 2013). As part of macro-level strategies to tackle problems, associated with post-conflict, education has been the target of reforms that are designed to reduce inequality and promote social cohesion (Hughes et al, 2010).

### Education structures and governance

Northern Ireland continues to have a selective system, where children at 10/11 years are selected on the basis of ability into particular types of schools. Pupils attend either grammar schools (selective) or secondary schools (non-selective) according to measures of academic ability. Although the selection test was abolished in 2008, selection has been unofficially retained by a grammar schools' consortium. Presently, just over 40% of post-primary pupils attend grammar schools in NI but the chances of

children entitled to free school meals (FSM) securing a place at a grammar school are nearly five times lower than others (Connolly et al, 2013). In 2010/11, an average of only 6% of grammar school pupils were entitled to FSM, compared to 26% of non-grammar school pupils.

### **Poverty**

Northern Ireland suffers from longstanding educational inequality. A substantial proportion of people aged 16-64 has few or no formal qualifications. Each year, A level and GCSE results show students in NI are ahead of students in England and Wales. In 2013, 68.1% of students achieved grades A\*-C in their GCSEs, with NI at 76.5%, England 67.9 % and Wales at 65.7% – students from NI were over 8% points ahead of those in England/Wales. However, by the time the most disadvantaged young people reach GCSE level, the attainment gap is substantial. The proportion of young people getting few or no GCSEs has remained largely unchanged for the last decade at around 14 % of all 16 year olds. This is doubled among children entitled to FSM at 30% (Chief Inspector's Report, 2012-2014).

### **Education and poverty policies**

In NI, there is a range of policies that aim to contribute to a reduction in the attainment gap that has been identified between those children who are poor and those who are from wealthier homes. These policies include a focus on Early Years, on supporting families at particular risk and on improving literacy and numeracy, amongst others. There are examples of policies characterized by collaboration e.g. the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister 'Delivering Social Change' framework that has been established to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages and to improve children and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities. This deploys a cross-cutting approach, aimed at breaking the long term cycle of multi-generational problems. Despite this, there remain structural and funding problems e.g. the Salisbury Review (2013) of the Common Funding Scheme for schools has identified the minimal difference in per capita funding between primary schools with affluent intakes and those with socially deprived intakes – despite commitments to bridge the achievement gap and to increase early investment in poorer children.

The multiplicity of policies referring to this concern reinforces the need for NI to adopt a strategic, collaborative and forward-thinking approach to closing the achievement gap in relation to the poorest and most marginal children and young people in our region.

### **Poverty measures**

Northern Ireland has developed measures of child poverty based on both low income and deprivation. Nevertheless the identification of poverty remains moot affecting policy understandings. In 2010, the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2010) comprising seven domains of deprivation; income, employment, health, education, proximity to services, living environment and crime was adopted. The Investigating Links and Deprivation Study (ILIAD 2012-2015) has drawn on NIMDM measures to examine in-depth anomalies within and between neighbourhoods regarding achievement and deprivation from the top 20% of most deprived NI electoral ward areas. This research evidence highlights critically that promoting educational achievement, for children from such disadvantaged neighbourhoods, cannot rely solely on the roll out of generic policy and its implementation in practice. Rather policy and/or practice must take cognisance of and address the multiple factors identified at individual, familial, community and structural levels that interact to



affect young people's lives and outcomes at a local level in these neighbourhoods. The ILiAD research points to the importance of:

- Schools serving disadvantaged areas working at having a positive 'presence' in the communities of the young people and families they serve;
- All schools continuously monitoring and evaluating school-community and school-home linkages;
- Schools networking and engaging collaboratively with each other, Further and Higher Education institutions and with other external agencies in pursuance of area-based learning/attainment goals, social mixing, and models of best practice;
- Training and supporting teachers to find ways to increase their levels of understanding about social difference and poverty.

## PART 3: POLICY-PRACTICE THEMES

In this section we identify some of the notable themes that emerged across the seminars. This is not a comprehensive list and indicates areas for possible further research.

### Theme 1: Divided Britain

As many educational scholars point out the idea that all students can achieve excellent levels of educational achievement is a relatively new one (e.g. Paquette, 2001, p. 352). Two decades ago, the emphasis remained on streaming, setting and sorting students into courses aimed at different future career trajectories. A consensus around the seemingly liberal ideal that all children and young people should succeed to the same high level should be celebrated. Yet, this consensus clearly has not been instantiated in policy or practices. Following the Brexit vote, much media attention and political rhetoric signalled concerns that specific groups felt alienated, forgotten and left behind. There is strong evidence that Britain is becoming a nation increasingly divided into the rich and the poor (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Dorling, 2011).

