No magic formula: marketing a marginal school

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NO MAGIC FORMULA

Marketing A Marginal School

by

Janet A Harvey

Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of
PhD of the Loughborough University
1st November 1996
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(i)
This thesis describes an action research enquiry into the marketing of a small independent girls' school in the West Midlands, of which the author was the headteacher. Chapter One outlines the research situation. In Chapter Two, literary perspectives are presented on the issues of educational marketing, independent education (with particular reference to girls), and the problems of marketing a contracting school. Chapter Three covers methodological issues. In the first spiral of the enquiry, the school's provision was analysed and new initiatives were undertaken to improve it. These are described in Chapter Four. Next, the views of parents were sought, to assist the school's management team to evaluate the success of these initiatives, and to acquire firmer knowledge about sources of students. Outcomes are presented in Chapter Five. Preparatory school headteachers were identified as important 'gatekeepers' in the process of transfer into secondary independent schooling. A series of interviews with prep school heads established their views on, and involvement in, the transfer process. These interviews are analysed in Chapter Six. Concerns expressed by the prep heads about their relationships with secondary heads, particularly of girls' schools, prompted the final cycle of this study: to compare the views of heads of independent girls' schools with those of the prep heads. These findings are outlined in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight presents a summary of marketing problems revealed by the research findings, suggests further areas of research, and indicates the final outcomes for the author and her school.
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QUOTATIONS

The thesis title and the quotations at the chapter headings are all taken from "The Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun", by Wess Roberts.

(ii)
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the staff, students, parents and governors of 'Bruford School'

Ave Atque Vale
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frontispiece</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: The Background to the Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical perspectives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reasons for the research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Marketing and Choice in Education: A Review of the Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The history and practice of commercial marketing</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental choice</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of educational marketing</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and the marketing of</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a contracting school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional ethics within educational marketing</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Methodology</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is research for?</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential research methods</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some problems and solutions</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The collection of data</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing the situation at</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruford: Chapter One</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing the school: Chapter Four</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The questionnaire to parents: Chapter Five</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing preparatory school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headteachers: Chapter Six</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The girls' schools' questionnaire:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Marketing Bruford School</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bruford Marketing Report</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal marketing</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External marketing</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues not tackled by the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruford Marketing Report</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1: Parents' Questionnaire

Questionnaire
Letter to pilot group
Letter to main sample

Appendix 2: Preparatory School Profiles

Masefield
Lord Byron School
Chesterfield
Hawkins College Junior
Tennyson House
Traherne Court
St John's
Harris
Marlowe
Hatton Park
Shelley
Wordsworth
Shakespeare
Chaucer Prep
Milton Hall
Middleton
Gaskell
Browning

Appendix 3: The Influence of Location on Parental Choice of Schools

Appendix 4(A): The Interview Structure for the Preparatory Headteachers

Appendix 4(B): Research Records of Two Sample Interviews

Mrs Jones, Masefield School
Mr Barrett, Browning School

Appendix 5: The Questionnaire Sent to the Girls' Schools' Headteachers

Questionnaire
Letter

Appendix 6: Traditions of Transfer from Preparatory to Secondary Schools

Bibliography

(vi)
TABLES

Chapter Three - Methodology

3.1 Map - Distances/driving time of schools from Bruford 116

Chapter Five - Asking the Customers

5.1 Length of time at Bruford 168
5.2 The number of other schools visited 169
5.3 Sources of information about Bruford 170
5.4 Factors influencing the choice of Bruford parents 173
5.5 Parents' responses to Bruford's current performance 178
5.6 Parents' views of recent performance 183
5.7 Views of recent performance of Year 9 & 10 parents 186
5.8 New parents' survey responses 188
5.9 The number of other schools visited (new parents) 188
5.10 Sources of information about Bruford (new parents) 189
5.11 Factors influencing the new parents 191
5.12 New parents' responses to Bruford's current performance 194

Chapter Six - Interviewing Preparatory School Heads

6.1 Student numbers and administrative divisions 210
6.2 Schools analysed by gender 212
6.3 Day/boarder division of students within boarding schools 214
6.4 Boarding school locations and catchment areas 215
6.5 Day school catchment areas 216
6.6 Secondary school destinations of students 218
6.7 Headteachers' periods of tenure 221

(vii)
Chapter Seven - Asking the Secondary Girls' Schools' Heads

7.1 The survey sample of girls' secondary schools 262
7.2 Age of admission to preparatory/junior departments 264
7.3 Rights of transfer from junior to senior departments 267
7.4 Ages of admission to senior schools 269
7.5 Admission procedures 271
ABBREVIATIONS

ASE: Association for Science in Education.

B, D, WB: students at a school who are, respectively, boarders, day students or weekly boarders.

BMR: Bruford Marketing Report (see Chapters One & Four).

C.E.: Common Entrance, the examination system by which independent secondary schools can assess students for admission. Papers may be taken at 11 or at 12 or 13. They are set centrally but are marked by the first choice school, which sets its own individual passmark. Students may name a second choice school: papers are forwarded if the passmark for their first choice is not reached. C.E. is not used universally (see Chapter Seven).

Ellis Committee: regional meetings of independent school staff for discussion of, and subject-based training in, curriculum development. The Ellis Committee has been superseded by the Independent Schools Curriculum Committee but, as with 'Baker Days', the former title remains in use.

Exeat: permitted leave from a boarding school. At Bruford this usually implied a night's absence from school. A fixed Exeat meant that the whole school went home for the weekend.

GSA: Girls' Schools Association - professional association of headteachers of girls' independent schools.
Abbreviations (continued)


IAPS: Independent Association of Preparatory Schools - professional association of headteachers of preparatory schools.

INSET: In-Service Education/Training for Teachers.

ISAI: Independent Schools' Association Incorporated

ISCO: Independent Schools' Careers Organisation

ISIS: Independent Schools' Information Service

LEA: Local Education Authority

OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education

Preparatory (Prep) School: An independent (i.e. private) primary school (see Appendix Two).

R.C.: Roman Catholic

SFIA: School Fees Insurance Agency

TQM: Total Quality Management

TVEI: Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

USP: Unique Selling Point

(x)
This thesis describes an action research enquiry into the marketing of a small independent girls' school in the West Midlands, of which the author was the headteacher. Chapter One outlines the research situation. In Chapter Two, literary perspectives are presented on the issues of educational marketing, independent education (with particular reference to girls), and the problems of marketing a contracting school. Chapter Three covers methodological issues. In the first spiral of the enquiry, the school's provision was analysed and new initiatives were undertaken to improve it. These are described in Chapter Four. Next, the views of parents were sought, to assist the school's management team to evaluate the success of these initiatives, and to acquire firmer knowledge about sources of students. Outcomes are presented in Chapter Five. Preparatory school headteachers were identified as important 'gatekeepers' in the process of transfer into secondary independent schooling. A series of interviews with prep school heads established their views on, and involvement in, the transfer process. These interviews are analysed in Chapter Six. Concerns expressed by the prep heads about their relationships with secondary heads, particularly of girls' schools, prompted the final cycle of this study: to compare the views of heads of independent girls' schools with those of the prep heads. These findings are outlined in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Eight presents a summary of marketing problems revealed by the research findings, suggests further areas of research, and indicates the final outcomes for the author and her school.
CHAPTER ONE

The Background to the Research
The Background to the Research

We must refrain from charging prematurely and furiously into unfamiliar situations. Roberts, p93

This chapter outlines the background to my research enquiry. It presents a brief assessment of the history of Bruford School and of the management styles of my immediate predecessors, which were my legacy, and explains the circumstances and focus of the subsequent research.

Historical perspectives

Historical understanding about a situation can help us to comprehend its present (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Historical research can also show how theories or forms of practice have developed. Some understanding of Bruford's history is necessary to an understanding of its situation at the time this research project commenced.

A brief history of Bruford School

Bruford School was established in the mid-1850s in a small Midlands country town by the daughter of an Huguenot family. In the 1880s the school moved to a large Victorian house, which at the time of my appointment still accommodated some of the students and the administrative offices. Other houses had been
acquired later for residential purposes.

The headteacher from the 1920s until 1960 was herself was the product of a Bruford education. Her artistic capabilities and love of music, combined with a marked tendency to snobbery, led her to seek the company of many of the leading artistic and literary figures of her day. She weighted Bruford's curriculum heavily in favour of the Arts. With one exception (an outstanding teacher of English) the staff, while enthusiastic about their subjects, do not seem to have possessed academic credentials (Huth, 1994). The school acquired a reputation for providing a pleasant, genteel education whose value, though not without merit, was not academic. Weber (1994) recalled that the headteacher boasted she had never passed an examination. I have found Old Brufordians of this era charming and poised, often with strong social consciences which have led them to become involved with a wide range of community work. However, several of them told me that they left school better equipped with personal qualities than academic attainments, about which they still express considerable bitterness.

In 1960 this head retired and sold the school to an educational trust which was formed at the instigation of parents to ensure the future of the school. The new governing body appointed, as her successor, an experienced teacher who had already held a headship abroad. From one of her colleagues, Miss Hurst (not her real name), I learned that the new head had been an Oxford graduate with much wider teaching experience than her predecessor. Over her years as Bruford's headteacher the school
attracted a different clientele. The network of social contacts of the previous head gradually fell into abeyance. It was no longer useful or even necessary to have good social connections to gain admission as a student (Harvey, 1994).

The school's reputation for pastoral care and individual attention was maintained, but more academic goals were set. Separate classrooms were built, so that classrooms no longer doubled as boarders' common rooms in the evenings. Supervised working time was organised to give the boarders 'homework time' (Harvey, 1994). In a private conversation, the head told me that she had introduced O-level and A-level examinations in 1960 (Harvey, 1992). These were apparently well-received by the girls, one of whom commented to her that term-time passed so much more quickly when one had work to do!

Hughes (1976) defined one style of headship as that of "... the extended professional - above average in personal teaching and pastoral emphasis and in openness to external professional influences" (p55). Miss Hurst said that the head taught her own subject so well that it "... was almost unknown for anyone to fail history" (Harvey, 1994). It may be inferred that the head was a professional of the kind described by Hughes, setting an example to those staff who remained after the departure of her predecessor. She had a good rapport with her students, though Miss Hurst felt her natural reserve made her appear austere to her staff. Whatever the reasons, the school attracted students with more academic ambitions and potential while she was in post.
This head's building programme was pursued by her successor, my immediate predecessor, when she joined the school in 1971. Between 1960 and the mid-1980s a continual process of building and adaptation provided the school with eight new classrooms, an audio-visual room, Science laboratories, a multi-purpose hall for Sports and Drama, and specialist rooms for Art and Home Economics.

**My predecessor and her management style**

My immediate predecessor appeared to have been well-liked by my new colleagues at Bruford. They told me that her care and concern for them as individuals was strong. She had the same concern for the students. Those members of staff who recalled her arrival in 1971 indicated that she had arrived as something of a human dynamo. Her vision had certainly propelled forward the building programme outlined above.

However, the pupil population had declined in her latter years, leading to a situation where the school was overstaffed for its numbers. Furthermore, physical resources were not sensibly used. For example, allocation of accommodation for new computing facilities, essential for teaching Information Technology and Design Technology in the National Curriculum, had only been made on a temporary basis. The sanatorium, meanwhile, had sufficient beds for a small hospital and, being housed in a separate building, required extra personnel which compounded the problem of overstaffing.
It seemed that all decisions were referred to the headteacher. Even such minor matters as the selection of paint colours for individual dormitories had been referred to her. Nevertheless, tough decisions about Bruford's staffing and accommodation problems seemed to have been indefinitely postponed or even ignored. The head showed reluctance to take firm action, particularly in situations where an unpleasant decision (such as a reduction in staff numbers through redeployment or redundancy) might cause pain to someone else. This accorded with the staff view of her as a caring person. However, resolution of the overstaffing at Bruford could only be achieved by cuts of some kind.

Other possible explanations of the failure to tackle these problems can be found in the work of Jones (1987), Handy (1991) and Brighouse (1991), among others. Jones (1987) recognised an "old model" of headship, in which decisions were centred on an all-knowing head, but realised also that schools are no longer the kind of "stable states" for which this style originally evolved (p5).

