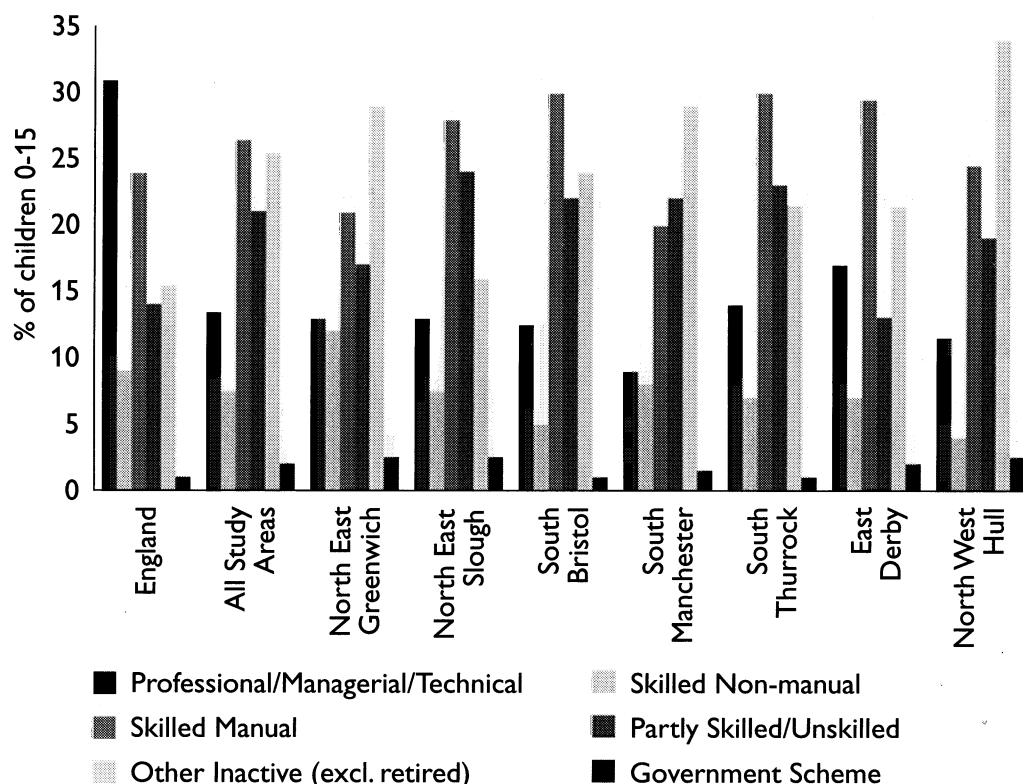


higher than the national figures (14% compared with 9% for England in April 1991). More than one in five of adult males in the Hull and Manchester study areas was unemployed. Among school leavers rates were significantly higher; 24% of economically active 16-19 year olds were unemployed and a further 9% on government schemes. More than 40% of economically active 16-19 year olds were unemployed or on a government scheme in the Manchester and Hull study areas, rising to more than 50% in one of the Hull wards (see Figure 2 on page 10).

Figure 1

Percentage of children 0-15 by social and economic status of head of household: 1991 10% Census

