situation. While I anticipate that a change in the HIDB's structure, even at this late date, *would* make a difference, it is my firm opinion that a rationalisation of the transportation infrastructure that serves the Western Isles would radically transform the economic potential of the region.

The Comprehensive Clearances

Robin Jackson

A distinctive characteristic of social life in the Scottish highlands and islands is the number of children obliged to leave home to obtain a secondary education. Often this means either leaving their island and travelling to the mainland or moving from Gaelic-speaking crofting and fishing communities on the West Coast to English-speaking urban centres on the East Coast (e.g. Inverness). This involves for the majority staying in a school hostel and for a select minority in approved lodgings in the town in which the secondary school is located. In 1972 eight of the 35 Scottish education authorities provided accommodation for 1700 secondary school pupils in 32 hostels (26 single-sex and 6 mixed).

It is perhaps relevant to note that Norway – which has similar problems to Scotland in the provision of education in sparsely populated regions – rejects the policy of hostelisation for pupils of compulsory school age. There are four main reasons. First, it is too expensive! Second, the community benefits from retaining its children. Third, the children gain by remaining members of the community. Fourth, hostelisation accelerates the process of depopulation.

Although going away to hostel is not something new –it has been the traditional pattern in many island communities (e.g. Orkney, Shetland, Outer Hebrides) for most of the century – it has now been extended to a new and totally different pupil population. No longer is it the case that most pupils in hostel are those seeking the necessary educational qualifications for

entrance to further or higher education. The recent centralisation of secondary schools in a limited number of small urban centres remote from many pupils' homes coupled with the raising of the school-leaving age in 1972 have led to a fundamental change in the character of state boarding provision in Scotland. Today a significant number of pupils in hostel are there against their will: forced to leave home and attend an 'alien' institution by a law which recognises neither parents' nor childrens' wishes.

Evidence from a recent study (Jackson and Robinson, 1974) conducted into state boarding provision in Scotland suggests that unless current trends are reversed the school hostel's newly acquired custodial function may lead it inexorably to assume many of the characteristics of a penal institution, for the new constraints imposed on staff and pupils are likely to prejudice attempts made by the staff to create and sustain the kind of open and democratic regimes sought not only by the Scottish Education Department but by the pupils themselves.

> "The particular objective of the hostel is to ensure that the pupils live in an environment which caters for their physical and material needs and for their emotional and cultural needs, and where they receive the oversight, the control, and the encouragement which good parents would provide for them at home." (SED, 1968)

One of the main aims of the hostel study was to obtain from all senior pupils (ie. 15 to 18 year-olds) in Scottish secondary school hostels their perceptions of hostel life. From a total possible population of 727 in 28 hostels (four hostels which catered only for younger pupils were excluded), completed records were obtained for 648 (297 boys and 369 girls).

When the pupils were asked to state what their expectations of hostel life had been prior to leaving home, it was clear that the boys felt the hostel should play mainly an instrumental role (ie. helping them to obtain good educational qualifications or providing them with sporting and recreational activities.) The

girls' expectations were quite different. They felt that the hostel should satisfy a wide range of their immediate, here-and-now social needs (ie. the wish to be treated as an individual; the desire for a stable and secure environment; the provision of opportunities for social mixing). This particular orientation may have encouraged the girls to enter hostels with far higher expectations than those held by the boys and to be less acceptant and more critical when reality fell short of expectation:

> "I expected hostel to be a nice, homely place with everyone enjoying life. To be a second home not just a place to sleep and eat. A place with lots of activities to keep ones mind off school for a few hours each night. To be a place where one would feel to be growing up and not to be treated like a child. To be a place where one could live at ease and in peace." (16 year-old pupil)

The alleged difficulties of coping with girls in residential institutions – particularly single-sex institutions – may reflect not so much the fact that girls are constitutionally or temperamentally more problematic but that they may judge their satisfaction with residential life by different and more demanding standards than the boys. Many of the intrinsic characteristics of institutional life which were noted to be particularly pronounced in the all-girl hostels (ie. block treatment, depersonalisation, rigidity of routine and extended social distance between staff and residents), work against the successful realisation of the kind of expressive goals that girls identify as being important for a residential institution to pursue.

One of the most significant findings in the study is not that the hostels apparently fail to meet so many of the pupils' stated needs (and the declared objectives of the Scottish Education Department) but that they appear to fail by such a wide margin:

> "Life in the Hostel did differ from what I expected. I sensed a lack of freedom, and the atmosphere to be a rather frightening one with a lack of security." (16 year-old pupil)

Of the two thirds of the pupils who found hostel life differed from their expectations, most experienced some form of disappointment or disillusionment. The main factors contributing to this general feeling of disenchantment were a lack of personal freedom, unhelpful or unsympathetic staff, the existence of too many rules which were either inconsistently enforced or unfairly applied, an unduly strict discipline, restricted access to the local community, boredom, lack of privacy and an 'unhomely' atmosphere.

However, an important distinction needs to be drawn between the efforts made by mixed and single-sex hostels. In mixed hostels there was a greater likelihood that the pupils' individual rights and needs would be recognised and respected, their obligations to their peers stressed and their active participation in the formulation of hostel policy encouraged. Greater efforts were also made to reduce the social distance between staff and pupils and to minimize the social isolation of the hostel from the local community.