Handy (1994) made reference to the Sigmoid Curve which outlines the path of development and decline for all organisations. If all is well in an institution, there can be a feeling that it is folly to change what is working efficiently. However, if plans for the future are not prepared and implemented before the inevitable decline begins, depleted resources and low energy levels may cause the decline to accelerate so fast that it becomes irreversible.
Brighouse (1991) warned that in schools "... remembered successes and a sense of history can so easily become ancient rather than modern" (p8). Brighouse also observed that some leaders are good in times of expansion but not in times of contraction and that for others the reverse is true. He suggested moreover that a stay in a school extending much beyond 9 years creates a real risk of staleness: heads in the surveys of Earley, Baker and Weindling (1990; 1995) agreed with him. Fielding (1994) indicated that "... enhanced sense of purpose for the institution" (p12), in which a long-serving headteacher continues until retirement, can only be achieved if s/he takes a constant hard look at management structures and the expectation of individuals, and consciously focusses on the school's strategic needs. This may be a painful necessity but, as Peck (1993) pointed out, pain is often part of the process by which an organism, whether a physical body or a human organisation, reaches and maintains optimum health.

The problem of falling rolls

During the early 1980s Bruford School was full, containing nearly 150 boarders; by the time of my appointment (December 1989) this had declined by 30% and seemed likely to fall further. In the term before I arrived (September 1990), daygirls were introduced into the school in an attempt to improve the situation.

However, the governors seemed unable to agree on reasons for the decline in numbers and in 1990 they appointed an external
marketing consultant to investigate. His report, which he
presented to a governors' meeting in November 1990, is discussed
fully in Chapter Four. As the incoming head, I was invited to
attend this meeting.

I took up the headship of Bruford in January 1991. Within the
school at that time Years 11 (age 15/16) and 9 (13/14-year-olds)
had the largest numbers. Many of the Year 11 girls had already
expressed their intention to leave and go elsewhere for Year 12.
The registered intake for Year 7 (aged 11) in September 1991 was
two. This would put the total numbers for September 1991 below
100, in a school which at that time was budgeting for a
break-even point of 120 boarders. Daygirls were charged much
lower fees. Even if the school reached, in September 1991, its
projected numbers of 20 daygirls and 100 boarders, the financial
shortfall resulting from the lower daygirl fees destroyed the
financial planning almost as completely as a shortfall in the
total numbers.

This financial position could not be sustained beyond September
1993. If there were no improvement in numbers, not only would
the gap between expenditure and income become unbridgeable, but
the pupil numbers would also have fallen too low for the
standard of education to be maintained. It would have become
impossible, for example, to offer team games in Physical
Education lessons. The school had, at most, two years in which
to reverse the decline in numbers.
The reasons for the research

Before moving to Bruford I had taken a sabbatical term at Exeter University, where I studied educational research methods. I determined to apply these to assist me to evaluate both Bruford's potential and the marketing activities suggested by the consultant, so that some theoretical perspectives on the school's situation could be achieved, leading to refined strategies. First, however, I turned my attention to the literature on marketing, to develop an understanding of its philosophy, aims and methods. These are discussed in Chapter Two.

Analysis of inputs, processes and outputs is needed if schools are to assess progress towards their chosen goals (Hulme, 1989). Resources for any activity are finite and efficient allocation of them necessitates evaluation of the potential benefits (Dennison, 1990). Decision-making about resources is uncertain if it is not based on information about performance (ibid).

In Chapter Four an account is given of the 1990 audit of the school's market situation, and the first steps taken to bring about improvement are described. After five terms, i.e. by the summer of 1992, considerable changes had been made in the school's curriculum, facilities, pastoral care and management structures. Some of the changes, such as the development of the Design Technology facilities, were of obvious academic benefit to the students and some, such as the greater freedoms, were of social benefit to them. A positive marketing approach had been
adopted to try to attract more students and help the school to survive.

Despite economic recession, Bruford had begun to register more students for 1992, so some of these changes appeared to be having an effect, but it was not clear which. The marketing consultant had approached only a small number of parents, current and prospective, so his results were a spot-check and not sufficiently extensive to be statistically valid. His report suggested that a wide variety of possible factors, internal and external, could be relevant to the successful marketing of Bruford. It seemed needful to ask all current parents for their views, and to follow up such an enquiry on a regular basis to see if there were any changes. From the findings it might be possible to detect both new areas for improvement and new sources of students. The outcomes of this survey are reported in Chapter Five.

These outcomes led to a change in direction. It appeared that comparatively few areas of internal marketing still needed attention, therefore the main focus of research was re-orientated towards the school's external market. Preparatory headteachers, who seemed to be important gatekeepers for secondary independent schools, were asked for information about the process of transfer for students from their schools into senior schools. Analysis of these interviews is given in Chapter Six.

The preparatory heads indicated several areas of potential
misunderstanding between themselves and the heads of secondary girls' schools. To triangulate these perceptions, a quantitative survey of a sample group of secondary heads was undertaken. Outcomes from this survey are presented in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER TWO

Marketing and Choice in Education - A Review of the Literature
CHAPTER TWO

Marketing and Choice in Education

You must be willing to learn, to listen and to grow in your awareness and abilities to perform the duties of your office. Roberts, p27

What is marketing and what does it have to do with education?

This chapter begins with a brief review of the origins, history and practice of commercial marketing for products and services. Education as a service is then examined.

This leads to the topic of parental choice; how and why parents select the services of particular schools and why some opt for independent schools. Within independent provision the special place of girls' schools and preparatory (i.e. independent primary) schools is considered.

Following on from that, the process of educational marketing is explored, looking at both the theoretical perspectives and the practical applications for schools. The specific problems encountered in leading and marketing a contracting school are considered. Finally, the issue of professional ethics within educational marketing is debated.
The history and practice of commercial marketing

From the Industrial Revolution until well into the twentieth century manufacturers pursued policies of mass production and therefore standardisation to keep up with the consumption of customers (Baker, 1994). As the knock-on effects of industrial revolution extended across the globe the number of potential customers increased. Mass production and mass consumption were the results.

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, changes in society profoundly affected manufacturing industry. In the western industrialised nations, the depression of the 1930s sharply reduced demand, which led to excess capacity in factories and distribution systems. This problem was concealed but not solved by the second world war. In addition, the enormous concentration of power and wealth in a small number of industrial conglomerates led to legislation to limit monopolies. This encouraged diversification in manufacturing industries. Furthermore the pace of technological innovation accelerated and eventually overtook the natural growth in demand caused by population increase (Baker, 1994).

Faced with greater competition and relatively stagnant markets, manufacturers sought new ways to increase sales. They looked for tangible benefits to offer, which would to enable consumers to distinguish one company's products from those of another and encourage them to purchase on the basis of the benefits offered. If such benefits were not evident, the only distinguishing
feature between two similar items would be price, with obvious effects on competition. The need to differentiate one product from another, and to promote the perceived differences so that customers could recognise them, produced the modern concept of marketing (Bartels, 1965; Baker, 1994). Differentiation between products also led to an increase in services and expansion in the number of service industries (Gronroos, 1984), because the provision of some kind of service linked to the goods purchased was often the way to offer an extra benefit.

Technology has continued to transform choice (McKenna, 1991) and to increase the pressure on producers to know more about their customers so that they can meet their needs. This has led to "relationship marketing", i.e. a closer focus on the people involved in sales transactions, both customers and providers (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991).

Marketing has also come to be seen as relevant for non-profit groups (Kotler & Andreason, 1991), where such organisations as the police service, hospitals, charities or political parties may "... exchange their products for a behavioural response in terms of respect, gratitude or political support" (Doyle, 1994a, p36). I shall argue that marketing, as it is now understood in the commercial world, is a valuable, indeed essential, management strategy for educational leaders.

Definitions of marketing

The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as:
"... the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably" (quoted in Majaro, 1982, p3).

Lancaster and Massingham (1993) defined marketing both as a function, which "... forms the interface with the firm's existing and potential customers" (p5) and as a philosophy, which "... puts the customer at the very centre of the firm's corporate purpose" (p7).

Bartels (1965) found that "... the ideas which became incorporated in the body of marketing thought" (p48) existed as early as the first decade of the twentieth century. However, he identified the 1950s as the moment of "... the adoption of the consumer's viewpoint as the starting point of all marketing planning" (p67). Baker (1994) dated the emergence of a marketing (as opposed to production) focus from the publication of an article called 'Marketing Myopia' by Levitt (1960). Levitt explained that product-orientation rather than customer-orientation had inevitably led to industrial decline. Concentration on products alone had caused manufacturers to define their business too narrowly. He gave the example of Hollywood movie moguls who failed to perceive the threat of television because they saw themselves as being in the cinema industry instead of the entertainment business.

A marketing focus leads industrial managers to consider four main factors in the identification and satisfaction of
customers' needs. These have been defined by McCarthy (1981), Doyle (1994b) and many others as Product, Price, Promotion and Place. They have come to be known as The Four Ps: collectively they form a 'marketing mix' (Borden, 1965).

The marketing mix

Products are the goods and services sold. Marketing was first developed to improve the sale of goods. The manufacture of goods must often be planned years ahead. They also have a life-cycle. Initially sales may be slow: a peak period will follow, after which sales again decline as the market becomes saturated. To limit the impact of this decline on company revenue, producers must have the next innovation ready before the last phase is reached. Aspects of the product which are important to customers are its quality, features, name, packaging, and the services or guarantees which come with the purchase (Doyle, 1994b).

Pricing takes account of several factors. Sufficient profit margins must be added to the cost of manufacture to leave a reasonable profit level but not such as to deter prospective customers. Perceived value in the eyes of the customers might in some circumstances make it essential to charge a high price. Luxury goods such as perfume and good wine, if sold below a certain price level, might not therefore attract the market segment of customers at which they are aimed. Conversely, for sale in a street market items priced too highly will not sell. The prices of competitors' products are also an influence.
Firms able to exert control over the market, through a monopoly or a cartel, or whose prices are fixed by law, will find pricing a less significant influence on their policy-making. Doyle (1994b) suggested that the list price, discounts, allowances and credit arrangements are all important considerations.

Promotion is the point at which selling becomes an active part of the marketing mix. Promotion is the advertising, not only of the goods themselves, but also of those specific features and/or intangible benefits which are supposed to differentiate the product from its competitors. Doyle (1994b) considered that industrial promotion included advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations. Buttle (1989) added direct mail, sponsorship and the packaging of the product itself as part of the promotion: anything that will attract the attention of potential purchasers.

Place is the final factor. This means not only the location of retail outlets but also the efficiency of the distribution network. For successful sales to be made, customers must have access to the goods and sales staff must be able to obtain them. Once demand has been created, manufacturers must be able to satisfy it if they are to make profits (Doyle, 1994b). If a manufacturer is unable to meet demand at the point of sale, others may successfully enter the market and capture the customers.

The Four Ps are all controllable to a greater or lesser extent by the manufacturers of the goods. However, Majaro (1982)
pointed out that producers are also constrained by external factors, such as the legal system, the actions of competitors and the consumer's environment. Laws and ethical codes of practice affect what may be sold, how and where it may be made, and how and where it may be sold. Competitors influence price: on the other hand, their products may be so far ahead of the market, and so clearly filling a particular niche, that competition is almost impossible. The Japanese world-domination of many aspects of technology in the 70s and 80s is a case in point (Majaro, ibid).

Hannagan (1992) suggested that marketing is the concept that an organisation's decisions should be governed by its markets, i.e. its customers, rather than by its technical facilities. However, the consumer's environment is perhaps the most difficult to foresee. Society's views change and with these changes come market variations. In Britain in the last twenty years, for example, it has become less socially acceptable to smoke or to purchase a fur coat. Even packaging may be affected by social trends: in some shops where all purchases used to be placed in a bag which advertised their name, there is now evidence of environmental awareness and customers are asked whether they want one. This may be due to genuine company conviction about green issues, or a very subtle form of market segmentation, or both.

Demographic changes affect where people live and require redistribution of infrastructure and support services (Payne, 1993). In the specific context of this thesis, demographic and
societal changes have had a marked effect on boarding schools in recent years (Tucker, 1994; see also below under 'Segmentation of the educational market'). Cowell (1994) pointed out that ignorance about consumer behaviour is particularly problematic in the marketing of services.

So far marketing has been considered largely in terms of goods. Education cannot be so classified. Education is a service. What difference does it make to the basic marketing concept if the 'product' is a service?

The problems of service marketing

The first problem presented by service marketing is the absence of a universally accepted definition of a service (Gronroos, 1984; Kotler, 1994). Cowell (1994) showed that so-called services cover an enormous range of situations, from transport-hire and hotel groups to professional and financial services, and include a non-profit sector of diverse organisations such as churches, colleges, charities, and art and music groups.