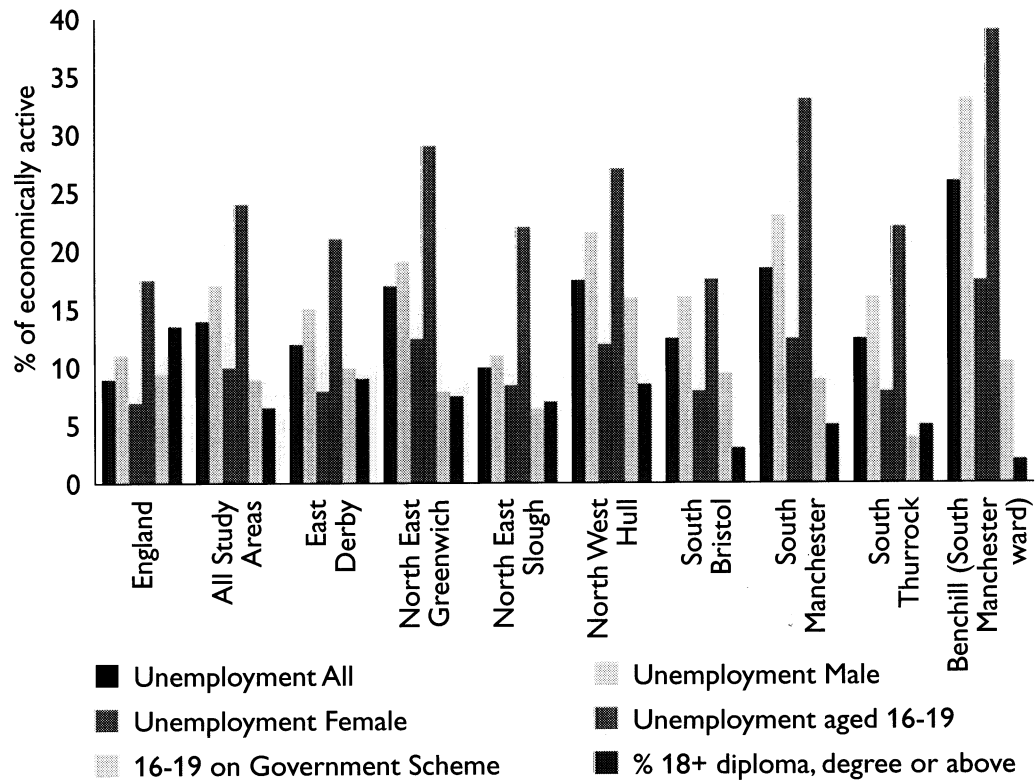


4 The areas have a high proportion of rented accommodation, usually owned by a local authority, and high levels of overcrowding: 16% of dependent children in the study areas live at densities greater than one person per room, compared with a national equivalent of 10% - in the Slough area this rises to 25%. The rate of car ownership is low: 37% of dependent children live in households without access to a car rising to 53% in the Manchester study area with one ward at 67% whereas the figure for England is 21% (see Figure 3 on page 11).

5 Minority ethnic groups represent a substantial proportion of the overall study area population only in Slough and Greenwich. In the Slough study area some 39% of children aged 5-15 are from minority ethnic groups

(predominantly of Indian and Pakistani origin), and in the wards where the primary and secondary schools are located, 59% and 18% respectively. In the Greenwich study area 24% of the same age group are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In the Derby study area, some 15% of the 5-15 year olds are from ethnic minorities. In the other four study areas more than 95% of school-age children are from white families. On census figures, unemployment among adults from the minority ethnic groups was significantly higher than that experienced by the white population in the same area (approximately 20% overall compared with 14% for the white group).

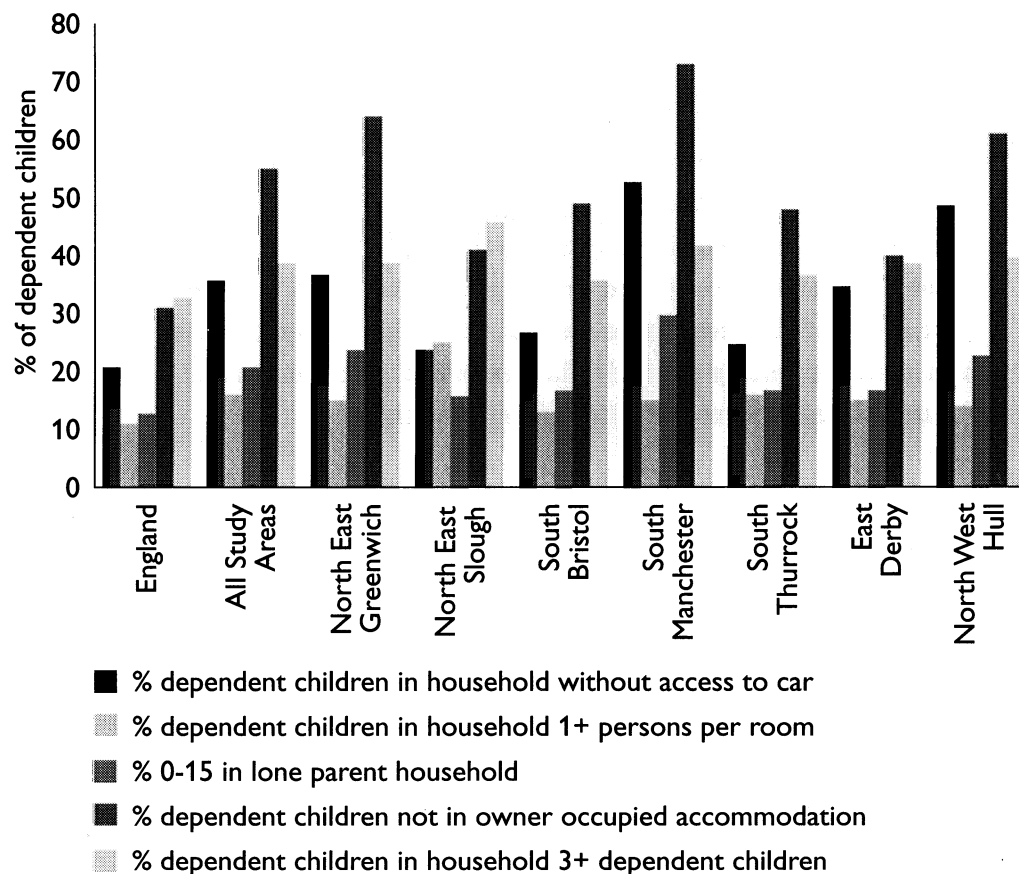
Figure 2
Selected measures of unemployment: 1991 Census
18+ qualifications, all adults: 1991 10% Census



