

**SHOULD THE SEXES
BE SEPARATED FOR
SECONDARY EDUCATION?**

**Pamela Robinson and Alan Smithers
Centre for Education and Employment Research**

Report for HMC, May 1997

Contents

Introduction	1
Examination Results	3
Views on Schooling	8
Transition to University	15
Is there a Difference?	20
References	24
Appendix A: Sample	25
Appendix B: Interview Material	27

Introduction

1. The publication of performance tables for schools has revived the old debate about whether it is better to keep the sexes apart for their secondary education. It is indeed striking how many of the schools at the top of both the independent and maintained lists are single-sex.
2. Over the years, the basis of the controversy has, however, changed. At the time of Dale's (1969, 1971, 1974) monumental researches, co-education was thought to be progressive and unsound, and it was struggling for a hearing. The general tenor of Dale's work was to look for the advantages of educating the sexes together. Now it is single-sex education which feels threatened. In the state sector, it has literally been decimated. From about 2,000 of both boys-only and girls-only schools in the 1960's, only 197 and 227 of each remain (EOC/Ofsted, 1996).
3. In the independent sector there has also been a major shift, but not quite on the same scale. While in 1968 only three of the 273 public schools were co-educational, by 1997 approaching half the 580 schools whose results are collated by the Independent Schools Information Service take both sexes. Only 237 continue as girls-only schools and 111 as boys-only schools. Boys' schools are increasingly opening their doors to girls, including some of the great public schools like Westminster, Rugby and Marlborough. This has been perceived as a threat by girls' schools and for a decade the Girls' Schools Association has been vigorously defending their patch. It is now single-sex education that is having to make a case.
4. Interestingly, a similar reversal has occurred in the United States (Sadker and Sadker, 1992). When, as in the early years of the century, girls' education was merely an adjunct to that of boys the campaign was for co-education to give both sexes equal opportunities. This culminated in the passing of a law in 1972 which, in effect, made single-sex education illegal in state schools. While some single-sex education survives in the independent sector, virtually all the state schools, including the Catholic Schools, have become co-educational. This has prompted a backlash based on the argument that boys so dominate mixed classes that 'true' equality of opportunity demands that the sexes be educated separately (see, for example, AAUW, 1992, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*).
5. Whatever the perspective, however, it has proved difficult to substantiate that one or other type of schooling is better. In an earlier report, *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling*, we analysed schools' examination results for 1994. Our conclusion was that the single-sex schools topped the league tables for reasons associated with single-sexness rather than the segregation of the sexes itself.
6. The report brought together evidence from a number of sources demonstrating that single-sex schools, as a group, differ from co-educational schools in a number of important respects besides admitting only either girls or boys. They tend, for example, to:

- be *highly selective* since they include survivors of the direct grant and grammar schools, as well as leading public schools;
 - recruit from *higher socio-economic backgrounds*;
 - be *long established* with a fine academic tradition.
7. Consistently across many studies, ability has emerged as by far the most powerful predictor of examination success. Indeed, the notion of judging the effectiveness of schools in terms of ‘value-added’ depends on it being so. Social class, representing in part parental expectations, also has a strong influence. When attempts have been made to control statistically for differences in the ability and social class of intakes, the apparent discrepancy in exam performance between co-educational and single-sex schools largely disappears. The ‘single sex vs. co-ed’ dichotomy has a detectable effect only when it stands as a proxy for type of school in general (Thomas, Pan and Goldstein, 1994).
 8. The conclusions of *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling* were not universally accepted. On occasions, they have been challenged vitriolically (Daley, 1995). Other evidence has been published purporting to show the superiority of girls’ schools (Kelly, 1995; McCrum, 1995). Clearly the issue needs to be re-visited and in this report we analyse the 1997 examination results for independent schools which, because more single-sex schools have survived in this sector, offer the best hope of comparing like with like.
 9. As a counterbalance to the claimed academic advantages of single-sex schools we also examine the assumed social benefits of co-education. It has been suggested that educating the sexes together is more like real life, and the experience of growing up with the opposite sex makes it easier to move on to the mixed environments of university and employment. We have been able to explore some of these claims through in-depth interviews with students in their second term at university.

Examination Results

10. In our earlier report, *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling*, we looked in detail at the outstanding performance of single-sex schools - both independent and state - in the examination league tables. When, as far as we were able, we compared like with like we found that the differences between co-educational and single-sex schools largely disappeared. We concluded therefore that the remarkable results of the girls-only and boys-only schools at GCSE and A-level were not due to single-sexness *per se*, but rather to factors associated with it. The evidence suggested that ability, social class, type of school, history and tradition were all involved.
11. At the time of that study no data were available for what might be thought to be the clinching comparison of girls in girls' schools with girls in co-educational schools, and boys in boys' schools with boys in co-educational schools, across the different school types. Special tabulations were therefore commissioned from the DfEE, and the 1995 GCSE results, set out on this basis, are shown in Table 1. However, rather than settling the matter conclusively, as was hoped, they further illustrate how difficult it is to tease out the truth on this subject.

TABLE 1: GCSE Results 1995

per cent 5 or more grades A-C (N)

	Ind (44,196)	Sel (8727)	GM (92697)	Comp (379,739)	Other (16,948)	Total (542,307)
Girls						
Single-Sex (44,558)	91.3	96.9	71.3	45.5	35.8	68.9
Co-ed (222,756)	81.3	91.1	50.8	45.4	25.9	47.2
Boys						
Single-Sex (36,095)	89.7	95.5	65.2	33.9	18.5	63.5
Co-ed (238,754)	79.0	89.4	41.0	36.2	18.1	38.8
Total (542,307)	85.9	94.8	50.2	40.7	23.2	46.4

Source: Special tabulation commissioned from DfEE

12. The overall shape of the results is as described in *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling*. Taking all schools together, pupils in single-sex schools do seem to do better than those in co-educational schools, but the gender split is uneven across the school types. Proportionally more of the single-sex schools are among the high-flying independent and grammar schools.
13. Many of the apparent differences disappear when the school types are considered separately. This happens with the comprehensives, for example, which comprise 70 per cent of the schools. It is possible to analyse the position in comprehensives further, as in Table 2, using Ofsted data. It is clear that the difference between schools with sixth forms and those without is greater than whether they are single-sex or co-educational.

TABLE 2: Comprehensives*average GCSE points score, 1995 (N)*

	Comp to 18		Comp to 16	
<i>Girls</i>				
Single-Sex	35.9	(99)	31.7	(53)
Co-ed	35.7	(1337)	33.3	(1211)
<i>Boys</i>				
Single-Sex	32.5	(81)	26.6	(42)
Co-ed	31.3	(1337)	29.0	(1211)

Source: Ofsted

14. Nevertheless if we go back to Table 1, we can also see that there are differences within school types. Pupils in single-sex independents, for example, seem to do distinctly better than those in the mixed counterparts. Interpreting the overall scores is complicated, however, by the fact that some of the schools are boarding and others are day; some are selective while others have open access; and some have just a smattering of the opposite sex while others are fully co-educational.
15. Table 3 shows a detailed analysis of the English independent schools' 1997 GCSE results taking these differences into account. Interestingly, when we get the schools as alike as we can, girls in the fully co-educational schools perform as well as - if anything slightly better than - their contemporaries educated separately. On average, 95.4 per cent of the girls in the selective co-educational day schools obtained at least five GCSEs at grades A-C compared with 94.3 per cent in the selective single-sex day schools. Girls in the co-educational Bancroft's, Leicester Grammar and Stockport Grammar do just as well as those at Bath High, City of London or Withington.
16. In so far as there are differences in the girls' performance overall this mainly resides in the boarding schools and the schools with an uneven mix of the sexes. The girls' boarding schools are generally celebrated institutions such as Benenden, Cheltenham Ladies and Roedean while the co-educational group includes several lesser known smaller schools with relatively poor results which pull down the average. The mixed group includes not only distinguished former boys' schools like Marlborough and Rugby that are now admitting girls, but also again a number of small schools.

TABLE 3: Independent Schools*per cent 5 or more GCSE grades A-C¹, 1997 (N)*

	Day ²		Boarding		Total ⁷
	Sel ³	NS	Sel	NS	
Girls					
Single-Sex ⁴	94.3 (142)	90.4 (9)	93.6 (70)	84.6 (12)	93.4 (233)
Co-ed ⁵	95.4 (40)	88.5 (6)	89.6 (36)	80.9 (5)	91.7 (87)
Mixed ⁶	90.9 (19)	87.1 (3)	86.8 (53)	77.2 (7)	86.9 (82)
Total	94.2 (201)	89.2 (18)	90.4 (159)	81.7 (24)	91.7 (402)
Boys					
Single-Sex	95.1 (66)	71.4 (1)	91.8 (41)	55.7 (3)	92.6 (111)
Co-ed	90.5 (43)	64.4 (6)	83.5 (38)	57.7 (8)	83.3 (95)
Mixed	82.6 (28)	59.5 (6)	79.3 (65)	54.4 (15)	75.8 (114)
Total	91.1 (137)	62.7 (13)	84.0 (144)	55.6 (26)	83.9 (320)

1. Minimum of 10 male or female candidates. 16 schools do not meet this condition for either and have been excluded. 63 others fall below the threshold for either boys or girls leading to some differences between the sexes in the numbers of coeducational and mixed schools shown.
2. Day, 10 per cent boarders or fewer; boarding 11 per cent or more.
3. Selective, non-selective according to DfEE classification.
4. Single-sex, 10 per cent or fewer of opposite sex.
5. Co-educational, 40 per cent or more of both sexes.
6. Mixed, 11 to 39 per cent of opposite sex.
7. Overall differences statistically significant (girls, F=10.4; boys, F=22.7), but girls' selective day schools not significantly different from corresponding co-educational schools.

17. Table 3 also reflects the national picture of generally better performance by girls at GCSE, but an exception is boys in selective single-sex day schools who do as well as girls in equivalent girls' schools. Since the boys-schools' group includes such well known names as Dulwich College, King Edward's Birmingham and Manchester Grammar this is perhaps not surprising. However, while girls in selective co-educational day schools did as well as those in the single-sex, the boys in the co-educational schools appeared to do less well. This was mainly due to the inclusion in the boys' tabulation of some extra small schools without sixth-forms (but having the threshold number of candidates) like Hydesville Tower, Walsall and St John's, Billericay, and a few co-educational schools where the boys did much less well than the girls (for example, Sunderland High and Kingswood School, Southport).
18. The pattern of similarities and differences strongly suggests that the performance of a school in terms of examination results has much less to do with whether it is single-sex or not than with other factors. This is reinforced by the A-level results shown in Table 4.
19. Overall there are no differences in the average A-level points per candidate for girls whether they are with, or separated from, the opposite sex though, unsurprisingly, there is a difference between the selective and non-selective schools. For boys, however, it is those who are in single-sex and mixed sixth forms who are ahead. The outstanding performance of the boys' selective single-sex day schools is confirmed at A-level. They are ahead of all other school types including the corresponding girls' schools.

TABLE 4: Independent Schools¹

average A-level points per candidate², 1997 (N)

	Day		Boarding		Total ⁴
	Sel	NS	Sel	NS	
Girls					
Single-Sex	21.5 (111)	21.9 (1)	20.3 (68)	15.6 (7)	20.9 (187)
Co-ed	20.9 (31)	16.2 (1)	20.0 (36)	17.4 (6)	20.1 (74)
Mixed	20.4 (18)	-	19.9 (58)	16.7 (4)	19.9 (80)
Mixed Sixth ³	21.0 (20)	-	22.7 (9)	-	21.5 (29)
Total	21.2 (180)	19.1 (2)	20.2 (171)	16.5 (17)	20.6 (370)
Boys					
Single-Sex	23.4 (38)	14.6 (1)	21.4 (21)	10.1 (2)	22.2 (62)
Co-ed	20.1 (34)	14.1 (1)	18.7 (35)	16.1 (7)	19.0 (77)
Mixed	20.7 (21)	11.5 (1)	18.8 (62)	13.7 (6)	18.8 (90)
Mixed Sixth	21.7 (21)	-	21.2 (10)	-	21.5 (31)
Total	21.6 (114)	13.4 (3)	19.4 (128)	14.3 (15)	20.0 (260)

1. For definitions see Chart 10.
2. Minimum of 10 male and female candidates. 40 schools fail to meet this condition for either and have been excluded. A further 23 are below the threshold for one sex or other so numbers of co-educational and mixed schools not always the same for both sexes.
3. Mixed sixth, 10 per cent or more girls in sixth form only.
4. Overall differences significant for boys (F=9.76), but not for girls (F=1.97). Boys in selective single-sex day schools do better than those in coeducational schools (t=3.44) and girls in selective single-sex day schools (t=2.46).