Definitions of services

Services can be assessed by definitions, classification, functional differences or characteristics. Wilson (1972) pointed out that official definitions of services are usually descriptive of the activity involved. They do not elucidate the essential nature of such activity. He quoted the United Kingdom
Central Statistics Office:

"It is obvious that services are activities directly relating to the general public - any form of work which is not manufacturing goods" (p157);

and also the United States' Treasury Internal Revenue Service:

"Expenditures which do not result in the acquisition of goods" (p158).

As Wilson said, these definitions are not helpful, and the latter implicitly excludes a number of areas which could be understood to be service industries, such as distribution, utilities and financial services.

Gronroos (1984) felt that lists of services became outdated as fast as they were compiled. He suggested that:

"Services are objects of transaction offered by firms and institutions that generally offer services or that consider themselves service organisations" (p19),

which implies that a service is all in the mind of the provider! Nevertheless, there is some validity in this view if it is taken in conjunction with Kotler's (1994) point that there are five categories of "offer" from providers, and that only one is a "pure tangible good" such as soap or salt (p465). The remaining "offers" move through "tangible goods with accompanying
services" e.g. computers; "hybrids" in which goods and the
service are equally important e.g. a restaurant; and "a major
service with accompanying minor goods" e.g. air travel which
includes in-flight meals; to "pure services" such as
psychotherapy (idem).

Definition of services by classification

Wilson (1972) suggested that the Standard Industrial
Classification is the simplest point of reference for
identifying a service. Thus within the concept of a service
would fall the following three groups of activities: any
economic activities involving the transport, re-packaging or
disposal of an extant product (thus including all wholesale and
retail trades); utilities (such as banking, real estate,
insurance and investment); and any other activities not directly
involving the output of physical commodities (e.g. recreation,
health, law, religion, public administration, accounting,
philanthropy and research).

The advantage of this method is that it eliminates doubt as to
whether an activity is a good or a service, but its drawback is
its inflexibility in the face of new technologies or new
concepts in industrial organisation (Wilson, 1972). The
construction and demolition industries present problems, because
they involve some change in the form of materials,
and provide a tangible product. Utilities also present
difficulties, because at the end of their process of interaction
with the customer s/he may have acquired a tangible investment
such as a house. Education, however, sits fairly comfortably in the third grouping, alongside health, philanthropy and research.

Definitions of services by function

Parry (1991) also saw service providers falling into three broad categories. His divisions were "Skilled Service Providers", which included accountants, hairdressers and ski instructors; "Transaction Managers", including bookmakers and estate agents; and "Service System Providers", such as hospitals, hotels, the media and retailing. Parry's divisions were based on how businesses organise themselves, how they interact with their clients and how individuals within them receive remuneration.

Parry included education in his third group, taking the view that teachers, while they may be professionals, did not count as skilled service providers unless (like golf professionals and ski instructors) they negotiated their remuneration with their clients on the basis of the time spent providing the service. Parry's use of methods of negotiation of remuneration as a measure defining levels of skill or quality of service does not equate with my own interpretation of the term 'professional'. Moreover his system, which defined similar service providers in different ways based solely on methods of remuneration, seems unnecessarily complicated and unhelpful. It does little to clarify the elusive nature of a service.
Services defined by their characteristics

For two reasons, I have elected to base my exploration of services on characteristics. Firstly, the literature on educational marketing largely defines this particular service by its characteristics, making comparisons with other services easier. Secondly, the distinctive characteristics of service industries have led marketing experts to develop the conceptual framework of marketing by adding further ingredients to the marketing mix.

The characteristics of services include four major factors not involved in the marketing of goods (Rushton & Carson, 1985; Buttle, 1989; Lovelock, 1991; Payne, 1993). Services are intangible: they cannot be identified by the senses. They are heterogeneous: the human element involved in their performance means they cannot be standardised and there will be variations in service depending on the persons delivering it. They are perishable and cannot be produced in advance and stored until needed. Finally, they cannot be separated from their consumption, and both consumer and provider are therefore inescapably involved with the provision of a service.

To these four characteristics, some authors have added a fifth: the difference of ownership (Gronroos, 1984; Lancaster & Massingham, 1993; Doyle, 1994a). A customer who buys goods has, subject to any legal constraints, unrestricted use of products purchased. With a service there is no transfer of ownership of the service itself, though as a result of receiving it the
customer may also acquire tangible goods (Kotler, 1994).

**Intangibility**

Rushton and Carson (1985) regarded intangibility as the single most important difference between goods and services because of the difficulty which a service presents to a prospective purchaser of assessing its quality. Furthermore, there may be a considerable lapse of time before the quality of the service becomes apparent. Education presents an excellent example of long-term revelation of quality: a poor choice of school, course or staff appointment may be irreversible by the time its unsuitability becomes apparent. Rushton and Carson claimed that marketing must address the problem of intangibility by clarifying the service for the customers and assisting them to evaluate it.

Gray (1991) pointed out that there are varying degrees of intangibility.

"The distinction between products and services is perhaps better seen as a tangible-intangible spectrum. From such a perspective, education is right at the 'intangible' end of the spectrum, with few if any tangible products normally provided as part of the service" (p14).

Doyle (1994a) agreed, quoting Shostack's (1977) continuum. Marketing such an intangible product presents special
difficulties to those trying to increase the number of potential customers. This is a point to which I shall return.

Consideration of the other three main aspects of product-marketing (heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability) indicates that the difficulties which arise in education are similar to those experienced by other services.

**Heterogeneity**

Heterogeneity presents the problem that it is not possible to eliminate the variable element provided by the difference between people. Viewing this dilemma in an educational context, the National Curriculum may prescribe what is taught, staff-appraisal may establish that teachers are competent and good management practice may ensure that all within an institution share its values, but unless the Secretary of State for Education finds a way to clone teachers (or, indeed, students) there will always be some differences between staff and some variations in student response. Buttle (1989) succinctly defined the problem of heterogeneity in service provision: "Human performance cannot be fully controlled by management" (p237).

**Inseparability**

Consumers/clients are inseparable from those who provide them with a service, and they may contribute in some way to its creation. A solicitor, for example, cannot draw up a will
without instructions from his client. Similarly, students are inseparable from the education they receive. Defining them as 'consumers' is not helpful since this language suggests that they are passive recipients, whereas in fact each teacher/pupil relationship is a joint construction of the education of the child involved. Also, within a school there will be many children simultaneously. They will inevitably have an impact on each others' experience and their interactions with each other will affect every individual student and teacher.

Gray (1991) observed that some service industries turn inseparability to their advantage by featuring the providers as part of the benefit of the service, giving examples from leisure industries such as the restaurant owned by a famous chef. There are possible parallels in education. A well-known figure as principal of a school or college may attract potential students or their parents. Historic examples include Arnold of Rugby and Dorothea Beale at Cheltenham Ladies' College. It might be interesting to ask Michael Marland at North Westminster Community College, or Ted Wragg at Exeter University, if they have considered the impact of their own high public profile on the marketing of their respective institutions. However, the appointment of such an individual will not be within the option choices of most educational institutions, though there is nothing to stop the holder of such a post setting out to achieve fame after her/his arrival. The importance of Public Relations as part of the principal's role should obviously not be overlooked when appointments are made. Schools can also emphasise their strengths as benefits to their students in such
areas as pastoral care, sporting and/or arts activities etc.

**Perishability**

Perishability is the fourth problem shared by all services. Empty seats on an aeroplane flight, for example, are wasted capacity and lost income. Gray (1991) pointed out that this may not be a problem in education if it leads to smaller classes and reduces pressure on teachers.

"The notion that the smaller the class the better the educational quality is persistent and supported with some research evidence. The private sector of education takes advantage of this by making a promotional feature of small classes - and charging accordingly. But for most pupils and students education in a small class is an unexpected and probably unsought quasi-benefit" (p15).

In a private school whose classes have shrunk below a financially viable level, small classes cease to be beneficial and become a cost, for more than monetary reasons. It is a social disadvantage, particularly in a boarding school, for any academic year-group to be so small as to offer no choice of friendship groups. This relates also to the inseparability of the service from both the beneficiary and the provider.

The characteristics of intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and inseparability shared by services caused
industrial marketers to add three further factors to the marketing mix (Cowell, 1984; Lancaster & Massingham, 1993). These are: People (those involved in selling and/or performing the service and, if different, the recipients of the service); Process (the operational system by which they receive it); and Physical Evidence (the environment within which the service is provided and the physical goods which may be necessary to its provision). Bateson (1989) preferred the expression Physical Environment to describe the last of these three.

The purpose of market research

Market research is intended to help the seller of goods or services to identify appropriate market mixes, so that the expectations of selected target markets may be met, or even exceeded (Birks, 1991). This task is complex, but basically requires two things: the ability to anticipate what the expectations of markets might be, and the ability to respond efficiently through the organisation of the suppliers. Foreseeing the expectations of the market includes both short-term and long-term forecasting, so that marketing mixes take account of all opportunities and problems which may arise. The organisation of the supplier must aim to make the greatest use of the company's strengths while minimising its weaknesses and taking remedial action to counteract competitive threats.

Service providers need to attract customers and also to keep them (Blackshaw, 1989). This requires the identification of potential clients, the ability to attract their custom, and also
the ability to retain them. Institutions must undertake a systematic approach to the development of products which will meet the needs of their potential markets.

Solutions to the problems of service providers cannot be found until they have identified their markets and it is appropriate at this juncture to consider the question of education. Who are our customers? Whom do we serve and for whom do we provide?

**Identifying the customers of education**

Identification of the 'customer' in educational terms means entering a terminological minefield.

Macbeth (1989) suggested that there are four possible client groups for the education system:

"... the pupil (who receives instruction), the parent (who is legally responsible for the child's instruction and has delegated authority over the child to the teacher), the education authority (which employs the teacher) or society at large" (p15).

Macbeth pointed out that some teachers regard the education authority, their employer, as the client to be satisfied, but this is not true. Though teachers are directly responsible to their employers, those authorities are themselves providers of a service, which service is offered to the public. The education authority (or, indeed, the governing body of any school) is
actually providing the service via the teachers as agents. Macbeth himself considered that parents, who are legally responsible for the education of their children until the age of 16, must be regarded as "the school's prime clients" (p16). He saw pupils as consumers, parents as clients, education authorities as employers and the general public as the indirect beneficiary.

Adams Chapman (1986) compared the dilemma of identifying customers in education to the situation experienced by manufacturers of confectionery!

"Should the product be positioned to appeal to the child or to the parent, who may be seeking quite different benefits? Unless the parent merely wants to keep the child quiet at any cost we may assume that s/he is acting in the child's best interests" (p109).

In post-compulsory education, Adams Chapman suggested that there are three potential markets: consumer markets, industrial or employer markets, and government/LEA markets. Whilst the individual students form the consumer markets, he felt that their teachers, friends and careers advisers might be significant influences. He considered that parents are also influential, but may not share the same expectations as their children. He drew attention also to the importance of employers' needs, especially in vocational areas. Adams Chapman therefore elected to call students "consumers" and other college constituencies "clients" (idem).
Gray (1991) found parallel situations in other service industries, where 'clients' are often long-term users of such things as the personal services of a lawyer, whereas 'customers' tend to have briefer one-off contacts with providers such as shops. He drew the distinction also between those who purchase and those who actually consume a service, giving again the example of parents - the customers - buying food for their children to consume.

Extending this viewpoint to education is problematic: Gray considered the dual role of Oxbridge students, who may be 'clients' when receiving the undivided attention of their tutors, but assume a different status if they attend a conference at which the same tutor is lecturing. I am not sure that such a distinction can be drawn but it does at least attract attention to the problem that students have a duality - or even a plurality - of roles within education. Gray and Adams Chapman were referring to post-compulsory education, but I suggest that this variety of roles exists for all students, whatever their sector of education.

In schools, the age of the children also has an effect on their status, because:

"Parents may act as 'customers' in deciding on the primary school to be attended by their children, the 'consumers'. But the same is not true at the age of 11 or 12 when the students usually have some say in the decision as to which secondary school to attend, and is
even less true at the age of 16 or 18 when decisions regarding higher and further education are made" (Gray, 1991, p3).

This diversity of status draws attention to the flaw in Macbeth's (1989) thinking, which ignored the fact that some students in an institution may be legally constrained to be there but that their older counterparts are present voluntarily. A school which offers education beyond 16 must aim not only to attract the 11-year-olds, who may already be expressing their wishes about their parents' choice of school for them, but also to retain them post-16 when they have the opportunity to go elsewhere. Such a school cannot afford to aim its marketing solely at parents. How it treats its students as clients must reflect the same consideration shown to parents.

