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THE LACK OF IMPACT OF INFORMATION:
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR A-LEVELS

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The Lack of Impact of Information: Performance Indicators for A Levels

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This article is an evaluation of a project to measure A level results. It considers how teachers were anxious about misuse of performance indicators. The authors are from the School of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Aspects of GCE Advanced (A) level provision have been measured yearly since 1983 in a project called COMBSE, standing for Confidential Measurement-Based Self-Evaluation (Fitz-Gibbon, 1984). The performance indicators were reported to schools each year, and it is the lack of impact of this information which is the topic of this article.

The second author invited the first author, a colleague who had had no contact with the COMBSE project, to interview headteachers and heads of English with a view to ascertaining the impact, if any, which the COMBSE project's yearly reports and meetings had had. In this article we provide first a brief description of the COMBSE project, a full account of the interviews and a discussion of the findings. Our purpose is to draw lessons for the future — a future in which the kind of data collected in COMBSE since 1983 may well become widely collected and reported. Can we ensure that the effort involved is worthwhile? Can we ensure that the information systems which are

developed are used to improve education? How is such information used? What was its impact, if any?

The COMBSE Project

The COMBSE project began in 1983 when a school governor asked for comments on a set of GCE A level results in Mathematics. No comment could be fairly made without knowing at least the kind of pupils entered for the examination and without knowing how comparable pupils had fared at other institutions. Even then it might be difficult to state that the school (or the Mathematics teachers) had had positive or negative effects. Research into the effects of schools on students is not well advanced as was made clear by Reynold's summary of the 'school effectiveness' literature at the BEMAS Research Conference, 1988 (Reynolds, 1988).

Since A levels represent the major filter into the professions and can have, therefore, a profound influence on individual careers, it seemed important to start a study of the effects of schools on A levels.

The research started with an approach to two local education authority (LEA) directors who gave permission to contact headteachers. A letter of invitation was sent to schools inviting representatives to a meeting. Nearly half of those approached attended the meeting and joined the project, making a dozen schools (which later became 10 due to mergers).

Since the research was initially unfunded it was important to keep the scale manageable, so data was collected only in English and Mathematics. The data collection was designed to be as efficient and credible as possible and demands on schools were kept to a minimum. University staff visited each school each year to administer a test and question-

naire. The administration was standardised by use of a tape-recorder. Following the release of the A level results, reports were prepared in which the examination results and attitudes of students in each department (English and Mathematics) were compared across schools, with allowance made for differences in the abilities of the students with whom the department had been working. In other words, a report was prepared each year detailing what would today be called input and output performance indicators. The input, for example, included GCE Ordinary (O) level grades, parental education and occupational status and the ability measures. The output indicators included not only examination results but also attitudes to the school, to the subject studied, educational aspirations and participation in extra-mural activities (in these reports schools were referred to by

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Participating schools and colleges	1
1.2	Data collection	1
1.2.1	Revision of the pupil questionnaire	1
1.2.2	Administration of the pupil questionnaire	1
1.2.3	Aptitude testing	2
1.3	Organisation of this report	2
2	Characteristics of the A Level Candidates	4
2.1	Prior Achievement: O levels	4
2.2	Socio-economic status (home background)	7
2.3	Aspiration levels	10
2.4	Ability measures	14
3	School Processes	16
3.1	Class size — the size of teaching groups ..	16
3.2	Differences in the 'pulling power' of the courses offered	16
3.3	Persons to whom the pupils can turn for help	16
3.4	Homework and other aspects of the use of time	16
4	Attitudes	25
4.1	Attitudes to the school	25
4.2	Attitudes to the subject	27
4.3	Extra-curricular activities	30
5	Results: A Levels	35
5.1	A level grades obtained at the various schools	35
5.2	Residual Scores	40
5.3	Teacher expectations, predictions	40
5.4	Other correlates of residuals	40
	Appendix A: Reports Produced in the COMBSE Study	47
	Appendix B: Guide to Reading Tables	48
	Appendix C: The Scales Used	49

Figure 1 Contents page for a COMBSE report

codenames known only to themselves and the researcher).