20. Among girls it is the mixed sixth-forms which do better as a group presumably because of some outstandingly able pupils transferring into schools like Westminster where the average A-level points for the 37 girls in 1997 was 35.32 (equivalent to 3 As+). There was no difference in the average score of girls in the selective day schools whether the school is single-sex (range 7.23 to 27.93) or co-educational (range 13.18 to 26.90). Boys in co-educational schools appeared to do less well than their fellow pupils in single-sex schools. But while the single-sex group is dominated by the former direct-grant and other distinguished day schools (lowest average score 16.57 other than one outlier), the co-educational group contains a number whose intakes include those who might not have succeeded in the state system (with average boys' scores of, for example, 13.26, 13.35 and 15.00).
21. While the findings of this chapter cannot be regarded as conclusive, we can at least be sure that separating the sexes does not have an effect on exam results on all occasions. We have found there is no difference in the performance of girls at GCSE in single-sex and co-educational comprehensive or independent schools. Differences do arise between boys' schools, but detailed inspection of the composition of the groups suggests that, in part at least, this is due to the different degrees of selectivity in the schools associated with differences in reputation, history and tradition. This is not to rule out differences in school effectiveness, but there is no good evidence at this stage to associate that with separating the sexes.

22. The argument that the performance tables are headed by single-sex schools not because they separate the sexes but because of associated factors will cut no ice with those passionately in favour of single-sex education, but it seems to account best for the facts. We now turn to advantages claimed for co-educational schools in respect of personal and social development.

Views on Schooling

23. Interviews were conducted with a hundred students in their first year at a high- ranking university (balanced for single-sex/co-educational schools, girls/boys and independent/state schools - see Appendix A for details). After the basic demographic information, the interviewees were first asked, “*What did you think of your school – did you enjoy it for example?*” If they did not comment on it both academically and socially these points were followed up in prompts.
24. The overall ratings are shown in Table 5 and, at first sight, this seems to confirm the common impression that single-sex schools are experienced as more beneficial academically, and co-educational schools more beneficial socially. However, closer inspection reveals a more complex pattern and further underlines the difficulty of making comparisons between schools on just one dimension when they differ on so many. In fact, the apparent difference in academic ratings can be accounted for by the proportions of independent and state schools in the single-sex and co-educational groups.

TABLE 5: Students’ Ratings of Their Schools¹

per cent ‘favourable’ (N)

	Academically	Socially
Girls²		
Single-Sex	73.6 (19)	50.0 (16)
Co-educational	42.1 (19)	87.5 (16)
Boys³		
Single-Sex	72.2 (18)	64.3 (14)
Co-educational	63.2 (19)	78.9 (19)

1. Does not include those with experience of both.

2. Differences for girls statistically significant – academically ($\chi^2 = 6.12$), socially ($\chi^2 = 5.24$).

3. No statistically significant differences for boys.

25. When independent and state schools are separated, as in Table 6, a different picture emerges, with co-educational independent schools rated as favourably academically as their single-sex counterparts. The difference in academic ratings for state schools is consistent with what is known about differences in performance between the comprehensives which are usually co-educational and the grammars which are mainly single-sex. The social ratings do mostly hold up across independent and state schools, except for boys in state schools. Being the summation of in-depth interviews the numbers are necessarily small, but the main differences are statistically significant.

TABLE 6: School Ratings¹*per cent 'favourable' (N)*

	Academically		Socially	
Girls				
<i>Independent</i>				
Single-Sex	73.0	(15)	50.0	(12)
Co-educational	75.0	(4)	100.0	(4)
<i>State</i>				
Single-Sex	75.0	(4)	50.0	(4)
Co-educational	33.3	(15)	83.3	(12)
Boys				
<i>Independent</i>				
Single-Sex	62.5	(8)	40.0	(5)
Co-educational	100.0	(5)	100.0	(5)
<i>State</i>				
Single-Sex	80.0	(10)	77.8	(9)
Co-educational	50.0	(14)	71.4	(14)

1. Difference between independent and state girls' schools in academic ratings statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 6.22$).

26. From the interviews, it is clear that the views of the students about their former schools are influenced to some extent by both gender and type of school attended. The girls from single-sex schools tended to fear there might have been distractions had there been boys present, and to value being pushed academically, though with some reservations about competitiveness and spitefulness. On the other hand, those who had been to co-educational schools regarded it as the natural thing to do. The male students who had been to single-sex schools tended to say there was no real difference socially from the co-educational experience because there were girls' schools nearby. Those who had been to co-educational schools often said that being educated alongside girls enabled them to grow up at ease with the opposite sex.

Female Students' Views

27. A number of clear themes emerged in the interviews. In the young women's they included academic emphasis, competitiveness, spitefulness, distraction, domination, different perspectives and adjustment.

- **Academic Emphasis**

Young women from many of the single-sex schools agreed that they were academically stretched. *"We were all pushed and that worked for me."* *"Lately I have appreciated the qualifications it gave me."* *"My sister went to a mixed sixth-form boarding school and didn't do terribly well and so my parents decided to send me to a single-sex."* However it obviously depends on the school because a girl who transferred to a co-educational school reported, *"The mixed school was a better academic standard, especially for A-level, and they pushed you far more."*

- **Competitiveness**

Sometimes the academic pressure was perceived as spilling over into undue competitiveness. *“All these girls together were so competitive. The smallest little spelling test and there was mass hysteria over what marks you got.” “It was a bit overbearing because I am not super-intelligent. At times, you’d have people going around depressed saying, ‘Ooh, I didn’t get an A.’”* But that was not a universal experience. *“They pushed you quite hard but they were quite good at telling you what your level was so it wasn’t competitive.” “The other girls’ school used to push them hard to do well academically, whereas mine was very nurturing.”*

- **Spitefulness**

There was also disagreement about the extent to which competitiveness became spitefulness. *“Okay, so it got a bit bitchy, all girls and things, but you did more work I reckon.”* Bitchiness was also the perspective from co-educational schools. *“I don’t know if this is true, but you always hear about girls arguing all the time and getting really competitive with each other.”* But a girl who changed schools disagreed, *“Most people say girls’ schools are really bitchy, but not at all.”* There were, however, suggestions of a different ethos in co-educational schools. *“When the girls did start getting bitchy the boys could make a joke of it. It was more relaxed having boys around.”*

- **Distraction**

A view quite commonly held by girls from single-sex schools is that boys would have been a distraction. *“It was a bit bitchy because it was all-girls, but without boys there was less of a distraction.” “There was quite high pressure anyway so not having boys made it more relaxing. Not having to worry about what to wear for example.” “I know a lot of people who have been to mixed schools and there was a lot of bullying, the boys teasing the girls and stuff like that”.* But the view from co-educational schools was *“part of growing up is getting to know what blokes do.” “You learn to cope with boys and they learn to cope with you.”* A girl from a single-sex grammar commented, *“Not seeing them in a working environment, you only ever saw them as a possible romantic thing. You were never looking for them as a friend.”*

- **Domination**

There was also a fear that the boys would have dominated classroom activities. *“I went to a course in the sixth-form where there were boys and you could tell as soon as you got there, they were shouting out, just far more aggressive.”* And a girl who transferred to a co-educational school commented, *“I think if you’re a less confident person it would have been a little bit of a shock, because blokes tend to take the piss out of you.”* However the girls from co-educational schools roundly rejected the idea that boys dominated lessons. *“The boys didn’t dominate the lessons - rather the girls. The girls in my year were strong on intelligence, and those who were not so intelligent were very strong willed. The boys didn’t really get a look in.” “It was competitive academically, but the boys didn’t dominate.” “In lower school I sometimes found it was the boys who tended to mess around so I got a bit frustrated. But they didn’t hog the limelight, quite the reverse.”*

They did no work at all and were generally particularly dim, especially in science."

- **Different Perspectives**

Girls from both single-sex and co-educational schools agreed it was better to have both male and female perspectives especially at sixth-form level, particularly in some subjects. *"I'd have preferred mixed classes at A-levels I think, because you need a male point of view as well, especially doing English and subjects like that."* *"I think a mixed environment is a positive thing. You tend to get different points of view from boys and girls in discussion in religious studies for example."* *"You get different perspectives from the two sexes and it helps to come together in discussion."*

- **Adjustment**

There was also agreement that co-education made for easier adjustment to higher education. Girls from single-sex schools commented, *"I think I might not have been as confident when I came to university as other people seem to be. I don't think I was too bad, but at first it was strange, just being plunged into a mixed community."* And, *"The opposite sex was a completely alien thing to me, so I missed out on a normal transition through adolescence."* This was borne out by the girls from co-educational schools. *"My sister went to an all-girls school and, while she enjoyed it, she found it difficult when she went to university because she hadn't been in with the boys all the time, in classes and stuff."* *"You're in mixed classes all the time and it is not such a shock when you come to university."* *"I think a mixed environment is important. It helps you to mix. You can imagine people who go to single-sex schools as being very naïve about the opposite sex."*

Male Students' Views

28. The young men's views were altogether less introspective. Many tended to deny there was any difference between the two types of schooling. *"The girls' school was right next door, also an independent school, so there was no real big difference."* *"Being in an all-boys environment wasn't really a problem because there was a girls' school down the road so they did a lot of things together, games and the rest of it. There was a lot of mixing. It wasn't really that much of a hassle."* *"I never noticed any difference from it being single-sex. There was a girls' school next door and we used to share things like plays with them."* The boys at co-educational schools sometimes indicated that although the sexes were together in the same school there was not much mixing. *"It was a bit segregated, especially high school. Girls and boys didn't really mix that much. At sixth-form I took all sciences and so there were only about two girls in each group."*
29. Many of the themes prominent in the girls' interviews - academic emphasis, competitiveness, spitefulness, different perspectives - did not really come up with the boys'. There were occasional mentions of distraction and domination. *"Everyone likes to show off in front of girls."* *"I've always thought I might have been distracted if I went to a mixed school."* *"This stuff about boys dominating is nonsense. In my school the girls were on a higher standard in maths and tended to dominate."*

30. But there were quite a few references to social adjustment. *“I feel a bit socially deprived, you know what I mean. It’s strange coming here and there’s all these women.” “I think that single-sex schools are a bit, well, unrealistic, not like the world, so it’s obviously a bit of a change coming to university.”* The boys in co-educational schools tended to argue the point even more strongly. *“Well you’re not segregated for the rest of your life, so it seems odd to segregate people when they’re at school. You need to learn how to communicate with both sexes.” “Well, apart from the fact that women are fun obviously, you can only take so much beer, football and fighting talk. My mates from single-sex schools, mostly private schools, seem to have ‘the rugby type’ bred into them.” “I can’t see many drawbacks to co-education. The benefits are that you are comfortable with the opposite sex.”*

Views of those with Experience of Both School Types

31. The views of these students are interesting and illuminating, but since they had only experienced one or other type of schooling the comparisons will have been with an imagined alternative. It is particularly interesting therefore to consider the views and preferences of those who had been to both single-sex and co-educational schools. We can here draw on not only 22 interviews, but also 39 respondents falling into this category in an associated questionnaire study (see Appendix A for details). Interestingly, the girls who had been to both types of school, tended to change at 16, but, while some boys transferred, most had had their schools go co-educational around them.
32. The preferences of those who had been to both school types are shown in Table 7. These tend to be away from single-sex education for both boys and girls, in spite of the different reasons for making a change.

TABLE 7: School Preferences of Those Who Had Been to Both
per cent

	Single-Sex	Co-ed	No Pref
Girls ¹ (N=26)	23.1	38.5	38.5
Boys (N=33)	18.2	48.5 ²	33.3

1. No overall difference between girls and boys.
2. Significant difference ($\chi^2 = 6.82$)

33. Reassuringly, the interview themes echo those of students who had been to only one type of school, but perhaps in sharper form. *“In an all-girls school it can be a bit bitchy and there was too much competition. I was quite happy up to about the fifth year and then had anorexia.” “I didn’t like the single-sex school very much because I didn’t get to join in with any of the activities and it was very bitchy. I loved the boarding school. It was mixed so I got to see blokes as well. It was more social.” “I found my single-sex school very petty and small minded. I very much enjoyed my co-ed school but being mixed it was difficult to get used to and I’m glad that I did then rather than at university.”*
34. In the case of the boys, it was often that the school itself became co-educational. *“A lot of the boys found it quite difficult to cope with the influx of girls – just because they hadn’t come into contact with them before.”* This

sometimes confronted them with their immaturity. *“I was really retarded by the school up to the fifth form because there were no girls. Until I went into the sixth form I had real problems talking to them and mixing with them socially.” “When you go into a mixed sixth form you find you’re actually more immature than you thought, so yeah it did make a difference.”*

Choice for Children

35. The inclination towards co-education is brought out more clearly in the responses (from both the interviews and the questionnaire study) to the question, *“Where would you send your children?”* Table 8 shows that nearly all of those who went to co-educational schools would send their children there, but this was true of only 38 per cent of the female students and 30 per cent of the male students who went to single-sex schools.

