THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FALLACY REVISITED:

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In Ghana, in the Accra area, just over forty years ago, in December 1959, Philip Foster drew his first sample of 210 middle school boys in their fourth and - for most - last year of formal post-primary education. He asked them about the kind of employment they would like to obtain - if they were 'completely free to choose'. He then followed this with a query about what kind of employment they 'actually expected to be able to obtain'. This was one dimension of work that would contribute to 'Foster's 'Vocational School Fallacy in Development Planning' in 1963' (1965a), and an important element in his classic case study, Education and social change in Ghana (1965b).

Arguably, there have been very few articles in the field of international and comparative education that have been so influential in academic circles, and also amongst some development co-operation personnel, as 'The vocational school fallacy'. One reason for this justifiably long-standing reputation is that Foster was prepared to stand out, in a period when it was all too easy to suggest that schools could deliver all kinds of attitude change (towards nation building, good citizenship and rural development), and state that 'schools are remarkably clumsy instruments for inducing prompt large-scale changes in underdeveloped areas' (1965a: 144). The 1960s was a decade which in Africa witnessed the ambitious targets for all sub-sectors of education in the Addis Ababa conference of 1961, the excitement about self-help educational expansion (harambee) in Kenya, and then a whole series of innovations designed to deal with the sudden arrival of primary school leaver unemployment - from the Brigades in Botswana, to

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1 'The vocational school fallacy in development planning' was first presented at a conference on Education and Economic Development in Chicago in 1963, and first published in the conference proceedings in 1965 in Arnold Anderson and Mary Jean Bowman (Eds.) Education and economic development Aldine, London. The article has been reprinted in several forms, but not all of these contain the full length of the original.

2 It would be interesting to know how widely known are Foster's article and book in Ghana today.
the Workers Brigades in Ghana, to the Village Polytechnics in Kenya, and, most famously, in 'Education for self-reliance' in Tanzania.

Foster's message about the limitations of schooling to change society arrived early in the decade which saw the application of the new approaches of manpower planning and educational planning to targets for the creation of, usually, high level manpower, through all kinds of exceptional and emergency measures.

What was particularly unusual about Foster's approach was that it was deeply embedded in a knowledge of the educational history of the Gold Coast right back to the 1600s, and his concerns with achievement, selection and recruitment in the early 1960s were founded upon an understanding of recruitment to office, mobility, status and differentiation in the traditional societies that eventually made up the Gold Coast, and later Ghana.

Put perhaps over-simply, Foster was able to argue that for well over a 100 years western education had been responsible for a massive amount of social change in this area, but that the schools had very seldom functioned in the manner expected by the educators and the policy-makers. In the new era of educational planning, Foster's book was a vivid testimony to what he called the 'unplanned consequences of educational growth' (1965b, 303).

What makes Foster's work especially worth revisiting after more than 40 years of Ghanaian independence, and after the decades of 'development', 'basic needs', 'adjustment' and - now - 'globalisation' is that, again, Ghana is a potentially prime candidate for examination. At independence, it was one of the best endowed nations in Africa, in terms of high levels of per capita income and of human resources; in the late 1990s it was felt to have managed the era of structural adjustment in a relatively successful manner. As part of this adjustment era, there have been substantial reductions in public service employment, the privatisation of parastatal companies, and rationalisation and reform of primary, junior and

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3 For the range of these initiatives, see King, *Aid and education in the developing world* 1991. Foster was one of the earliest critics of Nyerere's 'Education for self-reliance'; see Foster 1969.
4 In fact, more than half of the volume on *Education and social change in Ghana* is about education and social change in pre-colonial and colonial Gold Coast. Paradoxically, the book, which is a major scholarly work, is now much less well known than the article.
senior secondary education, as well as university (King 1989). More generally, there have been attempts to encourage an enterprise culture, under the broader Vision 2020 of its National Development Planning Commission (Government of Ghana 1995).

In this very different economic context from Foster's Ghana of the late 1950s and early 1960s, we administered, in 1998 and 1999, very similar instruments to those used to such effect by Foster. The results powerfully confirm in some measure but also raise important questions about Foster's long-standing findings. Most specifically, they suggest that there could, very possibly, be an identifiable school influence or school effect on attitudes towards employment and self-employment.

The Central Challenge in the Vocational School Fallacy (VSF)

The two publications by Foster mentioned above cover considerable ground. In their own right they make a major contribution to our understanding of Ghanaian education history against a background of social and political development. But, for many, Foster is best known as the champion of the realism and rationality of Ghanaian middle and secondary school pupils. Over against the multitude of plans, projects and commissions arguing for more practical, adapted and relevant education for Ghanaian youth, - from the early Basel mission years, to the Phelps-Stokes recommendations of the 1920s, to the pre- and immediate post-Independence periods - Foster's analysis has consistently backed the good sense of young people (and their parents) to work out what was in their best career interests.

At the heart of the debate lay the issue of vocationalism and its relationship to economic growth. Should not schools, and especially

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5 This research was carried out in association with the larger study of 'Education, Training and Enterprise', supported by the Department for International Development, in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. Further support was made available from the Moray Endowment at the University of Edinburgh. We were assisted considerably by Dela Afenyadu in pursuing this research, and have profited from his comments and reactions.

6 For a sustained critique of the Phelps-Stokes Commissions, the most influential of these plans for an 'adapted' education for Africa, see King (1971). I am grateful to Paul Nugent for pointing out that this interest in promoting vocational schooling was especially the case in Northern Ghana where there was a conscious attempt to avoid the 'mistakes' of the South (see further R. B. Bening).
those in predominantly agricultural societies, where the formal sector of the economy could only absorb a very small proportion of the economically active population, purposefully prepare young people with a substantial measure of the practical, agricultural and technical skills needed for the transformation of their societies? The nub of the argument, therefore, concerns the relationship of the school to its society, and particularly the role that the school can be expected to play in support of economic development. At a time when there were many ambitious schemes involving a central role for the school in national development, Foster remained frankly sceptical about the extent to which the school could, alone, become an active instrument in a massive economic and social transformation.\(^8\)

Could curricular change at the national level - towards more practical, vocational subjects in the schools - not only have a direct effect on the young people themselves and their choice of careers, but also indirectly on the emerging problems of the time, such as the unemployment of educated school leavers and the slow pace of agricultural and rural development? Foster's answer, after examining the record of 100 years of reforms, was that mission societies, colonial governments, and now the new independent government of Ghana, had frequently been attracted by the apparent logic of this position, and had sought to use schools in this instrumental way. But the plain truth was that 'the educational history of the Gold Coast is strewn with the wreckage of schemes' based on these assumptions (1965a: 145).

The reason lay principally in the new occupational opportunities generated by colonialism, and in the role of schools as one of the primary mechanisms for moving young people from subsistence activities to a position in what was then called 'the exchange sector' or modern sector of the economy. For clerical and commercial employment in this emerging wage and salary sector, African students had determined quite rationally that academic qualifications were a better preparation than vocational.\(^9\) Such

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\(^7\) A useful analysis of the range of the literature in the 1960s (much of it written by expatriates) which was preoccupied with the attitudes of young, unemployed school leavers can be found in Hanson (1980).

\(^8\) Foster was not alone in this view of school leavers; he was conscious of the parallels with Callaway's work in Nigeria: 'The fact is that school leavers' views of their vocation in life are determined largely by what happens outside the school, in the society and economy' (Callaway 1963).

\(^9\) Foster made the point that there was a real sense in which 'academic' education was more 'vocational' than so-called vocational education, since it
positions as existed for technically trained individuals were both fewer in number and less well paid. In addition, it could be said that for much of the colonial period the emerging West African professionals were very clear that they should pursue for their people the same form of academic education as characterised the education of the European elite in the Gold Coast. Accepting an education 'adapted to Africans', they argued, would compromise aspirations to social and political equality (King 1971).

School data on the Vocational School Fallacy

In order to explore the rationality of the Ghanaian school pupil, Foster decided to analyse the pattern of career aspirations of pupils at the end of their middle and secondary school years, and to use pupils' own perceptions of good jobs, in terms of status and income, to see what light could be thrown on their commonly-alleged obsession with white collar jobs, and their reluctance to consider manual work, whether in agriculture or in technical or vocational settings. We shall first summarise and comment on his results, and then look at them afresh in the light of new data acquired from secondary school pupils in today's very different Ghana.

