

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 28 - History		
Title of case study: Britain's Transition to Mass Education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Peter Mandler	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Modern Cultural History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2001 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Mandler's research on Britain's transition to mass education has contributed a unique perspective to public debate and policy formation on school organization and curricula and on higher education curriculum and research policy, emphasizing long-term social, cultural, economic and demographic determinants of educational change lying behind apparent short-term policy determinants. It has informed key interventions by the Royal Historical Society, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Alliance, and enhanced and informed public understanding of educational change in Britain and internationally on radio, in the press, on social media and in international policy circles. Through an ESRC-funded project it has more recently recruited memories and experiences of diverse postwar generations' secondary schooling further to raise awareness of the impact of society on education and vice-versa, and used this awareness to point to new directions for the teaching of British history in schools.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Mandler was Vice President for Education (2009-12) and President (2012-16) of the Royal Historical Society, Britain's premier learned society for history; he was also Convenor (2012-16) of the Arts and Humanities Alliance, a federation of learned societies in the arts and humanities. During this period he aligned his research and his policy work to ensure the latter was informed by the former. After demitting these roles he developed the research further in collaboration with Drs Laura Carter and Chris Jeppesen (submitted with this UOA with related publications) in an ESRC-funded project, 'Secondary Education and Social Change', which runs from 2017-21. The trajectory of Britain's educational system at all levels has been shaped since the Second World War by widening participation and this has had under-acknowledged effects on the content and consequences of education which are still at work today. The underpinning research developed four major themes:</p>		
<p>1) the significance of popular attitudes to education in a period of declining deference, growing aspiration and rapidly changing labour markets. Most previous historical work had focused on top-down, expert- and politics-led change, and had underestimated the way in which education is a reflection as much as an engine of social change. Mandler's work has brought into play much neglected social-science evidence of mass behaviours and attitudes and shown how these behaviours and attitudes were and still are the drivers of change, whatever policymakers do or think. [R4]</p>		
<p>2) the complex relationship between education and social mobility. Most policymakers continue to argue, in the face of much evidence from economists and sociologists, that</p>		

education drives social mobility. Mandler's historical evidence specifies more precisely under what conditions education does or does not facilitate social mobility, and argues that mass participation in secondary and higher education has other effects on society and economy not measured by social mobility. [R4]

3) **the 'two cultures'**. Mandler's analysis of subject choice in secondary and higher education has shown for the first time that, contrary to standard assumptions, mass participation led to the relative decline of STEM from the 1960s to the 2010s. In different phases of growth the humanities, 'social studies' and the creative arts have benefited instead. Awareness of this demand-led proliferation of non-science subjects draws attention also to the non-science orientation of both the culture and the economy. These arguments have been applied both to an understanding of the historical record and also to the very recent and unusual upturn in STEM share. [R1, R4]

4) **the significance of popular demand for state-society relations**. More generally, Mandler's research delivers a reality check to policymakers' illusions about the reach and significance of their own actions, and draws attention to the value of arm's-length relations between state and society (including in the public sector, where education mostly lies) and the continuing force of demand-driven behaviours in determining the shape of the world in which we live. [R2, R3, R4]

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] 'The Two Cultures Revisited: The Humanities in British Universities since 1945', *Twentieth-Century British History* 26 (2015), 400-23. Abridged and revised version, 'The Humanities in British Universities since 1945', *American Historical Review* 120 (2015), 1299-1310. Chinese translation by Xia Hong, *New History* 15 (2015), 272-91

<https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwu068>

[R2] 'The Impact of the State', in Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe (eds.), *The Impact of History? Histories at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2015), 169-81, ISBN: 9781138775107 <https://doi-org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.4324/9781315726533>

[R3] 'Parliamentary Scrutiny of Aid Spending: The Case of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)', *Parliamentary Affairs* 72 (2019), 331-52 (with Ambreena Manji)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsy014>

[R4] *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2020), ISBN: 9780198840145. Incorporates research first reported in Mandler's four Presidential Addresses to the Royal Historical Society (published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 2014-17) as well as the first results of the new research derived from the project 'Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1944', ESRC Research Grant (ES/P010261/1), GBP806,875, 1.10.17-30.9.21.