Figure 1 shows the Table of Contents for the report prepared following the 1987 A level results, and Figure 2 shows the format used for many of the tables. It was not a simple format, and a further complexity was the use of standardised residual gains for examination results. Briefly stated, these represent measures of how 'good' the results were once account had been taken of the prior achievement of the students with which the school had been working. They might be called a measure of 'value added' or 'school effectiveness'. They represent fairer performance indicators than simple raw results or percentage pass rates. Positive residuals indicate results better than might have been expected.

In summary, the COMBSE project collected a large amount of data by a single visit to each school, combined the data with A level results provided by the schools each September and reported analyses of the data back to schools, adjusting examination results for intake differences. It is important to note that the reports only went to schools. Both LEAs had probably forgotten the project existed.

A meeting was held each October or November at which the results were presented and discussed. The project ran from 1983 to 1987 with no school withdrawing and with three colleges of further education joining by

Table 4.2.1 Attitudes to the A level Subject English

		COMBSE 1987									
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mean	Group	4	9	16	10	13	15	3	14	7	2
1.8	SJHI	4									
2.5	SHUT	9									
3.0	NEW.2	16									
3.0	RAM	10									
3.0	COL.2	13									
3.1	NEW.1	15	*								
3.2	CHOC	3	*								
3.2	COL.3	14	*								
3.2	COLD	7	*								
3.2	ETON	2	**								
3.3	COL.4	17	**								
3.3	PLAY	5	**								
3.4	COL.1	12	**								
3.5	TRAD	6	*								
3.6	UNIT	1	**								
3.6	Cast	11	****								

F = 1.52, p = 0.10

Figure 2 Example of the tables used in reports

invitation. Since 1987 it has expanded to 47 schools and colleges but our concern here is to ask what impact it had, specifically in English departments, during the years 1983 to 1987.

Independent Assessment of the Impact of the COMBSE Project

The evaluation of the COMBSE project took the form of a series of semi-structured interviews, an approach which seemed best suited to the task of eliciting a full range of responses to the project and to future developments while ensuring that certain points central to our enquiry would be dealt with. Accordingly, a set of questions was taken to each interview which were elaborated on as necessary and interviewees were encouraged to develop their own points of view as extensively as they wished. All of the interviews, which varied in duration from about 20 to 30 minutes, took place in the interviewees' schools. When more than one member of staff from each school was to be seen, each was interviewed separately to avoid any danger of one member of staff inhibiting the other from expressing viewpoints which might have been of interest to us.

This evaluation covered eight schools which had been involved in the project from its inception; the head of English was interviewed in seven schools, the exception being one school in which the incumbent retired just before this study was undertaken. Where the school felt it would be worthwhile, the head-teacher was also interviewed. One head nominated one of his deputies and the head of sixth-form was interviewed in the school whose head of English was unobtainable. In all, six representatives of management contributed to the study, covering five of the schools studied.

It was an important aspect of this study that the interviewer should have had no previous contact with the COMBSE project and that this should be made clear from the outset of each interview. Informing the staff that the interviewer (Williamson) had no personal interest in the evaluation would, it was hoped, minimise any danger of opinions being softened to avoid causing offence.

The interviewees were told before the interviews began that we wanted to evaluate the impact of the COMBSE project, to sound out opinion about future developments and to ask

some more general questions about A levels. It was stressed that views about future projects would not be binding; we merely wanted to gauge opinion. Responses were not tape-recorded for fear this might inhibit interviewees; extensive written notes were made at the time.

In reporting responses to the questions, the views of heads of English and of 'managers' (heads, a deputy and a sixth-form tutor) are summarised separately as, not unexpectedly, their perspectives varied.

1. Awareness of COMBSE

The first question invited interviewees to comment on the extent of their awareness of the project. The response of the heads of English was quite consistent and reflected a low level of involvement. One felt that the project had been 'very peripheral', another that it had 'barely impinged on the consciousness'. Only one had been 'very much aware of the project this year' and it is worthy of note that she had only been in post for four months at the time of the interview. This low level of engagement seems to have been raised only on the occasions when the researcher in charge of the project (Fitz-Gibbon) came to the school. Four of the heads of English echoed the view of one who noted that he had 'hardly been aware of the project apart from two occasions when Dr Fitz-Gibbon visited'. Another commented that although he became more conscious of the project when his school was visited he felt, even then, 'disembodied' because he did not want to dominate what was happening. It would appear that, at least for English departments, close personal contact with the research team might be an important factor in raising levels of consciousness.

