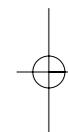
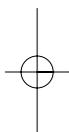


# Invisible children



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The Bow Group would like to thank all those who contributed their views and experience to this paper.



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## Invisible Children

It is ten years since Tony Blair made education his priority in government. An entire generation of pupils have passed through school under Labour's watch. Pupils who were in the first year of primary school in May 1997 finished their GCSEs last summer. Has every child mattered? In the first of the Bow Group's 'Invisible Nation' series, this report looks at how the Blair generation fared.

We look at more closely at the standard 5A\*-C measure of achievement, and look at how much those qualifications will be worth to pupils.

Then we look at those who don't get those crucial five good GCSEs. And we look at those who don't get 5 GCSEs of any grade at all.

But that is not the whole story.

This report shines a light on the invisible children. Children who didn't even get a chance to fail their GCSEs because they never even got to take the exam. Then this report asks what we can do about it. Factors behind social disengagement are complex but we conclude that central tracking of pupils, individualised learning and a real skills agenda are key to improving the situation we find here.

**This report reveals what became of the 656,000 pupils who were 7 in 1997 and who took their GCSEs in 2006 \*:**

### **The invisible Children:**

- 7,000 pupils are missing from education in their final year
- 30,000 pupils were either missing or not entered for GCSEs
- Nearly 60,000 pupils did not obtain any GCSEs, either through not turning up to their GCSE exams, not passing any exams, not being entered for GCSE exams, or disappearing off the school roll.

### **Undetected Underachievement:**

- 20,000 pupils who sat GCSEs did not sit maths GCSE, 26,000 did not sit English GCSE and 45,000 did not sit science GCSE
- Last year, 29,800 pupils who sat GCSEs did not gain any qualifications - a rise of 6,600 pupils from 2005.
- Over a quarter (27%) of boys do not gain a single GCSE above a C grade - along with a total of 130,000 pupils

### **The Divide of Deprivation:**

- In 695 wards across the country - mostly in inner-city areas of deprivation - the percentage of pupils gaining five GCSEs of any grade has actually fallen backwards
- Pupils taking Free School Meals and pupils with Special Educational Needs are most likely to be the victims of disengagement and educational failure: 41% of persistent truants have SEN, as do 64% of excluded pupils.
- The educational attainment gap between rich and poor is widening, particularly in urban towns

\* This study solely covers GCSE entries. Reflecting the fact that the core qualifications must be obtained through this award.

## The Class of 1997:

Last year, a generation of school children who were seven when Tony Blair took office, sat their GCSEs. After significant financial investment in schools and seemingly rocketing exam results, The Bow Group asks, how did they actually get on?

### Chapter 1: The Standard Measure: 5A\*-C

Each year, the measure of five good GCSEs including English and maths is used as a benchmark to test the performance of not only pupils, but also the performance of schools and the government's ability to improve standards in our schools, as laid down by league tables and Public Service Agreement targets. It is the measure that appears in all the headlines, and the measure that Ministers usually cite.

On the face of it, things look good, and there have been some apparent improvements in results. In 2006, 59% obtained five good GCSEs— 14% more than their counterparts who sat in exam rooms back in May 1997. Improvements should be welcomed, and those students congratulated. But moving beyond the successes to look more closely at the headline figures reveals areas of real concern. A worrying number of pupils are not getting GCSEs in the subjects they really need to succeed in life and a disproportionate number of these are boys:

- 355,000 pupils still failed to obtain five good GCSEs including English and maths.
  - Half of all pupils complete their GCSEs without a grade C in either maths or English—so-called 'level two' standard – that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority advises pupils need to function as citizens.
  - In 2006, 48% of pupils- and 45% of boys- finished 11 years of compulsory education without achieving at least a grade C in GCSE English. That's more than 232,000 students who will struggle to read and summarise information accurately or use basic grammar.
  - 44% per cent – over 270,000 pupils- failed to reach the same standard in GCSE maths – i.e. they are unable to perform tasks like calculating the area of a room.
- Gender divide:**
- Only 51.6% of boys gain five good GCSEs, compared with 61% of girls
  - Only 39.2% of boys gain five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared with 47.7% of girls
  - 43% of boys (140,700) take GCSEs in the core subjects of English, maths, science and a foreign language compared with 54% of girls
  - Only 21% of boys achieve 5A\*-C including English, maths, science and a modern language, compared with 31% of girls

These figures illustrate a tendency for schools to be driven to meet the important league-table targets of 5 good GCSEs. Sometimes this seems to be at the expense of the core subjects. They also highlight how far we have to go in our efforts to teach basic literacy and numeracy – the skills that employers ultimately want.

## Chapter 2. 20,000 Leagues beneath 5 A\*-C

But the 5A\*-C standard only scratches the surface of what's going on in our schools. Beneath this headline standard and the annual August newspaper headlines, there are far deeper challenges.

**“Teachers just concentrate on getting you to get a C. If you're not going to get a C, they don't really bother so much.”**

Of the 355,000 pupils failing to gain five good GCSEs including English and maths, thousands of pupils are not even coming close to achieving the grade. As schools are pressurised to produce impressive league table statistics, they are driven to push those students who can achieve five good GCSEs, often at the expense of less able students. As one pupil told The Bow Group: “teachers just concentrate on getting you to get a C. If you're not going to get a C, they don't really bother so much.” The result? An extremely long tail of underachievement in the English education system of pupils who do not even achieve a single C grade. Research by the Bow Group reveals: <sup>1</sup>

- Almost a quarter of all pupils sitting GCSEs (129,700 pupils) do not even gain any grade above a C- over 60% of these are boys.
- 27% of boys (78,100) do not gain a single GCSE above a C.