All items above are published by presses of international standing and R1 and R3 have been peer reviewed.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Mandler's 'bottom-up' perspectives on social and educational change in the postwar period have enriched public understanding in the UK but also much further afield (notably East Asia) of the complex relationship between the two and also affected education and public policy, in three main areas:

1) **Subject choice and curricular reform**. Mandler's understanding of the relationship between widening participation and subject choice has had an international impact in deepening understanding of subject distribution between the humanities, social sciences and STEM. He has been invited to present and discuss this research in the USA, Australia (as a keynote to the Australian Historical Association), Ireland (to inform the first all-Ireland efforts to bring together historians as an effective lobby group), Germany, South Korea and China

(where he toured universities in 2015 and met with senior university leaders, particularly at the Shanghai and Beijing ‘international studies’ universities which specialize in the humanities). In the UK, these historical perspectives were to inform curricular change in England – Mandler was consulted directly by the DfE in the formulation of new national curriculum, GCSE and A-level specifications for History (2010-15), wrote the Royal Historical Society’s consultation responses, and has since regularly advised DfE and examination boards in the drawing up and roll-out of those specifications, organized meetings with ministers to facilitate historians’ input into curricular design (Gove, Willetts, Johnson), and through Cambridge’s CSaP programme has met with senior civil servants from DfE, DCMS and BEIS to show what policy interventions can and cannot do to steer subject choice. As the head of DfE’s subject choice office put it after their one-on-one meeting, ‘I learned a lot, from both the conversation and the articles (which I have shared with colleagues). The new perspectives and insights that I gained continue to inform my thinking and discussions in this area.’ [E1]

The research has proved particularly illuminating to new universities seeking to gauge long-term trends in student demand (see invitations to speak at Leeds Beckett and Suffolk Universities, the latter to mark the grant of university status, and evidence of interest in Greece and Finland – E2, E3) and of wider interest to the general public (see appearances at the Hay Festival, on Korean radio to discuss the closures of humanities departments in Korea and Japan, reports in *Evening Standard*, *Daily Telegraph* and in the international press, and an essay that earned ‘exceptional’ reach of 40,000 downloads in two weeks in the long-form online journal *Aeon* - E4).

Finally, Mandler was instrumental in putting together the Arts and Humanities Alliance, a federation of learned societies, to advocate for the interests of the humanities, in large part to counter misinformation about trends in subject choice and their outcomes in earnings and other rewards. Since stepping down as its convenor in 2016, he has pursued this same cause through the British Academy’s Skills Programme on whose steering group he sits and which has also harnessed his research to help to explain trends in student choice for the humanities and social sciences: see the reports *The Right Skills* (2017) and *Qualified for the Future* (2020). His perspective on non-pecuniary elements in subject choices for the humanities has informed a recent *Report on the Future Humanities Workforce* (2019) issued by the Australian Academy of the Humanities, his data cited as illustrating the ‘resilience’ of the humanities in a supposed ‘Age of STEM’; has contributed to understanding of subject choice in the USA via the American Historical Association (who invited him to speak on humanities careers at its 2020 annual meeting) and the *Humanities Indicators* project; and has engaged with very recent debates over ‘steering to STEM’ in policy papers commissioned by *History & Policy*, ‘STEM Subjects and the “Market” in Education since the 1960s’, and the British Academy’s Childhood project, ‘Does It Matter What We Study In School?’