It is at this point that marketing analogies from the commercial world break down. In the educational environment, those who learn also play an essential part in the construction of their learning. Effectively, students both produce and consume the educational product. Inseparability of producer and consumer, in marketing terms, is complete. While it is possible to talk about relationships between schools and parents/employers/society in terms of producers and consumers, the relationships between schools and their students can only notionally be so described. To avoid confusion, I have elected to refer to the essential consumers/clients as 'students' (subsuming the term 'pupils' in this) and to regard them as the direct primary beneficiaries of education, viewing other beneficiaries -
parents, employers, society at large - as secondary beneficiaries.

It is important, however, to bear all beneficiaries in mind because they may share a common cause. Davies and Ellison (1991) warned that the interaction between parents and their children is a significant factor in the feelings of both towards a school.

Independent schools are particularly aware that their parents are direct 'customers' in the same sense as those purchasing legal services. They pay directly for the service received by their children. What extra benefits do they expect to accrue as a result? Consideration of this point requires that thought should first be given to those factors which influence all parents in their choice of schooling.

**Parental choice**

What factors influence choice of schools?

Johnson (1990) outlined the main educational choices offered between schools;

"public or private; 'free' or fee-paying; selective or non-selective (by various criteria); strongly or nominally religious; residential or non-residential;"
single-sex or co-educational;
all-through or age-related;
institutional or home-based" (p 28).

Research into parental choice has usually examined either the maintained or the private sector and most, though not all, of this research post-dates the 1980 Education Act which was the first to stress the rights of parents in selecting schools for their children (Johnson, ibid).

The Plowden (1967) research team found that location, religious ethos, word-of-mouth reports, and prior family contacts with a school were all significant factors in the choice of primary school. Some parents also considered educational standards and the atmosphere of the school to be important.

Johnson and Ransom (1983) found that families of children preparing to transfer from primary to secondary education at the age of eleven appraised their choice carefully. Most parents had made either a child-focussed choice, based on the health, ability and temperament of the child concerned, or a school-focussed choice based on criteria such as size, nature of student-intake (mixed or single-sex), amenities etc. Johnson and Ransom also drew attention to the fact that for most families the choice of secondary school was made for the oldest child: subsequent children followed on as a matter of course.

At secondary level, Elliott (1981) found that parents emphasised the process of education. His research separated process, i.e.
the way in which children were educated, from product, i.e. outcomes such as examination results, and when he gave parents a list of over forty statements about education, the two receiving most support were:

"Children's personal and social development at school is at least as important as their academic development.

The most important thing about a school is whether the children are happy and enjoy their lessons" (p57).

Potential happiness was also identified as a major factor by Coldron & Boulton (1991).

Other research (Adler & Raab, 1988: Hunter, 1991; West & Varlaam, 1991: West et al 1993, 1995; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993) supports the findings of Elliott (1981) and Johnson and Ransom (1983). Emphases may vary but parents usually mention good discipline, good academic standards and examination results, friends or siblings at the school, and proximity to home/ease of access as essential features of their chosen school. This last factor, that of location, is noteworthy because, since the Education Reform Act (1988), schools no longer have specific catchment areas. In theory, parents may elect to apply to any school. However, whilst convenience of location is important to them (Hunter, 1991: West & Varlaam, 1991; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993; West et al, 1995), high
academic standards in a school can encourage some parents to overlook distance (Adler & Raab, 1988; Griffiths, 1991; West, 1992a), or even move house (Edwards, Fitz & Whitty, 1989; Combe, 1995), so that their children may attend the school offering the best perceived provision.

Adler & Raab (1988) found that factors of school attainment could also be related to social factors:

"... the relationships are all ... towards schools with higher attainment measures, higher social-class schools, previously selective schools and larger schools; and away from schools serving local authority housing schemes and with catchment areas characterized by unemployment and low income" (p 171).

For some parents the teaching staff are also an influence on choice (Elliott, 1982; Hanford, 1990; West & Varlaam, 1991), particularly the headteacher (Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993) and senior management team (Davies & West-Burnham, 1990).

Individual case studies will be contextually-bound (Davies & Ellison, 1995) but nonetheless can be revealing. Hanford (1990), for example, expected that obvious, external factors would be significant, but found in fact that: "Parents placed much more importance on the hidden basic fundamentalism of schools" (p4). Academic standards were mentioned, but of ultimate importance to all the parents were the head and staff, followed by pupil behaviour, the views of other parents and
pupils, the school's reputation, personal experience of the school and the neighbourhood grapevine. Hanford's individual order of priorities stemmed from the survey undertaken by the senior management team of her school, which focussed on their own client group. Gaunt (1991), Cowan (1993a) and Tucker (1994) all pointed out the importance for every school of establishing the needs and priorities of its individual customer base.

Education for girls

Differences in parents' or students' preferences might be gender-oriented. Coldron & Boulton (1991) found that parents of girls were more likely to mention a current sibling at a school as a factor in choice, but all other factors seemed the same for boys as for girls. David et al (1994), however, found marked gender differences. Boys looking at potential schools were influenced by facilities, particularly for computing and sports. Girls were influenced largely by educational and social factors, particularly music facilities and friendly teachers. Furthermore, two-fifths of the girls in their study expressed a preference for a single-sex school, a preference also noted amongst important choice factors identified by West and Varlaam (1991), Hunter (1991), and West et al (1995).

Why do parents choose independent schools?

Research into parental choice of maintained schools would seem to have identified a strong vision among parents that education provides opportunity for their children. The limited research
into parental reasons for choosing independent education echo this.

Research into independent education has tended to focus on either the history or day-to-day life in such schools (Bamford, 1967; Ollerenshaw, 1967; Kamm, 1971; Wober, 1971; Gardner, 1973; Gathorne-Hardy, 1977; Honey, 1977; Rae, 1981; Walford 1984 & 1986; Avery, 1991) or has concentrated on the connections between privilege and education (Wakeford, 1969; Halsey, Heath & Ridge, 1984; Griggs, 1985; Reid, Williams & Rayner, 1991). Kalton (1966) undertook a factual survey of Headmasters' Conference (HMC) schools: i.e. those schools traditionally understood to be 'Public Schools', but that excluded the majority of independent schools (some boys' and co-educational schools, and all the girls' schools) which belonged to the other six organisations which represent the interests of private schools (Walford, 1993).

Comparatively few enquiries have been made into the reasons why parents choose independent schools (Roker, 1992). Lambert's (1968; 1975) research into boarding education, which included state as well as private schools, by definition dealt only with families who had chosen boarding schools for their children. Fox (1985) also confined her enquiry to boarding schools. Other investigations into independent education have included day schools (Hight, 1969; Johnson, 1987; Griffiths, 1991: West, 1992a), and research into Assisted Places (Edwards, Fitz and Whitty, 1989; Edwards, Gewirtz and Whitty, 1991) has been confined to day schools.
Such enquiries as have been undertaken indicate five main reasons why parents seek independent provision: social concerns; traditional views of education; academic requirements; boarding or other special needs; and discipline.

Social concerns

Fox (1985) identified a strong tendency to upward social mobility among the parents of her sample group. Just over half the fathers she interviewed were educated in independent schools: many of the rest attended grammar schools. The disappearance of these latter schools, and the change in status for many former direct-grant schools into fully independent schools, following the Education Act (1976), may have created in the minds of some parents the idea that the benefits of the kind of education which they received can only be found in the private sector. Fox observed, however, that it is difficult to disentangle parents' aspirations for their sons from their actual expectations of them. Three-quarters of the parents in her sample hoped their sons would go to university, a third of those obviously wishing for Oxbridge or Sandhurst, but they were not specific about ultimate career outcomes. By giving their son a good education they had discharged their parental duty.

Traditional views of education

Many of Johnson's (1987) interviewees were parents who had attended direct-grant schools and had sought places for their children in them before the local authority ceased to award such
places. She considered that:

"The direct-grant system represented what many perceived as the peak of what could be obtained via the maintained system of education. For parents with direct-grant education, what chiefly lingered on was a feeling of excellence, of high-quality grammar-school education which could respectably be used even by those who were theoretically committed to the use and encouragement of state education. Parents will not choose between public and private education, with a consciousness of choosing between two totally separate forms of education, until the heyday of the direct-grant has passed out of living memory" (p 90).

Highet's (1969) survey in Scotland revealed that family traditions were important to parents in Edinburgh who were selecting day schools for their sons. In some cases, not only fathers but also grandfathers had been educated at the same school. Highet's sample of parents placed particular emphasis on:

"... the corporate entity - with atmosphere, with visible and tangible attributes, with the school qua community past, present and future" (p225).

Highet discerned that a local boarding school, or an English 'Public School', was perceived by some parents to be the only
'better' school available and the only alternative to the family tradition of attending the father's old day school.

Lambert (1968) found that many children in public schools made the assumption that they would continue their family's tradition by entering such a school. However, Ollerenshaw (1967) thought that more than half the students in public schools were children of parents who had not themselves received such an education. She did not quote evidence, but the MORI/ISIS (1993) survey found that 55% of parents choosing independent schools for their children had not themselves attended independent schools. Few parents mentioned either family traditions or the 'old-boy network' to Fox (1985), and most of the parents in West's (1992a) sample had seriously considered state schools before turning to independent alternatives. These more recent figures seem to indicate societal changes in the potential market for independent schools.

Academic requirements

Anxiety about academic standards has influenced some parents to move into the independent sector. Fox (1985) found strong evidence to suggest that parents opting for independent education did so because of:

"... the moral panic over the impact on Britain's educational standards of progressive education and the new sociology of education that has been generated by the media and right-wing politicians" (p 128).
One cannot escape the notion that things have only got worse in this respect in the years since Fox did her investigation! Just over half the parents in her sample chose public schools because they perceived them as having better academic results. Dissatisfaction with provision in maintained schools can arise at secondary level (Johnson, 1987) or even at primary level (ibid). A third of the parents surveyed by West (1992a) made reference to the quality of education, and many of them were considering independent secondary schools because they believed their children to be very able academically.

Griffiths (1991), too, found a strong emphasis on academic standards though, in some cases, the decision to move into the independent sector was a response to 11+ failure. Private schools were perceived as more likely to develop latent intellectual ability.

Parents are also employees and employers, for whom academic standards for society in general are important. Fox (1985) quoted a father, himself educated at a secondary-modern school, who was worried about the quality of potential employees: "The state is a waste of time - they come out at sixteen as complete duffers" (p133).

Boarding and other special needs

Parents who work abroad or whose work may require constant relocation, such as those working in the armed forces, tend to seek boarding education, at secondary if not at primary level.
(Johnson, 1987). Some select private schools, though the option of a small number of state boarding schools is also available to them. Johnson (ibid), however, found that some children in independent boarding schools had instigated their own move into boarding, as Lambert (1968) also discovered in state boarding schools.

Some children have other particular needs which their parents feel can only be met in the private sector. The intellectual or artistic capacities of some children may only be stretched by education in an appropriate residential school. Social handicaps may also be overcome by such an environment. An example of this is bullying, particularly of a child who is in some way 'different' from her/his peers (Johnson, 1987).

Griffiths (1991) also mentioned bullying, real or perceived, at local comprehensive schools as being a reason why many parents select private schools for their children. Such schools, often smaller than maintained schools, offer the chance to develop more self-confidence. Small classes and the feeling of belonging to a community where everyone knows everyone else can engender a feeling of security.

**Discipline**

High standards of discipline can be seen as part of the overall ethos of independent schools. Fox found "character and discipline training" (p142) important to parents. Griffiths (1991), West (1992a) and MORI/ISIS (1993) all identified a
similar priority. To Highet's (1976) parents, the importance of discipline was linked to the support which all students could expect to receive from their homes, both in the sphere of academic work and in the keeping of regulations.

Other factors

Other factors mentioned by parents as reasons for selecting independent education were: the treatment of children as individuals; better teachers and/or methods; fuller education; size of school and/or classes (Fox, 1985; West, 1992a).

Parents' overall perceptions

Fox (1985) warned that parents whose children are entirely educated in the private sector have little opportunity to assess maintained school provision. Their views may not always be well informed. However, there would seem to be a general perception among parents who use the private sector, and some who do not because of lack of funds, that academic standards, social opportunities, character-formation, discipline and individual attention are more likely to be found in independent schools, and it is for these reasons that such schools are preferred. Most enquiries into parental reasons for choosing independent schools have been undertaken by external researchers. Cowan (1993a) lamented the absence of research by the schools themselves into the factors which led parents to select them. He considered that such investigations should be undertaken as part of a whole-school marketing policy.
In the commercial world, products and services are not usually marketed across the entire population. Different kinds of customers have different wants/needs and failure to differentiate between their buying behaviours would lead to poor customer-focus (Tonks, 1989) and, therefore, to ineffective and inefficient marketing. It is important to consider all aspects of the environment of each different customer group, particularly when marketing a service (Cowell, 1994). The market is therefore segmented to allow for different foci and thus to meet the needs of different groups of customers. This segmentation can be done by specifics or by descriptors.