The Child Poverty Act 2010, passed with cross-party support, set the goal to eliminate child poverty by 2020. The Act requires each jurisdiction in the UK to publish progress towards the 2020 goal in annual statements that have to be laid before Parliament or Assembly. In the forward to the State of the Nation Report 2015<sup>8</sup>, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission pointed out that far from moving towards meeting the goals poverty was increasing:

In our report last year we warned that without a dramatic change in approach to how governments, employers and educators tackled child poverty and social mobility, Britain would become a permanently divided nation. Nothing we have seen in the last 12 months has made us change our view. In this year's report we expose some of the deep divides that characterise modern Britain (2015: iii)

The Report documents growing social divides by income and by class. It drew attention specifically to child poverty stating: 'At the very bottom of society there are more than one million children living a life of persistent poverty.' (2015: iv).

...there is growing unease – even tension – about the lack of fairness in our society, a sense that our best days lie behind us not ahead. It feels like Britain faces an existential crisis about what sort of society we want to be. There is much talk of less elitism and more equality, of

less poverty and more mobility. But willing the ends without the means is a recipe for more division, not less. It is the job of employers, educators and policymakers to reconcile the ends they aspire to see with the means they are willing to deploy (2015: ix).

In retrospect, pointing to the existential crises was prescient and relevant given the outcome of the referendum six months after this report was published. The Brexit vote delivered a shock to the Cameron Government and has widely been recognised as, in part, a working class protest vote against his government and Osborne's austerity politics.

In its detailed analysis, the Report went on to couch the problem of inter-generational poverty firmly in terms of social class, in contrast to explanations of individual responsabilisation. It stated:

Britain has lower levels of social mobility than most other comparable countries. In Britain, income persistence between fathers and sons is the strongest of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In other words, ours is a country where the class and income of children when they grow up is more related to the class and income of their parents than elsewhere in the developed world ..... as many professionals in their 40s are from professional families than from working-class families (39 versus 10 per cent)<sup>9</sup>. There is a class ceiling in British society and it inhibits the life chances of hundreds of thousands of children – those from the poorest household the most. (2015: 1)

The report can be viewed as a damning indictment of the Cameron and May Conservative Governments' policies, specifically the removal of tax credits for poor families, changes to the benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit that made it harder for families to meet some of their children's basic needs. As Kitty Stewart (London School of Economics) reported to this BERA Commission at the Leeds seminar, the changes reallocated resources away from lower income families towards those in the top half of the distribution, and away from families with children towards families without.

## Theme 2: Definitions of Poverty

*"Poverty is not simply about living on low incomes, but being unable to have what we all consider the basic necessities of life."* (PSU: UK, 2014)

This Commission found notably at the Manchester Forum that 'poverty' is a term that children and young people do not use to describe themselves. It is a term that others use to define them. Defining poverty is not straightforward. The Oxford dictionary<sup>10</sup> defines poverty as, 'The state of being extremely poor', and also as 'the state of being inferior in quality or insufficient in amount.'

9. Goldthorpe, J.H. (2012) Understanding – and Misunderstanding – Social Mobility in Britain.

The word 'poverty' originates from 'Middle English: from Old French *poverté*, from Latin *paupertas*, from *pauper* poor' (Oxford dictionary). Therefore the word comes with connotations of the unworthy, the undeserving, the disaffected, and as Ashurst and Venn (2014) point out, these meanings are amplified in the UK press to the extent that they become part of dominant discourses (see McNamara and McNicholl, 2016; Gorski, 2016).

The ways that poverty is identified and framed in each of the four jurisdictions of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland varies and this has some influence on school policies and how educational resources are created, how they are directed and to whom. However, before addressing this, it needs to be recognised that the manner in which 'poverty' is spoken about, recognised, categorised and counted has changed across time and space.

In general, there has been a shift away from the use of the term of poverty to one of 'social exclusion' (Levitas, 2005). Ashurst and Venn (2014) suggest that this shift might relate to the increasingly close link between the use and availability of quantitative data in Government Education Departments, and the technical difficulties in finding appropriate descriptors to measure class, yet what is more important is that references to social inequality based on social class have been silenced and have disappeared. If talk of poverty is no longer framed within discourses of class, it loses its anchoring in social structures such as the economic base and financial systems such as capitalism and free market economics. Increasingly, in the UK, children born into families with few material resources are referred to in ways which invoke dominant discourses that pathologises them, as 'criminals in waiting', as 'undeserving of sympathy and understanding', and as 'the product of bad parenting and failing families' (Ashurst and Venn, 2014, 8).