2) **Secondary education and social change.** Here the research has provided new perspectives on the impetus to and impacts of universal secondary education, casting doubt on elite-led explanations and providing new historical contexts based on the welfare state, democratization and changing ideas of citizenship and aspiration. This research provided the platform for the award by the ESRC of an GBP806,875 research grant on ‘Secondary Education and Social Change in the UK since 1945’ (SESC), with Mandler as the PI and Drs Laura Carter and Chris Jeppesen as independent researchers (2017-21), one of the central purposes of which is to harness this new social history of mass education to public purposes.

i) in schools. With support from two additional impact and widening participation grants from Cambridge University totalling GBP12,000, SESC has hired four history teacher-consultants who have prepared lesson plans to introduce the history of secondary education into KS3 curricula (adaptable for use for the local study at GCSE and for A-level options). Students are shown how major issues of social change in modern Britain can be revealed in the histories of their own and other schools. The plans and further resources have been trialled at widening-participation schools in the region; presentations have been made to teachers and others at York, Cambridge, Enfield, Salisbury, Southend, Isle of Wight and through national webinars for

the Historical Association (HA, project partner and the professional organization for history teachers. While delayed by the pandemic, the HA will mount these resources on its widely-used platform providing CPD for secondary teachers. Early feedback has indicated how SESC's bottom-up approach might shift emphases in the teaching of modern British history: as one Head of History put it, this project 'made me realise that actually we've ended up with a focus on a narrow political British history...It's challenged me to adopt a very different perspective' [E5]; after a SESC workshop in York, the head of the North Yorkshire history teachers network reported, 'There was enthusiasm to use the materials that will come out of the project to improve teaching of later 20thC social history connected to our schools over the next few years.' [E6] In recognition of Mandler's track record in curricular reform, his public profile in the world of secondary education, and SESC's collaborative work, Mandler was elected President of the Historical Association in May 2020. In this capacity he will be giving approximately 30 further public lectures about the social, demographic and economic determinants of educational change and three annual lectures at the HA conference on the SESC work, to continue the dissemination of its social-historical perspective and new curricular materials in the next REF cycle.

ii) in public debate. A 0.5 Public Engagement Coordinator for two years was built into the proposal from the beginning; the project website (www.sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk) and its open-access briefing papers have proved crucial resources for teachers, social researchers and media outlets seeking to bring a genuinely experiential perspective to their understandings of the impact of education. SESC has quickly become a central resource for teachers, students, journalists, social scientists and media organizations concerned with putting present-day educational practice and policy into the context of long-term social transformations. Its research has contributed to multiple episodes of the very successful BBC2 series 'Back in Time for School' (2019) [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bx7lxc>], to a BBC R1 Extra programme on black history (2019) [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07qsvvd/1xtra-andre-gray-black-icons-inked>], to a BBC R4 'Briefing Room' programme on school examinations (2019) [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0002hml>], and to a BBC R4 Archive programme on comprehensive reorganization, 'Panorama Broke my School' (2019) [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0008pfw>] [E7], on which Jeppesen appeared as the principal external expert, and to the work of the 1946 birth cohort (Carter providing advice and support on recent communications with and queries to the cohort). SESC has organized workshops on the use of qualitative evidence in the birth cohort studies (for social scientists, Sep. 2019), on social media as evidence for recent social history (for teachers and data scientists across the UK, Jun. 2019), on historical experiences with multi-cultural education (for SOAS, for their better understanding of their target audiences, Dec. 2018) and anti-racist education (for teachers and students, Nov. 2019).

iii) in public policy. Mandler's focus on demand-side pressures and SESC's on student experiences have caused policymakers to reconsider how far and where their freedom of action resides and what demand pressures might really be driving policy change. Mandler's solo research in this area had already made considerable contributions to ongoing debates over education and social mobility, comprehensivization vs. grammar schools and parental and popular expectations of education [E7, E8]. He was invited to speak at a panel to mark the 70th anniversary of the Butler Act for a special gathering of senior civil servants in DfE (with Dame Alison Wolf and Sir Michael Barber), after which the Permanent Secretary commented, 'Your presentation on whether the Butler Act created a meritocracy was clearly well received [and] I was particularly glad that the panel discussion picked up on your theme of parental power as this remains very relevant to policy making today.' [E9] Similar themes re-asserting the significance of parental choice outside of legislative provision were developed in collaboration with Wolf on a special BBC R4 programme in 2016 'A Subversive History of School Reform', which led to lively exchanges with Peter Hitchens on social media and through his Mail on Sunday blog [E10], as well as a further appearance on BBC R4 in 2017 to discuss the significance of generational change on school reform from the 1960s to the present, citation in an LSE briefing on its widening participation strategy (2017), and in a leader in the *Times Higher* (2019). With the SESC project under way, Carter and Jeppesen