The management were more varied in their responses: two acknowledged that they had been 'hardly aware' of the project; the rest had all been conscious of it, although only one went so far as to say that he had been 'very much aware' of what was going on. On the whole, the heads, in response to this first, quite general question, gave the impression of having a higher level of awareness than the heads of English.

In response to more specific questions, however, the picture was somewhat different in that none of the management spoken to had attended any of the COMBSE meetings.

Likewise, only one of the heads of English had attended more than once (and she only 'some years'). One had been to the previous year's meeting but not any of the earlier ones. Asked why he had gone to the last one, he replied only that he had been 'interested to hear what people had to say'. The others had not attended the yearly meetings, although one proffered the information that the head of Mathematics had gone — because 'he's more interested in statistics'.

Asked whether they had read the project reports, the heads of English gave quite varied responses. One had read them every year and one, the recent appointee, had read this year's. Otherwise, the uptake had been at best fragmentary. One had 'read bits' but was not totally sure if she had finished any; another had 'glanced through them', and noted both that he had not received an individual copy and that his grasp of statistics was 'hazy'. Two had relied on interpretations from their heads of Mathematics, one commenting that he found the statistics 'hard to penetrate'. He suggested that the reports had been 'set out in a way which was learned and sound' and that they seemed to have been compiled 'with an eye to appearing to be meticulous rather than giving feedback to the schools concerned'. One head of English had never seen the reports.

Two points suggest themselves here: If staff are to be expected to read reports carefully they should probably be sent copies individually, and secondly, there is resistance to highly statistical formats among English teachers and perhaps others in the field of Arts and Humanities.

Again, the heads and their substitutes claimed to have been more assiduous in respect of reading the reports. Three of the heads had read them every year; the sixth-form tutor read them briefly then passed them on to the heads of English and Mathematics. The other two had read at least some of them. Set against this, however, we must note that several commented on the superficiality of their reading — one had read them all 'but not deeply' and she had not 'applied them'.

Asked whether they had found the reports interesting and of value, those Heads of English who had read them gave a rather discouraging response. All claimed to have found them interesting but in general it was

not felt that they would be useful. One summarised the general position by saying he was 'sceptical of the extent to which feedback could affect what we do'. Again, one pointed out that although he found them interesting, he had had to ask his Head of Maths for help in understanding them. He argued that 'more people would be interested in the findings if they were in another form'. He went on to say that he 'didn't learn much' he hadn't known previously — the report 'didn't shatter any of my assumptions'.

One had been 'taken aback by one or two comments', but put that down to individual pupils. (Reference was being made here to the one year in which some open-ended responses from students were reported back to schools after being suitably adjusted if necessary to guard the anonymity of the students.) His department had reconciled itself to negative comments because, it was felt, pupils 'tend to complain when asked that kind of question'. The other Head of English noted that 'pupils perceive teaching as less pupil-centred than teachers do' but argued that this may be because 'pupils feel the teacher is the expert and are very dependent initially'. This Head of Department did not see this gap in perception as a problem but merely as a reflection of the nature of the teaching situation in which her department found itself.

The Heads were even more forthcoming in respect of this question. All (except for one who was 'waiting to return to the reports and read them more carefully') said the reports had been interesting but most doubted whether the information could be of much use. One noted that the reports had 'highlighted truths about our situation' but although they had been 'anecdotally interesting' and the verbatim quotations were 'illuminating', he did not know how to follow the information up and could foresee no specific action arising out of the project. More forcefully, one felt that the reports were of no direct use because there was nothing in them which was new to the school. In his words, 'Their information was a subset of mine'.