6 Other striking features of the study areas include high proportions of pre-school and school-age children. In several wards more than 10% of their population was aged under 5 years (national average 6.7%); in one Manchester ward 32% of the population was aged under 16 years (the national average is 20%). This may in part reflect local authority housing policies, as may the higher number of families with three or more dependent children. Another feature is the high proportion of children from lone parent families. More than one in five children under 16 years came from a lone parent family in the study areas (national figure 13%). This rises to 30% of children in the Manchester study area. Overall, in the study

areas, more than a quarter of these lone parents are themselves aged under 25 years, rising to nearly one-third in wards with the highest proportions of such families (the national figure is 18%). (See Figure 3 below).

Figure 3
Percentage of dependent children in households of different types: 1991 Census



7 Other indicators of disadvantage need to be considered alongside those factors presented in the 1991 census data. All seven areas suffer some degree of geographical isolation on the outer edge of the cities. Infrequent and expensive public transport, running to the city centre but rarely to other parts, often compounds the social and economic isolation of those who do not own cars. Nursery schools reported a prevalence of dental problems and also of speech disorders and ear, nose and throat complaints among very young children which did not always receive prompt treatment because parents were unable or reluctant to travel to distant health centres. In some areas the quality of flats has deteriorated since their construction; neighbourhood shopping centres offer a limited range of services or are sometimes closed and boarded up. Litter, graffiti and the effects of vandalism are readily apparent in these dismal environments. The level of crime - drug abuse, theft and sometimes violent attacks against the person - is relatively high, although according to police reports it is often

undertaken by a small number of persistent offenders. Especially where minority ethnic groups are a small proportion of the population, racially motivated abuse and attack are frequently reported.

8 These factors, more difficult to categorise than the census information, contribute to the poor image of these areas as perceived from the vantage point of those in more favoured parts of the cities and to low self-esteem and feelings of disaffection among their residents. Pupils in their final years of schooling and students of various ages referred to the major disadvantage constituted by their address when they applied for jobs. On some estates families who had been resident for some years considered that their commitment to their community was not shared by the more transient residents who aimed quickly to obtain accommodation elsewhere. Some felt that schools located on the estates were also affected by the poor image of the areas; some parents, often those in employment, felt that their aspirations for their children would be better served if they secured places in schools in other parts of the cities.

Provision for children aged under five

ACCESS TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

9 Opportunities for education open to children aged under five varied markedly in extent and quality in the areas of the study.

Across the country the vast majority of children begin school in the year in which they will be five. Some areas have nursery schools or nursery classes attached to schools, sometimes with a supporting network of parent and toddler groups. At best, the variety of pre-school education provided diversity of opportunity, so that a child might attend a playgroup at age three followed by a place later in a nursery school or class. In all but two areas, however, **the number of places available was insufficient to allow nursery education for all children**, so that some gained only a part-time place and others none. Co-ordination between local authority and voluntary agencies was weak and some authorities provided funding for voluntary projects only for a short time. Pre-school playgroups, mother and toddler groups and crèches provided valued social and educational experience for young children but they relied for survival on the efforts of individuals, often volunteers whose regular attendance and commitment were sometimes hard to maintain. Non-statutory provision of all kinds was continually under threat from budget cuts and from the greater devolution of LEA funding to individual schools.