Specifics are direct variables such as purchase rates or product usage (non-user, medium user, heavy user); brand loyalty; purchase situation or occasion (impulse buying, social/business purchase); and media exposure (which newspaper do they read?) (Tonks, 1989). Descriptors cover indirect variables such as age, place of residence, lifestyle and personality. Some descriptors have, over recent years, received much attention (Tonks, ibid). These include geographical region; demographics; geo-demographics; and personality and lifestyle.

In education, descriptor variables may be very significant. Schools segment their market by age, accepting only those students who fall within a particular age-range, and therefore changing birth-rates inevitably affect intake. Some schools segment by gender, accepting only males or females. An
independent school also segments by income, effectively excluding students whose parents who cannot afford fees or find alternative ways to meet them. This is related to lifestyle.

Changes in the consumers' environment and lifestyles may affect the providers of a service (Majaro, 1982), and schools are not exempt from the pressures of external change. As an example, lifestyle changes have affected boarding education. After the end of the second world war, higher salaries and standards of living brought boarding school fees within the financial reach of "the new managerial society" (Lindsay, 1968, p10). These parents expected to visit their children regularly at school, so they tended to choose schools within reasonable driving distance of their homes (Lindsay, ibid). However, more recently the popularity of boarding has declined, particularly for full boarders. Since 1984, ISIS member schools have seen a steady decline in the numbers of full boarders (ISIS, 1995), though overall numbers of students in independent education as a whole rose annually between 1984 and 1991 (ibid). A major factor identified by ISIS was the sharp contraction in the number of UK service personnel. ISIS (1994) attributed about 40% of the decline in boarding numbers between 1988 and 1992 to the reduction in the Ministry of Defence Boarding School Allowance for children of armed forces' families. The Census returns for 1993, 1994 and 1995 showed further falls in full boarding numbers, again largely among boys (ISIS, 1993; 1994; 1995). Societal changes can therefore be seen to have had a considerable effect on the boarding sector of independent education: this market segment is greatly reduced.
Identifying the various segments within its market can help a school to see if it is attracting all the potential students who could travel to attend it. This may assist the school to identify any particular needs which those students may have which the school is not meeting. Use of geo-demographic analysis may help the school to assess the social class of its market and ensure that its communication with parents, employers, the general public and all prospective students is efficiently targeted (Pardey, 1991).

Independent education for girls

Most of the literature investigating independent education examines secondary schools: either boys' schools, especially the public schools, or co-educational schools. There is only a limited published literature which makes specific reference to independent schools for girls (Roker, 1992; Walford, 1993).

Fox (1985) also admitted that little research had been done into the purpose of girls' private education and that research into the relationship between education and privilege had also largely ignored girls' schools. However, in her survey she found that sisters mostly received a similar education to their brothers,

"... in as much as they are just as likely to be in higher education and indeed at Oxbridge but occupationally appear to be reproducing the careers of their mothers, being largely concentrated in the minor
professions of teaching and nursing as well as in clerical and secretarial work" (p113).

Does this reflect Okley's (1978) depressing findings? She felt that:

"The girls' school may be, invisibly, a preparation for dependence, while the boys' school is more visibly a preparation for independence and power" (p 109).

Is that really why parents send their daughters to private schools? Okley admitted that her material was largely subjective, based on her memories of her own public school in the 1950s. Evans' (1991) account of a girls' grammar school education in the same decade suggests that the limitations encountered by Okley were not, at that time, confined to the independent sector. Changes in social environment, and particularly changes in the status of women (Payne, 1993), may have altered the situation even since Fox's (1985) enquiry. This is an area where more research is needed.

As with the independent sector as a whole, extant publications on girls' schools again focus largely on history (Magnus, 1923; Kamm, 1971; Avery, 1991) or on day-to-day life (Wober, 1971), though Tucker (1994) surveyed marketing practice in girls' boarding schools with a view to advising on strategies for effective competition.

Wober (1971) concentrated mainly on what actually happens in
girls' schools and he did not enquire why girls or their parents had chosen their particular school, but his examination of the goals of such schools, as revealed through their prospectuses, is of some interest. The strongest elements mentioned were social responsibility, individual fulfilment and the 'all-roundness' of a wide education, followed by manners and careers.

Preparatory schools

If the girls' independent schools are poorly served in academic literature, reference to them is generous by comparison with the preparatory schools. There has been only one general history of preparatory schools (Leinster-Mackay, 1984), though histories have been published for individual schools. This may be due to the difficulty of creating an accurate historical definition of a preparatory school, for in the nineteenth century, when 90% of current preparatory schools were founded (Rae, 1991), the term was used to refer both to schools which prepared boys for entrance into public (i.e. secondary boarding) schools, and also, in the American sense, for those schools which prepared boys for university entrance (Leinster-Mackay, 1984). In this thesis the term 'preparatory school' refers to independent primary schools, which may be either single-sex or co-educational, and which offer educational provision at least up to the age of 11, but possibly also to 12 or 13. Some also offer boarding.

Allen & Dealtry (1951) outlined post-war preparatory school
education and Masters (1966) gave a detailed analysis of the characteristics and functions of member schools of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS). Both are now very dated, the latter not least because of its constant references to the education of 'The Boy'. Girls did not exist in the preparatory school world that Masters described, and at that time membership of IAPS was confined to headmasters. Headmistresses of girls' preparatory school belonged to a separate professional organisation, the Association of Headmistresses of Preparatory Schools (AHMPS). In 1981, when IAPS finally merged with AHMPS, the new organisation contained 500 boys-only or co-educational schools and 120 girls' schools (Pearson, 1980). The girls' schools offered a wide variety of provision from full boarding only to day-only schools, though the latter predominated (Pearson, 1981). Apart from the books mentioned above, other information about preparatory schools must be gleaned from publications of IAPS and its predecessor organisations: notably Preparatory Schools Review (IAPS, 1895 - 1987) and Prep School (IAPS, since 1988). Information presented in these publications relies heavily on practitioner knowledge (Popper, 1983: Bassey, 1990a).

Research into parental choice of independent primary education is extremely limited. Johnson (1987) found that some parents of primary age pupils had selected independent schooling because of dissatisfaction with local state provision. They were looking for schools which were more congenial to them or their children in terms of access, performance, or management. MORI/ISIS (1993) found that one-third of parents selecting preparatory
education were looking for "a better standard of education" (p12), which offered a better preparation for secondary schooling. Another important factor was the smaller size of classes.

The process of educational marketing

Do schools need marketing?

Prospective parents seeking independent schools have always had a wide choice of ethos from which to select. Independent schools come in a variety of shapes and sizes; single-sex and co-educational; with religious affiliations and without; with boarding only, day only or a mixture of the two — or three if weekly boarding is also an option. There are obviously many factors which influence parental choice. These now have increased relevance for the management teams of all educational institutions (Gaunt, 1991; Cowan, 1993a & 1993b; Greenwood & Gaunt, 1994). Until comparatively recently, the schools within a given Local Education Authority (LEA) would all be providing a similar pattern of education. This situation has now altered. Since 1980, successive Education Acts have given parents greater rights of choice in the selection of schools for their children, and since 1988 changes in the funding of education, leading to Local Management of Schools (LMS), Grant-Maintained Schools (GMS), City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and the revolution in the funding of tertiary education, have freed institutions to manage themselves and to offer their own individual curriculums, though
the National Curriculum currently prescribes 80% of the state school curriculum for children aged 5 - 16.

Increasingly, these changes in funding are producing greater variety within the state sector. Furthermore, the relationship of school finance to student numbers makes their recruitment and retention vitally important (Davies & Ellison, 1991).

How do educational institutions set about marketing themselves to parents, who may already have strong views about what 'education' should mean for their children?

Recent literature on educational marketing

The first sector to experience the financial reforms was the tertiary sector, and it was in Further Education that the earliest texts dealing with marketing in education were published. Scribbins and Davies (1985) were significant leaders in this field. They were succeeded by many others dealing with the marketing of secondary and primary schools.


To plan where they want to go, schools must audit their respective environments and carefully consider the ingredients of their individual 'marketing mixes': the 4Ps which apply to all marketing analyses (Product, Promotion, Price, Place) and the three further Ps of service marketing (People, Process and Physical Environment).

Texts on educational marketing have tended to overlook the 3Ps of service marketing, apparently subsuming these elements into the four main marketing ingredients. However, for effective comparison with commercial models reference to all seven elements has been included in this analysis of their applicability to education.

Product and Process

The first step in the environmental audit of a school is to establish the nature of the Product. This can be approached in more than one way. Gaunt (1991), for example, suggested "a school's potential" (p50) as a definition of its product. Analysis of parents' reasons for choosing the school is way to evaluate its potential.
Marland and Rogers (1991) elected to focus on students' needs. They found product an appropriate word to use of schools.

"A product is that created by producing - that is to lead ('duc') forward ('pro'). A product is that which results from creative planning and 'product-development' in this context is, therefore, the work of the school in establishing what would benefit the pupils and researching and planning it" (p9).

Marland and Rogers went on to point out that product development separates delivery (the actual teaching/tutoring) from content (what and how it is being taught). They suggested that "product development" in schools is shorthand for "preparation", i.e. curriculum development, planning for pastoral care programmes and any other forward planning which utilises the skill of the staff.

Actual delivery of the curriculum, pastoral care and so forth would, in the commercial world, be described as the Process. Schools have limited control over processes because of teachers' long-established professional freedoms in the classroom, but it is possible for their staffs to agree and operate whole-school policies on such matters as marking, recording achievement, pastoral support, etc. Since 1988 central government has prescribed 80% of the academic curriculum, which inhibits schools from adapting the whole of their curriculums to the needs of their individual communities. This situation emphasises the importance for schools of using marketing
analysis to enable them to exploit their limited freedom to best effect. It also shows the importance of the people who deliver the product, and of management arrangements, which should empower them to do this effectively (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991).

People

Guides to school marketing have stressed the importance of involving the whole staff.

"Developing a commitment to marketing involves all staff. The involvement of the workforce in devising the plan can be a productive exercise in itself. Teachers and support staff will know what the future holds for them, that they have been instrumental in formulating plans and that they have a role to play in the whole process. From a skilfully constructed plan, it is possible to identify problems at both school and departmental levels. It is also possible to identify trends which may not have been apparent, overlaps of effort and the way to move forward" (Stott & Parr, 1991, p48).

'Staff' here should really mean all staff. Support staff including cooks, cleaners, caretakers etc should share the vision of what the school is aiming to achieve (Marland & Rogers, 1991). In a boarding school, for example, the Catering Officer has a very significant role: creative meal planning is
vital in a residential establishment. Devlin and Knight (1990) reinforced this breadth of view: their handbook is a useful collection of In-Service Training materials designed as a whole-staff marketing focus.

The 1986 Education (No 2) Act, the 1987 Conditions of Service for Teachers and the 1988 Education Act have given maintained schools considerable powers over the appointment, appraisal and deployment of staff (powers long held by heads in the independent sector), but there is still considerable debate about the extent of teachers' professional freedom within the classroom. Staff ownership of the marketing concept, however, is essential for marketing success (Davies & West-Burnham, 1990). A school's people are inextricably linked to its processes. They are also essential to its self-promotion.

Promotion

Promotion of an educational institution means ensuring that its work is understood and appreciated by the community within which it works. Devlin and Knight (1990) identified both internal and external markets for this information. Their view of internal markets included:

"... the immediate school 'family' - teaching staff, full-and part-time; supply teachers; student teachers; non-teaching staff; governors; voluntary helpers; students; and also the extended school 'family' - parents; former parents, close friends and relatives;
former students and former staff; adults who use facilities or classes at the school; and traders and providers of services to the school" (p16).

These examples illustrate the inseparability of the people involved from the service which they provide or from which they benefit. Devlin and Knight (ibid) were careful to consider the importance of absolutely everyone who has regular contact with the school. In addition to students and school employees they included the crossing patrol and the local taxi firm, plus the school's accountant, architects, bankers, builders, caterers, equipment suppliers, sports shop, transport contractors, uniform outfitters etc.