If there had been any fears that respondents would tailor their answers in order to spare our feelings, these responses dispelled them. The picture that emerged was of a very peripheral level of awareness, a tendency not to attend meetings, to read reports sparingly and to take no action on reports once read.

2. Performance Indicators as Part of an Information System

The interviews also sought to elicit a response to future developments which might involve a study akin to COMBSE but which would differ in some important respects: it might be compulsory for schools to participate; it might be the case that information would be given to the local education authority; performance indicators along the Coopers and Lybrand (1988) lines might be used. (Actually about half of the suggested indicators in Coopers and Lybrand have been in the COMBSE reports since 1983 and some of those not included, e.g. student demeanour, are probably too value-laden and difficult to measure to ever be included in an information system.) None claimed to be wholly conversant with the indicators put forward by Coopers and Lybrand but all seemed to have gained some knowledge of them from the press.

Three of the management group seemed not to be much concerned about such a process. One felt it did not matter because the LEA gets examination results in any case; another 'wouldn't mind if there was a worthwhile product'.

The others took a more reserved position. One felt 'anxious' because the percentage of passes 'doesn't mean too much' in a school such as hers with only 12 to 18 candidates each year. She was 'concerned about the misuse of figures'. This last point worried two others. One referred to bad publicity previously about poor A level results. The other was 'concerned not about the collation of information' but the use which might be made of it. He argued that his school had 'suffered from information being put in the hands of people who misinterpret it'. He felt that comparative sets of data 'rarely serve any genuinely positive educational purpose'.

In general, the Heads were anxious about the possibility of data being misused — particularly by politicians and media — to give a misleading impression of the effectiveness of their schools. Three of the Heads of English seemed to have no reservations in this area, one feeling that 'any research is important and worthwhile', another arguing that 'everybody knows the results anyway'. The third was 'not embarrassed about what the children say' and felt he did not 'want to hide anything'. He was, however, unhappy that there might be pressures on the pupils who might feel hesitant

about giving responses which would not be confidential. The others expressed a range of concerns. One felt that it would be 'wearisome' to have to keep defending oneself. He would not welcome a situation in which 'decisions could be questioned because of statistics'. Another was 'a bit chary, especially about pupils' comments' while one declared herself 'wary' about non-confidential information — again, much would depend on the purpose to which it would be put. The last head of English was 'in favour of being open', but felt that A level is the area where there is most to fear. He would feel happier in respect of examinations at 16 being the focus of study because, in his view, the course work element there meant 'greater accuracy of results'.

All of the managers were broadly in favour of performance indicators, though all had reservations. One felt that it would be impossible to get two schools to agree on what would be suitable; another went beyond this, arguing that it would be useful if schools were to draw up their own performance indicators and justify them. His own school, he felt, might be unique in the authority. There was a need for flexibility, an approach which would not assume one index was applicable to all schools but which would involve schools and would examine problems on an individual basis. Other concerns voiced were that, to be successful, performance indicators would have to measure input as well as examination results, that they would have to be broadly based and that cognitive as well as socio-economic factors would have to be considered.

(Comment: That the project did measure input as well as examination results and took cognitive and socio-economic factors into account did not seem to have been noticed. Indeed there seemed to be, quite frequently, no awareness of the difference between the data provided by the project (outputs adjusted for inputs or 'contextualized' (Gray, Jesson and Jones, 1986) and the simple percentage pass rates which all too often are reported. We see this entirely as a failure of the project to communicate its methods adequately to this audience.)

Two people did show an awareness of proposals which are generally made for contextualising results by taking account of socio-economic factors. Both were critical. One Head was concerned about what he saw as a tendency to assume that a higher socio-

economic background would necessarily yield a 'more persevering and able pupil'. He felt that a child from a less favoured background might be more hard-working, since socio-economic background gave 'no guarantee of motivation'.

One person spoke against performance indicators, on the basis of some experience of TVEI. She felt that they had some use but were limited. She taught in a working class area and she argued that her department 'don't set limits' on what their students can achieve, the goal being to help bring the pupils 'to enjoy what we're doing more'. She argued that 'the connection between class and the appreciation of literature is so tenuous as to be meaningless'.