### Not achieving 5 Good GCSEs:

There is, however, another measure that is often overlooked on results day. This is the measure that represents the number of pupils gaining five GCSEs at any grade— 5 A\*-G. The percentage of pupils not gaining five GCSEs of any grade— not gaining 5A\*-G— remains at the same percentage 1999, and has even fallen slightly backwards since 2001:

Year	% pupils not gaining 5A*-G
1999/00	13.2
2000/01	13.1
2001/02	12.9
2002/03	13.4
2003/04	13.3
2004/05	13.1
2005/06	13.2

**Pockets of deprivation - Wards getting Worse:**

And in some places, particularly deprived inner city areas, things are getting substantially worse, not better. New research by the Bow Group reveals that by using this measure of 5 A\*-G, an analysis of educational performance in every ward in England demonstrates that in 695 wards between 1997 and 2006, the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs of any grade has fallen backwards.<sup>2</sup>

- In Avonmouth Ward, Bristol, 92.7% of pupils gained 5 A\*-G at GCSE in 1997. In 2006, 75.5% of pupils gained 5 A\*-G:
- In Myton Ward, Hull, the percentage of pupils gaining 5 A\*-G at GCSE fell from 98% to 73.5%
- In Brooklands ward, Manchester, the percentage fell from 79.3% to 67.6%
- In Anfield, Liverpool, down from 80.1% to 76.8%
- In Eccles ward, Salford, from 85.4% gaining 5 A\*-G to 75.1%
- In Benchill ward, the home of the Wythenshawe Council Estate and Ryan Florence, the percentage of pupils gaining 5 A\*-G has fallen by almost 3% since 1997, from 82.6% to 79.9%
- Between 1997 and 2005, an analysis of wards in cities reveals that the percentage of pupils gaining 5 A\*-G at GCSE fell backwards in:
  - o 11 wards in Liverpool
  - o 12 wards in Bristol
  - o 10 wards in Southampton
  - o 18 wards in Birmingham
  - o 12 wards in Sunderland
  - o 15 wards in Manchester

Comparing the latest 2006 results with those of 1997, reveal that 695 wards gained worse results with fewer pupils gaining five GCSEs of any grade.

**Pupils not taking the key GCSEs that really matter:**

27,000 pupils were not entered for English GCSE  
 20,000 pupils were not entered for maths GCSE  
 45,000 pupils were not entered for science GCSE - an increase of over a 1,000 pupils since last year.

The targets of 5A\*-C and 5A\*-G are useful measures of performance, but numbers of GCSEs can sometimes be misleading. Some GCSEs matter far more than others. English, maths and subjects like science are key to employment and life chances. Looking beyond the number of GCSEs, to GCSE subject, Bow Group research shows a very concerning picture: Tens of thousands of pupils in England taking GCSEs are not being entered for the GCSE subjects that are the ticket to employment and opportunity and which are supposed to be nothing less than compulsory.

The performance of boys in this category is particularly concerning. Far fewer boys than girls are being entered for core GCSEs:

- 8% of boys are not even entered for English and maths GCSEs,
- Of those that are, just 43% gain a C grade or above in English and maths, this compares with 51% of girls.
- Out of 318,100 boys entered for GCSEs last year, only 140,700 (43%) were entered for GCSEs in English, maths, science and a modern foreign language compared with 172,500 (54%) of girls.<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which pupils are not sitting core GCSEs is outlined in the table below:

	Boys	Girls	Total
Attempt GCSE	318,100	310,600	628,700
Achieve a C grade or above	240,000	259,000	499,000
Attempt English and maths GCSE	301,600	301,100	602,700
Attempt English, maths and science GCSE	288,400	288,900	577,200
Achieve a C or above in these subjects	125,400	140,600	266,000

#### The true extent of underachievement

The main reason for looking so closely at GCSE results is that they are the qualifications needed for further education and / or employment. In real-world terms, underachievement is measured by those not gaining meaningful qualifications. So how do Blair's children fare here?

On the face of it, there is a small improvement in those achieving qualifications. The number of pupils not gaining GCSEs has declined from 45,000 in 1996/7 to 23,200 in 2005, though this has subsequently risen to 29,800 in 2006. <sup>4</sup> Last year, however, proportionally the number of pupils not gaining GCSEs increased— from 2.2% to 2.6%, with the proportion of boys not gaining any GCSEs rising from 2.7% to 3.1%. <sup>5</sup>

However, this overall improvement since 1997 is also misleading, since many pupils are being kept out of the 'no qualifications' statistics by achieving merely a single grade. Even one G grade would be enough to remove them from the no qualifications category. This is neither of any practical benefit to the pupil, nor should this be seen any particular triumph.

Research by the Bow Group reveals the extent to which pupils who previously did not achieve any GCSEs are simply being tipped into gaining a scattering of GCSEs, all below a C grade and barely enough to improve their life chances. By combining the number of pupils gaining no qualifications with the number of pupils not gaining five GCSEs of any grade (the 5A\*-G measure), it is evident that those pupils who would have gained no qualifications ten years ago have barely improved their performance. They remain securely within a hardcore group of students who consistently fail to obtain any beneficial qualification whatsoever at GCSE.

Year	No grades <sup>6</sup>	Combined total: no grades and less than 4 GCSEs
1996/7	45,100	79,221
1997/8	38,400	70,400
1998/9	35,600	61,400
1999/00	32,900	59,100
2000/01	33,800	67,000
2001/02	33,300	67,000
2002/03	32,500	71,300
2003/04	26,600	72,200
2004/05	23,200	66,400
2005/06	29,800	65,900

## Chapter 3. The Invisible Children

### Case-study:

Yusuf is 19. His parents are Moroccan. He dropped out of school, and only went back into college when his friend's elder brother told his gang to make something of themselves. He wants to be an electrician, but believes he can't handle the paperwork that the national diploma will involve. He thinks he would rather work as an electrician's apprentice and learn through practice.

"I was in year 7 when I really started dropping out. I started hanging around with the wrong crowd and I found other things to do. I was living in a rough area. I just got distracted. I had friends in a different school, one was from my school, we went out together. We'd just get up to things, fighting, thieving things, drugs and things, not working, just messing around, you know...

Man, the main thing was boredom. At school, there was, just, like nothing. A sports club would have been good. I'd 've liked that. But I just didn't want education. My parents tried hard. They were worried. But there was nothing they could do. I just wasn't interested. And then they just kind of got used to it.

To begin with, I'd go in three times one week, then the second week not at all, then just one lesson for a whole week. I'd get into trouble, but I didn't listen to them ( the teachers) The teachers didn't understand. They used to make fun (of me) Some of them really took the piss. They didn't listen, it was like you was from a different planet. So I just said 'forget it.'

- Pupils drop off the school roll at an average of 5,000 pupils a year
- By the time pupils reach their GCSE year, over 7,000 are missing from education
- 21,600 pupils are not entered for any GCSEs
- 29,800 pupils gain no GCSEs
- In total, whether through going missing from the school roll, not being entered for GCSEs or not gaining a GCSE nearly 60,000 do not gain a single qualification.