Foster collected his pupil data from two rather distinct types of school. First, as we mentioned at the start of the paper, he administered questionnaires to 210 boys in the 4th year of what were called middle schools. To make sense of the answers it should be stressed that these schools (somewhat parallel to the secondary modern schools of the UK in the post-war period) were designed to be terminal, unlike the five year, highly selective secondary schools. Fourth year middle school students could realistically have little hope of joining the higher status secondary school stream. Would prepared young people for the jobs with the best pay and prospects in the economy of the time. A.G. Fraser, first joint-principal of Achimota College, had made this same point in the 1920s (King, 1971). This is not to say that technical schools could not also become popular with pupils, as for example they were for a short time in Kenya in the 1970s and early 1980s because of their close links with some of the best known employers in the country (King 1977; Lauglo and Narman 1987).

In 1960, there were some 200,000 pupils in the 4 year terminal middle schools, and just 14,000 in the selective public secondary schools.

In the year that Foster carried out this middle school study, nearly all the pupils from middle school who did manage to make the transition to secondary came from Middle I and Middle II, and just a handful from Middle III. So Middle IV was effectively terminal (Philip Foster to King, 3 September 1999)
their responses to a questionnaire show that their aspirations were hopelessly ambitious for white collar employment?

Foster was able to show that even when they were encouraged first to fantasise about their ideal job, and then say what they expected, in fact, to achieve, their answers were relatively level-headed. In their 'ideal' responses, just over 50% hoped to get artisan and skilled work, while only 30% aspired to get white collar, professional and clerical, jobs. By contrast, in their 'realistic' responses, the white collar proportion fell to 21% and even the aspiration for artisan and skilled work fell sharply to 22%. Instead of their aspirations for skilled work, the largest number now (35%) only expected to get semi-skilled and unskilled work.

It was a small sample of boys from non-selective, low-status middle schools, which were scrapped in the late 1980s, but Foster felt that the results on job aspirations had certainly indicated that the 'pupils displayed a remarkable level of realism' (1965a, 149). It may seem strange to readers now to hear that pupils in the fourth year of post-primary (middle school) education in a newly independent country should aspire in such numbers for artisanal and skilled work. But it should be remembered, in the extraordinary state of secondary school arrangements prevailing at that time in Ghana, that if a pupil in the fourth year of middle school did succeed in passing the common entrance to selective secondary education, he or she had to start all over again, in the first of five years of secondary.²

The second point that should be noted about this 1959 data from middle schools was that the pupils were asked by Foster about jobs and not about work or about self-employment (1965a: 149). We are told that the category of 'Artisans and Skilled Workers' - which was initially so popular with these students - was made up of careers such as electrician, motor mechanic, plumber, carpenter, mason, printer, painter, shoemaker, locomotive engineer, tailor etc. But at this distance from the data, there is no way of knowing whether those who indicated particular artisan trades were (with the exception of locomotive engineer!) thinking of work in the informal

² For the handful of fourth year middle school (i.e. non-selective post-primary) students who did succeed in reaching selective secondary, they would require no less than 15 years of schooling, in all, before they had the option to compete further for entry to their A level in the small number of senior secondary sixth forms.
apprenticeship system which was very widespread in Ghana or in the formal or modern sector of the economy.

In 1961 it was still 10 years before the term 'informal sector' would be first used in academic currency - and in fact would be coined of the informal economy of Accra by Keith Hart (1973); but it is evident that Foster knew well the extent of the informal, indigenous apprenticeship system in West Africa, and saw it as a possible basis for relevant upgrading of vocational and technical skills:

...a considerable amount of road transport in West Africa is serviced and maintained not by highly trained operators but by 'bush mechanics' who themselves have very little formal instruction. Upon this basis has developed a burgeoning system of informal apprenticeship; though most of the instruction is extremely rudimentary, here is an expanding base which can be built upon (1965a, 156).

Before we leave Foster's first sample, and turn to his larger national sample, there is a further point that is worth making. This middle school sample is drawn from the final years of 9 so-called 'academic-type' schools in Accra. Although it is almost certainly the case that these lower status post-primary schools did mimic the academic orientation of the selective secondary sector, their centrally laid-down curriculum was meant to have been diversified, and they were meant to have included 'housecraft and woodwork', 'arts and crafts', and 'gardening' along with the academic subjects. Whether they did or not, and whether they were seriously taught, given the distraction of the middle school leaving examination, cannot now be known for certain for these 9 schools. But the reason for underlining it is that we shall see later, in our own 1998-1999 questionnaire data, that the particular track, stream or type of diversification does seem to make quite a difference to the pattern of pupils' career choices.

It is particularly tantalising not to know a little more about these nine schools, and what was actually taught in their different curricula, when what is probably the purple passage of 'The Vocational School Fallacy' article is written about these schools, and not about the national sample of 2 years later. Given what this

13 The middle school sample is discussed in very similar terms in both of Foster's 1965 publications under review here. In neither case is any more known of the detail of what they were asked than the two questions about their 'completely free' choice of job and then the job they actually 'expected' to get.
passage asserts about curriculum, it would still have been good to know in some more detail what curriculum was in fact provided to these pupils:

The operative fact here is not that graduates [of schools] will not accept certain types of employment but rather that the schools (irrespective of what they teach) have been shrewdly used as the gateway into the 'emergent' sector of the economy. The schools themselves can do little about this. So long as parents and students perceive the function of education in this manner, agricultural education and vocational instruction in the schools is [sic] not likely to have a determinative influence on the occupational aspirations and destinations of students. Aspirations are determined largely by the individual's perception of opportunities within the exchange sector of the economy, destinations by the actual structure of opportunities in that sector (emphasis in the original 1965a, 151).14

This very strong version of the case against the 'vocationalisation' of the curriculum we shall return to in the 1990s when the Government of Ghana had introduced a whole series of agricultural, vocational and commercial subjects in the curriculum of the regular senior secondary schools.

A national sample for 'The Vocational School Fallacy'

Two years later, in 1961, Foster drew a national sample of secondary school pupils in their 5th year from 23 highly selective academic secondary schools. Actual responses amounted to 963 cases, or 45.8% of all enrolled boys, and 45.4% of all girls, in the fifth forms of the day. These high percentages concealed the fact that of the 963, no less than 775 were boys, and only 188 girls. This disparity was probably one reason why it was decided that only the male data should be used for the 'Vocational School Fallacy' article, though in the much longer monograph, the two key chapters (on achievement,

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14 He re-emphasised the point very vividly a couple of pages later: ‘....It follows, therefore, that no amount of formal technical, vocational or agricultural instruction alone is going to check the movement from the rural areas, reduce the volume of unemployment, or indeed necessarily have any effect on the rate of economic development’ (1965a, 153).
selection and recruitment; and on aspirations) do deal with both male and female data.\(^{15}\)

His purpose in this national investigation of selective secondary education was by no means concerned with an examination of the Vocational School Fallacy; indeed the term does not even appear in *Education and Social Change in Ghana*.\(^{16}\) Rather the data allowed him to consider the role of the key secondary school sector and its possible reflection of and impact on patterns of social stratification. Despite considerable evidence of differentiation in levels of achievement measured by examinations, even the very selective secondary schools were successfully drawing on a relatively wide segment of the Ghanaian population. Foster concluded that recruitment into selective secondary education was from a very broad basis indeed, and because of the key allocative role of the high status schools in determining access either to the emerging sixth forms or to higher education, he was able to affirm

> that there can be no doubt that the schools operate as extraordinarily effective channels for occupational and social mobility (1965b, 258).\(^{17}\)

Although this concern with the socio-economic background of pupils was not the principal focus of the Vocational School Fallacy article, it does in one way provide an important backdrop to considering now the occupational aspirations of this group of young people in Ghana. The schools, despite their high degree of selectivity, were operating in a relatively meritocratic way. Therefore the sample that Foster used is by no means the voice of second and third generation educated families, but includes a substantial number of young people from rural backgrounds, and with markedly low levels of parental education. The knowledge that a significant proportion of the aspirations we now examine are

\(^{15}\) Though Foster could show that selective secondary schools recruited from a surprisingly broad spectrum of the Ghanaian population, the striking inequality was in patterns of female recruitment. In 1961, girls in secondary school in Ghana were drawn from a much more restricted segment of society than boys.

