

National Child Development Study  
Fourth Follow-up, 1981

Working Paper  
No 36

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\* SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS FAILURE \*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Prepared by: Richard Ives

Main

Customer:

This Working Paper was prepared for the sponsors of the NCDS fourth follow-up. The views expressed are the author's own. Please do not quote or reproduce this paper without the permission of the author.

The National Children's Bureau  
8 Wakley Street  
Islington  
LONDON EC1V 7QE

Reproduced by:  
National Child Development Study  
User Support Group  
City University  
Northampton Square

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Missing Data
3. Definitional Issues
4. Assembling measures of school examination failure
5. Failure and experience of post-school education and training
6. Failure and highest qualification obtained
7. School exams failure and post-school education failure
8. Further work

Dedication

This working paper is dedicated to Jane Steedman who devised the devilish derived recodes, introducing me to research in the process, and who sent me this card for Christmas 1982.

If version one of the failed school exams derived variable (where CSE entries and failures are excluded) is cross-tabulated by highest qualification obtained (table 8) it can be seen that the position seen in table 5 is now reversed, in that those with no failures tend to be more highly qualified than those with failures.

#### 7. School exams failure and post-school education failure

X The pattern of school examinations failure described in this paper is very different from that of failure on post-school courses, as described in Working Paper 27. But what is the relationship between school examinations failure on subsequent, post-school education courses? Are people who have been unsuccessful in school exams more likely to be unsuccessful in education courses after school? As table 9 shows, while those with some school exams fails are a little more likely than those with no school failures to have subsequently been unsuccessful on a post-school course, they are also more likely to have a successful post-school course; over a third (34%:- 32% with no unsuccessful courses and 2% with both) of those with some school exams failures had undertaken a successful post-school course, while only a quarter (23% with no unsuccessful courses and 2% with both) of those with no school exams failures had undertaken a successful post-school course. However, if CSE results are excluded in the definition of failed school exams as in table 10 (where version one of the derived variable is used) those with no school exams failures can be seen to be doing a little better than those who have failures; on this measure over half (52%:- 47% with no unsuccessful courses and 5% with both) of those with no failures have successfully undertaken post-school education courses, compared to only 44% (41% with no unsuccessful courses and 3% with both) of those who had failed some GCE or SCE examinations. Of course, as was seen earlier, those who were not entered for any school examinations are not very likely to undertake post-school courses - only 6% of those not entered for CSE, GCE or SCE exams at school had done so.

#### 8. Further Work

This paper has confirmed that the experienced of failing school examinations is common for a large proportion of the NCDS sample who were entered for them. School exams failure is the norm, rather than the exception, and does not seem to have any particular effect on subsequent academic success.

Further work on this theme could examine further the relationship between number and type of exams entered and failure in school exams; the type of school attended and failure; failure in various subjects (failure rates are much higher in some subjects, such as maths, than they in others, such as English); failure rates and attainment in tests of reading and mathematics at age 16; failure rates and social background factors (Ives, 1980 showed that children from working class homes were less likely to be entered for exams than children from the middle classes) and a look at failure rates by region.

**Table 1 Missing exams data by reading test score at 16**

X Total no. of exams entered	Reading test score (in fifths)					missing NCDS III data %	overall % (N)
	Bottom fifth %	next fifth %	middle fifth %	next fifth %	top fifth %		
None	38	13	5	2	0.7	17	12 (1519)
One or more	51	77	84	89	92	60	75 (9379)
No exams data	11	11	11	9	8	23	13 (1640)
X Total (N=100%)	1695	1738	2035	1854	2188	3028	12538

Table 2 Failed school exams versions 1, 2 and 3

*Why not combine tables 2+3?*

	Version 1		Version 2		Version 3	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Negative scores	7	(319)	8	(363)	0	(-)
0 (no fails)	15	(712)	30	(1379)	81	<del>3774</del> <sup>9</sup> 3794
1	20	(921)	18	(817)	11	524
2	17	(812)	14	(638)	4	210
3	13	(619)	10	(474)	2	100
4	10	(450)	7	(346)	0.6	30
5+	18	(837)	14	(653)	0.2	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(4670)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(4670)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(4670)</b>

No. exams data	1379	1379	1379
Has <sup>st-</sup> posschool O levels	1378	1378	1378
No GCE or CSE entered	5111	5111	5111

Table 4 Failed school exams, version 4 by experience post-school education, education, training and apprenticeship

	No fails	Some fails	No entry
Apprenticeship or training only	34	30	31
Apprenticeship or training and education	8	12	3
Post-School education only	22	29	4
No post-school training or apprenticeship	35	28	62
Total (N=100%)	2086	5536	1530

*Excludes those who did not study for GEE/SCC/CSI after leaving school?*



X  
Table 5 Failed <sup>5</sup> School exams, version 4 by highest qualification obtained on an education or training course.

	No fails	Some fails	No entry
A level and above	33	45	5
O level <del>#</del> and equivalent	30	32	9
Below O level	37	18	7
No qualification	-	5	79
Total (N=100%)	2059	5536	1527

Table 6 Failed school exams, version 4 by entry for CSE examination

Type of entry	No fails %	some fails %	No entry %	Overall
No entry	0	0	100	17
CSE only	75	25	0	32
CSE plus others	10	39	0	26
No CSE entries	16	35	0	25
Total (N= 100%)	2088	5539	1530	9157

NOT CHECKED

Table 7 Failed school exams, version 4 by number of exams entered

Number of exams entered	No fails %	Some fails %	No entry %	Overall %
No entry	0	0	100	17
1-4	36	15	0	17
5-8	48	36	0	33
9+	16	49	0	33
Total (N=100%)	2088	5539	1530	9157

**Table 8 Failed school exams (version 1) by highest qualification obtained on an education, training or apprenticeship course.**

	No fails %	Some fails %	No entry * %
A level and above	65	52	12
O level	34	30	26
Below O level	0.7	6	34
No qualification	-	2	28
<b>Total (N=100%)</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>4080</b>	<b>5111</b>

\*This version does not take CSEs into account, so the "no entry" category includes those entered for CSEs only.

Table 9 Failed school exams, version 4 by Failure on post-school education courses.

Post-school courses	<u>School exams failure</u>		
	No fails %	Some fails %	No entry %
No post-school education courses	71	60	94
Unsuccessful post-school courses only	4	6	2
Successful and unsuccessful post-school courses	2	2	0.5
Successful courses only	23	32	4
<b>Total (N= 100%)</b>	<b>2042</b>	<b>5398</b>	<b>1518</b>

Table 10 Failed school exams, version 1 by failure on post school education courses.

Post-school courses	<u>School exams failure</u>		
	No fails %	Some fails %	No entry* %
No post-school education courses	42	49	84
Unsuccessful post-school education courses only	7	7	4
Successful and unsuccessful post-school courses	5	3	1
Successful post-school courses only	47	41	9
<b>Total (N= 100%)</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>3525</b>	<b>5111</b>

\*See footnote to table 8