(Comment: we believe their criticism of the use of socio-economic factors as contextualising variables is quite justified for two distinct reasons: (1) the relationship between achievement and socio-economic factors is generally much weaker than the relationship between achievement and cognitive factors (such as ability or prior achievement). Therefore statistically SES is not the best 'control variable' in general and at A level the data show even weaker relationships than usual. (2) It is unacceptable to imply that less must be expected of a child from a low SES home than from a child of similar ability from a high SES home. Given equal abilities teachers will strive to produce the same achievement levels, regardless of home background.)

Four of the Heads of English made a very minimal response to the question of performance indicators, suggesting that this issue may be one which those with more general responsibilities are more likely to see as pressing. Of the others, one felt it 'hard to resist in principle' but seemed concerned lest the exercise be undertaken in a 'crude' fashion; there was, he felt, 'pressure to be crude because of simplicity'. How the study was undertaken and the way in which results would be presented were important considerations to him, as was the action likely to follow.

The last area of enquiry about performance indicators involved the suggestion that data might be time-lagged in some way, perhaps by giving the LEA a three-yearly rather than an annual report or by giving the authority information a year after schools get it so that there would be an opportunity for reports to be acted on before being made public.

Three Heads of English had no strong feeling on this issue, although one of those felt that some such approach might help make younger staff feel less 'vulnerable'. Another argued that while it would be 'naive' to assume there would be no response to academic results, he was not concerned because his LEA was 'fairly enlightened, knew the problems facing particular schools' and 'would not respond crudely'. Three felt that a time-lag of some kind would 'improve perspective' and help to 'even out comments'. Two of these also commented that any such process should be a negotiated one and should encompass 'a range of views'. Only one was against; coming from one of the schools which had already expressed reservations about the danger of misuse of information, he argued that 'time-lagging would cause problems because if the politicians found out, they would think we were being defensive'.

This was a view endorsed by his Head, who would not object if information were restricted to professionals. 'Professionals wouldn't misuse the information. I'd be happy to talk about it with advisers, etc. Politicians worry me.' Another of this group echoed these concerns — he felt that since 'politicians don't understand figures', they look at A level passes and don't see the importance of background. He was also worried that politicians would not give sufficient weight to such factors as a growth in sixth-form numbers, improvements over a long period or the value of work in CPVE.

Three of the Heads would be happier for data to be presented over a three-year period rather than one, even if the one were delayed in its presentation. 'You can't snapshot a year's results' was a fairly typical comment. Even over three years, one Head felt the study would not 'be very meaningful with small numbers'.

3. Factors Related to A Level Attainment

The interviews moved on to consider two more general questions. The first of these was 'What affects examination results?'

The Heads identified a range of factors. All but one mentioned explicitly the quality of teaching. Four mentioned, in differing forms, support at home and three also commented on socio-economic background and levels of deprivation. Three pointed to 'school ethos'

as a significant factor. Several features were listed by two of this group as being important: facilities and resources; the cohesion and atmosphere of the peer group; treating students as adults and helping to build their confidence. The other factor widely commented on was pupil motivation, although the four who touched on this seemed to be divided in respect of whether this was something pupils brought with them or whether it was something which schools engendered differentially.

Among the factors listed by only one interviewee were: the amount of assisted work; the quality of the groundwork of the first five years in school, particularly in terms of developing study habits and pupils' sense of responsibility for their own learning; the pupils' ability to set their own targets; mixed ability teaching in the early years; the criteria for allowing students to proceed to A level; innate ability; cultural factors.

The complexity of the issue is mirrored in this range of responses but clearly the majority felt a conjunction of good teaching, pupil motivation and the support from the home was essentially the recipe for success.

The Heads of English again offered a wide — and not entirely overlapping — range of factors. Six, in one way or another, mentioned good teaching, sharing one of the Headteacher's views. Beyond that agreement tended to be less close than was the case with the Headteachers. Several student-related factors were listed: pupils' habits of study, motivation and interest; children's commitment in giving time and effort; not needing to take part-time jobs and, more broadly, pupil attitudes were all mentioned, as again was ability. The home was seen as important by fewer in this group, only one mentioning socio-economic background, one parental expectations and one 'supportive parents'.