Despite the large numbers of pupils not gaining any GCSE grade above a C, further below those who do not gain five GCSEs of any grade or any qualifications, there is a hidden figure. It is a statistic that the official records don't reveal, because they themselves aren't really aware of it. This is the number of pupils who simply didn't even make it into the exam room. "The Audit Commission Report ( Audit Commission 2004) recognised that the extent of the 'out of school' population was unknown..."<sup>7</sup>

However new research by the Bow Group reveals that through tracking the number of pupils in a single year from when they were fourteen through to taking their GCSEs, by examining the school rolls from 2005, 2006 and GCSE entries, it is possible to give an estimate of the number of pupils participating in education.<sup>8</sup>

The Government Actuary Department estimates there were 656,000 15 year old pupils in 2006. <sup>9</sup> This is confirmed by the school roll of January 2005. However, shortly afterwards pupils begin to drop off the school roll.

**Pupil numbers and GCSE entrants, 2005-2006**

	Pupil Age	Boys	Girls	Number
January 2005	14	335,730	320,370	656,100 <sup>10</sup>
January 2006	15	332,440	317,490	650,300 <sup>11</sup>
Reach KS4	15	331,436	317,506	648,942 <sup>12</sup>
GCSE entered	15/16	318,100	310,600	628,700 <sup>13</sup>

We estimate that 36,300 pupils are either missing from education or missing out on the chance to take GCSEs by not being entered for an exam.

The number of pupils not gaining any GCSEs rose dramatically to 29,800 in 2006. <sup>14</sup> Proportionally, the number of pupils gaining no qualifications increased— from 2.2% to 2.6%, with the proportion of boys not gaining any qualifications rising from 2.7% to 3.1%. <sup>15</sup>

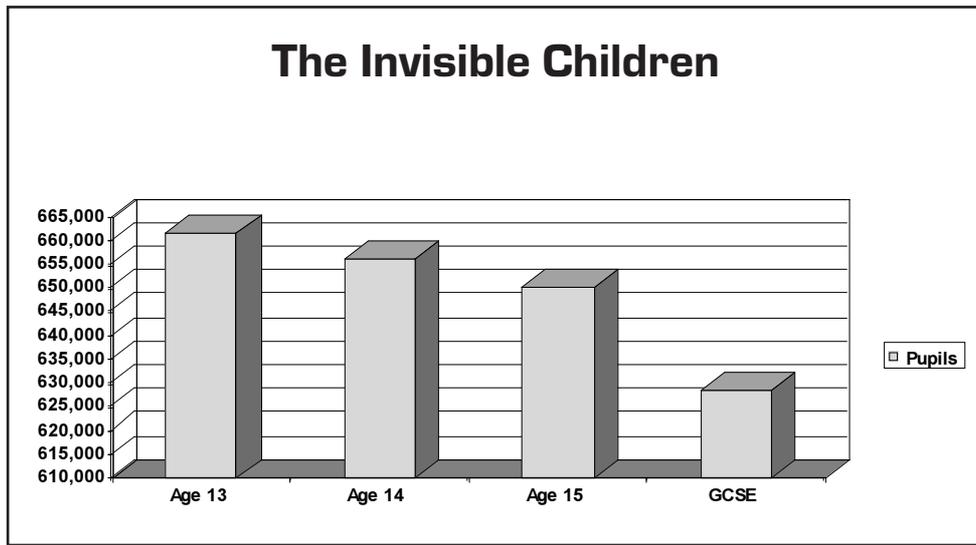
Combining these two figures, the number of pupils not gaining any GCSEs either through dropping off the roll, not being entered for an exam or not passing a GCSE is estimated as 66,100.

**What is happening in the maintained sector?**

- 597,118 pupils reached the end of Key Stage 4 <sup>16</sup>
- But only 575,640 pupils attempted GCSEs <sup>17</sup> - 21,478 pupils were not entered (compared with 70 in the Independent sector):
  - o 1035 of these were in special schools
  - o 5350 pupils were from Comprehensives- 3522 were boys
  - o 1800 were looked after pupils
- Of those entered, 21,693 gained no GCSEs.
  - o 15,870 were classified as SEN, but only 4362 had statements
  - o 1200 were looked after pupils
- In total, in the maintained sector, 43,171 pupils were not entered for GCSEs or gained any GCSE qualifications: over 7% of the maintained sector cohort.

Rather surprisingly, the Government has no way of tracking this kind of educational failure. For example, when David Willetts MP tabled a written question which asked how many pupils who, despite being entered for GCSEs, did not turn up to their exams, Jim Knight's reply merely stated rather enigmatically that 'The Department does not hold the information required to answer the question'. <sup>18</sup>

Invisible Children: Graph showing pupil numbers from age 13 – 15, and those taking GCSEs



## Chapter 4. Why does educational failure take place?

### Failure starts early:

The pattern of educational failure begins at an early age. 43% of pupils do not reach the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics when they leave primary school.<sup>19</sup> As a result, these pupils are not equipped to make the transition between primary and secondary school, and the leap from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The knock-on effect is that pupils are permanently playing catch up.

- Between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, 84,100 pupils make no progress or fall backwards in English, 36,100 in maths and 145,400 in science.<sup>20</sup>
- Almost a fifth of 14 year old boys have the reading age of a seven year old.<sup>21</sup>

"One boy on the estate is just 8 years old. He's in year 6 and goes out and takes bikes and things. The teachers can't stop him. Parents don't seem to be able to do anything. I ask myself, what's he going to be like as he grows up?"

*(Dave Jeal, Chaplain at Ashfield Young Offenders Institute, Bristol, and rector of St. James' community church, Lockleaze, Bristol)*

It is highly unlikely that a pupil who does not reach the expected level at Key Stage 2 will gain ground in time for GCSE:

- 71 per cent of those reaching level 4 at Key Stage 2 (age 11) in 1998 achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C at 16 in 2003.
- Against this, only 14% of those not reaching level 4 by age 11 achieved 5 good GCSEs five years later.<sup>22</sup>

### Rich and poor:

The attainment gap between rich and poor begins even earlier. Research by Leon Feinstein has revealed that even at 22 months, children from poorer backgrounds are significantly behind their richer counterparts.<sup>23</sup> By the time pupils begin school, children in the bottom 30% deprived areas perform over 17 points worse than in other areas in the Foundation Stage Profile.<sup>24</sup>

This gap between Free School Meal pupils and non-FSM pupils widens as pupils progress through school, to a divide of nearly thirty points at GCSE. The table below reveals how this gap (in the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level at each stage) increases, as non free school meal pupils pull away from their poorer counterparts:

### Gap between FSM and Non FSM pupils:

	Age 5	Age 7	Age 11	Age 14	Age 16
Non FSM	50	88	59	63	47.6
FSM	33	69	38	37	19.5
GAP	17	19	21	26	28.1