\(^{16}\) There is a good deal of discussion, however, of the failings of the various technical and vocational schemes of the colonial period.

\(^{17}\) The only exception to this generalisation would be the Northern region. But otherwise, there were even in the most prestigious secondary schools significant numbers of pupils from entirely uneducated rural parents (1965b, 246).
of first generation children of farmers and fishermen must be borne in mind when we revisit Foster's data a little later.

There were three dimensions of aspirations that Foster was concerned to explore - i. pupils' perceptions of occupational status and income, ii. pupils' vocational aspirations and expectations, and iii. their hopes and expectations of further academic and vocational study after basic secondary education.

To provide a basis against which to judge their own aspirations for employment, it will be useful to look at some features of pupil perceptions of occupational status and income, and in this to pay particular attention to the jobs that are central to the debate about vocational orientation. Foster provided a list of 25 occupations, across a wide range, but including no less than 4 different kinds of teacher (from primary to university), several professional and artisan positions, a few unskilled, and also one or two traditional occupations such as chief.

In many ways the results of the Ghana study were not dissimilar to other studies of this kind, but Foster made much of the fact that these secondary school students did not rank farming at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy (despite what was often alleged of student attitudes to farming). It came in at 16th in prestige rankings, and no less than 10th (out of 25) in perceived income. Foster commented: 'Even among these advanced students farming is still rated moderately high' (1965a, 151) in prestige and income, though only 1% of these students wished or expected to become farmers themselves.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is perhaps a pity that Foster did not treat the term farmer - which, he acknowledged, was a very heterogeneous group - as he had treated teacher. By breaking the latter into four distinct categories, he achieved four very different prestige ratings - from 2nd (university teacher) to 6th (secondary teacher), to 18th and 19th for middle school and primary teacher respectively; and in terms of their perceived income, the range was even greater: 2; 5; 16 and 21 respectively.

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18 It should be noted that these ratings are for male students only, except where stated otherwise. It was explained above that only male figures are provided in the VSF article.
19 University teachers in Legon or Kumasi today will wonder at university incomes being ranked second in the hierarchy of occupations, when it is commonplace for lecturers now to have to find additional sources of income to
We shall note later, from our own survey data, that farmer and other terms such as businessmen benefit from being differentiated into wider categories. By contrast, the other clear artisanal or skilled jobs - motor car mechanic and carpenter - were placed far below the perhaps artificially high position of farmer - at 20th and 23rd in status (just above farm labourer and street cleaner) and at 19th and 22nd in respect of income (1965b, 269-272).

Foster's treatment of these perceptions of income and status in an occupational hierarchy allowed him to make the point that, for most jobs, status is very closely related to the reward structure, and thus any attempt to use the curriculum to try and change the attitude towards, say, carpentry or motor mechanics, through a more diversified curriculum is likely to be 'ineffective and economically wasteful' (1965b, 275).

We shall return to look more closely at this position, with the benefit of our own data, but first it will be important briefly to examine what were the vocational aspirations and expectations of this highly selected group of secondary school pupils.

Data on pupils' ideal occupations and then their more realistic expectations were collected through the same contrast that was mentioned at the beginning of this paper with middle school pupils in their fourth year of post-primary education. The results were dramatically different. Compared with the 51% of these middle school boys who had had artisan and skilled work as their ideal, this highly selected secondary school sample had 26% of boys aspiring to go into scientific and technological careers, and some 22% of girls into similar fields. The next most common aspirations were for medicine (17% and 16% respectively) and then secondary school teaching (15% and 16%). What Foster found intriguing about these results was that they did not confirm the stereotype of African pupils obsessed with merely government administrative roles in the civil service (1965b, 275-9). Only some 7% of boys aspired to this kind of job.

make ends meet. Differentiating teachers was straight-forward and non-controversial as the categories are given. Doing the same with richer and poorer (cocoa and subsistence) farmers was carefully considered by Foster but eventually dropped because of the implied link with income which could have prejudiced other responses (Foster to King, personal communication 11th September 2000).
When these young people were obliged, next, to say what they would expect to do if they were unable to continue their studies beyond their present form five [in another question no less than 97% of the boys had aspired to continue with full time schooling after form 5], the picture changed radically. There were now no expectations of joining medicine, law, and the higher administrative services; and there were only small groups expecting to join scientific and technological careers. No less that 34% of boys expected to have to join middle school and primary teaching; and 50% of both boys and girls now expected to take government or other clerical positions.

It is difficult to be completely confident about what is going on in the pupil reactions to this contrast between ideal job and realistic expectation. Arguably, a somewhat artificial 'choice' is created by pre-specifying that the pupils' realistic option must exclude further than form 5 education. What may then happen is a rather mechanistic enumeration of jobs that do not need form 6 and further certification as opposed to a 'realistic' second best. Be that as it may, it is intriguing that even in the conditions of very constrained choice, it would appear that no selective secondary students identified artisanal or skilled careers as a realistic option; and yet 51% of the low status secondary (middle school) pupils chose this route as their ideal. We shall comment further on attitudes to skilled work in our own surveys.

Foster's chapter on 'The aspirations of secondary school pupils' included a valuable attempt to look at patterns of where earlier form five leaver cohorts had actually gone - as compared with where this 1961 group aspired or expected to go. And it ended with a very powerful affirmation of the extraordinary importance of income expectation in influencing the vocational choice of Ghanaian pupils in secondary schools, and an equally powerful assertion that the socio-economic background of pupils seemed to have had 'relatively minor influence' on their aspirations and expectations.

Before turning now to look 40 years later in Ghana at some of Foster's concerns, there are a few methodological observations that

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20 Primary school teacher was clearly still an acceptable outcome in the early 1960s for secondary school students; whereas skilled work was probably seen as leaving the security of government jobs. The detailed questionnaire is only available for the national sample, and not the earlier group of middle school pupils; so it is not possible to compare the precise wording - apart from the two questions mentioned in the text (1965b, 206).
may be made on what has been analysed from these two samples so far.

First, and perhaps most important, there is, as we said earlier, remarkably little attention to curriculum-as-taught in these two publications that have taken such a robust line on the inefficacy of curricular influence on aspirations and expectations. Both the 9 middle schools and the 23 selective secondary schools are said to be academic, but there is no detail on what was actually covered in the five years of selective secondary or the 4 years of middle school. We have mentioned already that, on paper, there was meant to be an element of craft and practical work in the middle schools, but it would be important to know if in fact there was any. Equally in the secondary schools, it would be worth emphasising that there really was no technical or vocational orientation of any kind in these schools.21 We underline this because it will be noted later from our own data that different streams or tracks do seem to have some direct influence on the pattern of occupational aspirations.

Second, although Foster does disaggregate his selective secondary schools into low status and high status, and does explore the differences in social composition and academic achievement in these different segments, and even at the individual school level, he does not examine whether there are different patterns of career aspiration within the different segments of secondary. It could well be that, because of his important finding about the similar social composition of both high and low status secondary education, there might be little differentiation in aspirations. On the other hand, when pupils appear to know well that a minority of secondary schools dominate access to sixth form and thus higher education, it would have been tempting to see if their aspirations were any different both within schools and between schools.

The only disaggregation in the aspirational data is that between the unselective middle schools and the selective secondary, in which it will be recalled that half of the middle school pupils aspired for artisanal and skilled work, in their ideal option, and apparently no selective secondary pupils aspired for these skilled trades in their ideal preferences. What could be driving the differences between these two distinct types of post-primary provision, and especially

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21 According to those who taught in the elite secondary schools at the time of Foster’s main survey, there were no vocational subjects on offer (Bennett to King, 18 July 2000).
when one group elects for the very vocational trades that are at the heart of the vocational school fallacy, and the other not at all?²²

The third and related issue is of course that there were no technical or vocational schools included in either of these two samples. It would indeed have been difficult to cover this possibility since there was only one public secondary-technical school (in Takoradi) operating at the time of Foster's investigations and in 1959 'only some 1 per cent of all persons enrolled in formal educational institutions were receiving instruction in vocational, technical or agricultural subjects' (1965a, 144). But again if there had been a desire to look at aspirations at the disaggregated, individual school level, it would have been fascinating to have seen whether this single exemplar of secondary technical education produced any distinct school effect in its pattern of aspirations.