The other feature shared with the Heads was the atmosphere in which the children were working, which was variously mentioned in terms of 'school ethos', 'sixth-form ethos', 'peer group atmosphere' and 'relationships within the group'. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this group, which is more directly engaged in classroom teaching, were more prone to stress the importance of teacher-pupil interaction, in terms of 'the personality of children and teachers', 'a relaxed happy environment', and the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship

in general. Other factors cited were group size, the relevance of the syllabus and the effect of GCSE results from the previous year on a given intake. Finally, one Head of English cited the economic situation as a factor in that children see less relevance in A levels now that it is so difficult to find work.

4. Preferred Indicators

The last question was deliberately a very broad one. 'How would you like to see your sixth-form evaluated?' This is the only question on which the interviewer absolutely refused to elaborate, so that the responses would reflect the interviewee's thinking on this question and not be narrowed down to perspectives circumscribed by the interviewer.

The heads' responses split into a dichotomy between the (smaller) number who stressed academic evaluation and those who took other approaches.

One suggested the sixth-form students should be evaluated 'in terms of their commitment to other forms of education' — such as 'their cross-age tutoring service' and 'organising activities like charity days'. They should be judged as young adults in an adult world, taking ownership of their own development. (Influence of TVEI/Records of Achievement?)

Another echoed this view — they should be evaluated 'in terms of maturity, measuring how much they've grown and developed as people. There is more to the sixth-form than A levels — pupils would realise their potential in every aspect'. She also favoured the view that there should be 'profiling by students themselves'.

Maturity was one of the themes of another of the interviewees, whose school, 'since it had a completely comprehensive' sixth-form aimed to help develop maturity and confidence. He felt the sixth-form helped many pupils who would not have been mature enough to leave after fifth year — they could 'blossom and flower' in the sixth-form. More generally, he argued for a breadth of evaluation looking at academic, social and psychological factors, the uptake of places in HE and FE, confidence, organisation and knowledge. He too stressed the need to involve pupils in the evaluation process.

One of the management interviewees felt it important that students 'get what they, as individuals, want from the sixth-form', be it a YTS

place, a job or whatever and that it should have been enjoyable.

Another felt that there were already inbuilt evaluators in terms of exam results and client satisfaction. He was not sure that formal evaluation was appropriate or necessary.

Only one Head stressed academic work because that, in his view (or, perhaps, in his school) is why pupils came to the sixth-form. If the exam results are not good, the other things, like 'happiness, sense of satisfaction, involvement over a wide range of interests, accepting responsibility for one's own performance and for younger pupils simply do not happen.

Even in this instance, though, there was very much an awareness that a narrow academic evaluation was not enough. Only one of the Heads of English responded on a broad front, arguing that 'the sixth-form are important to a school like this' — they have social value, raise the level of maturity, engender interest in academic matters and sporting activities. 'All this would be difficult to measure, but they improve the general atmosphere.'

All the others spoke of ways of evaluating in their subject, and interestingly all had alternatives to offer to traditional A levels. One advocated evaluation by 'course work — especially with the precedent of GCSE'. Such a procedure, spread over two years would, he believed, 'give a more consistent picture'. Another argued that 'A level is now an anomaly' and wanted less evaluation of A levels through traditional examinations. There were 'lots of interesting approaches now at University level' so there was little justification for the present A level format as a preparation for Higher Education. Assessment by continuous assessment and in more meaningful ways would better reflect the fact that 'literature is done for humanistic reasons, not for assessing by tests'. The Head of one Department was 'concerned that the gap between GCSE and A level is greater than was the case with O level' and argued both for profiling as a form of assessment and for a more broadly-based A level course altogether to counteract what she saw as too early specialisation.

Finally, one took a broader view of his subject and would like success with sixth-form English students to be evaluated in terms of such factors as whether pupils would continue to want to go to the theatre and think about what they had seen, and whether they would

want to carry on reading. These things, he felt, were 'hard to quantify, but they were important and should not be ignored'.