This gap between rich and poor has also failed to close in the past five years. In fact the gap between rich and poor (reaching the expected level at each stage) has in fact remained constant:

**Achievement of FSM pupils and Non-FSM pupils from 2002 to 2006**

KS 2	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
All pupils	53%	53%	56%	56%	59%
FSM	32%	32%	35%	35%	38%

KS3	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
All pupils	54%	58%	59%	61%	63%
FSM	27%	30%	31%	34%	37%

Parental background is a key contributor to educational success. The Youth Cohort study reveals that if neither parent has an A level qualification, a pupil is 35% likely not to gain a level 2 Qualification (GCSE or equivalent), and only 39% likely to remain in education at 18, compared with 61% for a pupil whose parents have a degree. <sup>25</sup> A one-third reduction in family income from the average (or £140 a week, £7,000 a year; in 2001) reduced the chances of securing a degree by around four percentage points. <sup>26</sup>

Geographical location and the extent of its deprivation are also key determinants of pupil achievement at school. The achievements of children in the most affluent areas of the country far outstrip those of pupils in the most deprived wards:

- In the 10% most deprived wards 29.2% of pupils gain 5 good GCSEs including English and maths,
- In the 10% most affluent wards, that number rockets to 57.6%

**Regional Pockets of poverty:**

Regionally, this trend is exacerbated further: there is nearly a 40% gap between the richest wards of the Yorkshire and Humber region, compared with the bottom 10% wards in the Midlands. <sup>27</sup> It is also alarming that the attainment gap between rich and poor has widened over the past few years rather than decrease.

The following table reveals how in many city areas, pupils on free school meals are being left behind as non FSM pupils pull away:

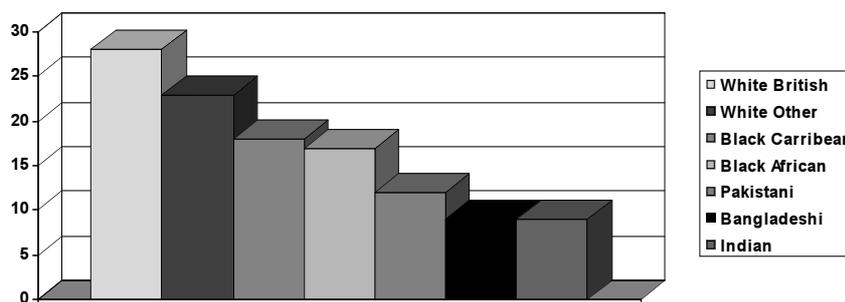
**The attainment gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils at GCSE (5A\*-C inc. English and maths by region:**

Area	2002	2005	Gap increase %
Bristol	19.8	22.6	2.8
Manchester	14.4	19.6	5.2
Liverpool	24.5	26.1	1.6
Birmingham	23.4	25.8	2.4
Bradford	20.4	23.4	3.0
Hull	17.7	21.8	4.1
Durham	26.5	29.7	3.2
Darlington	24.8	37.2	12.4
Portsmouth	19.7	20.4	0.7
Nottingham	19.3	19.5	0.2

The attainment gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils at GCSE (5A\*-C inc. English and maths) <sup>28</sup>

**Trends by Ethnicity:**

While poverty is a strong factor in educational underachievement, trends of under performance also emerge in terms of ethnicity. It is noticeable that out of the total number of FSM pupils sitting GCSEs, White British FSM pupils perform much worse than any other ethnic group: taking the 5A\*-G measure to reveal who exactly is at the bottom end of attainment, the figures reveal that 28% of white FSM pupils do not achieve five GCSEs of whatever grade, compared with 18% Black Caribbean and 12% Asian.<sup>29</sup>



**Truancy**

- 12% of GCSE pupils (67,660) are persistent truants
- 33% of persistent truants are Free School Meals pupils
- 41% of persistent truants have Special Educational Needs

The link between truancy and educational failure is well-known. But despite numerous government initiatives, truancy sweeps and nearly £1 billion spent in an attempt to reduce truancy, the number of unauthorised absences has continued to rise since 1997. A total of 1,399,197 pupils, one in five of all state school children, skipped lessons last year - a rise of 189,749 since 1997 when 1,209,448 pupils truanted. There is little sign that this trend will reverse, as government continues to fail to meet its targets: of the 370 secondary schools targeted for high absence, only 52 schools met their absence targets for 2007-08.<sup>30</sup>

However, the majority of all cases of truancy are committed by a hardcore group of persistent truants, defined as missing more than 60 school half-days. There are a total of 217,390 persistent truants in secondary school—making up 71% of the school population, but who account for 60.9% of all cases of truancy.<sup>31</sup>

There is a clear relationship between increased truancy as a pupil progresses through school. Rates of unauthorised absence rise from an average of 0.58% of half days missed per pupil in Year 7 (aged 11) to 2.43% by Year 11 (age 15). For persistent truants, this rise is particularly severe - from 20,140 in year 7 (age 11) to 67,660 in Year 11 (GCSE year). 11.6% of the total pupil population in Year 11 are classified as persistent truants during this crucial time- up by 14,850 pupils from the previous year.

**Case Study: Liam**

Liam fell behind in junior school, then didn't get into the school he wanted but his third choice school. He already had a reputation from his junior school and wanted to live up to it. He would do things to get into trouble.

His parents had no authority and he openly didn't go to school. He thought he was allowed not to go to school because there is no real come-back. Liam's parents didn't see parents' days as something they should attend.

Liam just couldn't see what's in it for him. The curriculum didn't mean anything to him, he felt that if he wasn't academic he was dumb-struck. He took to hanging around at his friends' houses when their parents were out. Shopping malls didn't turf them out and the police seldom asked him why he was not at school.

**Why are young people dropping out?**

During this research, we spoke to community social workers, staff at young offenders' institutes, teachers and young people themselves. A familiar trend emerges: Children are uninspired by what they see as an overly academic curriculum, or a curriculum that does not engage with what they wanted to do, or the way they want to learn; attractions outside the school gate are too much to resist, particularly after the transition from primary to secondary; there is always a group of mates to fall in with and most worryingly, they describe a world in which schools, shopping malls and the police seem complacent in taking them back into school.