10 Where sufficient nursery provision was lacking, competition for places resulted. Some took account of recommendations from Social Services departments about children whose needs were urgent but in others no weighting was given to social priority. Both these situations posed their own difficulties: in the first the nursery could be dominated by children with a range of substantial needs; in the second the most vulnerable could be overlooked. Not all parents were aware of such opportunities as existed: information about the range of pre-school provision was generally not well co-ordinated although one LEA has established a Children's Services Branch in order better to link voluntary and LEA provision and to improve the allocation of places. Elsewhere, local effort endeavoured to ensure that information reached those parents whose children might have the greatest need: pre-school workers in one area targeted particular estates each year and distributed leaflets about provision to every dwelling.

11 **The transition from home to school was greatly eased by the work of pre-school workers and of home – school liaison teachers.**

Visits to children's homes prior to entry to school and visits to the school by parents and children helped young children to settle securely into nursery or reception classes. This liaison included initiatives to engage parents' help directly, for example pre-reading activities, the use of toy libraries and with assistance in classrooms. Many schools took particular trouble to involve those parents who had little confidence in their own level of education. Parents' rooms in nursery and primary schools not only provided a welcoming place for parents to meet informally but also a base for continuing education via links with adult education services.

CURRICULUM, ACHIEVEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

12 Effective nursery programmes offered the social education essential for those children with little experience outside the family as well as providing a bridge to school. The daily routines provided a stable framework in which the pupils learned to establish relationships with adults and with other children of both sexes and of different ethnic backgrounds. They learned to make choices, to persevere and respond confidently within a wide range of educational experiences. They also learned important foundational skills, for example in language and number work often through a good quality of educational play activities. Work aimed at developing the children's language was given a high priority and systematically planned in most nurseries. Children learned to listen well and to be confident in speaking in small or larger groups. Children whose social experience was not wide had little previous opportunity to develop language proficiency. The linguistic competence of some indigenous white children was poor: they were able to make only single-word, immature responses and had limited vocabulary, poor articulation and restricted speech patterns. Nursery staff found the language needs of these children difficult to assess adequately and plan for effectively. In contrast, a nursery with a high proportion of pupils whose first language was not English planned work progressively using the expertise of a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL) and of a multi-lingual non-teaching assistant. In this case the gradual acquisition of a second language had the effect of focusing planning directly on pupils' needs.

13 Where the analysis of learning needs was sound the standards of achievement were good. However, this required more careful planning of the learning activities. In the best practice, the teacher in charge took responsibility for overall planning but all adults were well informed about the particular needs of each child and contributed to regular assessment of progress. In one nursery an annotated profiling system with a checklist

of key skills and concepts was used to record children's achievements and to plan further development. These sophisticated tools provided a firmer foundation for planning learning than those in other classes which recorded the activities undertaken but gave little detail about individual children's achievements.

14 The achievement of under-fives in reception classes was much less consistent, with poor and unsatisfactory standards in some classes. Where poorer standards obtained this was due in large measure to a poorly planned curriculum which failed to consider adequately the particular needs of under-fives. The adult-pupil ratio was markedly less good in reception than in nursery classes. In some cases admission arrangements adversely affected pupils' achievement with some pupils needing to move up after one or two terms so that incoming under-fives could be accommodated. Overall, nursery education brought a recognisable improvement to the children's ability to settle into school. The level of provision in most of the seven areas, both of nursery and other pre-school experience, was insufficient to ensure that all the children from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to benefit in this way.

Provision in the primary sector

INTAKE

15 Primary schools mostly served their immediate neighbourhoods. They drew a large proportion of their intake from just one or two of the surrounding electoral wards, where indicators of economic and social disadvantage were frequently high. In all the primary schools which had general inspections the proportion of children entitled to free school meals was at least 40%; in one it was 69%. Headteachers reported that a significant proportion of families had no income other than social security benefits. Those schools which had home-school liaison teachers or a home visiting policy for early years classes knew something of the individual circumstances of their intake. Detailed knowledge was often deficient, however, and many schools lacked information that could be used accurately to inform their curriculum plans.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING

16 **Children's abilities on entry to school were rarely systematically assessed** and even in those few schools where assessment was carefully undertaken, often no use was made of this information to plan the future programmes of work. Records received from nurseries were sometimes disregarded, and schools began their own records from the reception year. In the absence of accurate assessment teachers used more generalised estimates of pupils' abilities which led them in some schools to overestimate the effects of poverty and social disadvantage and to underestimate the potential ability of pupils. This was most marked in one school which had a high percentage of pupils of Asian background. **Such information as was available to schools was seldom taken into account in curriculum planning.** For example, although children's underdeveloped language skills and in particular their poor oral competence gave teachers cause for concern, no school provided a systematic programme of oracy targeted to the needs of any individual or group. Much more attention needed to be given to work concentrating on Attainment Target 1 in English, the development of speaking and listening.