We thus have the rather paradoxical situation that this most well-known article on the vocational school has itself no data on contemporary vocational education or the admittedly very limited vocationalised curricular options that existed in Ghana in the early 1960s.²³

The aspirations and expectations of secondary school pupils in the late 1990s

In September 1998 and July 1999, it became possible to revisit the continuing relevance of some of Foster's path-breaking work on aspirations and expectations and on the perceptions of status and income amongst secondary level pupils in Ghana.

There was a good deal of evidence that the wider economic context in which the schools found themselves in 1998 and 1999 had changed markedly from those first heady years after independence. The very terms 'emergent' sector and 'exchange sector of the

²² In point of fact, these two groups of pupils are never compared directly in respect of this most intriguing distinction.

²³ The 'Vocational school fallacy' did comment on the late 19th and early 20th century efforts in the Gold Coast to establish agricultural schools and provide technical and vocational education, but there is no information in the article on what was offered in the 1960s. That Foster had observed some agricultural classes in formal schools is evident from his noting: 'No one acquainted with agricultural teaching in West African schools can fail to be impressed by the apathy of the students, which is matched only by that of the teacher' (1965a, 159)
'economy' had made way for terms like the formal sector, but much more important than the changing terminology was a possible change in attitude towards what Dore (1976) had termed 'real jobs' in the formal sector of the economy. In the era of structural adjustment, there had been downsizing of jobs even in the once secure formal sector, and, much worse, it was widely felt that the salaries that could accrue from being a government clerk, or a university teacher - let alone a primary school teacher - were not sufficient for more than a part of the month. In other words, it had become even more essential for many so-called formal sector workers to have at least two jobs, and often the second and third jobs were in what has come to be termed the informal economy. In the 1980s, many young people saw leaving Ghana as their first choice, and the adjustment measures had had a very differential impact on different careers:

The structural adjustment medicine has not had the same effect across the economy, and its impact has differed significantly over the last decade and more. Arguably, with the lifting of price controls, with privatisation and export orientation, merchants, shopkeepers and traders have benefited, as have the privatised gold mining, and individuals with large export-oriented cocoa farms. Overall, agriculture has declined in importance and the service industries have become the largest sector in the economy (Stephens, 2000: 37).

In revisiting the occupational hierarchy and approach used by Foster, it was important to retain as many as possible of his own categories and questions, but, given the changes in the wider economy and in school curricula, it was also important to find a way of allowing pupils to comment on some of the newer career options that had, possibly, become much more commonplace for pupils to begin to consider in the late 1990s. It was also vital to bear in mind in analysing this new data, that central tenet of Foster's vocational school fallacy - that schools and their (vocational)...

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24 Nicholas Bennett, who was involved through the World Bank in some of the major education reforms of the 1980s, has mentioned that through a number of informal surveys he had realised that for several categories of students (from vocational to university) the first career option was in fact to leave the country (personal communication 17.7.00).

25 However, saturation of markets has squeezed many petty traders, and, of course, the prices of gold and cocoa have fluctuated wildly (personal communication, Paul Nugent). A series of books will shortly be available from James Currey on the adjustment experience of Ghana – see Aryeetey et al (2000) and Hutchful (2002).
curricula can have little determinative influence on student perceptions of opportunities, occupational aspirations or destinations. But in revisiting their attitudes, we wanted to be able to look at whether the new vocational streams and tracks appeared to have any influence on pupil orientations.

We were aware that without a longitudinal design in which pupils could be surveyed at the beginning, middle and end of their senior secondary schooling, it would be difficult to reach firm conclusions about school influences; and even an experimental design would have to take account of the fact that pupils' attitudes to careers do change anyway as they mature. All we could hope to show was whether there was an indication that schools were contributing some element to the larger mix of factors behind career aspirations and expectations.

**The new realism: attitudes towards self-employment**

Foster had been able to show that there had been something of a 'white collar myth' surrounding the alleged determination of pupils to seek safe government jobs. Forty years later, we felt it might nicely parallel his concerns to look at pupil attitudes towards self-employment; it would be an appropriate litmus test of pupil realism and of their appreciation of the changing labour market.

Accordingly, additional questions, both closed and open, relating to jobs and to self-employment, were included, first of all, in a pilot questionnaire that went to 220 final year pupils in 5 Accra senior secondary schools in September 1998. It seemed valuable deliberately to include amongst these five schools a substantial variety, with two of the highest calibre schools in Accra, a third which had originally been a middle school, a fourth which was a secondary technical school, and finally a private secondary school. But with the importance of understanding more about the outlook of those in vocational schools, most of whom would have completed at minimum the three years of junior secondary school, it

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26 In Foster's 1961 survey of secondary schools, he selected those in the final year of the selective 5 year secondary schools, and not those in the even more selective emerging 6th forms. In the subsequent reform, secondary education was divided into 3 years of junior and 3 years of senior secondary.

27 Because of the growing importance of private secondary education in Ghana, Foster had wished to include the private sector within his national sample, but the schools at the time had not been enthusiastic.
was decided also to include 4 vocational institutions, two run by government and 2 run by NGOs (a total of 105 young people).

Apart from re-using many of Foster’s questions, we also asked: ‘Would you be interested in becoming self-employed and working for yourself?’ While this is perhaps a leading question, no less than 89% of the combined secondary school and vocational students said they would, and then went on to illustrate and confirm this by detailing the particular character of that self-employment. At first sight this would seem to support Foster’s position - regardless of school type, pupils were signalling an interest in considering self-employment, presumably because of the changes they saw in the economy around them. In other words, one of the things that seems to have changed most dramatically is the organisational setting in which pupils say they would prefer to work.

The very high proportion of those ready to consider working for themselves is parallel to the even higher figure which responded to Foster’s query ‘Do you hope to continue your full-time education after you have completed your secondary school course?’ This produced no less than 97% of pupils who aspired to do so. But it was precisely these very high figures that led Foster to probe the realistic expectations of these young people. We did the same.

This very high, apparent interest in self-employment was therefore explored further in a second, larger survey of secondary schools nine months later, including 4 of the same 5 Accra schools that had been used the previous year, and then three new schools in Volta Region (2 in Ho, the regional capital, and 1 more rural). The total size of this second survey was 522. This time, amongst other things, we were anxious to follow up our earlier query about self-employment, and oblige pupils to think about this further in variety

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28 A big difference from Foster’s day is the huge number of vocational training schools (mostly private/NGO) that exist now and that did not exist then in the early 1960s, related to informal and semi-skilled opportunities. - I owe this insight to Nicholas Bennett of World Bank.

29 It is interesting to note that there was virtually no difference in this high level of interest in considering self-employment, amongst the different schools and technical training institutes.

30 It is interesting to note that in a national sample of 2000 surveyed in July 1999 by Michigan State University, no less than 86% agreed that individuals should pursue good business ideas, even if they must invest savings or borrow to make a business succeed (Bratton et al. October 1999: 23).

31 We are grateful to Tony Somerset for a discussion of the importance of the organisational setting.
of different ways. On the one hand, we were keen to take
cognisance of the fact that many young people might have become
aware of 'straddling' (being in both a formal sector job and another
position, possibly in the informal sector); hence to ask them to select
just one out of a list of work options might also produce a
misleading response. On the other hand, procedurally, we
suspected that if we asked pupils to indicate the range of what they
would accept before obliging them to choose amongst these, we
might get a more interesting and revealing response.

So, after asking them an open choice question about their ideal job -
almost identical in phrasing to Foster's question - we then went on
to probe as follows:

'If you were free to choose, who would you like to work for? Please
tick ALL those you would consider':

Table 1 Work and self-employment preferences of senior
secondary pupils in Ghana (multiple choices: N: 522)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For yourself (self-employed)</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For your family</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the government, or govt-run organisation</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a private firm</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When pupils were able to choose more than one, by far the three
most popular categories were: working for a private firm, then self-
employment, and then for government or para-statal organisation.
The results very powerfully confirmed the positive indications from
the pilot about self-employment. But, having established that self-
employment was certainly attractive when pupils were asked to
select ALL they would consider, the key question now was whether
self-employment would still be selected by many pupils when they
could select ONLY ONE of five possibilities:

'And who would you MOST like to work for? Please tick ONLY
ONE.'