**Who is playing truant?**

It is also important to look at which pupils are playing truant. Pupils who have English as a second language seem more committed to remaining in school, compared to English speaking pupils: 4.7% of pupils who have English as a second language persistently play truant, compared with 7.3% of English speaking pupils. Predominately, persistent truants are white - 85% compared with 2% Black pupils and 4% Asian. 71,130 persistent truants (33%) are free school meals pupils, while 89,060 (41%) of persistent truants have special educational needs. Worryingly, there have also been sharp rises in truancy rates within the urban areas of England:

A comparison of truancy rates between 1997 and 2006 (% of half days missed, unauthorised absence)

	1997	2006
Barnsley	1.9	1.98
Blackpool	1.6	1.91
Bradford	2	2.6
Bristol	1.6	2.37
Camden	1.8	2.24
Darlington	1.6	2.2
Derby	0.8	1.66
Greenwich	2.4	2.85
Leicester	1.9	2.25
Manchester	2.6	2.88
North Tyneside	0.8	1.03
Rotherham	1.5	2.06
Salford	1.2	2.1
St Helens	0.5	1.41

### Exclusions

- Last year, 220,840 students were suspended more than once in the same year- up 19,000 from 2003/4.
- In total, 11,300 pupils were suspended five times or more in the same year.
- 440 pupils were suspended more than ten times in the same year.

Though permanent exclusions from school have declined in the past year, the number of fixed period exclusions has risen by 13% since 2003/4 to over 390,000. The most worrying feature of the rise in fixed period exclusions is the rise in the number of pupils suspended more than once in a single year. Last year, 220,840 students were suspended more than once in the same year- up 19,000 from 2003/4. In total, 11,300 pupils were suspended five times or more in the same year. 440 pupils were suspended more than ten times in the same year.

The ultimate question that lies over exclusions is where do the excluded pupils go? Research by the Bow Group reveals that many of these excluded pupils have Special Educational Needs, who have struggled with mainstream schooling.

- 64% of excluded pupils have Special Educational Needs
- Half all permanent exclusions (49%) are of SEN children not in special schools, even though pupils with SEN but no statements made up only 15% of pupils in total.
- In 2004/5, Statement children accounted for only 3% of the school population, but 9% of all permanent exclusions
- Children with SEN but no statements are almost 7 times as likely to be permanently excluded as children without SEN.

It has already been mentioned that SEN pupils make up 41% of persistent truants. SEN pupils also make up the majority of all exclusions— 64% in all schools, and 87% in primary schools. <sup>32</sup>

### Pupil Referral Units

Excluded pupils may be given alternative education provision in Pupil Referral Units. (PRUs)

Since Labour came to power, there has been a sharp rise in the number of pupils attending PRUs: up from 7,530 to 15,240. The number of PRUs has risen from 309 to 449 in the last ten years, while their cost has risen from £100.3 million in 2000/01 to £263.3 million this year. <sup>33</sup>

A large factor in this rise is the increase in 15 year olds being referred to PRUs. The number has risen from 3,860 in 1997 to 7,080 in 2006. That's around the same number of 15 year olds in PRUs today as the entire PRU population in 1997. Why are so many 15 year olds entering PRUs?

Described in Ofsted's Annual Report as 'the least successful of all in ensuring the good progress of the pupils who attended', few pupils in PRUs ever make it to take their GCSEs, let alone pass them. Of the 5990 pupils in PRUs aged 15, only 56.6% entered for a GCSE, with 12% achieving a grade above a C, and just over half (53.6%) achieving any qualification whatsoever. <sup>34</sup>

It is perhaps due to these results that many of the pupils end up in PRUs in the first place. Local authorities are not obliged to include results from PRUs in their statistics: conveniently, the excluded are excluded from the league tables. <sup>35</sup> In a cruel twist, the performance measures that are meant to improve standards in the classroom may actually work to isolate and exclude the most vulnerable and challenging pupils altogether.

But pupils who are in danger of failing their GCSEs are not the only group to be siphoned off into a PRU. Looking closer at the type of pupils in a PRU reveals that the numbers and percentage of those with SEN are going into PRUs are rocketing – especially non-statemented.

- The number of SEN kids in PRUs increased by over half ( 56 %) since 1997
- The number of Statemented SEN increased by over a third
- The number of Non-statemented kids in PRUs has increased by 67% - a two thirds increase since 1997
- In 2006, 1.3% of children with new statements were put in PRUs. Back in 1997, that was only 0.8% <sup>36</sup>

#### **Who are the Invisible pupils?**

There are many groups who for various reasons end up dropping out of school. Often these pupils have found their education disrupted by life events - pregnancy or caring for a relative in need often leaves school taking a back seat. For instance, just 29.2 per cent of teenage mothers were in education, employment or training in the period 2004–06. <sup>37</sup> The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education outlined eight key categories:

- Looked after young people
- Teenage parents
- Young carers
- Young people with chronic illnesses or disabilities
- Suicidal Young people
- Young people suffering from mental illnesses
- Young people engaging in risk behaviour - alcohol or substance abuse
- Young people involved in crime <sup>38</sup>

#### **Looked After Pupils:**

Looked after pupils make up a recognisable core of pupils who did not sit any GCSEs.

Last year, 1000 children in care went missing: 820 of whom the government has no idea of their whereabouts. <sup>39</sup>

- Of 5100 looked after pupils in their GCSE year in 2006, only 3,300 actually sat any exams, and of these only 2100 gained 5 GCSEs of any grade. <sup>40</sup>
- Just 8% gained five good GCSEs, and only 1% of looked after children attend university.

This is clearly unacceptable, as are the significant regional differences that exist between the experiences of young people in care:

In Hartlepool, 85% of pupils in care leave school without a single qualification, compared with 24% in South Gloucestershire. A report by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit in 2003 estimated that taxpayers would save £300 million over three years if those leaving care entered employment or further education in the same proportions as other young people.

#### **Young carers**

An analysis of the 2001 UK census data for all households reported that:

- 114,000 (1.4% of all) children aged 5-15 were providing "informal" care for family members,
- 18,000 (6.3%) providing 20 or more hours care a week
- 9000 (3.1%) providing 50 or more hours care a week. <sup>41</sup>

A study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2000 revealed that half of young carers surveyed had missed school and over a quarter had no qualifications. <sup>42</sup>

#### **Disabled children**

Children with physical disabilities are also likely to face difficulty either attending school or accessing the facilities they need to progress with learning. As a result, disabled pupils are twice as likely to be NEET at 16 as non-disabled children of the same age, while 21% disabled people aged 16-24 are likely to have no qualifications at all, compared with 9% non disabled. <sup>43</sup>

## Chapter 5. Educational failure : The consequences

### **Case Study: Interview with Dave Jeal, chaplain Ashfield Young Offenders Institute, and rector of St. James Community Church, Lockleaze:**

"Kids in YOIs are three times more likely to come from single parent families. Many had learning difficulties but couldn't access any help. They're 'good' kids, but got into trouble at school.