Single-sex hostels, however, tended to assume many of the characteristics of custodial institutions in which there was an excessive rigidity of routine, pupils were treated as a group irrespective of differences in age, ability and interests, there were few opportunities for self-expression and there was such a sharp separation between staff and pupils that pupils were reluctant or unwilling to approach staff for advice and guidance when personal problems arose. Many such hostels, for what appeared to be reasons of administrative convenience, assumed a state of self-imposed isolation from the community. Attendance at hostel led to limited opportunities for social mixing outside the hostel peer group and involvement in social activities in the local community. Restricted access to the 'outside world', the adoption of institution-oriented as opposed to pupil-oriented practices by the staff combined with the frequent absence of any recreational and social activities in the hostel engendered feelings of boredom, frustration and resentment among the 'captive' adolescent population.

These apparent shortcomings in the Scottish hostel system

should not be seen as a wholesale indictment of all hostel staff. It is difficult to see how the kind of enlightened and liberal regimes wanted by both the SED and the pupils can be introduced in circumstances where, the staff are given little incentive to change, they are accorded minimal encouragement and support from the local education authorities, they are closely identified with, and tied to, the exigencies of the school system and they are subjected to a wide variety of other powerful external constraints (e.g. local churches, hostel sub-committee, etc.).

Pupil dissatisfaction was not restricted to hostel life. Nearly half the hostel pupils felt that, in school, they were treated differently by their teachers. Many believed that teachers were more strict, less sympathetic and had higher expectations for their work, behaviour and appearance. They also felt that teachers saw the hostel as an extension of the school, which permitted them a far closer degree of supervision and control of their conduct and work than applied to other pupils:

> "Hostel pupils are always expected to wear full school uniform whereas village pupils at school are not. If a hostel pupil is bad at school the punishment is used through hostel means, whereas the day pupils are not." (16 year-old pupil)

Attention was also drawn to the tendency of some teachers to treat hostel pupils not as individuals but as indistinguishable members of a distinct, uniform and potentially troublesome group. Repeated reference was made to the lack of sympathy, understanding and friendliness shown by some 'mainland', 'town' or 'East Coast' teachers to 'island', 'country' or 'West Coast' pupils. Hostel pupils who believed they were treated differently by other pupils felt they were regarded either with sympathy, pity, curiosity, ridicule or contempt: responses traditionally reserved for members of a minority group. Mention was also made of the fact that local pupils treated hostel pupils as 'outsiders' or 'intruders'. For their part, hostel pupils conceded that their restricted access to the community and their own clannishness precluded the formation of friendships with other pupils. The resentment and hostility shown by some local pupils may have been influenced, in part, by the unsympathetic disposition

of a few teachers, but more probably, by the apparent social cohesiveness and unity of the hostel group which could be perceived as a latent or real threat.

Paradoxically the comprehensive 'clearance' of children from Gaelic-speaking communities through hostelisation may be contributing to a short-term regeneration in Gaelic culture and language. The social and cultural isolation of the hostel population combined with the patronising and discriminatory treatment shown by English-speaking teachers and pupils may have awakened in some, and strengthened in others, a growing commitment to a Gaelic identity. Just such a process has been detected in a recent study conducted in the Isle of Harris, (MacKinnon, 1975). MacKinnon found that some of the more senior girls in hostel developed "a very strong commitment to the (Gaelic) language and culture, often using it as a cultural prop and developing almost a sense of Gaelic ethnicity."

The fact that school and hostel life are so closely entwined may encourage those pupils who are hostilely disposed to hostel to reject school and those resentful of their treatment at school to dislike hostel. There is therefore a possibility that some senior pupils may be encouraged to leave school prematurely simply to escape the rigours of hostel life.

> "I thoroughly enjoy school life as our school has a very high standard of teachers. The hostel life has been made unpleasant by the fact they don't get on together and are inclined to use the pupils as buffers between them. I have been in this confusing situation and unless you can stand up for yourself life can become very miserable." (18 year-old pupil)

It should perhaps be recalled that we are discussing – in the main – the views of the 'academic' pupils who have made a deliberate decision to remain at school and not the views of disaffected ROSLA pupils who may well have had stronger and more compelling reasons for wishing to leave.

One of the main reasons for the closure of the small secondary schools in the remoter rural areas of Scotland and the establishment of large centralised secondary schools was to extend educational opportunities through the provision of a wider range of educational, social and recreational facilities and by so doing encourage more pupils to remain at school beyond the statutory leaving age. One of the unintended consequences of the comprehensive reforms may have been to weaken rather than strengthen the schools 'holding power'.

However, comprehensive schools were established not only to provide greater educational opportunities but – and to many this is a more important goal – to diminish social divisiveness by encouraging greater tolerance and understanding between social groups drawn from different class, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The school is seen as an instrument for facilitating social integration and creating a more harmonious and stable society. This study provides little evidence that attendance at a central secondary school has facilitated integration. On the contrary, the degree and extent of antipathy and hostility shown to hostel pupils is one of the more dispiriting findings of the study.

While the belief that schools can act as effective instruments for promoting social change has a certain superficial plausibility, it would seem that on occasions our attempts at social engineering can lead to consequences which are not only undesired but directly contrary to our original intent. If a subsequent study found that the 'holding power' of the secondary schools in this region had not significantly improved since the introduction of a centralised system and if the present social divisiveness within the schools and the evident high level of dissatisfaction within the hostels had also not diminished, one would be entitled to question the wisdom of continuing to pursue a policy which was failing to achieve so many of its stated objectives.

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