Table 2 Work and self-employment preferences of senior
secondary pupils in Ghana (single choice: N=522)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For yourself (self-employed)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For your family</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the government, or a govt-run organisation</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a private firm 31%
Other, please specify 2%

It was remarkable that, presented with a situation where they could only choose one, the self-employment option remained as strong with this group of senior secondary students as working for government or the private sector. This seems a very suggestive, even robust, finding, and it must be remembered that it is not derived from a group of low status secondary schools (to use Foster's term), but from a very diverse group, which included two of the most prestigious schools in the whole of Ghana - Achimota (co-educational) and Presbyterian Boys.32

What was also very remarkable, however, was the range of interschool variation in preferences for self-employment, as well as for government/parastatal employment, and for private firms. Earlier, in the discussion of Foster's work, the importance of disaggregation amongst schools was mentioned. The following example will illustrate such substantial differences at the level of the individual school that it may well suggest that school character, tradition and location, as well as social composition (and family background) are playing some part. One other intriguing element in the chemistry of aspirations may well be what has been termed the effects of school 'chartering' whereby the unique characteristics of particular schools can actually confer on pupils both higher and lower aspirations than are justified by their educational performance (Somerset 1974).33

For instance, Achimota had no less than 53% of its 129 sampled pupils actually preferring self-employment, while the most rural school, Awudome (in Volta Region) had only 8% of its 41 sampled pupils selecting this option as first choice. The other high quality Accra school, Presbyterian Boys, recorded 25% of its 106 sampled pupils choosing self-employment as their first preference. What could be driving these very different numbers?

One of the biggest contrasts through this school-level disaggregated data is that between preferences for government work versus working for a private firm. By far the highest preferences in two of

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32 These two very high prestige schools in Accra were responsible for no less than 235 of the 522 in the second questionnaire.
33 I am indebted to Tony Somerset for reminding me of the relevance of the schools' 'chartering' effects, and also for suggesting that there could be school effects linked to the presence or absence of career guidance programmes. We have unfortunately no data on the latter in Ghana.
the three regional schools (in Volta) are to work for Government. The most rural school, Awudome, registered no less than a 78% preference for government employment, and one of the other two schools, in the regional capital, Ho, registered a 42% preference for government work. By contrast Achimota had as few as 9% of its pupils electing for government work as their first choice.

The other angle on this is the attitude towards working for a private firm. There is again a large range, with more than three of the urban schools having 40% or higher, and the most rural school having as low as 11%. These patterns might seem to suggest that being educated in a city school in the midst of a range of private sector initiatives is one of the factors influencing this, as compared to a rural school with little evidence of large-scale formal enterprise in the vicinity. In other words, this would support Foster's assumption about the determining effect of the economy. But then comes the surprise: the only private secondary school in our sample, Harvard College in Central Accra, which has a strong emphasis on business studies, registered the second highest preference of all schools for government work (at 50%), and had a relatively low score for private firms (11%).

This sheer variation amongst schools, therefore, suggests that there could well be a significant set of school level factors operating on pupil choice, in addition to whatever influence the economic environment and parental background may bring to bear. We shall

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34 The Ho sample may be skewed. Ho is singular because it has never been a town of great commercial significance. Its success rests very heavily on being the Regional (and District) capital. For pupils in Ho, there is likely to be a heightened expectation of getting a job in the regional administration or in one of the state corporations that have their headquarters there (Paul Nugent, personal communication).

35 We are indebted to Terry Allsop of DFID for suggesting that over the last 40 years the parental background of Achimota pupils may have shifted from government service to successful private sector careers, and thus changed as much as pupil perspectives (Allsop to King, 8th August 2000). A similar point has been made by a group of JICA-sponsored teacher training tutors in Hiroshima on 14th September 2000: that to the parents and children of poor farmers in the area around Awudome, a government job will still look like a secure option, while to the pupils of the best urban schools, the government jobs will appear a very poor alternative to private business.

36 Dela Afenyadu has suggested that Harvard College whose catchment area includes some of poorest urban communities in Accra, will be reflecting, in part, in its pupil preferences for government jobs the social status, present occupation, and lower ambitions of the parents (Afenyadu to King personal communication 14 August 2000).
return to look at this in more detail in a moment when we examine more specific job choices in different kinds of schools.

But, first, it may be timely to try and get behind what pupils are thinking of when they mention an interest in self-employment, for it is clear that they are making these choices against an economic environment that has shifted markedly since Foster’s day. It was assumed that like the occupations of ‘farmer’, ‘businessman’ or ‘teacher’, this category of ‘self-employment’ would cover a substantial range, but that in the minds of some of the most highly selected pupils in the country it might include examples that linked income and status, as Foster had shown for the employment choices of his sample. Here, from the 1998 survey, are just a few illustrations of ‘self-employment’ from one of Presbyterian Boys Secondary School’s science streams:

Open a private clinic (6)//my own architectural firm// Writing and publishing//setting up a computer firm//car mechanic// leisure artwork and painting//a firm to do construction and development projects//setting up a fast food chain or a hotel//fashion designing //electrical & electronic repair firm//seller of chemicals//music studio//computer programming //large scale farming of cash crops (2)//developing a research institute//pilot training school//lucrative barbering//small animal production//largescale bee-keeping//small scale poultry//cash crop farm//private tuition in science & computing//smallscale pigfarming//manufacturing local, natural soap//lucrative shoemaking// (1998 survey data; nos. in brackets indicate the numbers of pupils making this choice).

We suspect that Foster would be delighted with this list of some 30 pupils' aspirations for what we might call entrepreneurial self-employment, because of the range of their interests and also the strong scientific and technological (and even agricultural) emphasis. Equally it probably shows some shrewd insight into the way that doctors, in particular, are known to be setting up private clinics in Ghana, and it almost certainly reflects on some of the income possibilities associated with their own parents’ work.

And then by way of contrast, some of the self-employment suggestions made by girl pupils in O’Reilly’s Secondary School, also from the 1998 survey. It can be immediately seen that there is a
very different feel to this range of self-employment aspirations by girls from the visual arts and home economics tracks:

- Book binding (2)
- Graphic design (2)
- Fashion design (3)
- Computer aided design (2)
- Printing
- Snack bar (2)
- Catering (5)
- Hotel management (4)
- Craft products
- Restaurant owner (3)
- Small scale enterprise/trader (3)
- Design & dressmaking (3)
- Nutritionist
- Food stalls

(1998 survey data; nos. in brackets indicate the numbers of pupils making this choice)

Part of this difference may be explained by the fact that these pupils were girls, which may have given less of a technological and scientific feel than the options from one of the best science streams in the country. And it should be remembered that there is a very dynamic tradition of female enterprise in Ghana which could also have been influential, and to this we shall return in a moment.

But there still remains the key issue of whether beyond the influence of family and the impact of the changing opportunity structure outside the schools, there is some kind of school influence in these very particular patterns of self-employment aspiration. There is already some suggestion of this in the substantial school-level differences in aspiration for self-employment and government versus private employment, but to look a little closer at a possible school effect, it is necessary to note some of the major curricular changes in both junior (JSS) and senior secondary schools (SSS) which came into effect from 1987.

Afenyadu (1998: 14) puts these changes from the old middle and secondary schools succinctly. It can be seen that the curricular additions are some of the very items at the heart of the vocational school fallacy debate:

Apart from English language, local language, general mathematics and general science, which have been retained from the middle school system, new courses such as life skills, vocational skills, technical skills and technical drawing, social studies and cultural studies have been introduced into the JSS curriculum.

At the SSS level, apart from English, mathematics, agricultural science and Ghanaian languages, which have been retained as core courses (from the old secondary school system), elective courses introduced in the new system have been grouped
under business management, home economics, general, arts and science. Home economics students study food and clothing and textiles. Business students either study costing, accounting and business management as a set of electives or study clerical office duties and typing. Some selected schools offer technical drawing and technical studies and/or visual arts as electives. Computer skills are being introduced gradually into many schools.