TABLE 8: Choice for Children

per cent

Own School	Children’s School			
	Single-Sex	Co-ed	Both	No Pref
Girls				
Single-Sex (N=50)	38.0	20.0	18.0	24.0
Co-educational (N=180)	0.0	90.6	2.8	6.7
Both (N=25)	12.0	40.0	20.0	28.0
Boys				
Single-Sex (N=37)	29.7	29.7	10.8	29.7
Co-educational (N=122)	0.8	87.7	1.6	9.8
Both (N=35)	14.3	40.0	17.1	28.6

36. Among those who had attended single-sex schools or both there was quite a high proportion indicating ‘both’ or ‘no preference’. Of the 31 advocating both, 29 envisaged switching to co-education at the age of 16. (Two of them, young women, said that they would like this for a girl, but if it was a boy they would have no preference.) Of the remaining two, one said mixed at first and depending on how they were getting on perhaps single-sex, and the other single-sex to the fourth year then mixed.
37. Comments from the interviews reveal some of the reasons behind ‘no preference’. Many said, *“I’d leave it up to them.”* Or, *“The best school in the area.” “I’d basically just send them to a good school.” “I would want my children to have the best possible education they could get whether that’s mixed or single-sex.”* Independent vs state was also more important for some than co-ed vs single-sex. *“I think I’d send them to an independent school because that’s how I’ve been brought up.” “Probably independent if I’d got enough money.” “You do get a better education at a private school, that’s obvious, smaller class sizes and so on.”*
38. Those favouring a single-sex for their future children tended to emphasise the risks of distractions. *“Definitely single-sex. I think girls work better on their own.” “With girls I would send them to single-sex, but boys I’m not so sure. I*

think girls have a calming effect on boys but girls just get distracted by boys. Single-sex does have the disadvantage that you don't get used to being around boys. I was terrified of them until I was 15/16."

39. But many girls and boys from single-sex schools were thinking of co-education for their future children. *"I'd encourage them to go mixed. I think it's more natural and also it makes you more confident with boys. It's a great jolt coming here from a single-sex school to a mixed hall."* *"I think I'd send them to a mixed school, even though I didn't miss it myself. I think it is good to mix with different types of people."* *"I'd like my children to grow up alongside the opposite sex. I think it's much healthier for people to grow up in that sort of environment."* The boys from single-sex schools were perhaps more forceful. *"Single-sex is crap for social relations, for everything."* *"I'd like to send them to a mixed school to learn how to mix."* *"I'd definitely steer them away from single-sex education."*
40. Collectively the interviews tend to suggest a somewhat different atmosphere in single-sex and co-educational schools, but that this is less important than the academic standing of the school itself. Whether the pupils enjoyed or benefited from a single-sex or mixed environment seemed to be very much a personal matter. There were frequent mentions of the competitiveness of girls' schools and the good results they obtained, but there was no support at all for the idea that boys tend to dominate classes. There were some comments about boys being a distraction, but many felt that it was good to grow up together and get to know each other.
41. If the comments of those who experienced both single-sex and co-education and the comments on choice of education for children are taken at face value, there would appear to be some movement towards co-education. This appears to be mainly on the grounds of ease of transition to future life. It is to this aspect we turn to in the next chapter.

Transition to University

42. Something that came through in many of the interviews, particularly those with young women from co-educational schools, was that they felt the transition to the mixed environment of university was easier having grown up with boys at school. This was explored further using the combined interview and questionnaire samples (see Appendix A for details) for those students who had gone directly to university from a day school – that is excluding boarders, those who had taken a gap year, and those who were going to university later in life. The overall pattern of responses is shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9: Direct From Day School

per cent

	Difficulty in Adjusting to University ¹	
	Academic	Social
Girls		
Single-Sex (N=35)	42.8	31.4
Co-ed (N=139)	37.7	23.0
Both (N=18)	55.5	38.9
Boys		
Single-Sex (N=29)	44.8	24.1
Co-ed (N=90)	41.1	18.8
Both (N=22)	27.3	9.1

1. Differences not statistically significant.

43. Among both the young women and young men there are indications that those from single-sex schools do report more difficulty in adjusting to university than their fellow students from co-educational schools, though in the case of young women this is less than those who had been to both (who perhaps had moved because of their previous difficulties). None of the differences is, however, statistically significant.
44. Even for those students going straight on to university from school, the experience of single-sex or co-education is overlain by so many other things.

- ***Having to Look After Yourself***

“It was difficult at first just being independent, cooking and generally getting around.” “You’ve just got to start doing things for yourself, your clothes have got to be ironed by yourself in the morning and your dinner’s not going to be on the table unless you go and get it!” “You do come to university to get a degree, but it’s all part of growing up as well, learning to cook for yourself, washing. Everyone’s in the same boat, you just have to grin and get on with it.”

- ***Adjusting to Big City***

“At first it was very difficult because there were so many more people here compared to the small village where my parents live.” “Very, very strange, I used to live in a village with 150 houses and now I’m in a student population of a 1,000 odd.” “I’m having a few difficulties socially, in that I find the city particularly club-orientated, very fashionable and trendy, which is not me.”

- **Living in Hall**

“There are times when you need space, that can be difficult living in hall.”
“Always having to be ‘on show’ and never having any time to oneself is difficult.” *“It’s really difficult when everyone around you is saying ‘let’s go out’, it is very easy to give in.”*

- **Not Living in Hall**

“Living at home left me out in the cold.” *“There isn’t much of a life here for me, at the end of the day I just go home.”* *“I found it hard being away from home and not being in hall, it’s more difficult to make friends.”*

- **Partners**

“I found it quite hard at first, but then my boyfriend came up here, so that helped.” *“My boyfriend’s not a student, so I’m not mixing with anybody from the university which feels very strange.”* *“Many of my friends find it hard to get on with my boyfriend.”*

- **Personality**

“I’m also fairly extrovert and so I don’t mind going up and introducing myself.” *“At first, because I didn’t know people very well I was quite timid.”*
“I’m the sort of person that just doesn’t like change.” *“I’m just not mature enough, basically, that’s all it is.”*

- **Social Life**

“It’s been rubbish socially, it’s not what I thought going to university would be like.” *“I expected it to be a lot more lively, but after a while you realise it’s no better than where you started out – Milton Keynes in my case!”* *“I was expecting the city to be far more sociable than it is – the majority of students appear to spend most of their leisure time working!”*

45. Some of the students from girls’ schools did admit that it was odd having boys around. *“I feel a bit inhibited, really, with boys around which is a bit strange.”* But for most any anticipated difficulties did not arise. *“It’s not been harder to settle in after a single-sex environment, it’s just been odd. I wouldn’t say it was a drawback but the change was definitely obvious.”* *“It’s been all right. I was quite surprised, when I was at school, I remember saying, ‘when I get to university it’s going to be so weird, being with the lads in lessons’, but it isn’t.”* *“After I’d been here a few months I suddenly realised I was working with boys and it hadn’t bothered me at all.”* Some even welcomed the change. *“I must admit I found it refreshing to be around boys rather than girls, because I found even though academically I benefited from single-sex education, it gets very bitchy if it’s just girls.”*
46. Bearing in mind the many factors that can affect adjustment to university and the different ways students responded to the transition, it is perhaps not surprising that the single-sex vs co-education dichotomy does not show through strongly. This is also true of many of the other variables that might have been expected to have a bearing on ease of transition to university. Table 10 shows that none has a statistically significant effect by itself except the gap year and A-level results.

TABLE 10: Difficulty of Adjustment to University

per cent expressing difficulty

Comparison (LH ¹ vs RH ²)	Academic			Social		
	LH	RH	χ^2	LH	RH	χ^2
Single-Sex vs Co-education	44.9	43.8	ns	30.3	23.4	ns
Girls vs Boys	43.8	44.7	ns	24.5	22.7	ns
Independent vs State	55.2	42.6	ns	20.9	24.5	ns
Day vs Boarding	55.0	50.0	ns	20.0	21.1	ns
GAP Year vs No GAP	65.9	42.3	0.01	17.5	24.2	ns
Good A-levels vs Other	47.2	39.8	ns	27.9	17.6	0.025

1. Left hand pole.
2. Right hand pole.

A-Level Results

47. The connection with A-level results is somewhat surprising in that students with good passes (equivalent to three B's or above) apparently find it more difficult to adjust to university than those who got through at a lower level.
48. The interviews suggest that a possible reason for the unexpected finding is that the higher-performing students are more aware of the difficulties. Contrast these comments from students scoring 40 A-level points or more with those achieving less than 20. First the high scorers: *“I found it quite difficult to start with, but it’s just a matter of getting organised, which you have to do yourself and then fitting everything in.”* *“I find it a lot harder. It’s harder to judge how well you’re doing a lot of the time because the stuff isn’t given in and marked and handed back to you.”* *“Instead of them trying to drum it into you, they say ‘right, go away and learn it’. It’s all based on tutorial groups, so you have to be motivated which is quite hard.”* Then the low scorers: *“I’m a naturally lazy person. If I wasn’t as intelligent as I am I’d come unstuck, you know.”* *“I never seem to get reported for missing anything. I’ve just passed my exams, I passed them all, not very well, obviously, it just seems you can get away with doing only so much.”*
49. It could also be that some highly intelligent people find it less easy to get on with fellow students. There is a suggestion too that some of the high performers were performing to their limits in the school situation and are finding it hard to move to a higher gear *“I find it difficult because at school we were told what to do. I miss lectures and things here, not really though any particular reason and I don’t understand it because I used to be such a swot really.”* *“At school there was always someone to talk to, there was always someone to turn to if you couldn’t do the work.”* *“At school I had people who were genuinely interested in me, who knew who I was, who taught me, and who would willingly give up their time to help me out.”*
50. Some of these difficulties carry over into ease of social adjustment. The young woman who used to be a swot admitted, *“I’m having a bit of a nightmare, really. I don’t know why. I think it’s because I got so happy back in my old school and I’m the sort of person that doesn’t like change.”* Contrast this with: *“At the start of term I was really keen, after that I dropped into a period of very little work while discovering the social scene.”*

51. But it would be wrong to stress the differences too much. As we can see from the range of comments (including those in Appendix B) every student has her or his own story. Some students with good A-levels found it easy to adjust, *“I’m coping with the work and I’m finding it absolutely fascinating.”* And some with poor A-levels were aware of the difficulties, *“It’s a case of having to do a lot more things yourself, getting your books, doing the research.”* Just as with the apparently clear-cut single-sex and co-educational distinction so many factors come into play.

Gap Year

52. One of the high performers reported difficulty because his maths got ‘rusty’ during a year out, and this seems to be part of a general experience. Table 11 shows that of all the variables examined the gap year seemed to have the biggest impact. The gap-year students were significantly more likely to report more difficulty in academic adjustment, and to report somewhat less in social adjustment. Table 11 shows that the difficulties were experienced by both male and female students, whether they were from single-sex, co-educational schools, or had experienced both.

TABLE 11: Difficulty of Adjusting Academically

	<i>per cent</i>		
	Single-Sex	Co-ed	Both
Girls			
Gap (N=18)	66.7	53.3	66.7
No Gap (N=233)	43.2	41.0	47.8
Boys			
Gap (N=17)	50.0	80.0	75.0
No Gap (N=183)	42.9	44.6	29.6

53. There was an underlying consistency in what the students told us. In their various ways they said:
- that because they already had experience in organising their own lives (and perhaps getting a bit of wildness out of their systems) they found adjusting to university much easier than they thought they would have had they come straight from school;
 - that they had learned to get along with all kinds of people;
 - that they were clearer about what they wanted to do.
54. But they also said they were finding it difficult to get back into the academic swing of things. *“I was actually scared of writing an essay because I haven’t written one for eighteen months.”* *“I would have been well prepared (academically) had I not taken a year off.”* *“I’ve found it difficult to bring back that academic discipline.”* These students were in their second term at university and it is likely that they will have soon got up to speed again. Any evaluation of the gap year itself would have to take into account not only first experiences at university, but any longer term effects.

Boarding

55. Another of the groups that was taken out of the analysis in Table 9 was those students who had been to boarding school. It was felt that their experiences of adjustment to university might be different from those coming straight from a day school. But in the event, as Table 10 shows, there seemed to be no overall difference in impact.
56. From the interviews it is clear that the boarders shared many of the same difficulties as the day pupils. Academically, they found learning tends to be organised very differently in schools and universities, and some were able to make the transition more easily than others. Socially, again the same things tended to be mentioned - adjusting to life in a big city, coping with distractions and the quality of the social life.
57. But there were also some interesting differences. One girl said she was not so practised in going to clubs because unlike day pupils she always had to be in by 10:30pm when she was at school. Another said that the great thing about university was that it was so big that if someone was unfriendly you could just ignore them. One of the male students contrasted his study bedroom at school with trying to work in a university flat and said he had to run away to the library to get any work done. Generally the former boarding pupils gave the impression of being able to cope with university relatively easily - *“boarding school is similar to a hall of residence with more rules.”*

Conclusion

58. The transition from school to university for many students is not straightforward. The ways of studying are perhaps more different than is generally supposed and this has to be juggled with the experience of living away from home perhaps for the first time and having to make new friends. Young women from single-sex schools, in particular, were concerned about whether they would be able to cope in a mixed environment, and some did report difficulties, but most seemed to adjust with few problems.
59. Our analysis of the in-depth interviews has shown that sex of school is only one factor among the many which can come into play. Ease of adjustment to university depends very much on the person and her/his personality and experiences. This adds to the argument that there are few generalisations that apply to single-sex schooling vs co-education.