This Commission has sought to broaden definitions of poverty. Poverty in the 19th century discourses was primarily understood as an outcome of a failure to generate wealth (Ashurst and Venn, 2014). In the current conjuncture this failure, while it could be attributed to the global market, generated the problem of labour, that is, the abstract quality of work in the sense that lower demand for a product means the need for less labour (the relation so clearly presented in the zero hours contract). In other words, we cannot understand poverty and its transmission in any way separate from the accumulation and transmission of wealth (Walkerdine, Cardiff seminar). If the one is a by-product of the other, then the experiences of each are also closely tied to each other. To understand poverty, we must understand wealth.

In the recent book *Breadline Britain: the rise of mass poverty* (2015) Lansley and Mack paint a devastating picture of the reality of poverty today and its causes. They challenge the myth that poverty is the fault of poor people and that the benefits system has become too generous breeding state dependency. Instead, they document the massive social and economic upheaval that has shifted power from the workforce to corporations. They point to the rise of low-pay, zero-hour contracts and downward social mobility that has contributed to the rise in number of people living in poverty in the UK today.

In England and to some extent in the other jurisdictions, child poverty has increasingly become defined as 'academic failure' that is blamed on families with low aspiration and schools that are supposedly not competent. The 'failing' schools discourse in England drives a wedge between the

responsibilities of the Westminster Government and the teacher profession that has been made to become the scape-goats and individualises the responsibility for poverty effects.

This can be evidenced by a remarkable announcement made during the life of this Commission, that the Westminster Government was proposing to abolish measures of child poverty using household income and replace it with range of indicators such as parenting, academic achievement and school absentees without reporting on household income. As the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission pointed out:

Abolishing the legal targets does not make the issue of child poverty go away. It remains a deep scar in the fabric of our nation. The issue is less how child poverty is measured and more how it is tackled (2015: ix).

The rather absurd suggestion to remove household income as a measure of poverty was overturned in the Lords in January 2016. High levels of poverty in the UK are a direct result of political choices made by successive governments. This becomes apparent when we look at poverty trends across the years.

### Theme 3: Poverty trends

By way of a preface, a summary of the general trend in child poverty in the UK was presented by Kitty Stewart in the Leeds seminar.

In brief, between the 1970s and 1990s, child poverty rose in the UK faster than in other European countries. Eradicating child poverty was high on the Labour Government agenda when it came to power in 1997. The Brown New Labour Government budget in 2008 set out to halve child poverty by 2010 primarily through a series of benefits aimed at helping poor families, such as increasing child benefits and tax allowance for low income families with children. In the five years following the 2008 financial crash, the tax credit system continued to operate well to protect families from the consequences of recession. In its first two years in office the Cameron-Clegg Coalition Government continued to raise child tax credit above inflation (Stewart and Obolenskaya, 2016). As a result, there were levels of poverty dropped gradually, however, the Coalition Government also implemented a series of cuts and reforms to the benefit system that have had a negative effect on the incomes of families with children.

The Cameron Conservative Government in office from 2015 introduced further cuts and reduced local authority budgets, and as a result we see a rise in child poverty across the four jurisdictions from 2013 onward. It had a 'one pronged' solution to poverty which was to get families into work while at the same time reducing benefits and focusing on human capital. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission reported in 2015 that reducing supposed dependency on the state cannot in itself tackle the complexities that create persistent poverty. It bluntly stated that the Cameron Conservative Government's welfare-to-work strategy could not and would not meet the needs of these families (2015: ix). The report was particularly scathing about David Cameron's One Nation slogan and questioned his government's commitment to achieving the goals set out in the 2010 Child Poverty Act. It stated:

It has long been obvious that the existing child poverty targets are not going to be met. In fact they will be missed by a country mile. That is a matter of deep regret. A country that is the fifth richest in the world should not have 2.3 million children officially classified as poor (2015: iv).

This BERA Commission notes levels of child poverty are rising across the four jurisdictions and are predicted to rise further in the next few years as the welfare reforms such as Universal Credit take hold. The effects will be felt more deeply in Northern Ireland and in Wales, where levels of poverty are already far higher than in England and Scotland. Teachers therefore are simply expected to deal with poverty effects and manage the complex difficulties in classrooms, a matter to which we turn next.

#### Theme 4: Children and young people living in poverty

Often teachers do not understand enough about existential poverty to get beyond pathologising discourse of families, parents and children as feckless and undeserving (Singh et al. 2013). For example, 'challenging' or 'unacceptable' behaviour is manifest, periodically or often in schools, by some children and young people who live with poverty. Challenging behaviour is often a signal that a young person has reached the limits of what she or he can bear. This can be expressed, for example, as outbursts of anger, running out of the classroom, persistent low-level tactics to annoy other pupils as well as withdrawal, silence or seemingly belligerent or aggressive behaviour towards staff. While teachers have little choice but to 'treat the behaviour' many also attempt to find opportunities to temper the causes of such behaviour and then to compensate for what might be perceived to be lacking.