For example, one young lad, he got excluded at 14, never took his GCSEs, was in prison by 15 for stealing cars. As soon as schools can get shot of the trouble makers, they do, and if they are still on the roll, the schools still get the money for them.

### **No GCSEs? No job**

Failing to achieve the 5A\*-C benchmark irrevocably damages pupils ability to earn and secure a well-paid job. Research by the LSE has demonstrated that whereas passing 5 GCSEs at A\*-C generates a 27.5% financial return for men and 23.5% return for women, passing 1-4 GCSEs at A\*-C only generates a 14.8% return for men and 11.2% for women. Importantly for the implications of educational failure highlighted by this report, GCSE qualifications at grade D or below have more or less a zero return. <sup>44</sup>

### **Staying on at school:**

When it comes to numbers of 17 year olds staying in education, The UK's record is a damning indictment of this failure: currently 37th out of 40 in a league table of major industrial economies, the problem has got worse in recent years, with the percentage of 17 year olds in full-time education and training falling from 80.1% in 1997 to 79.1% in 2003. The proportion of adults in the UK without basic school-leaving qualifications is twice that of Canada and Germany. <sup>45</sup> The UK not only struggles to entice people to stay at school after 16, but it is also failing to ensure people get enough out of the system in the first place.

### **Rising numbers of NEETs**

The trenchant number of pupils gaining less than five GCSEs at A\*-G, which has remained approximately the same since 1999, is also reflected in the number of pupils who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) at sixteen.

Currently, one in six sixteen year olds are considered NEET. This proportion has not fallen since 2000. <sup>46</sup> Recent evidence presented in the Conservative Party's "State of State Schools" revealed that in fact there has been a dramatic rise in this category. Although there has been a decline of 41% in the number of NEETS aged 16 to 24 between 1992 and 2001, it has since risen by 44% between 2001 and 2006. The situation is particularly alarming among 16-17 year olds, with the number of NEETS rising by 38% since 2001. <sup>47</sup>

There is a strong correlation between educational failure and the likelihood of a pupil leaving school to become a NEET. Three out of ten young people who had gained fewer than 5 GCSE grades D-G (the 5A\*-G measure) in year 11 had turned into NEETS aged 18. The same is true for 19% of truants in year 11 and nearly one in three pupils who received a fixed term or permanent exclusion from school.

The impact of educational failure is dramatic and lasting. Life chances are immediately either limited or removed entirely. 37% of 16 year old pupils who are out of work at the age of 16 are still unemployed by 18. If these pupils do find work, it is often low paid. Out of the proportion of those earning less than £6.50 per hour, 53% have no qualifications.

For many pupils who end up as NEETS, disengagement comes at a heavy price: in one survey, 71% of NEETS admitted to using illegal drugs, compared with 45% of pupils either in education, employment or training, while 29% of NEETS had committed a crime, compared with 11% of non-NEETS. <sup>48</sup>

### **Young Offender Risk**

And educational failure leads to even more serious consequences:

- 42% of young offenders sentenced in courts have been excluded from school.
- A further 23% were truanting significantly. <sup>49</sup>
- 52% of male prisoners and 71% of female prisoners have no qualifications.
- Over 50% of young people on Detention Training Orders (DTOs) have literacy and numeracy levels below those of the average 11-year-old.
- Nineteen per cent functioned at or below the level of the average seven-year-old.
- 80% of young people receiving custodial sentences had no qualifications.
- Between one quarter and one-third were not in education, training or employment immediately before they went into custody. By the time of release this figure had risen to 60%. <sup>50</sup>

Too many of the invisible children of today erupt back onto our radars as the criminals of tomorrow. It is unacceptable to let these young people fall through the net of society.

## Chapter 6. What can we do about it?

There will be no silver bullets in tackling a problem that is so deep rooted. But this paper suggests some ways in which we can begin to recognise then solve the problem:

### **i. We need a central register to track children not at school:**

First, we need to know the extent of the problem. That has been the primary aim of the research in this paper. The issue of children missing from education is not new. In 2004, a report by Ofsted which investigated the management of the school roll by ten local authorities between September 2003 and April 2004, concluded: 'While some schools and LEAs are relentlessly focused on keeping track of the most vulnerable pupils, others are content with minimal oversight, which ceases once the pupils have moved beyond immediate contact'.<sup>51</sup>

It is concerning that under an 'Every Child Matters' agenda, children should simply be able to go missing from the school register. The DfES needs to establish a more effective means of tracking pupils who are most likely to drop out of school, in particular the most vulnerable groups outlined above.

Currently, there is no central mechanism through which a national database can operate: The DfES instead leaves it up to local authorities who do not seem to be providing the information.

This kind of information is crucial to monitoring and understanding the youth disengagement that is currently being tackled too late in the cycle by ASBOs. The introduction of a national register has apparently been planned since 2002, but even here the onus is on local authorities to track missing pupils rather than the DfES itself.<sup>52</sup>

### **ii. Early Action: The extent of educational failure witnessed in the system could and should be avoided if problems were detected at an earlier age.**

If standards are to be raised in the classroom, we must engage pupils in education at a young age. This means ensuring that every pupil is able to read properly through tried and tested learning methods such as synthetic phonics. There must also be a greater focus upon numeracy whilst encouraging a love of learning through a broad and balanced curriculum at an early age. Intensive remedial programmes through the use of setting and streaming - which currently only takes place in 40% of secondary schools - would help to provide support and guidance for every pupil's individual aptitude.

### **iii. Pupils must also be allowed to progress through education at their own pace.**

The recent 2020 Vision report and the government's Making Good Progress consultation point in a new direction towards personalised learning, tailoring and setting and streaming.<sup>53</sup> However, progress measures at the Key Stages do not go far enough. If we are serious about personalised learning, pupils should be allowed to take GCSEs when they are ready, rather than being shoe-horned into helping deliver national targets and performance measures.

Given the seriousness of educational failure at 16 and its consequences upon both the student and the employer, it seems right that just as more able students should be allowed to progress through GCSEs early, those of lower aptitude should be allowed to sit their GCSEs when they are fully able to comprehend what is being taught. More pupil setting in every academic year— rather than in the final years of school— would be an effective means to achieve this and should be considered as a possible reform.