Is There A Difference?

60. There is enough in the evidence of this study to see how the claims that single-sex education is good academically and co-education is good socially have arisen. But, for all that, they are caricatures which distort a more complex reality.
61. While, for example, it is true that, overall, single-sex schools do achieve better GCSE and A-level results than co-educational schools, this does not take into account the different school types. When, as far as is possible, like is compared with like, comprehensives without sixth-forms, for example, or selective independent day schools, it emerges that girls in single-sex and co-educational schools do equally well. At A-level, girls, if anything, appear to do better in mixed sixth forms, perhaps because some of the exceptionally able transfer post 16 into academically outstanding previously boys' schools.
62. There are differences between some of the groups, particularly boys' groups, but this has to be seen in relation to the schools' histories and traditions. Until the mid-nineteenth century schooling was for boys. Young ladies were educated at home by governesses. When the push for girls' education came, it replicated much of what was already there for boys - exclusive boarding and day schools. Co-educational boarding schools tended to spring from a set of beliefs which emphasised gentleness and justice above the intellect and competition. Even by 1968 only three of the 273 public schools were mixed-sex.
63. State education lagged a long way behind independent education, and it was not until 1902 that an attempt was made to set up a coherent system at the secondary level. It was thought natural to separate the sexes since boys were being prepared for work and the girls for the home. Mixing did however occur when, as in rural areas, there were not enough children to fill two schools. Most of the grammar schools, whose selective role was underlined by the 1944 Act, were single-sex.
64. All this changed dramatically with the Labour Government's Circular in 1965 directing the local authorities to set up a comprehensive system. Segregation by ability, sex, race or religion was thought contrary to equality of opportunity, and most state schools were re-organised on a co-educational basis. Not all local authorities, however, implemented the government's policy (as was their right), and to this day we have about 160 grammar schools, of which three-quarters are single-sex. Later another consequence of Labour policy was to strengthen the independent sector by forcing some of the top grammar schools, like Manchester and Bradford, which were in the main single-sex, to go private by removing their direct grants.
65. The ethos of a school depends in part on goes to it. Many single-sex schools are able to attract high-fliers and have long experience of developing their talents. The headmaster of Winchester (quoted in Smithers, 1995) put it rather nicely when asked what was it that his school did to regularly top the performance tables. *"It is a bit like the visitor to Cambridge who asked how they managed to get the lawn as nice as that. The answer was that you must mow it and roll it daily - for about 600 years."*

66. While some young women told us that they valued their single-sex education because it had been good academically and there were no boys to distract them, others said they had found the environment over-competitive and bitchy. On occasions, these pupils had moved to co-educational schools which they had found academically more challenging. While some young women from co-educational schools said they valued the opportunity of growing up with boys and sharing their points of view, others found the boys messed around and did not work hard. There was no support at all, however, for the idea that boys dominated mixed classes.
67. In general, the students' academic ratings of their schools were associated more with the independent/state dichotomy than whether the schools were single-sex or co-educational – with perhaps, not surprisingly, the independents (and also grammars) coming out higher. The more favourable social ratings for co-educational schools did however hold up across most categories. This is supported by the students looking ahead to their own children's education. When asked to think about what sort of education they would want for their offspring, about 90 per cent of those who had been to a co-educational schools plumped for what they had had, largely because they said they thought it more natural to grow up with the opposite sex. In contrast, only about a third of those who had been to single-sex schools would send their own children there. However, what mattered most was: is the school a good one and would it suit my child?
68. In discussing going up to university, most young women and young men said they thought the transition to the mixed environment would be easier from co-educational than single-sex schools. In some cases this proved to be so, but for many the adjustment was made without really noticing it. What the students had to face in common – living away from home, adapting to new ways of learning, looking after yourself and coping with life generally – tended to relegate whether their school had been single-sex or mixed to the background. Neither gender, nor sex of school, nor whether it was independent or state, exerted an over-riding influence on transition to university. Of all the variables considered, only the gap year (where there were difficulties - probably temporary - in academic adjustment) and A-level results (where surprisingly those with better passes reported more difficulties – perhaps because they were more aware of them) seemed to have an effect.
69. No simple pattern regarding single-sex and co-education therefore emerges. Unlike physics, education is amenable to few generalisations. There are no statements that can be made with the power, elegance and universality of $E=mc^2$. Any generalisation has to be so qualified that it becomes more a series of particularisations. Thus while it is possible that some girls (or boys), at some stages of their lives, may do better or worse at a single-sex or co-educational school, it is not possible to claim that all girls or boys, under any conditions, and at any time, would do better in one or other type of schooling.
70. Such was the tentative conclusion of our report, *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling*. It was suggested that girls' and boys' schools stood out in the GCSE and A-level performance tables not because of single-sex schooling *per se* but because of factors associated with it – like ability of the intake, social class background of the pupils, the type of school involved, and the

history and tradition of the schools. This line of argument has subsequently been supported, for example, in the Equal Opportunities Commission/Ofsted (1995) report, *The Gender Divide*, which opens its discussion with, “*The comparison of single-sex and mixed schools is contentious and very complex; there is no straightforward answer to whether one type of school is more successful than the other because so many variables are involved.*”

71. But interpretations of this kind have infuriated some commentators. Daley (1995) writing in *The Times* saw *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling* as a systematic attempt to explain away an obvious truth and detected “*a whiff of Stalin about it.*” While, however, educational research may offer few neat generalisations, it can expose the falsity of some of the ‘self evident truths’ of the headlines.
72. Since the first report there have also been further claims for the superiority of single-sex schools, particularly girls’ schools. Kelly (1996) analysed the 1995 GCSE results as compiled by the National Consortium for Examination Results (run by local authorities to help them monitor and assist schools), and concluded that girls’ schools tended to score better than comparable mixed schools. But the research has been severely criticised by Thomas who argued, “*the report makes the performance of girls in single-sex girls’ schools look good (when compared to girls in co-educational schools) but does not allow for the fact that girls in single-sex schools may be more able/academic on entry to school and also be more socio-economically advantaged than their peers (per cent free school meals measures disadvantage not advantage). Therefore, it is crucial to control for all relevant factors simultaneously (i.e. prior attainment, social class, per cent free school meals, ethnicity etc.) in order to separate out the true impact of single-sex schooling on student attainment.*”
73. The results of Arnot, David and Weiner (1996) have also been interpreted as indicating the superiority of girls’ schools. And it is true that for seven types of school, at GCSE, girls’ schools came top. But in six of them (independent selective was the only exception) co-educational schools came next and boys’ schools last. The results therefore do not seem to reflect school effectiveness as such but rather the proportion of girls in the school, since as is well known girls tend to do better than boys at GCSE whatever type of school they are in (except, interestingly, the present study suggests single-sex independent day schools).
74. Criticisms have also been made by McCrum (1994, 1995) who has long been arguing for single-sex education for girls. He attributes what he sees as a decline in the A-level performance and chances of gaining places at top universities of girls in state schools to the abolition of most single-sex grammar schools. However, the apparent decrease which he portrays could have come about through the wider spectrum of ability represented in his sample as the number of girls continuing in education has risen. Girls’ educational participation and performance have gone up so rapidly that it is now boys who are seen as the problem. It will be remembered that this reversal occurred at a time when the number of single-sex schools was declining. While the improvement in the girls’ position may not have been

caused by co-education, it is difficult to claim the converse - that co-educational schools are failing girls.

75. On the other hand, it is also difficult to maintain that single-sex and co-education are differentially related to performance at university. Research in New Zealand (Hughes, Lauder and Strathdee, 1991; Holland, 1994) seemed to suggest that students from co-educational schools do better in first-year university examinations than do students from single-sex schools, which would fit in nicely with the claim that they adjust more easily to the mixed environment. However subsequent research by Hughes *et al* (1996) suggests the apparent difference may have come from confounding school type and school gender (a familiar story but with the boot on the other foot). In New Zealand a higher proportion of pupils from independent schools than state schools are successful in gaining admission to university. This is perhaps because, through better tutoring, they are performing at a higher level in relation to their abilities. By the end of the first year, students from state schools tend to have caught up in terms of their abilities and so do better in the examinations. The state schools are mainly co-educational while independent schools are often single-sex, hence the apparent sex-of-school effect.
76. While it is difficult to stand up the superiority of either single-sex or co-educational schools, academically or socially (the differences claimed, as we have seen, are open to other interpretations), there are indications in the study that the mood continues to swing towards co-education. Many students educated in single-sex schools were thinking of co-educational schools for their children. A switch at 16 was also a favoured option for girls. In contrast, nearly all of the young women and young men educated in co-educational schools said they would send their own children, if they had them, to that type of school. There were also girls leaving single-sex schools for either social or academic reasons, but there was hardly any movement in the opposite direction. Boys' schools increasingly seem to be admitting girls, responding to, and contributing to, the trend towards co-education.
77. The evidence of this report strengthens and extends the conclusion of *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling* that while some schools may be better than others and while some pupils may do better in a single-sex or mixed environment there is no general rule that can be attached to separating or bringing together the sexes for their secondary education. Good schools are good schools, and this is what was important to the students. There will be many personal, social, cultural and religious reasons for preferring single-sex or co-education for at least part of secondary schooling. Parents can exercise their choices confident in trusting their instincts for their child and their feelings about a particular school, knowing that there is not some over-riding relationship with academic performance or transition to university to which they should defer.

References

- American Association of University Women (1992). *How Schools Shortchange Girls*.
- Arnot, M., David, M. and Weiner, G. (1996). *Educational Reforms and Gender Equality in Schools*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Dale, R.R. (1969, 1971, 1974). *Mixed or Single-Sex School?* Vols I-III. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Daley, J. (1995). *The Times*, 23 August 1995.
- Equal Opportunities Commission/Ofsted (1996). *The Gender Divide*. London: HMSO.
- Hughes, D., Lauder, H. and Strathdee, R. (1991). The university performance of pupils from state and independent schools in New Zealand. *Access*, 10, 1-7.
- Hughes, D., Lauder, H. and Strathdee, R. (1996). First-year university performance as a function of type of secondary school attended and gender. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 31, 13-28.
- Holland, L. (1994) cited in Hughes *et al* (1996).
- Kelly, A. (1996). Comparing like with like. *Education*, 187, 1, 13-15.
- McCrum, G. (1994). Decline of the state school girl. *The Times*, 7 November.
- McCrum, G. (1995). The second sex. *Times Higher*, 31 March.
- Sadker, M. and Sadker, D. (1993). *Failing at Fairness*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Smithers, A. and Robinson, P. (1995). *Co-educational and Single-Sex Schooling*. Manchester: CEER.
- Smithers A. (1995). The single-sex illusion. *The Times*, 4 September.
- Thomas, S. (1996). Misleading methodology. *Education*, 187, 8, 17.
- Thomas, S., Pan, H. and Goldstein, H. (1994). *Continuity of School Effects*. London: Institute of Education.

Appendix A: Sample

A1. The students interviewed in depth for this study were a small sub-set of those taking part in a larger project on transition to higher education. Four universities were contacted in July 1995. With the registrars' approval, admissions tutors agreed to distribute a questionnaire to all September 1995 new entrants who were full-time, home, first degree and with A-levels. The total number of questionnaires handed out was approximately 12,300. The four institutions were chosen to be representative of universities.

- University A – a long established high ranking civic;
- University B – a former college of advanced technology;
- University C – a former polytechnic;
- University D – a green-fields university established post-Robbins.

The returns are shown in Table A1.

TABLE A1: The Overall Data Set

University	Questionnaires	Response	Per Cent ¹
A	4200	2178	52
B	1500	796	53
C	5000	1215	24
D	1580	1028	65

1. Only approximate because while we know how many questionnaires were given to universities we do not know how many were given out to students.

Interviews

A2. Of the 2178 students responding at University A (the high-ranking civic), 1415 agreed to be interviewed. A letter was sent in January 1996 asking them to arrange an appointment. We were contacted by 441 students (spurred by a prize draw for book tokens) and each was asked to indicate whether they had been to a single-sex or co-educational school, or both.

A3. Interviews were carried out in January to March 1996 with 127 of the 441 who contacted us. The target was for, as far as possible, equal numbers of single-sex/co-educational, girls/boys, independent/state schools. The main interview study was based on the 100 students shown in Table A2.