Young people living in areas of high poverty often live parallel lives to middle class young people, although rates of poverty have been rising in these groups as well. Research and numerous organisations and charities<sup>11</sup> provide insights into the burden that children and young people have to bear.

The lived experiences of poor children and young people have implications for pedagogy and curriculum. It has been shown that minority groups, marked by intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and class, have multiple burdens. Minority groups must first recognise what the rules of the game are within schools, and then to recognise the logics of academic subjects, (e.g. Bernstein 2000; Cole 1985; Zipin, et al. 2015). Poverty exacerbates this further (Ridge 2005).

For example, fitting into the school culture can be particularly difficult for children and young people living with poverty because so much of their lives do not fit with dominant expectations of the nuclear family as a stable support base. Of the 60 young people living in an ex-mining town in south Wales interviewed by Renold and Ivinson (Ivinson, 2012, 2014; Ivinson and Renold 2013a and b) many inhabited more than one household across a week. Most had complex family structures and less than half lived in traditional nuclear families. More than half had experienced their parents splitting up and many had had to cope while new partners and sibling joined one or more of the families to which they belonged. A number of young people had up to three fathers associated with them, for example, a

11. <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/news-events-and-publications/evidence-briefings/child-poverty-casts-a-long-shadow-over-social-mobility-pdf/>  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/keyofficialdocuments/Child%20Poverty%20lit%20review%20DWP.pdf>  
<http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/impact-poverty>  
[http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_work/child\\_poverty.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/child_poverty.htm)

biological father that they did not know, a father who they knew and bonded with during childhood and following a further rupture, the arrival of another man. Most had many step-siblings from one or more union.

Many young people in this study in Wales moved around a great deal yet within fairly short distances and some inhabited up to three households in one week. A typical pattern of movement involved a student living with mum and her children Monday to Friday, going to dad's house on Friday evening and sometimes staying with grandparents at the weekend. While many other students lived close to aunts, uncles, cousins, nans and granddads and found this a source of social resilience, some found the proximity of everyone knowing your business stifling and restricting. Some described their struggles to get far enough away from an abusive, violent or alcoholic parent and how close-knit networks exacerbated this problem. Often the issues that some young people and children are trying to cope with are so traumatic that they cannot voice what is upsetting them (Iverson, Cardiff Seminar).

This local fluidity of movement around neighbourhoods meant that attachments grow up here and not there, sometimes within a family, yet sometimes not. With the impact of unemployment, extended family networks have shifted under economic conditions of deindustrialisation. Heavy and rising unemployment and sometimes the lack for local work opportunities place enormous strains on couples and children carry these burdens, sometimes caring for grieving parents and sometimes trying to shelter them from the demands they face in school.

The next generation of young people face dilemmas. While the bonds of sociality forged around the necessities of industrial life, are re-enacted through everyday life in their communities, these practices are functionally, if not affectively, out of date. While older generations could afford to wait out their time in school because they were going to enter industrial jobs, young people are being held in place through affective bonds of sociality passed down by older generations while, at the same time, having no other choice than to make it in schools where success is predicated on a different set of values, namely, individualism, competitiveness and access to private spaces (rooms to study in and computer workstations to access the internet) and not communal space. These working class young people experience tensions between the values of individualism required to achieve in school and the bonds of solidarity in local communities. Their everyday lives are often different to middle class children's lives and these differences play out in school cultures (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Ridge and Millar, 2006)

Furthermore, Mazzoli and Todd (2016) and Ridge (2002, 2006b, 2007) reveal the everyday, small yet hurtful rituals of school life that expose poor young people as an 'under-caste' to use Busher's<sup>12</sup> (2016) phrase. The kind of distributed dwelling and fluidity of movement described above can make it very difficult for some young people to arrive at school with the right books, equipment and clothing. They are made to stand out, for example, by being identified as a Free School Meal (FSM) taker, not having the right uniform or sports kit, turning up without a pen, unable to pay for school trips and having few extra curricular activities or trips. Some avoid having friends round to their houses because they cannot provide the space and snacks that are expected by peers. As Ridge's (2006a: 209) work demonstrates young people go to great lengths to save their parents from having to find extra money for them for school activities.

12. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/forums/topic/listening-to-student-voice-is-a-matter-of-social-justice-not-just-good-teaching>

Young people living with poverty often have to perform a double role in school: to hide the consequences of household financial limitations that may lead them to be judged to eat the wrong food, have the wrong tastes and wrong fashion sense (Skeggs, 1997, 2004; 2011) while trying to fit into a school culture that values individual autonomy, self-confidence and examination performability. These lived tensions entail schizoid subjectivities that require effort to maintain and which can spilt apart when the pressure becomes too great (Ivinson and Renold, 2013a and b).