Devlin and Knight (1990) further defined a series of external groups who need to understand and support the school's aims, including feeder schools, community organisations, industry and commerce and the local authority. To these groups Davies and Ellison (1991) added national organisations. They saw positive marketing as a way of counteracting poor perceptions of educational standards by central government. They pointed out also that funded projects such as TVEI are of financial benefit to schools and that grants and sponsorship accrue only to those institutions which are perceived to be giving 'value for money'.

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which is responsible for the regular inspection of schools, should also receive a clear message that a high quality of education is being provided.
Marland and Rogers (1991) supported the view that a school must convey its mission to all those with whom it has contact.

"There is no escaping the fact that a school's work is viewed and judged by pupils, staff, parents and the communities it serves. It is part of the school's work to assist this process, both by making knowledge available, and by the way that information is selected, shaped and presented" (p9).

As already mentioned, the entire staff must be involved in this process, but the role of the headteacher will be crucial (Davies & Braund, 1989; Aarvold, 1990). The management of the school's interface with its external environment is one of the key tasks of headship (Jones, 1987; Mauriel, 1989) and the head is both figurehead and spokesperson for the school (Davies & Braund, 1989). Consequently, much of the liaison with the local community will devolve upon her/him (Davies & Braund, ibid; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993).

**Place and Physical Environment**

Over Place schools have less control. It is not usually possible for them to move their actual buildings and not always easy for them to convert inappropriate old buildings to new uses. However, they can influence the Physical Environment. Schools have control over where and how courses are offered within their site (Bowles, 1989). Open or resource-based learning; admission and assessment procedures; provision of
resources; and the quality and ambience of the rooms, the buildings and site are all matters over which management can exercise authority.

**Price**

Price is the one element where private education differs from state provision. For students in institutions where the education is 'free' i.e. paid for by the state, Bowles (1989) saw the cost in terms of the effort they must make to gain access; entry qualifications, travelling time/distance/cost, and the fellow-students with whom they will have to work. Moreover,

"... the price of education, in real terms, is more than money. The value which people place on it may be low, partly due to their perceptions" (Stott & Parr, 1991, p4).

Price, it seems, cannot be separated from promotion, or from the perceived quality of the service.

Those who elect to pay for education will see price in strictly financial terms, comparing similar institutions and also possible fee-support in the way of scholarships, bursaries or grants.

For the institution the implications of resource allocation link price to the physical environment and to staff costs (Knight, 1993). At least two-thirds of the running costs of a school are
spent on personnel (Higginbotham, 1989). Critical decisions must be made to ensure that human and physical resources are efficiently and effectively deployed.

Historically the teaching profession has resisted the implications of the 'commercial' aspects of the price of education, yet independent schools obviously offer a commercial service and all educational institutions are cost centres and need to balance their budgets. In maintained schools the relationship of school finance to student numbers makes their recruitment and retention essential (Davies & Ellison, 1991). Schools must attract enough students to generate sufficient income to cover their costs and invest for the future. They must operate as viable businesses to survive.

**Carrying out a market audit**

A variety of methods of 'audit' are recommended in the literature to enable schools and colleges to assess their present performance. The most popular is the SWOT analysis, in which an institution finds its internal Strengths and Weaknesses, and identifies its external Opportunities and also any Threats.

"An internal audit would seek to assess the strengths possessed by the school. This would be first, in terms of staff resource, skills presently used in school and those that could be developed in future together with any knowledge or contacts that could be utilised in
potential developments and second, in terms of other assets such as a favourable situation, good accommodation, established reputation and so on" (Bowles, 1989, p40-41).

Devlin and Knight (1990) encouraged institutions to consider their Unique Selling Point (USP): the factor or factors which make it unique within their catchment area or even within their local authority area. Is it single-sex? Does it have strong religious affiliations? Or the largest sixth-form, or unusually small classes? Every institution must have something which distinguishes it from its neighbours.

Opportunities and Threats derive from the external pressures identified by Majaro (1982): the actions of competing institutions, societal/environmental factors and legal restrictions. Griffin (1987) likened these to a circle surrounding the institution, containing:

"... the societal constructs that have direct or indirect influence on schooling, such as a degree of citizen satisfaction with school procedures and outcomes, level of willingness to increase the financial base of schools, federal and state legislative activity concerning qualifications of teachers and so forth" (p19).

How are these pressures to be assessed? Bowles (1989) identified two main areas for consideration: a review of
national demographic trends in pupil population, teacher-supply and employment prospects; and an assessment of the local catchment area in terms of prospective students and parents, including competitor-schools.

Stott and Parr (1991) suggested that SWOT analysis may be undertaken in many ways: by management team; by department; by desk and field research; by use of the institution's database; by resource audit. All these methods will produce useful information. This research information will establish what the clients want and need from the institution. If possible the clients' perceptions of the product and service should also be obtained (Davies & Ellison, 1991). From these sources the institution must define and, if necessary, re-define its product and service. This is the point at which any changes to its provision should be planned and implemented.

Consideration of the elements of the marketing mix, audit of provision and the definition of the product/service form the first three stages in the marketing cycle. At this point the institution should be able to produce its 'mission statement' and objectives for the future.

The mission statement and corporate plan

The mission statement will indicate a school's core values and should underpin its policies and future actions. It must reflect objectives and be actively supported by all staff. For this reason they, together with parents and students, should be
consulted about its creation (Gray, 1991). Nevertheless, consideration of an institution's mission is one of the main tasks of leadership (Drucker, 1990) and the mission statement may be more coherent if drafted by the head (Mauriel, 1989) or senior managers (Gray, 1991), though only after extensive negotiation with other interested parties.

The corporate plan for the future will also require participative consultation with staff, for their commitment is vital to its successful implementation, and they, rather than management, are the ones who are involved most directly in responding to customers' needs (Gray, 1991).

**Telling the world**

The next stage is to consider promotional approaches and techniques. Here another basic marketing model, quoted by Bowles (1989), Gray (1991) and others is AIDA: getting Attention; holding Interest; creating Desire; obtaining Action. The 'internal market' is most important here (Devlin & Knight, 1990; Davies & Ellison, 1991). Everyone involved must be disseminating the same information about the institution and its aims. Word of mouth messages must be consistent with any printed information. The attention of the outside world can be attracted in a variety of ways, including prospectuses, brochures and flyers, media contacts, advertising and group promotion.

Like Doyle (1994b), Gray (1991) identified four main areas of
activity; advertising, publicity materials, promotional activities and personal selling. Gray pointed out that the first two are impersonal and permit only one-way communication, so it is difficult to assess whether they reach their target. The latter pair allow two-way communication and therefore can be targeted and evaluated with greater accuracy.

Promotional activities, in educational terms, consist of such activities as open days, conventions, exhibitions, trade fairs, media appearances etc. For an independent school the regional, national and even international ISIS exhibitions present an opportunity to reach parents who, by their very attendance, are displaying an interest in private education. Gray (1991) observed that those involved in such activities will need to possess, or to learn, the skills required to prepare the exhibition and man the stand. Passers-by have to be persuaded to stop and look at the stand and to take an interest in the service offered. Their enquiries must be noted, logged and followed up.

Travelling exhibitions visit schools and colleges to try and recruit potential students and, increasingly, secondary schools are visiting their 'feeder' primary schools. Gray (1991) noted that senior management requires:

"... the ability to persuade colleagues to give up their time willingly at evenings and weekends to staff promotional events" (p129).
Promotional activities lead naturally to opportunities for personal selling, which may also have been generated by advertising and publicity in the local media. Personal selling takes place wherever the prospective parent or student meets a representative of the institution. In educational terms, personal selling means:

"... identifying the nature of what is required and then ensuring that the school gives ultimate priority to supplying that product and service and to maintaining its quality" (Davies & Ellison, 1991, p2).

Many teachers are uncomfortable with the notion of 'selling' their school. They see it as morally dubious. This ethical dilemma is debated in the final section of this chapter. However, whether a teacher realises it, or likes it, or not, when talking about his/her school s/he is giving an impression of its ethos and core values, which will either attract or repel potential students, directly or through relatives, friends, or other social or professional contacts.

It is at the 'point of sale', where the needs of the student are assessed, that the problems of intangibility which education presents must be solved. Gray (1991) suggested a solution: that the 'seller' should try to put himself or herself into the 'buyer's' shoes.

"This involves finding out their perceptions, fears and needs through effective questioning. Only when these
are understood can the advantages and opportunities of the educational service be presented as solutions to problems - in terms of benefits" (p130).

Kotler and Andreason (1991) related this to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and considered the situation of American students selecting college education. Students may worry about basic needs like accommodation and food, the problems of coping away from home, and the likely congeniality of their fellow-students. In addition they will have self-esteem and self-actualisation needs which will be fulfilled by the courses and final awards.

This scenario has many parallels in secondary education, and most notably so in an independent boarding school. Worries about cost may devolve largely upon parents rather than prospective students, but in any residential school fears about finding congenial fellow-students, concerns of self-esteem, the need for self-actualisation and "a high need for both achieving and belonging" (Kotler & Andreason, 1991, p137), so commonly felt in adolescence, must all be addressed by the school's staff.

Gray (1991) pointed out that:

"Quality improvement is achieved by encouraging groups and individuals to examine and spell out their expectations of their suppliers and the requirements that customers have of them. In an educational organization, this blurs the distinctions between
students and staff, looking instead at customer's needs and quality of service" (p148).

Gray postulated that, if all involved are trying to improve the quality of service, all must be involved in promoting 'customer care' and in enhancing levels of satisfaction. In this context, 'customers' may be parents, students or colleagues in another department. The strategies required to identify needs and plan delivery of the service will be essential in all spheres of action. This model is directly paralleled in commercial relationship marketing (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991).

Thomas and Donaldson (1989) proposed a model of customer care which took account of five different interfaces: the management-customer interface; the staff-customer interface; the management-staff interface; the customer-system interface; and the management-system interface. They held that effective customer care required efficient operation of the organisation at all five interfaces and that it was the responsibility of management to ensure this.

I suggest that this view is particularly relevant in an educational context because successful education relies on a high level of personal interactions. It therefore follows that marketing is a key management responsibility and a function of leadership within every educational institution.
Leadership and the marketing of a contracting school

The problems of contraction in an independent school

Within a contracting independent school marketing presents special problems. The resources (fee income) available are declining and if the school wishes to introduce new courses or to respond in other ways to students' needs it has to use existing resources more efficiently or cease to support some of its current programmes (Dennison, 1985).

Dennison (ibid) defined this as "... the real challenge of contraction" (p3); public perceptions of how a school copes with this situation may eventually affect student intake. He considered that improving the quality of the education offered could be a route out of contraction. He pointed out that contraction tends to focus attention on teacher-associated problems: the difficulties of managing with fewer resources; possible lower levels of motivation and morale; fewer promotional opportunities; and increased calls on their level of commitment. All these, while facts of life, must not distract attention from the main purpose of schools, which is to provide education for children. A school's ability to adapt to changing conditions is significant to those who make external judgments about its effectiveness.

It therefore follows that the problems of the moment, such as declining rolls and less favourable working conditions, must not be allowed to dominate staff thinking. Furthermore, additional
commitment by staff will be needed, not only to maintain existing activities, but to plan new ones.

"The purpose of management, in this context, is to achieve that commitment, while simultaneously ensuring that the other activities continue to be performed as well, if not better. The thrust, therefore, is towards tasks - the itemization of the new, the continuation of others, and the elimination of those no longer appropriate - as determined by parameters provided through the match between pupil requirements and environmental demands" (Dennison, 1985, p5).

Declining student numbers result in fewer staff and those that remain need to be more flexible. Dennison recommended that all staff should be involved in management decisions, wherever possible, to develop greater flexibility. If teachers see that a real role exists for them in the management of the school, and that they can affect outcomes, a greater sense of commitment will be generated for 'our' school.

The Bruford Marketing Report (1990) drew attention to all these points, stressing the importance of adapting the school to changing conditions, and drawing attention to the need for greater staff involvement and flexibility.

The leadership challenge

Dennison (1985) referred to the work of Adair (1980) in
suggesting that effective leadership in these circumstances requires simultaneous attention to three factors: the group task, group morale, and the individual differences between group members.

The changes in the group's tasks occasioned by falling roles require the maximum involvement of the staff in redefining them and matching performance to the new tasks. Leaders at all levels need to consider the impact of these changes on all individuals and to take account of these to "... sustain the task and group morale components of their leadership" (Dennison, p65).

Dennison (1985) also took the view that:

"... the idea of motivational levels being raised or morale being sustained by one leader, whether by a headteacher or any other unit head, is defective..." (p83).