These curricular changes mean that, unlike the 775 secondary school pupils in Foster's national sample in 1961 who were, apparently, undifferentiated by track, our approximately 742 secondary pupils in 1998 and 1999 can be identified with the following very specific tracks, options or streams:37

**Achimota:** General Arts (2); General Science; Agricultural Science; Visual Arts; Home Economics

**Presbyterian Boys:** General Science (2); General Arts; Business

**O'Reilly:** General Arts; Business; Visual Arts; Home Economics

**Kaneshie Secondary Technical:** Metalwork; Building Construction

**Harvard College:** Business (2)

**Awudome:** General Science

**Ola:** Business

**Mawuli:** Technical; General Science

[Survey Data, 1998-9. Figures in brackets indicate numbers of streams sampled]

The possibility of a school influence or effect was explored further in several different ways. The first was to examine pupils' perceptions of their two most valuable school subjects 'that may help you in the work you want to do'. It was thought entirely

37 Nicholas Bennett, of the World Bank, who was one of the key architects of the overall education reform in Ghana, has mentioned that the government, in 1990-1991, actually wanted senior secondary schools completely diversified by type as compared to the package of programme options that was finally agreed (Bennett to King, 26 Jan 2000).
possible that there would be a major emphasis by pupils on the importance of English and maths, regardless of the specialisation by track. Again, it was crucial to review this at the disaggregated school level; at the aggregate level, not a single subject except maths (8%) got more than 4% of total pupil responses. The results were quite remarkably consistent once we looked at what was happening in the individual school: pupils almost always picked out as most valuable the very subjects that were at the heart of their specialisation (and at the centre of the vocational school fallacy debate):

**Presbyterian (science):** 93% of valuable subjects were accounted for by maths, physics, biology and chemistry (English was not even mentioned)

**Harvard (business):** 86% of valuable subjects were accounted for by accounting, business management, economics, and keyboard skills (English = 4%; maths = 5%)

**O’Reilly (visual arts):** 82% of valuable subjects were accounted for by graphic design, textiles

**O’Reilly (home economics):** 80% of valuable subjects were accounted for by clothing & textiles, general knowledge in art, management in living and home economics

**Achimota (agricultural science):** 78% of valuable subjects were accounted for by agricultural economics, general agriculture, core science, and horticulture.

**Achimota (general arts):** 82% of the valuable subjects were accounted for by government and history (English getting only 3% and maths 6%).

**Kaneshie (technical):** 75% of the valuable subjects were covered by building construction, engineering science, metal technology, technical drawing (English = 3% and maths = 5%)

These are surprising and yet extremely consistent results, in which a sample of highly selected secondary school pupils identified their specialised stream subjects as the most valuable, and when asked whether there were subjects that were missing from their curriculum, they merely added further technical and practical subjects, as well as subjects like French, presumably because of its vocational use.
This school-level variation in attitude to different subjects was paralleled by very clear evidence of different preferences for self-employment by school track. Thus when we put together all the different schools and looked at the variation by track, there were again some very suggestive patterns towards self-employment, as opposed to working for the family, government or a private firm. As can be seen in Table 3:

**Who would you most like to work for? PLEASE TICK ONE**

Table 3 Preferred employer by school track

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Employer</th>
<th>School Track</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocation/Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt.</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see very clearly, those who are in the more vocational and technical tracks, such as Visual Arts, Home Economics, or technical studies, do appear to have a much stronger preference for self-employment (46%) than those in other tracks. But even here there are exceptions. For instance, in Achimota’s science stream, an astonishingly high 71% of the pupils said they would prefer to work for themselves.

There would certainly appear to be some kind of school or curriculum effect at work here. But to pursue it further, the ideal career aspirations of pupils in these individual schools were examined. Again, there was a very strong correlation between the particular track and the occupations most desired. In other words, there was no such thing as an Achimota response to our questions;

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38 Column totals may not sum to 100% due to exclusion of "other" responses.
it differed by track and stream. Thus in Achimota which was the top academic school (along with Mfantsipim) in Foster’s sample, its agricultural science stream had an extraordinary variety of preferred agricultural careers mentioned, as a first choice, - including agricultural economist, agricultural scientist, agricultural engineer, horticulturist, landscape architect, soil scientist, veterinary officer, livestock farmer, poultry, vegetable and fruit specialists, large scale animal & livestock farmer, large scale fruit farmer. Whereas in its general arts stream which had regarded government and history as its key subjects, there turned up the following very different shape of vocational aspirations: lawyer, judge or solicitor (52% of replies), administrator (10%), diplomat, legal secretary, company owner, factory owner, tourism civil servant, architect, customs and excise officer - and - for good measure - President of the Nation! (1998 survey data)

Following Foster, we pursued these ideal aspirations of 1998 and 1999 by a probe into their realistic expectations of what they thought they would be doing after finishing their education, and who they thought they would, in fact, most likely be working for. And again there seemed to be a clearly different pattern - not just by school but by stream and track. Thus, the 30% of the entire 1999 sample who, we had noted, would have preferred self-employment as their first choice, now fell dramatically to 14%, and many of those who still stuck to their guns, and expected to be self employed had adjusted downwards the level of their ambitions. This is entirely rational since pupils know that entering self-employment often requires work experience, some capital and connections.39

Obliged to be more realistic, it is interesting to note that almost half of the pupils in the established urban schools looked to private firms, and then to government jobs, while as many as many as 80% of the pupils in the most rural school still looked to the government as their expected employer.

39 It is worth noting that this realistic approach to self-employment still differed a good deal by school and by track. The most notable was Harvard College where as many as 30% now expected to enter self-employment. But given what we have said above in footnote 36, this ‘realistic’ self-employment may be much more of the subsistence than enterpreneurial variety.
Table 4: Who do you think you will work for? Please Tick One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Employer</th>
<th>All Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVT./PARASTATAL</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE FIRM</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 14% who expect to be self-employed do not only comprise those who, earlier, aspired to self-employment. Indeed more than a third of this group had originally aspired to another employer, with over 20% aspiring to work for the government.

This mismatch between aspiration and expectation is greatest for those who aspire to self-employment. While only 26% of those who had aspired to self-employment really expect to be self-employed after school, the corresponding figures for those aspiring to work for a private firm is 65% and for the government 75%. What can this mean? The career trajectories of those wanting to be self-employed are apparently not so fixed or so linear? Or that the meanings of self-employment are markedly different in different schools?

The answer may in part lie in the difference that the particular career makes to the nature of pupils' aspirations and expectations. In other words, self-employment as a private doctor, accountant or engineer would be rather different from self-employment as a seller or trader, in the sense that pupils might well aspire to run their private clinics, engineering or accountancy firms, but might recognise they would probably need to start by working for government or another employer first. This was exactly the pattern that emerged when we looked at the organisational settings that pupils aspired to for these three most popular careers (doctors, engineers and accountants). No less than 28%, 22% and 33% aspired to be self-employed in these three careers respectively, but when obliged to be more realistic, these fell to 9%, 16% and 11% (and the overall numbers also fell substantially). Realistically, many of these would-be medics, accountants and engineers thought they would in
fact be working for the government instead of for themselves (68%, 36% 47%). Professional builders were a somewhat different case, almost certainly because of the character of the job. No less than 62% in this career had aspired to be self-employed (with no one aspiring to work for government), but likewise both the overall numbers and the percentage expecting to be self-employed had fallen when asked to be realistic (25%), but the expectation had been more to work for in the private sector than for the government. A similar pattern was evident for careers like catering, designing and business owners. High aspirations towards self-employment (45%, 56% and 56% respectively) tended to be converted into expectations of working more in the private sector.40

For all these careers mentioned above the numbers of those aspiring had fallen – often quite substantially – when obliged to be more realistic. At the other end of the spectrum were a few careers like teaching, or small scale selling and trading, where the numbers of those aspiring had been very small, but realism had encouraged a change of heart. Thus only 14 out of a total of 522 had actually aspired to teaching, but as many as 34 eventually thought they might find themselves in this career. And similarly with trading, only a handful had wanted to be traders, but no less than 36 expected they might be. Here again, the organisational setting is important, since self-employment as a teacher is much more problematic than a lawyer or doctor. Hence, logically, we find those expecting to be teachers are located in the government or the private sector, rather than in self-employment.