TABLE A2: Interview Sample

	Independent	State	Total
Girls			
Single-Sex	15	6	21
Co-educational	4	15	19
Both	6	2	8
Boys			
Single-Sex	8	10	18
Co-educational	6	14	20
Both	11	3	14
Total	50	50	100

Questionnaires

- A4. In order to fulfil a request from the sponsors, the sample was widened to include more institutions. In May 1996 a postal questionnaire (based on the interview schedule) was sent to a 1 in 5 random sub-sample of students in the dataset at the remaining institutions (Universities B, C and D). The response rate is shown in Table A3.

TABLE A3: Questionnaire Sample

University	Contacted	Returns	Per Cent
B	160	100	62.5
C	243	126	51.9
D	206	116	56.3
Total	609	342	56.2

- A5. The thrust of this study has been to listen to what individuals told us about their single-sex and co-educational school experiences, and the bearing of these experiences on adjustment to university. But, on occasions, in order to give some idea of the numerical pattern of responses the interview and questionnaire material has been aggregated and the various categories counted. The make up of this combined group is shown in Table A4.

TABLE A4: Combined Sample

	Universities				Total
	A	B	C	D	
Girls					
Single-Sex	22	11	10	8	51
Co-educational	29	40	67	56	192
Both	8	6	5	7	26
Boys					
Single-Sex	19	10	2	7	38
Co-educational	35	23	38	30	126
Both	14	9	4	8	35
Total	127	99 ¹	126	116	468

1. One female provided no information on sex of school.

Appendix B: Interview Material

Box A: Young Women Educated in Girls-Only Schools

Because I've never been to a mixed school it's hard for me to say, but I would say single-sex schools are better academically because there's less distractions.

Ind Board, 20 points, Classical Studies

Academically we were all pushed and that worked for me.

Ind Day, 26 points, German and Russian

Its a really academic school which at times was a bit overbearing because I am not super-intelligent. At times, you'd have people going around depressed saying, "Ooh, I didn't get an A" - yet they had a B. I went there for the third year, because we moved, and it was tough going into a new school at 13 because girls can be quite bitchy at that age. Some girls in our year were so cut off. All their social life was school, and they didn't have brothers. They couldn't relate to boys at all. I'd say, "for goodness sake they're not going to bite you".

Ind Day, 26 points, Physiotherapy

I'd have preferred mixed classes at A-levels I think, because you need a male point of view as well, especially doing English and subjects like that. I don't usually have any hassle speaking to boys. It's just there seems always to be that sort of distance between me and them, I don't know why.

Ind Day, 26 points, English

It was a good working environment. There was quite high pressure anyway so not having boys made it more relaxing. Not having to worry so much about what to wear for example. You did have to make an effort to go and meet boys, but there was a boys' school just up the road.

Ind Day, 26 points, Medicine

There were four independent schools in the area, two boys' and two girls'. The other girls' school used to push them hard to do well academically, whereas mine was very nurturing. It was good academically but would rather develop a rounded person. I was very happy up until the fourth year when I had ME. I had to take a year out but the teachers were incredibly helpful and I went back to a reduced curriculum.

Ind Day (Convent), 20 points, Theology

They had this image of a very high powered place - straight As and going off to get an amazing job. I'm not fussed about not going to a school with boys. But all these girls together were so competitive. The smallest little spelling test and there was this mass hysteria over what marks you got. "I didn't do any work at all" they'd say. It really did annoy me. I wanted to work hard and do well, but I just didn't feel that I needed that kind of pressure anymore, so I left for a state school which also happened to be single-sex.

SS, Ind Day to 16, then SS Comp to 18, 26 points in arts, converting to Medicine

I'm glad I went to a single-sex school because I think it would have made a difference work-wise. The boys' school was right next door so you got to mix with the lads out of school. However, not seeing them in a working environment, you only ever saw them as a possible romantic thing. You were never looking for them as a friend.

State Gram, 32 points, European Studies with Spanish

It was a good school, but some teachers were better than others. It generally worked out that for each subject I had one brilliant teacher and the others not very good. It was a bit bitchy because it was all-girls, but without boys there was less of a distraction.

State Gram, 26 points, Politics and Modern History

I think I did more work than I would have if I'd have been in a mixed school. But all my lad best friends went to the boys' school and we mixed for social things, youth clubs and stuff. I mean, okay, so it got a bit bitchy, all-girls and things, but you did more work I reckon.

State Comp, 24 points, Physiotherapy

Box B: Young Women Educated in Co-ed Schools

It was quite relaxed really; there weren't arguments and things. I don't know if this is true, but you always hear about girls arguing all the time and getting really competitive with each other. I don't think it is as competitive if there are males as well.

Ind Board, 28 points, Psychology

In a mixed setting there is much more social integration. You learn how to cope with boys and they learn how to cope with you. Quite frankly I can't think of anything worse than being stuck with a load of girls. The boys didn't dominate the lessons - rather the girls. The girls in my year were strong on intelligence, and those who were not so intelligent were very strong willed. The boys didn't really get a look in.

Ind Board, 25 points, History and Spanish

I could have gone to a single-sex school that was much nearer, but I wanted mixed. I don't think the boys distracted me or anything like that. You're in mixed classes all the time and it is not such a shock when you come to university. It was a real community atmosphere so I really missed that when I left school.

Ind Day, 38 points, Medicine

My sister went to an all-girls school and, while she enjoyed it, she found it difficult when she went to university because she hadn't been in with boys all the time, in classes and stuff.

State Comp to 16, then Ind Day to 18, 30 points, Medicine

I think a mixed environment is a positive thing. You tend to get different points of view from boys and girls in discussion in religious studies for example. It was competitive academically, but the boys didn't dominate.

State Gram, 32 points, Genetics with a Modern Language

I think a single-sex school would have been really weird. Its not normal. Its isolated. Its not a cross section of society if you're one sex on you own. Part of growing up is getting to know what blokes do.

State Comp, 36 points, Law

You get different perspectives from the two sexes and it helps to come together in discussion.

State Comp to 16, Sixth Form College to 18, 40 points, Law and Accounting

I just took the mixed environment for granted. I'd say the girls were a lot better academically.

State Comp, 40 points, Law

It really didn't make any difference that there were boys around. I decided not to take entry to an independent school which would have been single-sex, and I think I made the right decision. I played in a jazz band, I went over to Hungary and we played there, I played hockey. In the private school they play lacrosse so I would never have played hockey. I probably enjoyed it because it was a comprehensive school more than the fact it was mixed.

State Comp, 26 points, Physiotherapy

I took the mixed environment for granted. In the lower school I sometimes found it was the boys who tended to mess around so I got a bit frustrated. But they didn't hog the limelight, quite the reverse. They did no work at all and were generally particularly dim, especially in science. In the sixth form the 'flukiness' of boys was to do the minimum of work and still do well, whereas the girls sweat blood and get the same marks.

State Comp, 26 points, Social Anthropology

In a mixed environment you have as many male as female friends. When the girls did start getting bitchy the boys could make a joke of it. It was more relaxed having boys around. I'm living with all-girls now and I'm finding it strange because I am used to a mixed environment.

State Sec Mod, 34 points, Psychology and Neuroscience

Box C: Young Men Educated in Boys-Only Schools

It was a bit strange because the school I went to before (up to 13) was mixed, so going there was a bit odd, but it didn't really freak me out or anything.

Ind Board, 30 points, Law

The girls' school was right next door, also an independent school, so there was no real big difference.

Ind Day, 40 points, Chemistry and Patent Law

Being in an all boys environment wasn't really a problem because there was a girls' school down the road so they did a lot of things together, games and all the rest of it. There was a lot of mixing. It wasn't really that much of a hassle.

Ind Day, 40 points, Medicine

I didn't mind the single-sex environment. I don't have other things to compare with. My primary school was mixed but that was a long time ago. I quite liked it.

Ind Day, 38 points, Physics with Astrophysics

I never noticed any difference from it being single-sex. There was a girls' school next door and we used to share things like plays with them.

Ind Day, 33 points, Geography

It was quite an academic school. They pushed you quite hard to do an extra A-level. I never went to a mixed school after age 9 so I couldn't compare it.

Ind Day, 32 points, Philosophy

There were two girls' schools nearby so we did know girls. It was just in the classrooms we didn't.

Ind Day, 28 points, Chemistry with Medicinal Chemistry

I didn't think about the single-sex environment much. On reflection I think I would have preferred it mixed but at the time didn't think about it.

State Gram, 34 points, Chemistry

It was a Catholic Grammar for boys. The single-sex environment was okay because obviously it was what I was used to. We had a parallel school which was a girls' school, and we had dances and that kind of thing with them.

State Gram, 38 points, Medicine

There was a girls' school nearby and we often did things together so it didn't make any difference really.

State Gram, 32 points, Drama

I feel a bit socially deprived, you know what I mean. It's strange coming here and there's all these women.

State Gram, 28 points, Genetics

I think that single-sex schools are a bit, well, unrealistic, not like the world, so it's obviously a bit of a change coming to university.

State Gram, 40 points, Economics

On reflection, I did have a good time there, but it was a 'results factory'. I'd probably have chosen a coed school in the interests of social development.

State Gram, 36 points, English and Philosophy

I think I probably did more work in a single-sex school than with girls about. Everyone likes to show off in front of girls.

State Gram, 24 points, History

Box D: Young Men Educated in Co-ed Schools

I was sent there partly because I had a disruptive period in junior school and I ended up going to an educational psychologist who decided I was a bit precocious. I still didn't fit in all that well at first, but it changed gradually as I grew up. I liked the mixed sex environment. It's pretty essential to integrate.

Ind Board, 26 points, American Studies

I was in an all-boys school until I was fourteen. At that school, another independent, I was really low, bottom of the class. Then I went to the mixed school which wasn't selective and did really well.

Ind Day 14-18, 40 points, Medicine

It was the best type of school for me. They pushed you hard enough so you could achieve your potential, but not so hard that you just thought 'sod it' I'm going to pack it all in. Single-sex education may suit some people, but I need to have female friends. I need to have female influences in my life, so I don't think I would have enjoyed a single-sex school as much.

Ind Day, 32 points, Computer Science with Business

I've always been at school with girls and I've made a lot of good friends of the opposite sex, as well as girl friends. I can't imagine being in a single-sex school, not talking about this girl and that girl.

Ind Day, 29 points, Maths and English

Well you're not segregated for the rest of your life, so it seems odd to segregate people when they're at school. You need to learn how to communicate with both sexes.

State Gram, 44 points, Aerospace Engineering

I couldn't hack being in an all-male environment. It would get on top of you. Well, apart from the fact that women are fun obviously, you can only take so much beer, football and fighting talk. My mates from single-sex schools, mostly private schools, seem to have 'the rugby type' bred into them.

State Comp to 16, Sixth Form College, 32 points, Civil Engineering

For a start girls tend to level out the behaviour of lads. I found that I got on very well with girls and better in general than with the lads. If I'd been to an all-boys school, university would have been the first time I would have been learning with girls. I think it is far better to be integrated.

State Comp, 40 points, Economics

I think that if you're intelligent enough it's not so much the school that matters. You're going to do well enough wherever you are. If you go to a comprehensive you mix with people of both sexes that you're going to find in every day life. A single-sex boarding school would give you a very restricted outlook. That's my perspective, but I don't know because I haven't been anywhere else.

State Comp, 34 points, Medicine

Being in a single-sex school is avoiding reality, because you will never live in a single-sex world. This stuff about boys dominating is nonsense. In my school the girls were on a higher standard in maths and tended to dominate.

State Comp, 24 points, Economics

It was a bit segregated, especially high school. Girls and boys didn't really mix that much. At sixth form I took all sciences and so there were only about two girls in each group. I knew them well, but it would have been nice if there had been more.

State Comp to 16, Sixth Form College to 18, 30 points, Chemical Physics

I've never experienced a single-sex school but I think mixed is better. Academically it was patchy but socially it was good. I think I did as well as I could have done.

State Comp, 30 points, Architecture

I can't see many drawbacks to co-education. The benefits are that you are comfortable with the opposite sex.

State Comp to 16, Sixth Form College to 18, 34 points, American Studies

Box E: Young Women With Experience of Both

I enjoyed my boarding school a lot, but I wanted to leave at 16 because it was really restrictive. I wanted to go to a mixed boarding school from 16 but for various reasons I couldn't.

**SS, Ind Board to 16, State Coed Sixth Form College
24 points, Combined Studies**

In an all-girls school it can be a bit bitchy and there was a bit too much competition. I was quite happy up to about the fifth year and then had anorexia. I became much more happy in the sixth form, especially when it became mixed, and made a lot of good friends.

**SS, Ind Day with mixed sixth form
43 points, Medicine**

I didn't like the single-sex school very much because I didn't get to join in with any of the activities and it was very bitchy. I loved the boarding school. It was mixed so I got to see blokes as well and all the classes were mixed and everything. It was more social.

