to expose this situation, but one should be alive to the
danger that if one rocks the boat too much there will be
pressure for standardising syllabuses, and prescribing the
criteria that should be tested in any English (or Mathemat-
ics etc.) examination. There are already pressures for
this from the Standing Conference on University Entrance
at A-level; and the Wadding Report, reinforced by the
provision, in the memorandum of the Ministry of Education,
and subsequent discussions about the establishment of a National
Co-ordinating Body, moves in this direction for a common
system at 16+.

For a school-leaving certificate as a replacement for or
supplement to public examinations, one faces a dilemma
should one pander to the genuine, if somewhat (but only
somewhat) misguided, desire for comparability by setting
up inevitably elaborate procedures for moderation, valida-
tion and accreditation and give labels, either in words or
in grades, that are designed to have some common currency
between schools (but warning of the limitations of the
commonness of the currency) or should one allow each
school to develop its own reporting procedures? The
latter invites employers, universities and colleges to take
much more initiative in devising their own selection
procedures: in many senses this would be thoroughly
constructive, but it does invite 'league listing' of schools,

negotiation and all those bad effects that public examina-
tions were originally designed (first century B.C. 3,000 years
ago, and in the 19th Century in this country) to overcome.
It also implies a boom in (often inappropriate) psychologi-
cal and educational testing by employers with possible
destabilising knock-on effects into the schools, let alone
the creation of problems for children on the millennium
nightmare of 'league listing'. How can one avoid leaping from the frying
pan into the fire?

1 This paper was originally written in the summer of
1978 and delivered at a PRISE Conference on Assess-
ment held on 31 March, 1979, at Oxford. It has been
slightly amended for publication.

2 For a development of these arguments and more technical
detail about the problems of investigating comparability,
see Comparability in GCE published by the JMB on
behalf of the GCE Board (May 1978) and Comparability
of Standards in Public Examinations: Problems and
Possibilities prepared by the Schools Council Forum on
Comparability and to be published shortly by the Schools
Council.

3 See, for example, The Reliability of Examinations at

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Changing Educational Standards:
A Fruitless Search

by Professor Harvey Goldstein, Head of Department of Statistics and
Econometrics, Institute of Education, London University.

To make comparisons across time, to chart the progress
of institutions or societies, is such a common activity
that one rarely finds any serious attempt to question
critically its usefulness or its feasibility. Many individuals
exert a great deal of effort, for example, to devise standard
of living or price indices to monitor aspects of economic
change. Others calculate mortality rates or estimate the
average heights of children in order to monitor progress
in health. In both cases, but especially the former, there
may be arguments about the most useful technique to
use, but little dispute about the possibility of making
comparisons over time or about the possibility in principle
of being able to do so. For educational attainment, like-
wise, the notion of making comparisons across time is
deployed in both within the exam system and with regard to standardized achievement testing. It is only quite recently that there has been any suggestion that comparability of exam performances across time may have inherent problems which defy purely technical solutions. Such a possibility, however, does not seem to have been taken seriously in current discussions of across
time comparability of 'standards' based on achievement
tests. In this article I shall examine difficulties about such comparisons and suggest that we may have been expecting answers to the wrong questions.

In the so-called 'Great Debate' in education, the contribu-
tion of the Government by way of the Assessment of
Performance Unit (APU), and the increasing use by
LEAs of standardized tests of language and mathematics
are now familiar and have become incorporated within the
ubiquitous 'Educational Accountability' scene. A central
motivation for this activity, and an explicit aim of the APU,
is to make useful statements about changes in standards of performance over time. Such statements might, for example, concern the changing mathematical

competence of school leavers. Thus, an engineering
employer might feel that the mathematical attainments of
the school leavers he employs now compare unfavourably
with those of 20 years ago. (It is often to add that any examples I use are chosen to illustrate points and not to
score them.) Such a statement, however, says little about
the mathematical attainments of school leavers in general,
since the type of leave entering engineering may well
have changed over time with possibly more of the mathemati-
cally able now going to higher and further education,
or other forms of employment. By the same token, state-
ments about the achievements of university entrants say
little about achievements among 18-year-old school
leavers. Moreover, even if we did have evidence about
changing attainments for children in general, it would not
necessarily follow that the cause of any changes lay in the
schools. Failing attainment, for example, might be due to
changing environmental factors which are themselves
related to mental functioning. The evidence needs to
connect the school system with change in attainment is
nearly always lacking and indeed it is difficult to see
how one might obtain such evidence, since school curricula
and organisation are changing at exactly the same time as
the wider society and environment are changing and there
seems little hope of disentangling these factors. Of course,
specific aspects of a curriculum or types of school organis-
ation can be compared in a research project, but this is
not the same thing as separating out influences which are
historically confounded. Where it is possible to make
comparisons of change for different sub-groups of the
population, for example, those in the north of the country
compared to those in the south, then such relative changes
might be more informative. Here again, though, without
further specific search there is little possibility of
ascribing anything directly to the effect of the school
system. Finally, there is the real difficulty of trying to

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Re-organisation and In-Service Training in one area of Surrey

by R.J. Cantor, Area Inspector, Surrey.

The Farnham and Ash area of South West Surrey was re-organised in 1973 along comprehensive lines. Where there had previously been two single-sex grammar schools, four secondary modern schools and a number of primary schools, the pattern was now changed as follows: one co-educational, open access VI Form College based upon the boys' grammar school; four comprehensive 12-16 schools; eleven middle schools for the 8-12 age range; 10/20 first schools for the 5-8 age range.

The changing structure, of itself, created the need for considerable rethinking on a wide range of matters, some practical and immediate, some more theoretical and far reaching. To facilitate such discussion a steering