This BERA Commission posits that rethinking poverty requires theoretical and methodological shifts that recognises these lived tensions: differences that emerge in classrooms, yet classrooms are embedded in multiple contexts, such as communities with their historical legacies (e.g. Rogoff 1996). We recognise that differences that relate to children living in poverty reach beyond the child and come from complex interrelations between persons, activities and contexts, where context such as community might have a history that includes a transition from industrial to post-industrial conditions of living.

When thinking about poverty and learning increasingly we understand the roles of affect, (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, Walkerdine, 2010); corporeality (e.g. Evans et al. 2010); place (e.g. Jamieson, 2000) and the intergenerational transmission of community values (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2011). Affects that become manifest in behaviour arise from beyond the school walls. If we de-centred the individual from the analysis for a while, it is possible to recognise that some children and young people are territorialised by the effects of education policy landscapes and ultimately capitalism. Viewed from this angle it becomes possible to recognise their anguish and respond to it with the kind of sympathy and empathy that it requires. This is necessary to get beyond what the People and Work Unit in Wales referred to as the 'Blame Game' (Kerr, et al. 2014; Barnard & Turner, 2011; Lupton, 2004).

Out of control behaviour can therefore be recognised as a reasonable response to overpowering, neo-liberal claims about the power and the potential of the individual to achieve, that are in contradiction to young people's experiences in social contexts where there are few supporting structures. Accordingly, poverty is created and recreated through a myriad of social, historical and well as material and corporeal forces that dynamically create and pattern milieus in which children and young people are born and become human citizens.

### **Themes 5: Gender, underachievement and social disadvantage**

Across four jurisdictions the data on achievement demonstrates that, in general, poor boys achieve less well than poor girls at all age levels. Yet this pattern becomes particularly stark in Northern Ireland, for example, where schools are segregated along class and religious lines. There is continuing, persistent underachievement by working-class Protestant boys.

In Northern Ireland, educational disadvantage and inequality does not impact upon all sectors of society equally. The Peace Monitoring Report (Nolan, 2014) identified "the most significant divisions are based on gender and class...Catholic middle-class girls enjoy remarkable educational success, while Protestant working class boys experience equally remarkable failure. Protestant, working class male pupils as a group are at particular risk of experiencing educational disadvantage and/or low educational attainment in Northern Ireland. Boys have persistently lower levels of attainment than girls throughout primary and post-primary education. According to the Equality Commission Report (Burns, Leitch & Hughes, 2015) fewer than one in five boys on free school meals in the controlled



(largely Protestant) schools — roughly 18% — gained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, compared with 32% — nearly one in three — in the maintained (largely Catholic) schools. There are a myriad of complex and interdependent factors identified (Leitch et al, 2016) which contribute to underachievement amongst young working class Protestant males:

- Gender divisions in the way that education is perceived and valued;
- Differences in cultural expectations and learning styles between males and females;
- The impact of low self-esteem and a lack of local positive role model for some young males in Protestant disadvantaged areas; and
- Higher absenteeism rates in all-boys schools serving the areas of poverty and high deprivation in comparison to all-girls schools.

While the intersections of gender, class, age group and religion as well as ethnicity were flagged by this BERA Commission across the six seminars in relation to poverty and achievement, this is an area that requires further investigation. Such work would feed directly into debates surrounding May's penchant for increasing the number of grammar schools in England as it relates to levels of child poverty.

#### **Theme 6: Curricula diversity and lifeworlds**

This section deals with school knowledge and the extent to which teachers have flexibility to make links between academic knowledge and meaningful connections to the lifeworlds and experiences of children and young people living in poverty. This relates to the structure of the curriculum as well as the extent to which teachers feel a sense of ownership and professional trust. The picture shows increasing diversity across the jurisdictions, especially since powers for education were devolved to the Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly. Scotland has had a distinct education system for many years.

Since the 1980s curriculum and qualification systems have been adapted to meet the needs of a wider ability range. In the early 1980s the qualification systems that differentiated students at age 14 and provided academic 'O' level and CSE qualifications England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland Ordinary and Higher Grade were aimed at the top of the ability range. The examinations routes tended to reflect social class divisions. Therefore the introduction of a national curriculum that became statutory in 1988 in England and Wales and a year later in Northern Ireland was widely regarded as move towards equitable education. However, the nature of the curriculum, whether it should be a subject based academic curriculum, or a progressive curriculum that enables integration between subject and between academic and applied knowledge has remained hotly debated. The cross-curricular themes were the non-statutory elements of the national and common curricula that were supposed to fulfil the roles of social, personal and spiritual education (Whitty, Rowe/Iverson and Aggleton, 1994). In relation to children and young people living in poverty, the issue at stake is whether or not teachers have the flexibility to make links between students' lifeworlds and academic subjects (Young and Lambert et al. 2014; Zipin et al. 2015).