Occupational Rankings

In this challenge of sorting out the school influences from the impact of the surrounding economy, it was finally thought to be useful to compare our pupils' perceptions of income and of status with almost the same 25 occupations that Foster had used 40 years earlier. It might provide an insight into what had happened to the status and income of jobs over the adjustment era. We made a few changes. Where Foster had broken down 'teacher' into 4 levels (from university to primary), we retained it as one, but we broke 'farmer' and 'businessman' into large-scale and small-scale. We also included some newer careers, such as fashion designer,

40 Overall numbers in these three careers (11,16 and 16) are so very much smaller than those who had aspired to be medics, accountants and engineers (106, 107 and 64) that we cannot be as sure of the trends.
restaurateur, NGO/Community worker and engineer. The results from the pilot survey (of 1998) were quite strikingly different from the main survey of the following year, and for a reason that had not been anticipated. Where Foster had asked about the high and low 'respect' and 'prestige' of these jobs, we first asked (in 1998) about their 'importance' in Ghana and then (in 1999) about their 'high and low respect' and their 'status'. The quite extraordinary difference between the 'importance' and 'respect' of particular jobs made it very clear to us that our respondents were very sensitive to nuances of meaning. Certain jobs were 'important' in our pupils’ eyes, but they had very low 'respect' or 'status'.

In fact, as Table 5 demonstrates, certain jobs were regarded by secondary pupils as 'important' but low 'status' - e.g. teachers, large-scale farmers, nurses and policemen, while others were seen as high status but not particularly important e.g. politician, restaurant owner and chief. On the whole, pupils linked status to income, and differentiated both from importance.

This table with its data from two slightly different surveys allows of a slightly 'non-Fosterite' interpretation. As we had noted earlier, Foster had argued that, for most jobs, status is very closely related to reward structure; hence there is little purpose in trying to use the school or the curriculum to change perceptions. But the following Table 5 might suggest that the close linkages amongst income, status and aspiration are not the whole story, or that the story is not so simple. Clearly, many pupils do not only see rewards in terms of status and income. Some aspire to jobs that are important (to the nation or to themselves) even if their status is low. The role of the school in ordering and influencing these attitudes is also likely to be rather complex.

Before looking further at Table 5, it might be interesting to see just two of a large number of comments by pupils who thought that low status jobs were very important:

If I am free to choose any that that I wanted, I’d prefer to be a teacher because without teachers, the country will not develop (Harvard College, male, Arts Stream 1999 Survey Data).

Students are mostly trained academically, and not in creative works which will help to develop our skills. These students end up doing only white collar jobs, hence leaving precious resources which could be utilised to generate income and
develop the idle economy (Ola, female, Business Studies, 1999 Survey Data).

**Table 5** Occupational Rankings by importance, status and income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Scale Farmers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Scale Business-men</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Designer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22(22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcar Fitter</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24(24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Owner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11(14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this occupational ranking, doctor remained No.1 (as with Foster), but both in importance and in status. No. 2 in terms of 'importance was our undifferentiated teacher but in terms of status & respect, the teacher tumbles to No 17 (very close to primary teacher in Foster). Nurse is another job that is regarded as important to Ghana but has relatively low status, and policeman is similar. Engineer - one of our new categories - comes out as No. 3 both in importance and status, and large-scale farmer, at No. 4, is seen perhaps surprisingly as important but low status. But what is clear in these rankings is that some of the recognised 'skilled' jobs, such as motorcar fitter, carpenter, small scale farmer, small scale businessman and petty trader are all relatively or very low in importance and status.

But when it comes to ranking some of these occupations in income terms, there are many more dramatic changes than in Foster's day. Our undifferentiated teacher falls to 19th from being second in importance, and the carpenters and fitters fall right to the bottom of the income hierarchy. But it is an interesting perception of several of our new jobs, many of which could be self-employed as much as employed, that fashion designers and restaurateurs moved up towards the top of the income scale along with large-scale businessmen. In fact, it could be argued that the majority of jobs in the top ten for income, including lawyers and doctors, as we heard from the pupils, could involve working for oneself as easily as being employed.

Methodologically, the case for the disaggregation of certain job categories is plain. Foster had shown the wisdom of this with the term 'teacher' which our surveys had left undifferentiated. But he had made much of the fact that in his survey 'farmer' had been 16th

---

We had considered breaking teacher into several categories, but with the constraints of space felt it more important to do this with 'farmer' and 'businessman' which Foster had had as single categories.
in prestige ranking and 10th in income. Whereas we have seen, by dividing farmer into large and small, that the small-scale farmer is right at the very bottom of importance, status and income, while large-scale farmer has a much more significant ranking.

But even here, it would be valuable, if there were space, to sift out how these hierarchies change at the individual school level. However, it was already plain that there were significant differences between the school responses and the vocational institutions we had included in the 1998 pilot survey. Just one example: carpenter was rated 18th in importance by secondary school pupils but 9th by pupils in specialised vocational institutions. So again, it looks like there might be an institutional effect behind some of these differential rankings.

Concluding observations and continuing challenges

Foster's original monograph and article did a great deal more than provoke one of the longest-running debates on the politics of the manipulation of schooling in the developing world that there has ever been; he established that the social composition of what were in fact highly differentiated forms of selective secondary education were remarkably similar, and that there was a powerful belief that such schools were 'open to all individuals of talent, irrespective of their origins' (1965b, 239). We can argue something supportive of this position. Already from our 1999 sample it is quite clear what secondary school pupils believe are 'those things which people have said are important to being successful, in the job you hope to do'. Indeed, challenged to say what single thing was more important to being successful than all the rest, pupils were in no doubt that it was intelligence (37%), then, interestingly, honesty (20%) and only then certification (14%). A belief that Ghana remains a meritocratic society seems still to be alive today as in Foster's time, and in some respects perhaps more so. However, the reality may be that the parental background and social composition of the high and low

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42 The position of chief was rated as 4th in status terms in Foster's sample and 8th in terms of income. By 1998/9, it was being rated as low as 22nd from the top in terms of importance, but was still 4th in status & respect and between 11th and 14th in income.
status secondary schools may have been widening over these 40 years.  

When it comes to pupil assessment today of how well schools prepare young people for the world of work, there is again a clear first emphasis on the importance of their certifying role, but, intriguingly, this is followed both by creativity and then by 'practical skills'. Again, pupils seem to be pointing to something that looks like a curriculum effect, though more analysis would need to be undertaken at the school level to verify the variety of positions taken on these key school factors in later success.

The debate about practical subjects in primary and secondary school remains highly relevant today in several countries. In Kenya, there has just been a national commission reviewing the 8-4-4 system which has had a strongly practical emphasis since the reform of 1985, and there have been powerfully competing interpretations of the results (Afenyadu et al. 2001). And in South Africa a similar debate has been developing as it seeks to reform its basic education curriculum towards a series of core skills, including practical income generating activities (Afenyadu et al. 2001; King and McGrath, 2001).

One reason the issue will remain in the foreground of contention, even in the new century, is that clearly pupils are directly affected by their perceptions of the opportunity structure outside the schools - whether in the post-independent Ghana of 1959-1961 or in the very different economic milieu of 1998-1999. But equally, it seems undeniable from our data, that there is some persistent form of school or track effect. This is not so obvious when the data is aggregated, but it shows up very strongly with disaggregation.

Of course, there will continue to be debate about whether in school systems that have tracks, it is the tracks that attract particular pupils

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43 The gap may be even greater between our sample of schools as a whole, and the large new group of Community Secondary Schools that have been developing with World Bank support in the late 1990s.

44 In a rather provocative finding from March 1999, Nishimura and Orodho found that no less than 78% of secondary school students in Kenya thought that vocational and technical subjects in formal schools were 'very necessary and very important or necessary and important; and yet 86% of their teachers thought exactly the opposite. Equally, Kerre and Oketch (1999), as part of the larger DFID study, found that at secondary school level 63% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way schools had provided preparation for self employment, as compared to 66% for regular employment.
with these specific career orientations rather than the tracks themselves that influence attitudes to work and to jobs. Without longitudinal studies, these questions cannot probably be finally resolved, and even these would be challenging because of pupil maturation in school.

There is a further factor that certainly plays a substantial role in the complex chemistry of career orientation which we have alluded to at various points, and that is the influence on pupils of their parents' involvement in particular work. This is especially important but difficult to disentangle in Ghana where there is a continuing very strong tradition of women engaging in trade and business, at all social levels. In our 1999 sample, from Achimota to Harvard, there were very high proportions of mothers engaged in such activities. Here again, the influence on attitudes towards enterprise and towards different kinds of self-employment of this home experience is difficult to discount.