**SS, Ind Day to 16, then Coed Board to 18
28 points, Geography**

Most people say girls' schools are really bitchy, but not at all. However, the mixed school was a better academic standard, especially for A-level and they pushed you far more. When I arrived at the mixed school they were quite a way ahead, but the competition really helped and eventually I got on better than people who'd been there first. Blokes are so competitive in lessons and its a big hassle if you do better than them. I think if you're a less confident person it would have been a little bit of a shock, because blokes tend to take the piss out of you.

**SS, Ind Day to 16, then Ind Coed Day to 18
30 points, History and Italian**

I found my single-sex school very petty and small-minded, possibly because of the people who ran it. Though lately I have appreciated the qualifications it gave me. I very much enjoyed my coed school but being mixed it was difficult to get used to and I'm glad I did it then rather than at university.

**SS, Ind Day to 16, then Coed State Gram to 18
40 points, Medieval Studies**

Box F: Young Men With Experience of Both

I thoroughly enjoyed myself at school but I thought there were disadvantages in being single-sex and then bringing in the girls. A lot of the boys found it quite difficult to cope with the influx of girls - just because they hadn't come into contact with them before. A lot of the girls got a lot of hassle just for being girls.

SS, Ind Board, with girls admitted to sixth form, 38 points, Medicine

My pre-prep school was mixed and initially as far as I can remember it was quite a shock suddenly having no girls in the school. The arrival of girls in the sixth form wasn't such a shock because by then you're socialising outside school and as well I was playing in orchestras.

Day Pupil at SS, Ind Board becoming Coed, 34 points, Medicine

It was always mixed in the sixth-form and they started bringing girls into the lower years, the year below me. So it wasn't fully mixed until I got into the sixth-form. It was far more enjoyable and relaxed in a mixed sixth-form.

Ind Board becoming Coed, 21 points, Economics

The girls when they arrived in our year were in very small numbers. It took about two years to settle down. Then we had a new influx into the sixth form, which started everything up again. It wasn't so much that they were girls, but that they were new faces again. Our year weren't very happy.

Ind Board becoming Coed, 24 points, English

I've not really known anything else and being boys-only did not bother me in any way. It was more when it came to me being in the sixth form, because before that you didn't have much contact, or constant contact, with the opposite sex. It made a change, you had a new load of friends.

SS, Ind Day, with mixed sixth form, 24 points, Maths with Italian

I was really retarded by the school up to the fifth form because there were no girls. Until I went into the sixth form I had real problems talking to them and mixing with them socially. Academically it was a really good school but they overworked you and pushed you too much. It was a sporty sort of school also. There was a lot of resentment and prejudice between certain groups and girls would have made it more balanced.

Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 18 points, Town and Country Planning

I didn't really mind the single-sex environment, because for the first three years it was single-sex and the last two, the sixth form, was mixed. I was a day boy anyway and was home at weekends so I had friends outside.

***SS, Ind Day, with mixed sixth form
16 points (distracted by sport), History and Economics***

It was single-sex up to the fourth year, then it mixed. It's the same school split into sites and then they combine them more as you go up the school. The argument was that with single-sex education you're not trying to show off to all the girls, but as you get older you tend to do that less anyway. I think that's a good idea actually.

SS, Ind Day, becoming Coed, 30 points, Economics

At independent school everybody was of similar parental class background and socio-economic status. It was odd not being with girls for the first year. But I preferred the independent school for what it had to offer.

State Coed Comp to 14, then Ind SS Day to 18, 28 points, Geography

Moving into a mixed sex environment when I was 16 didn't make any difference.

SS Comp to 16, then Coed Sixth Form College, 35 points, French

When you go into a mixed sixth form you find you're actually more immature than you thought, so yeah it did make a difference. Academically, it didn't make much difference at all.

Sec Mod with mixed sixth form, 24 points, Philosophy and Politics

Box G: Choices for Children's Education of Young Women from Single-Sex Schools

It depends, I'd probably send them to an all-girls school, but I'd leave it up to them to choose what they wanted to do.

Ind Board, 22 points, Economics

I think I would send them to boarding school, because I felt that was really good and I really enjoyed it. But it would depend on what they wanted to do and it's down to the individual. I'd probably prefer them not to go to a mixed school because it can be a distraction. Both my brother and sister didn't do too well and they both went to the same school. Though I think you would get a more balanced outlook if you went to a mixed school. Until I came to university I never knew how boys lived and I've now realised how untidy they are.

Ind Day to 16, Board (Convent) to 18, 18 points, Music

I think I'd send them to an independent school because that's how I've been brought up. I'm not sure about boarding school. I know a lot of people who didn't take to it. I think I'd send them to a mixed school, even though I didn't miss it myself. I think it's good to mix with different types of people.

Ind Board, 40 points, Medicine

Mixed definitely. Probably independent if I'd got enough money.

Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 43 points, Medicine

If I had the choice, I would send them to an independent school, unless there was a good comprehensive in the area. I think it would probably be mixed from my own experiences. I'd like my children to grow up alongside the opposite sex. I think it's much healthier for people to grow up in that sort of environment. It's probably because I've got a sister as well. If I'd had a brother it might have been different.

Ind Day, 26 points, English

I'd ask them for a start, but I'd encourage them to go mixed. I think it's more natural and also it makes you more confident with boys. It's a great jolt coming here from a single-sex school to a mixed hall. You've got to mix with boys the whole time and have confidence to go out and meet more people.

SS, Ind Day to 16, Co-ed Ind Day to 18, 30 points, History and Italian

I'd send them to single-sex from the age of eleven. I can't see a mixed school causing problems though. It's whatever suits the person.

Ind Day, 30 points, Medicine

Definitely single-sex. I think girls work better on their own.

Ind Day, 40 points, Theology

I really don't know. The best possible school in the area. If the single-sex school is better, I'd send them there.

State Gram, 32 points, European Studies with Spanish

With girls I would send them to single-sex, but boys I'm not so sure about. I think girls have a calming effect on boys but girls just get distracted by boys. Single-sex does have the disadvantage that you don't get used to being around boys. I was terrified of them until I was 15/16, then being locked up in boarding school for two years you miss out in that side of your adolescence.

SS, State Gram 11-16, then SS, Ind Board 16-18, 31 points, Music

Box H: Choice for Children's Education of Young Women from Co-ed Schools

Mixed, but obviously where they wanted to go but I would prefer them to go to a mixed school. I don't think it distracted me or anything like that. It hasn't had any bad effects. I think the good effects are its not such a shock when you come to university and you are in mixed classes all the time.

Ind Day, 40 points, Medicine

Definitely a mixed school.

Ind Day, 38 points, Environmental Biology with French

I would choose a mixed school for my child and I'm not so sure about it being an independent school though.

Ind Board, 25 points, History and Spanish

I'd have no objections to sending them to a mixed school. I think people who send their children to a single-sex environment damage them in some way. They are sheltered from the opposite sex, they don't know what to expect.

State Comp, 40 points, Law

Definitely a mixed school. It would depend on the schools in my area. I'd like to send them to a grammar school if possible - maybe private, I'm not really sure about that. It sort of goes against my principles really to pay for education.

***State Comp to 16, then mixed sixth form of Boys' Grammar 16-18
30 points, German and French***

Probably mixed. This is probably completely wrong, but I always thought that single-sex schools maybe had problems with bitchiness between the girls, groups being much more tightly formed, there being a lot more problems. In a mixed environment you have equally as many friends that are male as female.

State Sec Mod, 34 points, Psychology and Neuroscience

Box I: Choices for Children's Education of Young Men from Single-Sex Schools

I'd send them to the same one if I had boys because its done good for me so it could do good for anybody.

Ind Day, 40 points, Chemistry and Patent Law

It would depend on what they want to do. Mainly I wouldn't base the choices solely on whether it was mixed or single-sex.

Ind Day (some girls in sixth form), 38 points, Physics with Astrophysics

As a parent I would want the best education for my children. I think mixed if there was a choice.

***State Coed Comp to 14, then SS, Ind Day 14-18
28 points, Geography***

I'd send them to independent school if I could afford it. I don't know whether mixed or single-sex. It wouldn't be that much of an issue, but what was nearest and available.

Ind Day, 20 points, Geography

I'd definitely steer them away from single-sex education.

Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 18 points, Town and Country Planning

As for mixed or single-sex, I don't really know, but I suppose in a mixed school there are distractions in the classroom and things like that.

Ind Day, 34 points, Philosophy

I would probably send my children to the same sort of school as well, although it would be quite a difficult decision. It would be the actual social standing of the school that I would choose rather than the sex.

Ind Day, 40 points, Geography

It depends, but I'd like to send them to a mixed school to learn how to mix.

State Gram, 28 points, Genetics

Probably the same kind of school as myself. Because in the long term its the results that count.

State Gram, 36 points, English and Philosophy

I'd basically just send them to a good school. I wouldn't push them into anything, If they didn't want to go to a single-sex school then fine, okay. It would depend more on the standard of the school itself.

State Gram, 27 points, Biochemistry with German

I'd send them to mixed school, definitely. Single-sex is crap for social relations, for everything. I've heard some evidence that boys do the same and girls slightly worse at mixed schools. But academically, I don't think it would have made any difference at all really.

***State Sec Mod with mixed sixth form
24 points, Philosophy and Politics***

Box J: Choice for Children's Education of Young Men from Co-ed Schools

Independent, probably mixed. Its like being in the real world I guess. There's a lot of social skills involved. I don't think there's much point in sending them to single-sex. I don't see any advantage to it. The girls used to do more work earlier on and the boys used to work at the end. The women always did better in the mocks.

Ind, 40 points, Medicine

It would depend on the reputation of the school to be honest. If schools were of equal standing, I'd probably send them to mixed. I think that's half the education in itself, learning to get along with people and learning to get along with girls especially.

**Ind Day to 16, then State Sixth Form College 16 to 18
29 points, Maths and English**

I'd be inclined to send my children to the same sort of school as I went to and hope they got as good a deal as I got.

Ind Day, 36 points, European Studies with German

I think mixed, but I don't know whether all the way. Its difficult to say because I don't know what my children will be like, but if they were like me I suppose its good to grow up a bit with just your own sex.

Ind Board (SS for first 3 years), 28 points, Geography

I'd like them to have a similar sort of education that I had, but mixed all the way through (school became co-educational when he was in his second year). There's arguments for and against it. But I'd like them to be able to grow up next to the opposite sex and treat them as equals.

Ind Board, 24 points, English

I wouldn't send them to a single-sex school, because I think that's a bad idea. You do get a better education at a private school, that's obvious, smaller class sizes and so on.

**State Comp to 16, then Sixth Form College
32 points, Civil Engineering**

I would positively choose a mixed-sex school.

State Comp, 40 points, Economics

If you've brought your children up well I think that they should be able to choose themselves by the time they are 11. I'd hope they'd choose a mixed school.

**State Comp to 16, then FE College
48 points, Physics with Theoretical Physics**

I would want my children to have the best possible education they could get whether that's mixed or single-sex. Sex of school isn't important. I think most single-sex schools probably have a sister or brother school attached. My brother went to one like that.

State Comp, 34 points, Medicine

I would send my children to a mixed school because I would say a single-sex school followed by university with a mixed environment would be fairly disruptive.

State Comp, 24 points, Economics

Box K: Social Adjustment to University of Young Women from Single-Sex Schools

I must admit I found it refreshing to be around boys rather than girls, because I found even though academically I benefited from single-sex education, it gets very bitchy if it's just girls and I found here if you've got boys around you get a different perspective and it offers more variety.

Ind Day, 26 points, German and Russian

I think sixth form could have done more to prepare you, because they gave you this rosy view of university life. But when you actually get here it is a bit different. I think also I was a bit sheltered. I think I've gained more confidence since I've been here. I found it quite hard at first, but then my boyfriend came up here, so that helped.

Ind Day, 26 points, Geography

Very difficult. I'm having a bit of a nightmare, really. I don't know why. I think it's because I got so happy back in my old school and I'm the sort of person that just doesn't like change. I feel a bit inhibited, really, with boys around, which is a bit strange, but I didn't really get to know them properly until the sixth form. I don't know if it's just blokes, I think it's different in the respect that at my old school there was a wide range of ability and you get into Medical School and they're all really intelligent.

Ind Day (with mixed sixth form), 43 points, Medicine

The flats are single-sex, but you still get boys down the hall. I had a few teething problems to start with. I found it a bit difficult to get on with everybody. I think it was just I was a bit withdrawn when I first came here because I didn't know anybody. The second term has been brilliant, we've all become really good friends and like family in the flat.

Ind Day, 26 points, English

It's been okay, I enjoy it – the freedom if I want to be out late one night I can, and there are loads of things to do. After I'd been here a few months I suddenly realised I was working with boys and it hadn't bothered me at all.

Ind Day, 26 points, Medicine

It's been fine. The mixed environment hasn't affected me at all. I get on really well with all the girls in my flat (all girls).