Scotland has had a distinct approach to curricular for many years and does not have a national curriculum (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007) so much as set of guidelines for teachers. In effect, teachers in Scotland have the scope to undertake curriculum making so long as they adhere to the national

guidelines. Over the 1980s and 1990s opportunities for young people to gain qualifications were widened - first the Standard Grade reforms provided certification for all abilities at age 16 (Gamoran 1996) and then the Higher Still reforms provided a flexible framework for post-16 qualifications (Raffe et al. 2007).

There have been numerous curricular reforms since 1988. In England and Wales the Dearing Review of 1993-94 lightened the subject content of the curricula yet retained the strong subject classification and played down the role of the cross-curricular themes. In Northern Ireland the cross-curricular themes were given a strengthened role in part due to the history of sectarian conflict and the peace process, that heightened the sense that education needs to link to life outside school. Even so, each of these curricula was seen to be overly prescriptive and to stifle teachers' autonomy (Colwill et al. 2007). The revised national curriculum in Northern Ireland in 2007 was still subject based but was designed to give teachers more flexibility. The intention was that 'teachers will be able to design coherent learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful to learners and use more dynamic and innovative teaching and learning approaches' (Colwill et al. 2007: 420). At this point teachers were ostensibly still in control of pedagogy although many disputed this.

Since the 2000s curricula across the four jurisdictions have become increasingly divergent and therefore address poverty differently. In part the diversity has been due to jurisdictions wishing to reflect national concerns and develop a distinctive identity within their education systems. The curriculum in England has retained a strong subject classification. Gove's reforms aimed to make the curriculum harder and to force schools to somehow make academic knowledge available to all groups including working class groups and those from areas struggling with de-industrialisation and poverty

Once the Welsh Government achieved devolution in 1997 it set about developing a curriculum that was aimed to create clear blue water between it and the Westminster Government. The Learning Country document, espoused a progressive curriculum to meet the specific needs of Wales, where poverty was high on the political agenda. In 2009, Leighton Andrew abandoned the Learning Country paving document<sup>13</sup> and in reaction to PISA results, and, as in England, reverted to a curriculum focused strongly on literacy and numeracy at the expense of other areas of the curriculum, except at the Foundation Phase (children aged 3-7 years). The Donaldson Review (2015) argues for Areas of Learning, as basis of the new curriculum that is being developed with full co-operation of the teaching profession. Assessment is organised around competencies rather than subject content.

Potentially a curriculum organised around Areas of Learning allows a teacher to combine subjects in a variety of ways without losing the deep principles of the subject. The Donaldson's Successful Futures Review<sup>14</sup> cites international evidence suggesting that Areas of Learning create coherence between primary and secondary phases and combine both inherited, cultural forms knowledge while accommodating knowledge required for the future. Donaldson pointedly noted in his review that England retains subject areas against the recommendations of independent reviewers<sup>15</sup> (Donaldson, 2015, 37).

In preparation for the Community Forum in Manchester, we ran a series of workshops in three secondary schools (year 9, students aged 13-14), and one primary school (year 6, children aged 9-10 years) in three areas of Manchester in low SES catchment areas yet with divergent ethnic mixes. A

section of young peoples' views presented at the Forum, shows that they were deeply concerned about the curriculum in England. Year 9 students stated:

Schools should teach knowledge that is relevant to our lives.  
 We need to learn skills that will ultimately benefit us in the future.  
 Why do we have to learn about maths, English and science and not about what we should expect from life?  
 Young people should be encouraged to take up activities that they enjoy, not funnelled into professions (doctors, lawyers).  
 The curriculum should focus on social issues, important news coverage and preparation for life.  
 We need to be taught practical skills such as knowledge of taxes, mortgages and how to buy a house.  
 There should be far more work experience, across all years.  
 Work experience should be integrated into the school curriculum from age 13 year onwards.  
 There should be progression from work experience to paid work while in school.

These comments reflect their concerns about their futures, the need to make a living, find somewhere to live and be able to deal with the world they are part of. They require a curriculum that has strong links to their real life concerns and addresses social issues. They objected to being labelled, forced to cram for tests and the high levels of stress this induces. They stated:

Young people should not be labelled as an 'F'.  
 Young people should not be labelled in ways that demotivate them.  
 Our whole future should not be determined by one set of exams.  
 The new 1-9 GCSE is making it more difficult.  
 Teachers should recognise some people's learning barriers.  
 Free time should be free time, not crammed with homework to the point of causing stress.  
 The stress of homework makes us not want to study.  
 Why, why, why are you putting hundreds of tons of pressure on us?