17 Responsibility for the overall planning, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum was not clearly allocated in the majority of schools. **Curricular planning varied unacceptably between year groups and between classes** to the extent that the pupils' entitlement to the National

Curriculum was not always assured, because for example the allocation of teaching time to subjects was unbalanced. In the most effective practice co-ordinators for core and foundation subjects had well-defined responsibilities which included support for planning and assessment of the subject throughout the school. Co-ordinators often lacked non-contact time to enable them to work alongside colleagues, and they rarely assumed responsibility for monitoring classroom practice. In some schools there were no schemes of work to guide teachers' planning; teachers were insufficiently acquainted with programmes of study and received too little guidance from school documentation about what was to be taught, learned and assessed at each stage. Issues of continuity and progression in learning consequently received too little attention.

18 Teaching of a high quality was not uniformly provided for most children in most schools. **Inconsistent practice was a feature of many schools**, with the good and the very poor often existing side by side and the quality of children's experience dependent on their chance allocation to one class or another. More commonly, children experienced a narrow range of teaching methods and teachers did not design a range of tasks that acknowledged pupils' different knowledge and previous experience. Too often teachers' low expectations resulted in depressed pupil achievement.

ACHIEVEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

19 **Standards of achievement showed considerable fluctuation within and between subjects and key stages in individual schools and significant variation between schools.** In English the standard was unsatisfactory or poor in five of the seven schools that had general inspections. In one of the other schools visited, 50% of pupils in Year 6 were well below the average for 11-year-olds in reading, and, in another, two-thirds of pupils were unable to read at a level appropriate to their age. Most schools used a variety of methods and materials to teach reading including a phonic approach. Teachers gave a high priority to hearing children read but their records noted usually only what they had read and not their level of skill. Greater emphasis was needed on teaching pupils how to use their phonic skills to read more effectively and how to blend sounds in order to decode unfamiliar words. Few teachers taught pupils to use context clues so that they had additional strategies for new words and learned to concentrate on meaning and become confident, self-correcting readers. The needs of more fluent readers were rarely addressed by teaching them advanced reading techniques which they could use for note-taking, scanning information and for research skills.

20 Standards of writing were correspondingly poor though there was some variation in the levels of pupil attainment in different classes. Too much use was made of worksheets requiring little beyond a word or gap-filling exercise, with the result that children acquired skills out of context and did not learn to apply these by writing independently. They were given few opportunities to write for a suitable range of purposes and audiences. Standards of speaking and listening received too little attention: pupils were often required to listen but were rarely engaged in discussion which might extend their thinking, help them to argue a case or defend a point confidently.

21 **Standards in numeracy were unsatisfactory or poor in most schools visited.** Pupils were usually competent in the four rules of number but they were unsure of which operation to use when faced with practical problems. Work in other aspects of mathematics such as shape, space, algebra and data-handling was often neglected. Opportunities to apply skills in practical situations and in investigations were too limited so that pupils were not learning to see mathematics as a means of understanding the world around them.

22 Science was established in the curriculum of all the schools often through a framework of topics, but the identification of appropriate learning objectives and the planning of activities to match programmes of study were in some cases adversely affected by teachers' lack of scientific knowledge. In general the work tended to concentrate on the knowledge-based attainment targets with much less systematic attention to helping pupils use their knowledge and skills in scientific investigations. All the schools were beginning to implement the Orders for geography and history though the majority were at the early stages of development. Standards reached in these and other foundation subjects of the curriculum varied within and between schools. Good standards in any subject were rare, however, and it was clear that pupils' low achievement in literacy, oracy and numeracy was adversely affecting their progress in other areas of the curriculum.

23 Teachers recognised the need to make regular assessments of pupils' achievement but **the use of assessment outcomes to provide a basis for planning future learning was rarely part of their everyday practice.** Recording systems mostly took the form of subject tick sheets which indicated that attainment targets had been covered in class but not how well individual pupils had performed. Assessment of individuals' attainments was often limited to statutory testing and to that required for reports to parents at the end of the year. Results of standard assessments