Two others argued for more original modes of evaluation of the school's provision. One suggested individual interviews, the other argued for retrospective evaluation by students two or three years after completing their course.

Discussion

Perhaps it almost goes without saying that professionalism and concern were evident from responses to the interviews. Teachers and managers welcomed information, did not wish it to be hidden but wanted it to be useful and did not want to see it mis-used in the press.

It was equally clear that the information provided in the COMBSE project had not been useful, perhaps because it was presented in rather impenetrable reports which were either not read at all or only skimmed and not well understood.

It might be thought that these interviews would be discouraging to those running the project (and that it is amazing that this article has seen the light of day!). Such a reaction did not in fact result from the findings for a number of reasons.

1. Expectations

The findings had been expected. The project had run on a shoestring budget and the one meeting a year, which many staff could not or did not attend, was felt to be inadequate as a means of explaining the statistical concepts and involving staff in using the data. In particular the single meeting meant that most staff did not participate in on-going revisions to the questionnaire designed to improve its usefulness. Furthermore the process variables had not at that time been analysed and reported back and it is these which might have implications for practice.

2. Statistics and English Staff

The interviews targeted Heads of English and the project might have been of a little more interest to mathematics staff, given the rather statistical nature of the reports.

However, the rather impenetrable reports were not necessarily altogether a bad thing. It is better not to make reports simplistic and too

easily accessible, in order to encourage serious study of the complexity of schools and to discourage facile and precipitous interpretations. The system is after all for professionals and cannot be understood by those without the professional training to do so.

3. Light Monitoring is the Aim

The lack of impact was much more welcome a finding than a negative impact would have been. The aim of the project was to monitor lightly, without upsetting people unnecessarily and without intruding on the time staff need for their primary task of teaching.

4. Early Days

We've only just begun to develop an adequate database with fair performance indicators. Such a system needs development as does any system. To create a fully useful management information system will need the addition of a management system to complement the database (Figure 3). The management structure should ensure adequate INSET for Heads of Department and Head Teachers to enable them to make their own interpretations of the data each year. These staff would then help to develop the system further by suggesting important factors which might be included in subsequent years in the database.

5. Recent Changes in LEA Roles

Under the Education Reform Act, LEAs are to monitor the performance of schools (DES 7/88 circular). An HMI report entitled 'The Use Made by Local Education Authorities of Public Examination Results' clearly indicates that there is much progress needed in most LEAs.

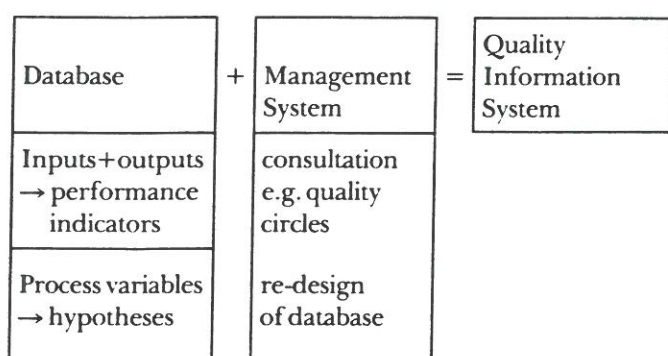


Figure 3 Elements of a Quality Information System

The kind of system we have been offering is new to most people and along the lines urged by these current developments, but it takes time for this way of looking at schools to become familiar and accepted. There are many ways to look at schools some of them more informal, resting on personal expertise and judgement, as in HMI inspections. This role, of inspectors, is suggested for LEA advisors in the DES circular.

It seems likely that as advisors are to take on inspection roles they would do well to acquire the kind of information system the project has developed. Indeed, if this monitoring role for LEAs is not developed there will be one less reason for LEAs to survive.

6. Recent Growth

The project has recently grown to include more than 50 institutions in six LEAs, and to cover 11 A level subjects, not just English and mathematics. We think this growth is because a number of persons recognise the quality of the project, added to which there is probably the thought that a fair system of performance indicators is the best defence against unfair systems which might be imposed. And still no school or college has dropped out: we must at least be very little trouble, even if not useful yet! We're working on the usefulness.

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