They spoke a great deal about feeling controlled by a government that is remote and does not understand their lives. Their desire to feel free, to have more choices and to have the opportunity to enjoy learning was strongly articulated. They stated:

There are many ways to learn, we need multiple routes and ways to learn. Every person should have the right to an education with choices, with different ways to learn.

We want to learn in ways that uses more art and more 'doing'.

They also expressed considerable empathy for their teachers:

Teachers are rushed off their feet.

Teachers have to spend too much time marking.

Teachers should have the time to plan a really good educational lesson, instead of doing administration.

Teachers need time to focus on education.

Classes should be smaller.

Arguments about whether curricula should be organised around academic subjects or Areas of Learning can too easily be polarised into binaries such as, 'powerful knowledge' or 'lifeworld' knowledge (e.g. Moore, 2013; Young and Lambert et al., 2014, also see Whitty, 2010). Instead, we advocate views of learning that enable links to be made between lifeworlds and subject knowledge (Zipin et al., 2013).

One of the key requirements of a curriculum for children and young people with the complex lives (Ainscow, Dyson, Hopwood and Thomson, 2016; Kerr, Dyson, Raffo, 2014) is that teachers have the scope to be flexible. Colwill and Gallagher (2007) found that the challenges faced by curricular planners in the 21st century is to create curricula that are sufficiently visionary and flexible to allow teachers to respond to the needs of students, in effect, to make the links between school knowledge and students values and purposes. The Manchester Forum reinforced the need for curricula to address young people's concerns as well as to enable them to access knowledge. The young people summarised, what they wanted from education as 'knowledge and friendship'. To exercise flexibility in order to make links between academic knowledge, moral and practical concerns that young people expressed, teachers have to have some autonomy, some ownership of the curriculum and to feel they are trusted (Beckett, 2016; BERA-RSA, 2014) Sachs, 2015). While these conditions exist to some extent in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, they do not exist in England to anything like the same degree.

## PART 4: POLICY ADVOCACY

During the time of this Commission it became increasingly difficult to imagine how academic research can influence education policy as 'the university project' is side-lined (Furlong and Lunt, 2013; Whitty, 2014) and governments' centralising control of the education system and the curriculum via control of testing became tighter. This should alert BERA and its research community to the necessity to uphold the workings of a complex democracy in the UK.


The recent Sainsbury Review in England (Sainsbury, 2016) has raised again the extent to which across the UK, the school curriculum and qualifications system has been overly-dominated by academic routes into post 16 and 18 progression for young people. Previous attempts to strengthen vocational routes and to create greater parity of esteem with academic qualifications have largely failed (Pring et al., 2009). The growing focus across the UK governments on employability and apprenticeships as a means of creating a more skilled workforce may offer hope in this respect.

### The current situation

Given the underlying proposition of this Commission that educational research on poverty and schooling is not being used effectively enough in policy or practice at present, consideration needs to be given to the processes of policy-making. This begins with recognition of the privilege accorded to certain kinds of evidence and disciplinary approaches (RCTs and other quantitative studies), which reflect only a fraction of the research evidence available around how school and classroom interventions can be used to help alleviate poverty as a barrier to children's academic achievement.

This Commission suggests that BERA, as a leading organisation that helps to facilitate and disseminate education research, should carefully consider its role in line with its Strategic Review in regards to poverty and policy advocacy. As indicated above, the problems are exceedingly complex while the extant policy solutions are erroneously presumed to be adequate to the task of addressing major social and educational concerns in this era of Brexit controversies and negotiations. At issue are the assumptions and mind-sets that inform policy orthodoxies, especially when the academic research community are side-lined.

BERA needs to operate in the political landscape and build its connections inside and outside governments (see Yeatman, 1998) to infuse its research-informed insights on education and social policies and practices into the media, professional and public debates, major political parties, trade unions and other peak industry groups including think tanks. Wilson (1987), who provided a detailed social and policy history on work on poverty and public policy in the USA, captured this as follows:



In the final analysis, the pursuit of economic and social reform ultimately involves the question of political strategy. As the history of social provision so clearly demonstrates, universalistic political alliances, cemented by policies that provide direct benefits to wide segments of the population are needed to work successfully for major reform (Wilson, 1987, 164).