Foster's message today as in 1963 remains relevant for any attempts to use schools to deliver massive changes in attitude and aspiration in the absence of any parallel initiatives in the larger economic environment. His doctrine was an unpopular and necessary corrective in an era that had often a naive trust in the transformational potential of formal schools. But we hope we may have said enough to suggest that influence on attitudes and expectations is not an either-or dichotomy between school and society, - rather a complex compound of both, and of family backgrounds. Schools may well turn out to add to or mitigate the influence of society. But the continual weakening of teacher quality and of teacher salaries are bound to put at risk many positive school effects in the bulk of ordinary schools (King 2001).

At the turn of the 20th century, Foster's work retains its relevance in so many ways. Nor is this famous article only about vocational

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45 If we put together the various categories of business involvement, we have the following proportions of mothers involved in enterprise in our 7 schools: Achimota (61 of 123), Presbyterian Boys (50 of 107), O'Reilly (59 of 75), Ola (26 of 41), Mawuli (39 of 86), Awudome (22 of 36) and Harvard (34 of 37).

46 It should not be surprising to learn that Foster (1969) was one of the first to be highly critical of Nyerere's ambitious social goals for the schools of Tanzania in Education for Self-reliance (Nyerere 1968). But for a useful commentary on Foster's critique of this reform, see David Court (1972). Court reaches the interesting conclusion 'Critical scrutiny of this (Foster's) analysis gives a number of grounds for the view that schools are not entirely powerless to contribute to social change' (ibid. p.10).
fallacies; rather it is about any attempt to manipulate a single element of education and training to produce an economic effect out of school. Today, it is not impossible if Foster were to examine the rapidity with which an international, political consensus has emerged in the last ten years around the centrality of basic education to the eradication of poverty that he would be tempted to write instead on the dangers of 'a basic education fallacy in pro-poor growth'.

But we should end this account with Philip Foster himself. He has, because of the vocational school fallacy, been assumed to be hostile to all forms of vocationalisation in schools. Which is not the case. And students of today who only read this single article, and not the 17 other substantial publications he completed between 1962 and 1968, could be forgiven for thinking that this theme was something that Foster specialised Which was not the case either. Philip Foster's own comment on the vocational school fallacy is where we must leave this ongoing debate for the moment:

Having said this, I must add that I personally am in favour of attempts at more diversified types of curriculum and school systems for pedagogical and educational reasons. Don’t expect such changes to influence the realities of the labour market, however, as George [Psacharopoulos] found out in his Discus project evaluations. Moreover it is simply hypocritical to talk about more ‘practical’ training in African schools when most are so poor that they can’t even afford a few nails and hammers at best! Moreover, as you well know, I am hostile to elites in poor countries that propose reforms while sending their own kids to elite academic institutions.

Funny about the ‘vocational school fallacy’ – I wrote it in a few days as a “spin-off” from my own major interest in education, class formation and stratification in LDCs. You never can tell what’s going to sell as the ad men say! (Foster to King, personal communication, 3 September 1999).

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47 Of these many publications, none is explicitly concerned with the vocational element in schooling, though see Foster 1964 ‘Secondary school leavers in Ghana: expectations and reality’.
48 George Psacharopoulos and William Loxley (1984) in the World Bank carried out a study in Tanzania and Colombia to try and ascertain the cost-effectiveness of diversified secondary education schemes (in the wider DISCUS research project).
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Foster, P 1965a 'The vocational school fallacy in development planning' in A A. Anderson and M.J. Bowman (Eds.) Education an economic development Aldine Publishing, Chicago.


King, K. J. 1991 *Aid and education in the developing world* Longman, Harlow.


King, K and McGrath, S. 2001 *Knowledge and Enterprise* forthcoming.


1. What is the name of your school? ____________________________

2. What is your track? Eg. Arts, General Science etc. ____________________________

3. What is your form? Please tick one box.

   - Fourth
   - Fifth
   - Sixth
   - Other, please say which... ____________________________

4. What is your age? ________

5. Are you male or female? Please tick ONE box.

   - Male
   - Female

6. After you finish you secondary school course, would you prefer to stay in education or go straight into work? Please tick ONE box.

   - Continue in education/training
   - Go into work

7. If you were free to choose any job that you wished, what kind of job would you like to have? Please explain the job fully

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

7a If you were free to choose, who would you like to work for? Please tick ALL those you would consider.

   - For yourself (self-employed)
   - For your family
   - For the government, or a government run organisation
   - For a private firm
   - Other, please specify ____________________________
7b. And who would you MOST like to work for? Please tick ONLY ONE.

- [ ] For yourself (self-employed)
- [ ] For your family
- [ ] For the government, or a government run organisation
- [ ] For a private firm
- [ ] Other, please specify ____________________________

8. Of course, we cannot always choose the kind of job we should like best of all. From your experience and that of your friends who have left school, what kind of job do you think you are most likely to get, after you have finished your education?

______________________________

9. And of course, we cannot always choose who we work for. Who do you think you are most likely, in fact, to work for after you have finished your education? Please tick ONLY ONE

- [ ] For yourself
- [ ] For your family
- [ ] For the government, or a government run organisation
- [ ] For a private firm
- [ ] Other, please specify ____________________________

10. And what job do you think you will in fact be doing in 10 years time? Again please explain the job fully

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11. What work does your father do? Please be as detailed as possible.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. What work does your mother do? Please be as detailed as possible.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
13. Here is a list of different types of jobs that people in Ghana have. Read the list carefully and against each job indicate the status and respect in which this job is held. As you see against each job we have put five squares showing whether the job is held in very high respect, high respect, average respect, low respect and very low respect. Against each job put a SINGLE tick in the box showing which best describes the status of these jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Very High Respect</th>
<th>High Respect</th>
<th>Average Respect</th>
<th>Low Respect</th>
<th>Very Low Respect</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
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<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Small-scale farmer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large-scale farmer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small-scale business person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large-scale business person</td>
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<td>Shop assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police-man/woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO/Community worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petty Trader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorcar fitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurant owner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
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<td>Miner</td>
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<td>Factory worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
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<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>Chief</td>
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<td>Actor/Actress</td>
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<td>Soldier</td>
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<td>Fashion designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
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</table>

NOW CHECK YOU HAVEN'T MISSED A LINE!
14. Here are the same jobs again. This time we want you to give us your view on the money these people earn. Put a SINGLE tick in the box opposite the job that you think best describes the incomes these people earn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Very High Income</th>
<th>High Income</th>
<th>Average Income</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
<th>Very Low Income</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
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<td>Journalist</td>
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</table>

AGAIN, PLEASE CHECK YOU HAVEN'T MISSED A LINE.
15. Here are some things that people have said are important to being successful. Please read each of them and rank how important you think they are for making you successful in the job that you hope to do. (1 is very important, 5 is least important.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Very important)</th>
<th>(Not important)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What you family does</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Intelligence</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The school you went to</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Design skills</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Luck</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Certificates gained at school</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relevant job experience</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Getting on well with people</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Honesty</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Being creative</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Ambition to be wealthy</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Risk-taking</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The people you know</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
<td>☐ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Practical skills</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15a. And if you had to say that one of these things was more important to being successful than all the rest, what one would that be? Please write its number in the box.

☐

16. Here are some ways that education prepares you for the world of work. Please read each of them and say how well your school has prepared you for the world of work in each way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Quite Well</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Not well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being creative</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design skills</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates gained at school</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
17. What are the two most valuable subjects you have taken in school that may help you in the work you want to do?

1. ___________________________

2. ___________________________

18. Are there subjects which you COULD NOT get in school but which would have been useful for your future work?

□ No
□ Yes

If yes, please say which: ___________________________

19. Do you hope to continue your full-time education or training after you have completed your secondary school course?

□ Yes
□ No

If yes, what kind of college do you hope to go to?

□ Teacher Training College
□ University
□ In an apprenticeship
□ Technical Institute
□ Nursing College
□ Commercial College
□ Other, Please specify: ___________________________

And what subject do you hope to study there?

________________________________________

Finally, if you think that there is anything else important regarding your education and how it prepares you for the world of work that we have missed please write about it overleaf. We shall read very carefully everything that you say. Thank you for your help.