These may be solutions for those pupils who are still missing out but have the academic ability to gain five good GCSEs. But these are not solutions for every pupil. This report has highlighted the long tail of under-achievement in our schools. But to begin to solve the problem we need to recognise that each of these so-called underachievers is a potential achiever. It is clear that the conventional academic route has failed them - so what is the alternative?

**iv. We need to take a fundamentally different approach to how we can engage the invisible pupils in learning.**

If young people are to gain the broad skills (like communication, creativity, self-knowledge, curiosity, resilience, taking responsible risks) needed to succeed and a reasonable understanding of the world of work and the options open to them, they need to gain more experience of the real world. Practical learning means learning by doing things for real, working with experts and combining theory with practice. We should recognise the value that practical learning and grounding education in the real world can bring to all pupils; for those who are disengaged it can/could/should form the main pathway to success.

**Case study:**

**Garry Cave - National Smelting Boxing Club, Avonmouth, Bristol**

Garry runs a boxing club in Avonmouth, Bristol and also serves the neighbouring deprived ward of Kingsweston.. Avonmouth's A\*-G achievement has plummeted by around a quarter since 1997, despite a national 14% rise.

Many of his boys come from a school which has a history of under-achievement. The gym is very popular; over subscribed, and Garry is desperately looking for £25m to expand the gym by another building.

Lots of Garry's boys don't attend school. They find boxing helps them build self-esteem and get used to an ordered environment, and taking instructions from authority figures.

One of Garry's boxers has special needs, and attends a special school. Garry says that boxing helps him vent frustration and helped him to behave.

But Garry also tells how alternate education outside school helps the children of travellers who attend the gym. These children often fall out of school early, and go to help in their father's business as builders, or other tradesmen. They make money that way, and build a business for themselves. However, this usually depends on tight family support in traveller communities.

Community organisations like this, which are not seen as part of a conventional authority and which are rooted in the local area, are already providing a successful way to engage or re-engage young people. But valuable as these organisations are in helping to keep young people in education, in themselves they do not usually provide qualifications which young people need to get a job.

**Practical learning:**

One way of doing this is to raise the status and quality of practical learning in schools. But this must not mean that an academic curriculum for all should become any less rigorous. Rather, we should recognise the value that practical learning and grounding education in the real world can bring to disengaged pupils. Practical learning can and should provide a mechanism for teaching more traditionally academic subjects such as maths. An engineer or an electrician will need good numeracy and literacy skills, and many young people will access these subjects better through a more hands-on method of learning.

"...And then, while I was still bunking off school, my mate's dad died. Then everything went messed up. It wasn't fun any more. My mate's older brother said to me "you might as well go to college. Give college a go part time and see how you go." So I did a BTech First Diploma in Electronics. My whole group of mates was on my course. We did ok. It was Electronics with a bit of English and Maths. I found it a lot easier than school. I could do all the electronics stuff with my hands, you know? I don't like the paper work. But when you get down to actually doing the thing, well, it's really easy."

Last year I finished the course, and I'm supposed to go on and do a National Diploma. But I don't know if I want to do it. It's for two years. And there's paperwork. I guess I'll do it if I have no choice.

Things might have been very different if my mate's older brother hadn't spoken to us. I'd like to be an electrician. But I don't want to do all the paper work. I'd love to work as some kind of electrician assistant and do the proper stuff. Not all the paper work."

(Yusuf, age 19)

This is not a new idea. Policy makers have long been talking about practical or 'vocational' education. But what emerges from talking to those who've slipped through the net, is that they feel they are expected to access a practical subject through an academic route.

To make practical learning a reality, we have got to break away from a terminal obsession with academicising vocational courses, to teaching the practical through the practical and teaching the core academic skills through more hands on methods for those who learn better that way.

"It is so SO important to get a job they can do instead of this so called 'vocational' training. There's no practical work in that. You have to be an academic to do manual work now. That's just daft. If you're not academic, you just get excluded. These kids are clever kids. They make things, bits of paper and what have you, with joints and rivets, to pass in-between the cells. They would do extremely well in engineering.

The whole structure needs to change. 92% of juveniles will re-offend and end up back in prison. There is nothing for them to go back to. The Prisons are full. It costs £55k to lock one of these kids up for one year, surely getting them an apprenticeship would be a better use of money? If you give an ex-offender somewhere to live and a job, they are 3x less likely to re-offend. "

**(Dave Jeal, chaplain Ashfield Young Offenders Institute, and rector of St. James Community Church, Lockleaze )**

The divide between practical and academic is not simple; in terms of training for business, Ofsted highlighted exactly the same problems as Dave Jeal; namely that the method of learning is often inappropriate for what is to be learnt:

"Few schools have developed coherent programmes of economic and business understanding for all students. Too little use is made of curriculum opportunities, such as work experience and industry days, to develop students' business understanding and enterprise skills in the broadest sense." <sup>54</sup>

We should recognise that in order to re-integrate challenging pupils who have slipped through the net, we must focus harder on alternative forms of practical learning. The opinions of many persistent truants and the case studies mentioned reflect the fact that our school system is not engaging with the particular and challenging needs of these pupils, many of whom the report has shown either come from deprived background or have complex and often undiagnosed special educational needs. We need to restore a sense of confidence in students that not only will their learning matter, but that they have the talent and ability to succeed.

**v. 'Enterprise Portals': Making practical and vocational learning a reality:**

Simply introducing more practical learning in schools is not enough. Schools must be able to reach out into the real world, and in particular to business. Above all, practical learning qualifications must be both credible and useful in the working world. Where possible, the solution lies in courses which are constructed and delivered in collaboration with businesses. Collaboration can result in tailored and cutting edge course content.

The Government has attempted to open up skilled trades and professions to students through the introduction of new vocational diplomas sitting alongside GCSEs and A-Levels.<sup>55</sup> Appreciating the need for real business involvement, it has tried to forge links by encouraging partnerships between education providers and business.

Whilst well meaning, it fails to understand the realities of the working world. Many companies are just too busy to engage in what could be a time consuming and ultimately fruitless venture. This is particularly the case for small firms. We need to provide real incentives for businesses to become engaged in practical learning in schools, sharing their experience and knowledge, whilst at the same time demonstrating to disaffected pupils that education does have a point. A more effective means of achieving good collaboration and to get business involved could be achieved by using the tax system to influence behaviour.<sup>56</sup>

Research suggests that business wants to play a more direct role in supporting education. A poll commissioned by the City & Guilds showed that 71% of businesses wanted more assistance from Government to support apprenticeship schemes.<sup>57</sup> Specifically, 57% called for a better dialogue between schools and colleges, and 56% wanted effective guidance on how to develop and run work placements. Nearly two thirds (62%) wanted the Government to offer tax breaks.<sup>58</sup>

Government must reach out to business and industry. It must pool their latent experience and knowledge for the benefit of the education system. Small businesses in particular are the home of many of our skilled tradesmen and most successful entrepreneurs. Indeed, of the 4.3 million business enterprises in the UK, 99.3 per cent are classified as 'small'.<sup>59</sup> Yet, despite being in the overwhelming majority, they remain a largely untapped resource.