#### How could research work more effectively?

Critical education policy scholarship, and similar work in social policy around poverty and the role of the state should leave us under no illusions about the political challenge of advocating for a broader policy approach. Nevertheless, there are things that BERA and its education research community could do to increase the possibility that educational research on poverty and schooling be used more effectively to inform policy and practice. First, we need to think pragmatically. Politics notwithstanding, research is only going to be used if it helps policy makers or practitioners know what to do or provides clear arguments and resources for those in opposition. So some work is needed to translate what we know into more usable forms.

## PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. BERA organise and host a major public conference with a remit to articulate the poverty/education problem, in a clear and well evidenced way.

The challenge is to bring world-class researchers together in a way which both recognizes the complexity of the problem (and thus points to the breadth of policy implications) but also helps to point to areas of priority action. Their brief could start with the questions - where does research suggest that politicians should start, or what they should definitely avoid?

2. BERA commission a review of literature on poverty and policy advocacy

The brief should be to be clearer in **articulating what works**, beyond the short term classroom interventions for which evidence is now being steadily accumulated, notably by this BERA Commission. The task should be to demonstrate (from evidence here and in other countries) the effects of raising family income, of adopting different pedagogies, of building different school/community relationships, of increasing school funding.

If we – as an educational research community - want to reject a narrow understanding of ‘what works’ in terms of test scores, can we demonstrate the longer-term benefits to individuals or society of broader approaches?

3. That BERA endorse and support the pilot studies that derive from this BERA Commission, especially as they entail international collaborations: the ‘histories of poverty’ project in London, Cardiff, Bradford & Sydney; and a multi-city ethnographies project in Leeds, Oxford, Geelong and Adelaide.

The brief is to be clearer about **knowledge gaps** (including where there is insufficient knowledge to support existing policies), and about the dilemmas and difficulties in translating research into policy (for example teacher autonomy vs low teacher expectations; poverty and achievement).

4. That BERA extends its office staff/secretariat to include a policy officer and a media officer.

This relies on the need to operate pragmatically and politically, proactively and reactively, for equity policies with bi-partisan support.

The brief here is to ask to whom is our educational research most useful in helping some different strategies and actions to emerge that can address child poverty and its effects on education? What do these people need from us?

Arguably more effort may need to go into building new alliances and the resources to support these that go beyond traditional critique of mainstream politicians with responsibilities for education and schools policies.

## ■ 5. That BERA develops a structure for organisational deputations

Such a structure might draw on the BERA Office/Secretariat and elected senior officers, BERA Council but also BERA SIG's given research expertise is variously located across the organisation.

This move to deputations relies on a need to think **beyond schools** in order to better understand how changes, for example, in income or health or housing or transport have an effect on children's experiences and life chances. This has implications for our professional activities, including the way we define educational research for impact in the REF.

The brief here is to extend the knowledge and reach of the educational research community in ways that would enable us to contribute to addressing relationships between child poverty and education more effectively across government departments and agencies, for example.

Carrying these recommendations and acting in these ways requires academic researchers to move from roles of research, analysis and critique to embrace roles of translation, policy development and advocacy.

It is the experience of the multiple authors of this report on this BERA Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy that numerous changes (e.g. the expansion of HE, technology, social media and the growth of think-tanks) make activities of this kind imperative. They have demonstrated some ways to act collectively if these are some of the directions it wants to follow:



## PART 6: OUTPUTS

This BERA Commission has built an interconnected transnational network of research-active practitioners, including academics, teachers and policy makers, across the four jurisdictions of the UK and in Australia to engage in knowledge building about poverty and cumulative multiple deprivations as these find expression in education and schooling.

Further to the six seminars and the two pilot studies noted above, this Commission also engaged in the following activities and publications:

1. A 2016 BERA pre-conference event at Leeds Beckett University
2. 2x2 interlinked symposia at 2016 BERA conference in Leeds
3. A 2016 AARE pre-conference event at University of Southern Queensland
4. 2x2 interlinked symposia at 2016 AARE conference in Melbourne
5. Publications following
6. A joint authored article for Ruth Boyask's special issue 'From Critical Research to Policy' for Educational Philosophy & Theory.
7. Chapter contributions to Sawyer at al. (AARE network), 'Resisting Educational Inequality', Routledge, (2017)
8. Chapter contribution to Simonds and Smyth 'Education and working class youth', Palgrave McMillan (2018)
9. A book proposal on this BERA Commission for Routledge
10. Plans for a 2017 BERA pre-conference event on histories: venue UCL IoE
11. Ditto 2x2 interlinked symposia at 2017 BERA conference in Brighton
12. Plans for a 2017 BERA post-conference event on ethnographies: venue Oxford
13. Tentative plans for a 2017 AARE pre-conference event: venue TBC
14. Ditto 2x2 interlinked symposia at 2017 AARE conference in Canberra
15. Further publications anticipated

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