then delivered on invitation two 'Heywood calls' to Whitehall (Jan. 2020) giving over a hundred civil servants historical context for policy relating to parental involvement and gender in secondary education. The publication of Mandler's monograph [R4] in September 2020 established a definitive statement about the demand-side determinants of policy impacts to guide future policy-making. It has already been hailed by Wolf, the government's principal adviser on further education, as 'hugely relevant to anyone interested in policy. With luck, it may even improve policymaking', and by the director of the Higher Education Policy Institute as 'the book we have been waiting for...we should read Mandler's conclusions not as some dusty historical reflections but as a lesson on the stresses and strains that we are likely to face on the hopefully continuing – but not inevitable – journey of educational progress. We could not have a better guide.'

3) **Research policy.** Here the research has emphasized the historical traction of the 'Haldane Principle' regulating the arm's length between government policy and academic research, at a time when rapid institutional and policy change tends to invite historical amnesia. An earlier episode in 2011, based on Mandler's research, which mobilized humanities organizations against government attempts to steer their research agenda, was one of the precipitating factors forming the Arts and Humanities Alliance out of an earlier, more sporadic lobbying group. Much of its subsequent advocacy has been based on these premises; Mandler wrote up this sequence of events as part of a longer history of state-humanities relations in 'The Impact of the State'. Since 2016 he has been collaborating with the international lawyer Ambreena Manji, initially at the instance of the Arts and Humanities Alliance, to direct attention to the relevance of the Haldane Principle to recent attempts to steer academic research towards Official Development Aid goal [R1]. This work has been introduced as testimony to Parliamentary committees and a subsequent (2019) Independent Commission for Aid Impact report has aligned with its findings.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [E1] Testimonial email from director of the subject choice unit, Department for Education, 15 Apr. 2018.
- [E2] Dean of University of East Finland on implications of the Aeon analysis for higher education planning, in his blog, 15 Jun. 2016 - <https://blogs.uef.fi/keeping-the-lead/>
- [E3] Interview on implications for European higher-education policy, 'Contemporary Issues', Jul.-Dec. 2017: [Link](#)
- [E4] Email from editor at Aeon, 28 Dec. 2015, re 'Rise of the Humanities reader and download numbers'
- [E5] <https://twitter.com/CorinneGoulee/status/1276947652702351361>
- [E6] Email from YorkCLIO history teachers' network workshop at which Laura Carter sought input into development of SESC curricular materials, 28 Feb. 2020.
- [E7] Landing pages for iPlayer, Back in Time for School; Andre Gray: Black Icons Inked (16 Oct 2019); Panorama Broke My School (21 Sept 2019); Implications of TRHS 2013 analysis for school organization in Jeremy Warner, 'Why grammar schools are not the answer to our economic and social ills', Daily Telegraph, 30 Aug. 2016 - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/08/30/why-grammar-schools-are-not-the-answer-to-our-economic-and-social/>
- [E8] Higher Education Policy Institute blog on implications of TRHS 2013 analysis for higher education planning, 1 Sep. 2016 - <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2016/09/01/last-time-conservative-government-set-higher-education-targets/>
- [E9] Testimonial letter from Permanent Secretary, Department for Education, 26 Nov. 2014.
- [E10] *Mail on Sunday* blog, Aug. 2016 - <http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2016/08/all-schools-are-comprehensive-but-some-are-more-comprehensive-than-others.html>, BBC *Analysis*, Jul. 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07knmpc>, BBC *When Greeks Flew Kites*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b090ccrh>