He gave two reasons. First, senior staff need to distance themselves from decisions made externally to the school, e.g. by the LEA, to avoid being associated with unpopular measures that must be taken as a result of problems arising from such decisions. Secondly, management should avoid removing from individual members of staff those management decisions that are more properly their responsibilities. Both reasons are valid, but are based on the assumption that staff are accustomed to making such decisions and that they already have a clear vision
of where the school is and where it needs to go. If such a vision does not exist within a school, it is clearly the responsibility of the headteacher to raise both motivation and morale so that staff can seek it. Drucker (1990) went further: he saw it as "... the first job of the leader... to think through and define the mission of an institution" (p3).

Higginbotham (1989) pointed out that raising motivation and morale must not be merely a short-term process.

"A wise head will create space in his crowded life for long-term thinking as well as day-to-day management. He will tap the talents of his staff in hundreds of sometime casual conversations. "Managing the structure" is a human process, bringing out and exploiting the abilities of individuals, recruiting the best, motivating them, creating career opportunities within the school, retaining valuable people and sometimes, of course, encouraging them to move on" (p13).

Harvey-Jones (1988) identified a further essential of leadership in this context: the integrity which establishes and maintains relationships of trust.

"The lines between manipulation, management and leadership are fine, but devastatingly clear in the minds of individuals. Manipulation, or the fear of manipulation, arouses more antagonism and is more antipathetic to
business success than almost anything else..." (p130).

Open management structures and the empowerment of staff are vital features of any successful organisation.

Financial pressures on staffing in independent schools

Higginbotham (1989) remembered that schools, particularly independent schools, have to pay their way. This means that two things must happen: demand for places must be stimulated so that there is no superfluous capacity in any class and, given that at least two-thirds of the running costs are on manpower, staff must be deployed to maximum effect. In a contracting school, however, the need for some staff redundancies may be unavoidable (Stenning, 1990).

It is vital that a school's income should be maintained. It is that income which pays the salaries and provides all the resources, yet within the teaching profession there is sometimes a resistance to the 'commercial' aspects and the idea of any surplus is unacceptable. This leads to a consideration of the potential conflict between marketing and professional ethics.

Professional ethics within educational marketing

Teachers are often unhappy with any transfer of commercial terminology to education (Greenwood & Gaunt, 1994), fearing that with the transfer comes also an unacceptable commercial ethic.
This fear is understandable, given the apparent political motivation for much of the recent change in education. Nor is such a view confined to education. It has been debated in other non-profit spheres. Habgood (1993), for example, questioned the ethical suitability of a marketing approach to evangelisation. Similar considerations have, in the past, inhibited charities from active involvement in marketing because they felt that the public associated marketing with "... slick and perhaps underhand professionalism" (McIntosh & McIntosh, 1984, p9). Diggle (1976) recognised the same problem in marketing the arts.

McIntosh and McIntosh (1984) suggested that, far from being undesirable, marketing was actually an ethical imperative for charities. Beneficiaries from charitable giving should derive the maximum benefit available, which means that charities must find out precisely what those beneficiaries really need. This is as much a part of charitable marketing as research into fundraising options and attracting potential donors. Independent schools are often charitable foundations and therefore a close parallel can be drawn in respect of the identification of needs, but if this view is held it must be extended to encompass all institutions of learning, whatever the source of their funding.

Non-profit organisations such as schools also need to view 'profit' in a different light. Profit can be a measure of how effective expenditure has been (Diggle, 1976). Cost comparisons across two or three years give an indication of how equitably, effectively and efficiently resources are being used (Knight,
Student learning outcomes, in terms of examination results and other recorded achievements, can also show how well human and physical resources have been allocated. All these measures will help the institution to assess the extent of its success, and help it to remedy weaknesses (Hulme, 1989). These indicators will be regularly scanned in any school which takes its marketing seriously. House (1989) lamented the dominant theme of economic efficiency in the current educational climate, but pointed out that an ideal system of accountability would involve asking the question "Is this information going to help the institution adjust to the characteristics of the student?" (p218) and the customer-centred nature of marketing analysis should mean that the answer to this question is affirmative.

Furthermore, I suggest that it is not unethical for a school to take a proactive stance on public relations. Gummesson (1981) defined professional responsibilities in such a way as to make it not only desirable but imperative that every professional should be involved in marketing. A person's professional competence is not automatically known to all who may need it, clients may need assistance to find it, and:

"... it is not unethical or unworthy to express the advantages of a service of a professional man as long as the truth is told" (p34).

I take the view that teachers have, for too long, neglected to publicise 'the truth' of what they do well and that those who are skilled in their profession should not be embarrassed to
make this clear to the world outside the walls of their schools.

However, this considers only the public relations or 'selling' aspect of marketing. As I have tried to show, marketing is more than mere public relations: it is a focus which should inform and direct the policy and management of the whole institution. Gaunt (1991) and Cowan (1993b) both frequently found an absence of whole-school commitment to marketing because school leaders and their colleagues interpreted marketing so narrowly. Cowan identified three marketing stances, of which this, which he called Marketing A, is the first. Marketing A is externally imposed on the school and concentrates on promotion and image-building. Cowan advocated a move through a transitional stage (Marketing B) by developing a more self-evaluatory style, to the ultimate view (Marketing C). Marketing C embodies the true perspective of commercial marketing.

"Real marketing is the philosophy of management which recognises that the success of the enterprise is only sustainable if it can organise to meet the current and prospective needs of customers..." (Doyle, 1994a, preface),

as opposed to the myopic perspective found so frequently in education by Cowan (1993b). Marketing embraces the idea of partnership, involves all stakeholders (internal and external), takes a longer-term view of institutional development and is:

"... the creative surge within organisations that can
overcome difficulties, identify opportunities and ensure that they are turned to the benefit of the organisation. It allows organisations to have control over their destiny... it is the central pulse of the management process from which all systems diverge" (Cowan, ibid, p11).

This focus on the needs of clients comes close to the aims of Total Quality Management (TQM): there are many parallels between the goals of marketing and the benchmarks of quality management (Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993).

In summary, therefore, a marketing orientation was found to be relevant to Bruford's situation. It offered a way of focussing on clients (both students and parents), suggested methods of analysing the school's corporate image and appraising the quality of its provision, and outlined approaches to market research, public relations and advertising. As a result of the new marketing focus, changes were made in the school's curriculum, student privileges, facilities and procedures (see Chapter Four). Subsequently, approaches were made to obtain the views of those in Bruford's internal market (Chapter Five) and external market (Chapters Six & Seven). Ultimately, analysis of the information obtained through market research led the governors to accept the need for Bruford to merge with a neighbouring school (see Chapter Eight).
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Rarely are there perfect decisions. The best decisions are the more prudent of the logical alternatives. Roberts p68

In this chapter I begin by exploring the purposes of research, considering reasons why teachers may undertake research and my particular reasons for pursuing this enquiry. My professional circumstances, as described in Chapter One, led me to select the action research approach to methodology, which is outlined in the second portion of this chapter. Thereafter I give details of the specific methods used for the collection of data at different stages of the enquiry and indicate the various problems which arose.

What is research for?

Delamont (1992) suggested that doing research is similar to undertaking a voyage of discovery. Researchers "... seek enlightenment and understanding" (preface, p vii), with the aim of sharing their findings in return for some reward, financial or professional or perhaps both. To a great extent this described my situation at Bruford, where "enlightenment and understanding" about client needs were urgently required, but it would have been possible for me to pursue various marketing investigations within my school without using them as the basis
for a formal research project. However, studying educational research methods while on sabbatical at Exeter University in 1990 had led me to the view that the benefits of research should extend beyond benefits to the researcher or the immediate research situation.

Somekh (1993) argued that educational research is pointless unless it has a beneficial effect on what happens in schools. Educational research should be systematic enquiry which provides either information or a series of principles upon which teachers can draw. Some research may provide both these things. Research projects should have outcomes with practical applications, which should be accessible to others who may be able to use them.

Gurney (1989) made explicit the view often held amongst teachers that research is largely the province of academics, having "... little relevance to everyday practice" (p14). Schon (1983) also regretted the tendency for research and practice to follow divergent paths. Both Schon and Gurney suggested that the aim of research should be to develop understandings which can inform decision-making about practice. Gurney (1989) and Lomax (1991) identified the unfamiliarity of research language as a barrier to potential teacher-researchers, and made reference to the value of publishing research in language which is easily understood. Popper (1972) also believed that "The search for truth is only possible if we speak clearly and simply" (p44) and suggested that "Simplicity and lucidity is a moral duty of all intellectuals" (idem). In my searches through the literature
and my quest for an appropriate methodology I was often to regret that the observance of this moral duty was not more widely practised.

Bassey (1990a) recognised that there are two kinds of theory: "theory-in-the-literature" and "the common-sense theory of practitioners" (p36). Informal sharing of teacher practitioners' professional expertise happens regularly in staffrooms. The publication of research, whether in written form or through inter-personal contacts in the staffroom, provides a way for teachers to share the experiences of others with whom they do not have regular professional contact. This implies that teachers will themselves become research practitioners. In so doing, they recast the relationship between research and practice, because research triggered by a practical situation is undertaken on the spot and its outcomes inform subsequent action (Schon, 1983). Furthermore, this offers a potential solution of the problem of finding an accessible language, because teachers who are research practitioners are forced to communicate in order to make sense of each others' meanings (Lomax, 1990). Research can therefore empower teachers because it enables them both to create meaning and to bring about change.

It is part of my personal philosophy that educational research should inform and illuminate teachers' practice and provide a resource for the potential improvement of that practice by offering possible solutions to problems which they may encounter. It was from this starting point that I explored the
methodologies available to me.

**Potential research methods**

Educational research falls broadly into two main categories: the positivist or quantitative; and the interpretive or qualitative.

Quantitative methods treat educational research as an applied science, taking its methodology from scientific enquiry (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Shimahara (1988) outlined the process of such research:

"It begins with the definition of a problem, followed by the formulation of hypotheses, and proceeds to the designing of instruments to test the hypotheses; subsequently it involves data collection and analysis, followed by the drawing of conclusions" (p82).

The positivist approach assumes, however, that one has already comprehended fully the nature of 'the problem' to be solved. The extreme intangibility of education (Gray, 1991) makes its problems difficult to identify and elucidate. My own school certainly had no shortage of problems but their very proliferation inhibited concentration on any specific area. The literature on school leadership and marketing (see Chapter Two) indicated the need to consider a wide variety of possible factors which might influence the successful marketing of a school. Additionally, these problems were people-related and
interactions between people are hard to quantify.

To use positivist methods alone would have been unsuitable. One cannot measure something unless one knows what needs to be measured and one cannot develop hypotheses to solve problems which have still to be identified. It was necessary for me to achieve some kind of systematic critique of my situation and a deep understanding of the problems of Bruford before I could develop hypotheses or test for solutions.

The interpretive approach

Interpretive social science recognises the need for practical deliberation when considering the alternative courses of action possible in any given situation, and when selecting from the various alternatives the best course of action to be taken (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Qualitative methodology offers an approach whereby problems may be identified by interrogating and interpreting the views of people involved in those social situations where the problems are located. Qualitative researchers select from a variety of research techniques, drawing on sources such as verbal or written accounts, observation and personal constructs (Cohen & Manion, 1989).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested a phenomenological approach: that theory about social situations can be generated by extrapolating patterns of activity from the raw data. They called this process the discovery of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss suggested that theory which is generated as an
outcome of individual research projects can help those who use it to find solutions within their particular circumstances. Potentially this approach appeared to meet the requirements of my situation.

Case study

Case study offers the opportunity for a holistic view of a particular process or research project (Gummesson, 1991). Stenhouse (1985a) described case study research as "systematic self-critical enquiry" (p8), undertaken in a specific situation. This seemed an appropriate methodology to apply to a research project examining the situation of a single school.

However, case study is difficult to define and therefore to evaluate critically. Case study research is open to the accusation that it is too subjective to be valuable and that it cannot be assessed by established, generally acceptable criteria because no two cases are alike. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) suggested that:

"... case study evaluation would appear to be a 'paradigm' with none of the requisites of a paradigm - agreed subject-matter, methods, theories or exemplars" (p28).

Stenhouse (1980) defined a further difficulty of field research for case study: finding a way to accumulate evidence "... in such a way as to make it accessible to subsequent critical assessment, to internal and external criticism and to
Bassey (1990b) however, viewing case study as the study of a singularity, considered it a valid form of research provided that its findings were understood to apply to the specific case and would not necessarily be a valid source from which to generalise. Gummesson (1991) appreciated this as a strength of case study findings, questioning the value of generalisation because all social phenomena are situation-specific, and solutions to problems require account to be taken of the individual circumstances in which they arise.