Ind Day, 28 points, French and Italian

It was difficult at first just being independent, cooking and generally getting around. I started at my school when I was about eight and until I was about 15 I was really shy because it's so sheltered and I don't think that's such a good thing. Our school joined with the boys' school for General Studies. That was good because it helps to work with people you don't know.

Ind Day, 36 points, French and Russian

It's been all right. I was quite surprised, when I was at school I remember saying, "When I get to university it's going to be so weird, being with lads in lessons", but it isn't. Maybe by the time you get to uni, you've not totally matured, but you've matured to some extent. It's a different working atmosphere. Because it's bigger you're not so conscious of them being there.

State Gram, 32 points, European Studies with Spanish

I sat in my first lecture and I looked around and saw all these hundreds of people and I thought, "Well I should be looking at all the boys and seeing how wonderful they were or how ugly they were or something". But I wasn't. I thought I'd go more crazy than I did. It wasn't a disappointment. I'm having a brilliant time and everything's good.

State Gram, 26 points, Politics and Modern History

It's not been harder to settle in after a single-sex environment, it's just been odd. I wouldn't say it was a drawback but the change was definitely obvious.

State Comp, 28 points, Chemistry with Studies in Europe

Box L: Social Adjustment to University of Young Women from Co-ed Schools

It's really good because the people I live with I really like. It's different from home because you've got nobody to report to and also you don't have to plan ahead and that sort of thing you can just go and do it. I really like being independent and doing what I want, it's good.

Ind Day, 38 points, Environmental Biology with French

I think it's great because you can do anything you want to. It's really good. Also with our course, they arrange loads of social things. I think the co-educational school background helped because I don't find a problem getting on with the lads on my course. A lot of my friends are lads. I think I would have had more problems coming from a single-sex school.

Ind Day, 38 points, Medicine

Very easy, I'm in a hall of residence. Compared to school it's completely different because you are living with people and not at home, but I haven't found any trouble adjusting at all. It's been really natural.

State Gram, 40 points, Accounting and Law

Very, very strange, I used to live in a village with only 150 houses and now I'm in a student population of 1,000 odd. I don't think my personality has changed very much because when I was at school I was in small classes and you'd speak out then. Now I'm in a flat, it's like a little class, the same number of people, so I speak out in my flat. At first, because I didn't know people very well I was quite timid, but now we all know each other, we speak really openly.

State Comp, 36 points, Law

If I hadn't joined the club I wouldn't have many friends at all. I think being in a mixed school has helped because most of my friends are male. At school I was very hesitant about talking to lads, then I made a couple of friends in the last year and then in the sixth form college I could talk to lads as friends.

State Comp to 16, then Sixth Form College, 26 points, English

It's quite easy, I found. I found myself being much louder and more confident here and I feel almost inhibited when I go back home, which is odd because I thought it would be the other way around. Because there's so many people, you meet so many people, you're bound to find someone you get along with, and I've got a really good group of friends.

State Comp, 24 points, Social Anthropology

The mixed environment has helped. It's different talking to a boy than a girl, you need a mixture of both, being able to communicate with all sorts of people.

State Comp, 26 points, Social Anthropology

It's fine, no problem. I think doing music, you have to be quite confident anyway, so I'm lucky in that respect. I'm also fairly extrovert and so I don't mind going up and introducing myself. I haven't really had that many problems. And because I've come from a mixed sex school and doing music as a brass player, the opposite sex hasn't been a problem either.

State Comp, 20 points, Music

I live in halls, so it's probably just me. I'm only a child anyway so I have a problem being with lots and lots of other people. It's really living at university twenty-four hours a day, whereas at school you were there for six hours and then you'd come home and be totally cut off, or at least as much as you wanted to be.

State Sec Mod, 34 points, Psychology and Neuroscience

Box M: Social Adjustment to University of Young Men from Single-Sex Schools

I wouldn't say I was ready to leave home. I felt it quite hard at first, for the first couple of weeks, but after I've loved it. A single-sex school and adjusting to university life has been no problem whatsoever. Schools are not particularly reality. I don't think it affected me at all.

Ind Day, 40 points, Accounting and Law

You've just got to start doing things for yourself, your clothes have got to be ironed by yourself in the morning and your dinner's not going to be on the table unless you go and get it! I don't think coming from an all-boys school into mixed lectures has been too much of a problem, because I'm a bit of an extrovert!

Ind Day, 40 points, Chemistry and Patent Law

I'm enjoying it. I think a lot of it's the fact that it's new and different. It's a bit more hectic than it needs to be because you are living in the same place as your friends. It's a lot easier to go out for the night. Back home you stay at home and go to bed or watch TV. Most of my friends are male anyway, the matey aspect of it all. Coming from a single-sex school has not caused any problems. I talk to quite a few girls, they're not some alien race or something.

Ind Day, 38 points, Physics with Astrophysics

Going to a single-sex school has not really had any effect. I'm not shy around girls or anything. I think to be honest, being at a single-sex school you actually make more of an effort to mix with the opposite sex, simply because they're not around all the time. There's a definite incentive to go out and try and mix.

Ind Day, 28 points, Geography

Coming from a single-sex school didn't make a blind bit of difference to be honest. I've settled in well, I think. I'm enjoying myself, made lots of new friends, I think my school was helpful. It wasn't just a school for getting grades, they actually tried to give you some personality. So in that respect they prepare you quite well.

Ind Day, 20 points, Geography

Socially, brilliant, no trouble at all, absolutely brilliant. I used only to see the girls from the girls' school on the bus on the way back and that would be it really, apart from swimming. With girls you sort of calm yourself down a bit I suppose from when you are with your friends. I found myself offending people when I first came here because I was so used to being really outrageous. I have had to temper myself a bit. I've got the nickname of 'Rude Boy'.

State Gram, 24 points, History

There's not really a problem with girls and going out. I felt I had more contact with girls at grammar school than I do now. You tend to do things within the hall like going to the bar and not venture out. It's very lively.

State Gram, 16 points, History and German

It was strange to be with all these women but it's enjoyable and you've got to learn how to live differently because you've got to be understanding of other people. You're spending three years with them aren't you? You've just got to take people as they are. I wouldn't say it was difficult, but it wasn't easy.

State Gram, 28 points, Genetics

Even though I went to a single-sex school, fitting in to a mixed environment is no problem. Mum and dad divorced in 1985 and I lived with my mum and my sister for a little bit, so I'm used to it. Plus I had some mixed classes in sixth form (with girls' grammar) as well and I'm used to social activities outside school which were mixed.

State Gram, 27 points, Biochemistry with German

I would say that it's been quite a big step and quite difficult. I wasn't prepared for it. Like I say, I'm just not mature enough, basically, that's all it is. It's the responsibility, I'm just not used to that amount of responsibility, to get used to it all in one go for every aspect of your life is so hard, it really is.

State Sec Mod, 24 points, Philosophy and Politics

Box N: Social Adjustment to University of Young Men from Co-ed Schools

It's the first time I've been away from home, I've never been a boarder. I'm on a corridor so it's equivalent to a flat I suppose. I think I've adapted to it. It was difficult to start with, because I've always been used to going home in the evening. I went a bit mad in the first couple of weeks, but then it was all right.

Ind Day 14-18, 40 points, Medicine

I'm in a single-sex hall at the moment, which is a bit of a shock, because a lot of the guys there went to single-sex schools and their attitudes are a bit peculiar. When they see girls walking into the bar they go 'Christ what's this'. No, they're really friendly and you get to meet people out of hall anyway, so it's not a problem.

Ind Day, 36 points, European Studies with German

I quite like it in halls, it's easy enough, the location is ideal, yeah, it's all right. The whole flat gets on well. I quite like that there's always somebody there to talk to. I think it's great, I'm having a great time, to be honest.

Ind Day, 30 points, Economics

Halls is different, it's a nice change. I happen to be on an all-male corridor and that's something new to me. The people in hall are different to the people I would normally associate with. There's a lot of public school people and a lot more sporty than I am, generally. But I'm quite fortunate because there's a lot of people I know from home at university, so I've got two groups of friends.

State Gram, 44 points, Aerospace Engineering

It's been fairly easy. I think if I'd been shut off in a public school I might have had trouble settling in. One of my flat mates went to a boarding school and you can see the difference. It's hard to say what the difference is, he's fairly immature and at times shows off. He's always energetic and lively, and a bit of a kid at times, and just seems to be different from the rest of us.

State Comp 11 to 16, then Sixth Form College, 34 points, American Studies

Socially I don't think I've had many problems. The people I'm sharing the halls with are brilliant, I don't think I could ask for anything better. Regards mixed schooling – yes it probably helped, but it goes a bit further than just a mixed environment. When you're actually all living together, you have to treat all people differently and with respect, because there's no escaping from it anymore.

State Comp, 40 points, Law

Pretty well on the whole. I've been pretty fortunate in the fact that I happen to get on with all my flat really well and my best friends are in my flat. So it's been fortunate in that I haven't had to do a lot of going out and meeting people knowing nobody. I don't think attending a mixed school made much difference. But living in a flat full of boys I'm not currently in a situation where I'm having a great deal to do with girls socially.

State Comp, 40 points, Economics

I've enjoyed coming to university. There's a lot of pressures on you though, financially, people wanting you to conform to what they're doing. It's all part of coming to university. You do come to university to do a degree, but it's all part of growing up as well, learning to cook for yourself, washing. Everyone's in the same boat, you just have to grin and get on with it.

State Comp, 30 points, Architecture

My hall is about two-thirds boys to girls. I don't think I've have picked it if I'd known. One of the main reasons I came to university was for the social life. Maybe I built up too big expectations.

State Comp 11 to 16, Sixth Form College, 30 points, Chemical Physics

Box O: A-Levels and Adjustment to University – Young Women

I suppose it's quite difficult really because at school we were told what to do, certainly it's not like that so I guess I've found it difficult to adapt. I always used to be really conscientious but I find that I miss lectures and things here, not really through any particular reason and I don't understand it because I used to be such a swot really. I went to the counsellors and they talked to me for a while but it just didn't really do that much for me. They were lovely, but I still felt such a failure, obviously as a student who wasn't getting on. I went to my doctor and he put me on anti-depressants. Over Christmas I felt much better and came back with a positive attitude but now I'm back down again.

SS Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 43 points, Medicine

I'm coping with the work and I'm finding it absolutely fascinating. I didn't really expect to enjoy it this much. It is a lot more independent than I expected and even than other courses in the university. There are very few hours of lectures a week, and part of this year's course is to do a mini-dissertation so that is quite a lot.

SS Ind Day to 16, Co-ed State Gram to 18, 40 points, Medieval Studies

It's been quite difficult because I don't know yet what I'm supposed to be doing, how much work I'm supposed to be doing and that sort of thing. Now I've done my first exams, I'm a bit more conscious of what I'm supposed to be doing, to start off with it was quite unclear.

Co-ed Ind Day, 38 points, Environmental Biology with French

I found it quite difficult to start with, but it's just a matter of getting organised, which you have to do yourself and then fitting everything in, I don't think there's too much work. The difficulty was working out what had to be done and when. I think it's beneficial to be left alone, it helps you to sort yourself out, to work out your priorities, because there's not going to be someone there all the time.

Co-ed Comp to 16, Sixth Form College to 18, 40 points, Law and Accounting

It's harder than I thought it was going to be because a lot of people said, "After A-levels university will be a breeze". The first six weeks I only had reading to do and I thought 'this is great'. Then came the crunch – four essays to do – long essays in as many weeks. I find it quite hard because I didn't realise how spoon-fed we were at A-level, I didn't notice it at the time. I realise the teachers virtually told us what to write in the essays. Here it's like, "you've got a 3000 word assessed essay – get on with it". Oh I don't know how to do this – but I'm getting more used to it. It's still different to how I expected it would be.

Co-ed Comp, 26 points, Social Anthropology

I've found it difficult. Writing essays...oh, God! To be perfectly honest I am a naturally lazy person anyway. If I wasn't as intelligent as I am I'd come unstuck, you know. Because I think "I'll get through that", I don't really work until the last minute. At school you were spoon-fed, but you did have to work on your own as well and I've realised that no-one's going to do it for me. The lecturers aren't going to chase you because it just means there's one less essay for them to mark.

SS Ind Day, 20 points, Theology

I passed my exams and they weren't so bad. At school the discipline was quite good and you had to get your work in on time which helped prepare us for university.

SS Ind Board, 20 points, Classical Studies

I'm finding the Music College more difficult. A lot of the people there don't really take into consideration where you've come from. A lot have come from music schools and only a handful of us have come from normal education, and they still expect you to be up to the same standard and have the same discipline and I'm finding it really difficult to get into that kind of discipline. We do about 45 hours. A lot of the students there only do that course and don't have lectures or lessons to attend. I find it a lot more difficult to plan my time.

SS Ind Day to 16, SS Ind Board to 18, 18 points, Music

Box P: A-Levels and Adjustment to University – Young Men

I feel as if you're alone. At school there was always someone to talk to, there was always somebody to turn to if you couldn't do the work. Now you've just got to stick your head in a book and work it out for yourself, so it's just a change. That's what I was expecting, that's what everyone said. It's been quite difficult but not impossible.