A key proposal by the Bow Group is the creation of Enterprise Portals up and down the country. Each Portal would be administered by the local authority Children's Services and Economic Development departments and be a gateway for local public services to engage with small businesses. The objective would be to build a network of local small businesses which could assist with training and support for students. Small businesses agreeing to participate within a Portal would enjoy an exemption from paying business rates. As rates are collected locally, it allows tax incentivisation to be administered at local authority level.

Business rates are the third largest item of expenditure for many businesses and the burden of business rates falls heavily on the smallest businesses. According to the Annual Business Survey, the smallest firms pay 6.3% of their Gross Value Added output in business rates as opposed to only 0.3% in the largest.<sup>60</sup> Exempting small businesses could therefore create a powerful incentive whilst at the same time promoting a small business friendly policy.<sup>61</sup>

Enterprise Portals offer an opportunity to localise skills training and build a practical offering which reflects an area's local economy. Partnership work should not be prescriptive; each Enterprise Portal should have some discretion as to what expertise it decided to pool. For instance, it could plan how many businesses it would work with on a year-by-year basis to ensure a suitable supply of work placements available for students.

Discretion could also be exercised as to what businesses could offer in return for their discount. For instance, a menu of options could be displayed designed to ensure participating businesses were not overly burdened. Indeed, a key aim of Enterprise Portals would be to develop a large pool of participating companies in order to spread the burden of support and allow education providers to cherry pick what they needed at certain points in the curriculum.

Likely avenues for partnership working could include work placements, peer review of existing educational content; and presentations to students on various aspects of a specific profession. The exact nature of individual partnerships could be assessed through survey forms constructed by participating local authorities. They would then need to be integrated into existing vocational content.

Enterprise Portals could also be used to encourage local teaching staff to shadow one of the scheme's business partners for several weeks. In France, teachers play a key role identifying career routes. They are encouraged to work closely with companies and a voluntary scheme exists whereby teachers can take up to three weeks to join various companies. The aim of this is for the individuals to learn more about differing career paths for the benefit of their students.

The French scheme can come in the form of either a three-week placement with one company, or a one-week placement with three different companies. There is considerable merit in allowing an element of the teacher workforce to experience first hand a business environment, particularly if they are involved in practical skills teaching or in providing guidance on the career options of their students. The local authority would be able to scope out what options they might wish to pursue.

Finally, central Government would need to bare the costs of the shortfall in revenue borne out of business rate exemptions. There would also be a cost to local councils for administering schemes. We do not envisage a need to raise extra funding, rather money could be used out of pre-existing skills expenditure which replicates much of what Enterprise Portals would seek to achieve.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) would be the most obvious choice. Its main aim is to improve the skills of England's young people. However, out of a budget of £10.4 billion in 2006, only £8.6 billion of this money reaches the frontline. A staggering £1.8 billion is spent on staff costs which have risen by 26% between 2001/02 and 2006 of which there are more than 4,400 people employed who have no direct contact with training youngsters.<sup>62</sup>

Whether the LSC will survive under a future Brown administration or a future Conservative administration, is not a question for this paper. However, given the size of its funding, and the questionable use of resources, it represents a perfect feeder should Enterprise Portals take off.

**Conclusion:**

**This paper has shown that despite good intentions, not every child has mattered. Tens of thousands of young people have disappeared from the the statistics, and from the social and political radar.**

**This paper will not solve the problem of the invisible children, but it does do the one thing necessary before we can begin to solve the problem: It brings a forgotten section of society back into the light.**

**And once back in the light, these young people present a crucial challenge to politicians and policy makers who have a duty to re-engage them into society. To do this we must respect the abilities of all young people. We must make sure that the skills agenda really is at the centre of the education debate, and that young people, schools and businesses all take a lead role.**

## Notes

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- 52 The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 2004/05 Business education in secondary schools.
- 53 Tomlinson's proposals for a diploma framework would eventually replace GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications for 14-19 year olds. Whilst the Government has rejected an entirely new framework, diplomas are currently being introduced into schools up and will provide an alternative route from 14. See: 14-19 Curriculum and Qualification Reform, Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform, October, 2000.
- 54 The Government created the 14-19 Pathfinders programme to implement differing approaches to 14-19 learning. A key aim was to build partnerships with local businesses. See: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/dsp\\_pathfinders.cfm?sid=9&pid=214&ctype=TEXT&ptype=Single](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/dsp_pathfinders.cfm?sid=9&pid=214&ctype=TEXT&ptype=Single)
- 55 The sample consists of employers from trade industries, such as construction and engineering who have, or have had in the past, students on work placement schemes. In total, 319 interviews were conducted by telephone. "UK businesses struggle with work placements" City & Guilds, 11th November 2004.
- 56 "UK businesses struggle", City and Guilds.
- 57 SBS, 'SME Statistics for the UK 2004', 25 August 2005
- 58 The latest figures relate to 2004 and would have changed since the introduction of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme in 2005. The data shows non-domestic rates as a percentage of their Gross Value Added. The smallest relates to companies with a turnover band of less than £50,000, the largest relates to over £1 bn. See the Annual Business Survey, 2004.
- 59 Small businesses already qualify for the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (SBRRS) which would could provide an effective guideline for identifying firms eligible for Enterprise Portals. Firms currently receive a discount if their rateable value is below £15,000 (or less than £21,500 in Greater London). Eligible businesses with rateable values of below £5,000 receive a 50% rate relief on their liability. This relief will decrease on a sliding scale by an estimated 1% for every £100 of rateable value over £5,000, up to £10,000. After £10,000 businesses would still benefit from the small business rater multiplier up till a rateable value of £15,000 or £21,500 in Greater London. See for further information: [http://www.mybusinessrates.gov.uk/rates/other\\_reliefs/index.html](http://www.mybusinessrates.gov.uk/rates/other_reliefs/index.html)
- 60 See: LSC Annual Report and Accounts, 2005/06.