SS Ind Day, 40 points, Accounting and Law

It's quite tough the course, there's quite a lot of work to do. Instead of having lectures nine to five and them trying to drum it into you, they say, "right, go away and learn it". It's all based on tutorial groups, so you have to be motivated which is quite hard. It's easier just to do nothing and no-one says to you "you're not doing enough", then the exam times come around and you think "Oh God!"

SS Gram, 38 points, Medicine

I find it a lot harder. It's harder to judge how well you're doing a lot of the time because the stuff isn't given in and marked and handed back to you. A lot of the time it's tutorials where you go through the work and you know whether you've got things right, but you can't tell how well you'd do if you were left to yourself.

Co-ed Gram, 44 points, Aerospace Engineering

Now I think I've adjusted quite well, but initially it was quite a shock. At school I had people who were generally interested in me, who knew who I was, who taught me, and who would willingly give up their time to help me out and that was nice and you also knew everyone in your class. Here, I got the impression that mostly, even my tutor, was mainly wanting to get out as soon as his time was up. If I hadn't turned up for months nobody would have noticed.

Co-ed Comp, 40 points, Economics

I found it difficult to adjust because I took a year out I had to try and get back into it. Especially with the maths, because it's a subject that needs practising and I felt rusty with it.

Co-ed Comp to 16, FE College to 18, 48 points, Physics

At the start of term I was really keen, after that I dropped into a period of very little work while I was discovering the social scene so I got a bit lost. I sort of over did it and under did it and managed to get behind. I've managed to get into a fairly steady rhythm this term.

SS Ind Day, 18 points, Town and Country Planning

Probably not as strenuous as A-levels, definitely not as strenuous as A-levels. Much less work a week, no firm deadlines or not as many firm deadlines. The tutorials are the only compulsory thing you have to go to. So if you miss a lecture all you've got to do is copy up the notes.

SS Ind Day, 16 points, History and Economics

I haven't found the work too much of a problem, it's just getting used to using different facilities and getting used to how to work at university.

Co-ed Ind Board, 24 points, English Language and Literature

It wasn't particularly hard, I was just lazy, I was going out a lot and doing other things rather than doing the work. I find it hard to attend lectures and to get work in on time, especially when the people aren't there to chase you up. I never seem to get reported for missing anything. I've just passed my exams, I passed them all, not very well obviously, it just seems you can get away with doing only so much.

Co-ed Ind Board, 21 points, Economics

It's a case of having to do a lot more things yourself, getting your books, doing the research. We haven't had any problems going to lectures and things. I would say now that I can only really work under pressure, I can't pre-plan like I used to, there are too many distractions, and I leave things to the last minute.

SS Gram to 18, 16 points, History and German

Box Q: Gap Year - Young Women

Took a year off from studying to travel, got out of practice a bit. Standard of study was very high at school and I would have been well prepared had I not taken a year off. Boarding prepared me for living away from home at university. However, you are still quite isolated from the real world at school.

SS Ind Board, 28 points, Modern Languages and European Studies

I had a year out last year when I worked in a boarding school in Switzerland. You can tell very much which people have had a year out - more mature and self disciplined. I made my decision to do Classical Studies two years ago and it was quite a gamble that I would still want to do the same thing.

SS Ind Board, 20 points, Classical Studies

It's pretty tough at first, especially coming back from Africa, I thought "what on earth am I doing?" Looking back, I think if I'd have come straight from Sixth Form College it would have been disastrous, university is completely different. I don't know how one would cope. For example, at school if you hadn't done an essay they would say "you can't go out this weekend". You're eighteen or whatever and you're supposed to come to university and cope on your own.

SS Ind Board to 16, Sixth Form College to 18, 24 points, Combined Studies

I haven't found adjusting difficult at all but I did take a year off (five months in India, then working in London) so that makes a difference as well I think. Having been abroad it wasn't like I had just come straight from school. Because you have to organise your own life and look after yourself it was easier. I definitely would not like to have come to university straight from school, even for me when I've never been shy or anything and always lived in a big city.

SS Ind Day to 16, SS Comp to 18, 26 points, Medicine

During my gap year I was doing all sorts of things (mainly voluntary work) and I quite missed having a 'structure'. Academically, I've had to work a bit to get back. I was actually scared of writing an essay because I haven't written one for 18 months. I thought "can I still do this?" Which is one of the drawbacks of a gap year, although there are so many pluses to outweigh them. Socially, I've settled in and made friends. I was a bit wary of going into halls of residence having had a gap year. I've been lucky in my flat and next door they're all third years or had a gap year.

SS Ind Day (Convent), 20 points, Theology

Although my school didn't really prepare me for higher education I spent a year travelling which meant I had to learn to be independent, money management and self-discipline. These are all important aspects when moving away from home and into a new environment. Travelling also got me used to meeting new people and starting up conversations.

Co-ed State Gram, 34 points, Sociology

I'm settling down OK, although it took me a while to get back into it after taking a year out, (gap year in French school). You are more spoon-fed at school and are told what to expect in exams etc, but here it's left to you to figure it out for yourself.

Co-ed State Gram, 32 points, Genetics with Mod Lang

I took a gap year so it was difficult to back into studying. The school was very structured with homework and things. At university it's very much off your own back.

Co-ed Comp, 26 points, Pharmacy

At university you are expected to organise yourself and I found this adjustment the hardest thing. I think because I'd taken a year out to travel I had already experienced being away from home. A lot of students seemed to be desperate and just a bit immature.

Co-ed Comp, 24 points, Philosophy and English

My year out between A-levels and university, studying at a university in France, helped me to become more organised and used to studying, but I still found it hard on coming here to decide what work was important and what wasn't (reading lists for example). School was not much help although I didn't ask for it directly since admitting problems tended to be magnified in the Record of Achievement reports.

Co-ed Comp, 22 points, Politics, Economics and Philosophy

Box R: Gap Year - Young Men

After a year out (French university, travelling in Australia) I don't actually need to be around people. I'm doing law so I've got to be pretty focused. So when people come to your room you just to say "sorry I'm on my way out". I've found it quite difficult to get back to work, but I now get my head down nine to five, every day, and I do a lot also in the evenings. People on my course are really, really fiercely competitive.

SS Ind Board, 30 points, Law

My gap year (worked in a ski resort in Switzerland, then went to South America) has helped. The university is so different to my old life, it could have a culture shock in a way, but it wasn't because I'd had that the year before. I've noticed that some of the people who didn't take gap years are going crazy now, drinking all the time. Whereas we did that in the gap year. I remember thinking how nice it is not having any parents around, really perhaps going a bit over the top. But now its "do the academic bit".

Co-ed Ind Board, 28 points, Geography

I think I'm different as well because I took a year out (intercultural exchange to South America living with family and going to school). A lot of people go on about how school teaches you to be independent but it's so restrictive and the rules are so stringent, you don't really know anything at all, it's a bit like being in prison.

Co-ed Ind Board, 21 points, Economics

I took a year out in Nepal teaching English which had the effect of thrusting school into the background. Single-sex schools are not very helpful for coping with and adjusting to social situations but the gap year made a big difference. I found it difficult to get used to studying afterwards because university was so different from school and what I had been doing in Nepal.

SS Ind Day, 40 points, Philosophy, Politics and Economics

If I hadn't done a gap year (spent four months in Italy working as an English language assistant, then shop work, then worked in a private bank in London, then took three months out) I think I'd be saying different things now. Nobody at school felt ready to go to university. I think it's a personal thing. Socially it's a breeze. I settled in straight away, my parents dropped me off and within ten minutes I thought "Yeah, I'm going to be all right here".

SS Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 24 points, Maths with Italian

The gap year (worked as a waiter in a Swiss ski resort, then travelled in SE Asia) made a big difference. I get on with all the people in my flat. We have quite a mature level of understanding between us, although some of them are rugby-playing beer drinking lads, we still get on.

SS Ind Day with mixed sixth form, 16 points, Town and Country Planning

I think my year off helped (gap year in Africa). Having been travelling you get to meet people, and having worked as well, you meet normal people, people who aren't students. In our flat, they've put us all together, people who've had a year off, so we all bore each other with our travel stories!

SS Gram, 38 points, Medicine

Again, I don't know to what extent having a year out (casual work in hotels in France, Germany and Switzerland) had an effect on me, because I went for a year not doing any academic work. I think perhaps that's made it more difficult. I've found it difficult to bring back that academic discipline. I actually changed my course three quarters of the way through my first term, because I wasn't enjoying myself, doing Government and Political Theory.

Co-ed Comp to 16, sixth form college to 18, 32 points, Politics and Modern History

I took a year out and went to America where I worked on a physics programme and did some voluntary work. I can see the difference in people who have come straight from school. The people who have had a gap year seem a lot more relaxed about going to the pub and things, and seem to be more happy in general.

Co-ed Comp to 16, FE College to 18, 48 points, Physics

Box S: Young Women from Boarding Schools

Academically, there's been a bit of a problem. At school I was given all my work and everything. Here there's no one saying "work, work!" so I didn't do anything. I turned up to my three seminars a week and missed all the lectures, everything, then suddenly at Christmas I thought "Oh my God!" I had no notes. Socially, it's been just great. The university is so big that if someone is unfriendly you can just ignore them.

SS Ind, 40 points, Medicine

University is quite similar to A-levels, as we had to do a lot of work for ourselves and do a bit of background. At university you have to do it all for yourself and the problem is that some people aren't used to doing that. I've settled into halls straight away, but it has been harder to adjust to the City, clubs and stuff like that, than for day girls because their parents let them stay out later while we were allowed out only a couple of times in the week and at weekends and then only until 10:30pm.

SS Ind, 22 points, Economics

At school you had to get your work in on time which helped to prepare me for university. Socially it's pretty much the same – self-discipline and all that. I had a year out last year where I worked in a boarding school abroad.

SS Ind, 20 points, Classical Studies

At university there's quite a lot more reading around the subject and making the effort. But at boarding school there were fixed prep times so I found it quite easy to go to the library and sit for a few hours working. Living away from home I learned to live with situations. I haven't really felt homesick that much, but actually none of my other friends have either.

Co-ed Ind, 28 points, Psychology and Neuroscience

I really enjoyed myself at school, but disliked the lack of privacy. It, however, has given me independence and an ability to adjust to many situations. University is less structured than school, but because I took a year off it would have been difficult to get down to studying anyway.

Co-ed Ind, 24 points, History

Box T: Young Men from Boarding Schools

University has taken a lot of getting used to academically. At school it was teachers just throwing everything at you. All the stuff you needed to know for exams they would tell you in class. I didn't even have textbooks, everything I needed to know I was told. Whereas here it's more go away and read it up and then if you have got any problems come back. Socially, it is not all that different from being at boarding school. You're staying in close proximity with your peers, you're working in your own bedroom (especially since I'm in self-catering), the only difference is going out – there are so many pubs and clubs. At school there were a lot of distractions like sport. I used to knuckle down there and I am doing so here.

SS Ind, 38 points, Medicine

My school had superb facilities, especially for sport and drama, with good opportunities for all kinds of activity, but it is still very much geared to academics/sports players, and people with strengths elsewhere don't always gain respect. I am finding the essays at university far longer and more drawn out so that I have to structure work over months rather than days or weeks. Being in equally mixed groups of males and females makes for a very different atmosphere. I find I have to be far more open and clear in conversation because of meeting people from such diverse backgrounds.

SS Ind, 18 points, Music

Very enjoyable, widened horizons considerably with extra-curricular activities. Independent study was encouraged. Boarding school is similar to a hall of residence with more rules.

SS Ind to 16, Co-ed Ind to 18, 30 points, Engineering with French

School taught you to be able to stand on your own two feet. I hate to admit it now but it is character-building stuff. It was a very good atmosphere, and because it was mixed there was good social interaction in the evenings and over weekends, particularly between boarders through the summer. We had a swimming pool and nice grounds to sit in. I now feel that I was quite privileged. I've one particular friend who hasn't boarded and hasn't been away from home before. She's an only child and was taken to and from school each day by her mother, and she is now finding it quite difficult to cope. Academically, I understand about independent study and going off and researching things for yourself, but why do people set the same small set of questions when they know they've got 400/500 students. I hate the library because the books are never there. I'm having to try to get away with using the books I've already got.

Co-ed Ind, 26 points, American Studies

I'm used to working in a bedsit like at boarding school but in a flat it's not so easy because there's all the noise from other flats and the different types of courses make work patterns different for different people. Scientists when they come back don't really have so much work to do outside of lectures, because they have a whole day of lectures. Whereas myself, I have a lot of reading in my own time and a lot of research, so I get a bit disturbed when everyone else comes back, but I just run away to the library. Socially, I'm finding it remarkably easy because it is just like being in a house at boarding school.

Co-ed Ind (went Co-ed when he was in second year), 24 points, English