Simons (1989) defined case research as a focus of study and approved a choice of methods so long as they were related to the purpose of the study and the nature of the case. This view was supported by Golby (1989):

"Methodology is a matter of what is appropriate and possible, given the research situation and its aims" (p168).

Though methods used in case studies may all be used in other forms of research, they can provide a rigour of methodology in case study even though the findings will necessarily be different for each individual case.

A variety of methods may be used to accumulate data: systematic observation; desk research such as documentary accounts; and survey techniques including questionnaires and interviews (Simons, 1989; Gummesson, 1991). Some of the data may lead to
quantitative measurements, such as the outcomes of questionnaires, but these are used in response to the need for information and not as the sole raison d'être of the research (McNiff, 1988). As it transpired, the study of my own case eventually required the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative research.

Whatever research methods are selected, it must be remembered that they filter the researcher's experience of a particular environment. Exclusive reliance on one method may lead to bias or distortion of the researcher's picture of the social world under study. Thorough analysis of the social phenomenon under review must include the researcher's recognition of the effect of her/his presence, participation or even intervention in the process being examined (Gummesson, 1991).

Assessing the validity of case study research

Critical assessment of case study research may be difficult but it is not impossible. Campbell (1988) suggested that professional experience can enable practitioners to compare notes with others, even if such sharing can only be through the written word. He called this process "biographic interactionism" (p69). Bassey (1990b) agreed that practising teachers cannot always find answers to their problems within their own experience and may usefully relate research reports to their own practice, provided that there are sufficient similarities between the research situation and their own. Stenhouse (1985b) suggested that the comparison of one's case
with the cases of others might open up new perspectives for critical assessment, thus providing one solution to the problem of validity in case study research.

I hoped that my research would eventually illuminate the problems of others because of the opportunities which it presented for comparison. However, no-one's situation in education is ever exactly paralleled because no two schools' staffs, pupil populations or buildings are identical. In this context, individual case study is the only way in which a researcher can hope to examine every issue within a specific institutional environment.

Stenhouse (1978) compared case study to the study of history. He pointed out that history involves making evidence accessible for public discussion and interpretation. The historian, using rigorous and well-understood means of testing the validity of evidence, appeals to her/his reader's experience. Similarly, case study can provide the opportunity for researchers to examine the "... cumulation of data embedded in time" (Stenhouse, ibid, p21) and analyse their data in the same way as historians do. By this means they create a contemporary history of education.

Even undertaking a review of the literature, which is an essential part of empirical research, is itself an historical study because the researcher is reconstructing past research on the assumption that the principles of such research have a bearing on her/his present work (Wiersma, 1986). Methods of
historical research, as outlined by Cohen and Manion (1989):

"... the identification and limitation of a problem... the collection, organisation, verification, validation, analysis and selection of data; testing the hypothesis where appropriate and writing a research report..." (p48)

seemed extremely relevant to my situation.

However, case study research offered only a limited solution to my needs. It did not go far enough. As headteacher of Bruford, I wanted not only to explore the problems faced by myself and the school but to find and implement solutions to those problems.

**Action Research**

Since the 1960s a movement to involve teachers in research has led to a new approach to interpretive research (Elliott, 1991). It differs from other kinds of qualitative research in that the researchers are not external observers. They are actively involved in the research situation because it is their own working environment.

This is the action research model. The aim of the action researcher is to improve his/her practice by developing a greater understanding of its social and historical context (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The term "action research" came from the work
of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin and was defined as:

"... simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social institutions in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p162).

As its name implies, the basis of action research is ACTION, both within the system under consideration and by the people involved (McNiff, 1988). Lewin (quoted in Kemmis, 1980) likened it to a spiral; a self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting. Reflection leads on to the planning stage of the next spiral and so on. Different versions of this spiral can be found (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Griffiths, 1990; Griffiths & Tann, 1991; Elliott, 1991), but all contain the same basic process from the generation of ideas through action and reflection to a further planning stage. Elliott (ibid) pointed out that the number of spirals in any research project will depend on the project, and on its time-constraints, but that there could be as many as three or four.

The spirals described so far are linear in character. McNiff (1988) took a slightly different and more three-dimensional view: that the main spiral of research could generate offshoots which could be explored as seemed appropriate to the researcher without her/him losing sight of the main research-focus. These offshoots might permit other researchers to join the enquiry at
different levels as it progressed. McNiff also suggested that the offshoots could possibly become the main focus of the enquiry if the research process, or the ongoing action within the situation under study, indicated that this was necessary. Loftus (1991) found this a most helpful approach, which allowed his research to follow the path of his enquiry as it progressed. He felt free to change direction as he made new discoveries because the research approach was not constricting him to a single path. The main direction of my own enquiry changed as information was accumulated about Bruford's situation: responses to the second spiral of the enquiry prompted a change in focus from internal to external marketing.

The great value of case study using action research is that it recognises the specific context within which the innovations are embedded and tries to analyse the processes by which they are implemented (Simons, 1989). For the researcher, this leads to the acquisition of a great deal of detailed knowledge about her/his own situation. Ideally, the next step beyond this will be decision-making based on an individual's informed understanding.

The main potential weakness of action research is the possibility of distortion and/or bias which may arise due to the involvement of the researcher in the situation which s/he is researching. However, any scientific analysis of human actions embodies values and interests, both as objects of enquiry and as constituents of the science itself (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Furthermore, a practitioner cannot correct her/his own, possibly
self-distorted, perceptions in her/his professional life unless s/he examines them critically, and research methods may offer appropriate triangulation. Suitable methods of triangulation are considered later in this chapter.

Action researchers hope to create the conditions under which they can identify aspects of institutional life which require change, to develop a theoretical account of why constraints should be overcome, and to offer potential solutions to overcome them (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action research therefore offered a methodological framework for my enquiry. It allowed me to examine my current situation, to plan and execute such actions as seemed appropriate, to review them and to plan further action as necessary. I found here a direct parallel between my methodology and the subject of my study. In commercial enterprises, marketing professionals also use research to make sense of situations and to form views of potential outcomes. Birks (1994) used the term "research in action" (p170) to describe this process.

The Action Research process at Bruford

The first spiral of research at Bruford began with reflection by myself and my colleagues on the evidence presented by the marketing consultant (BMR, 1990). This led to various marketing activities, some based on the action plans proposed by the consultant and others based on ideas put forward by myself or by other staff (see Chapter Four).
Fully informed reflection on the possible outcomes of these changes was not possibly without information from parents. The need to assess parental responses to the changes led to the second spiral: the collection of data about parental views on those changes and a quantitative analysis of it (Chapter Five).

The outcomes of the survey of parental reasons for choosing Bruford (Chapter Five) led to a change in direction from internal to external marketing. It appeared that there were comparatively few areas of internal marketing which still needed attention, therefore it seemed that it might be beneficial to re-orientate the main focus of research towards the school's external market. Consequently, the reflective section at the end of the second spiral led to a series of interviews with preparatory school headteachers as the third spiral (Chapter Six). This in turn led to a survey of the heads of secondary girls' schools (Chapter Seven), to triangulate the perceptions of the preparatory headteachers. This final portion of the third cycle became as much qualitative research, exploring the veracity of the information given by the preparatory headteachers, as action research, though it was still relevant to Bruford in that I wished to know whether my school's situation was unique.

Some problems and solutions

The problems of validity within case study raised by Stenhouse (1980) and Atkinson and Delamont (1988) are particularly
relevant in action research, in which the researcher is not only an observer but also a participant in the case under review, and, moreover, one who is actively seeking to change the research situation by improving her/his own practice and that of colleagues. In these circumstances, the triangulation necessary to validate the findings can present problems to the researcher.

**Triangulation and the Bruford Marketing Group**

Triangulation provides an opportunity to test and, if necessary, revise hypotheses through consideration of the data from different standpoints (McNiff, 1988). It can be achieved through the use of two or more methods of data collection or by analysing the same events or information from two or more perspectives. Similar conclusions reached from different sources can strengthen a researcher's confidence in the accuracy of her/his results (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Triangulating factors used by Winston (1990) included both consultation with colleagues and the passage of time. He found that these allowed him to take an overview of events from a more distant perspective.

Action researchers can also involve others collaboratively in their research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1988) as a means of validating their work. At Bruford I asked several of my colleagues to assist me in planning marketing strategies and they became known as the Marketing Group. This team consisted of myself; the deputy head; one of the mathematics teachers; my personal assistant who was acting as Registrar (and who during
the research enquiry assumed this role full-time); and one of the governors. This last individual was in fact the marketing consultant who had written the original Bruford Marketing Report and who had been invited to join the governing body after his professional contract to the school had expired. When the deputy head left at Christmas 1991 her successor replaced her. The Marketing Group met first in the summer term of 1991 and continued to meet once or twice per term throughout the period of my research enquiries. Minutes of meetings formed a data resource for Chapter Four.

The function of the Marketing Group's personnel was threefold. First, they acted as a sounding board for ideas on marketing and on the collection of data and contributed their own views in these areas. Secondly, they offered perspectives on the data as it was collected, thus providing triangulation of my perceptions and, hopefully, reducing or eliminating distortion or bias arising from my unaided analysis. The third aim of their involvement was to establish the foundations for further activity after my research was completed. It was envisaged that Bruford School would continue to need a marketing focus and that the Marketing Group would be a strategic forum for these activities.

There could be drawbacks to the participation of colleagues: their perceptions and reflections could alter the retrospective interpretation of events. It is difficult, for example, to differentiate the researcher's views from those of others. On the other hand, the perceptions of colleagues can help to
validate the researcher's views through their informed scrutiny. I certainly found my colleagues' diverse viewpoints helpful. As an example, the questionnaire to parents (see Chapter Five) was shaped by their several interpretations of the Bruford Marketing Report and their personal views of the importance of different aspects of school life to potential parents.

A further risk was the imbalance of power within the group resulting from the position power (Handy & Aitken, 1986) which I held through the office of headteacher. Care was needed to ensure that my views were not given greater weight than those of other group members when decisions were made.

My degree supervisor was also a valuable 'critical friend'. Being distanced, both literally and metaphorically, from the action, he was able to observe critically from a more remote perspective. His questions frequently enabled me to clarify my thinking because of the need to explain events or feelings and put ideas into words. This supports Lomax's (1990) view that research forces teachers to improve their communication skills in order to create and convey accurate meanings.

I also used Winston's (1990) second triangulating factor: the passage of time. For marketing purposes, I analysed my research diary at regular intervals, reviewing responses from the external market from evidence such as confirmed registrations; comments from current and prospective parents; and reactions from visiting preparatory school heads to changes in the school.
Inevitably, also, the passage of time between the collection of data and the writing of this thesis created a more distant perspective on the meaning of events and actions to which, when they occurred, I may have been too close to see clearly.

**Ethical issues**

Pring (1987) pointed out that, in respect of any research, moral problems will arise concerning the right of researchers to learn what they need to know for their research purposes. He considered that a general code of conduct could provide safeguards for anticipated problems but that "... there can be no substitute for moral responsibility" (p278) on the researcher's part. He indicated that the "relationship of trust" between teacher and evaluator places great restraints on the evaluator "... however much public importance he attaches to the information he has" (p288).

Pring was assuming the evaluator/researcher and the teacher to be different persons. "Relationships of trust" are even more delicately balanced for a teacher researching in her/his own school. In such a situation the researcher can never be a neutral outsider but is actively involved with events. This creates ethical problems in school-based action research (Kelly, 1989; Somekh, 1995), particularly in the area of professional relationships. It is an even greater problem for headteacher-researchers, who hold power over colleagues and students by virtue of their office (Handy & Aitken, 1986) and are gatekeepers in their own
research area (Homan, 1991). Winston (1990) recognised "... a real ethical dilemma" (p15) for a head writing about his colleagues, yet to reflect on his own practice as a headteacher he could not avoid reflecting also on theirs.

In my situation I was the main evaluator and I was reviewing, amongst other things, the actions of my colleagues, governing body and immediate predecessor. Smith (1980) found that:

"The core ethical problem in any social science research is acting in the context of two conflicting values - the pursuit of truth through scientific procedures and the maintenance of respect for the individuals whose lives are being lived, focally or peripherally, in the context of one's research project" (p 192).

I tried to avoid this conflict by keeping everyone informed about my research activities. For example, governors and staff were advised of the contents of the questionnaire which was sent out to parents and I also sent a copy as a courtesy to my predecessor. All staff - academic, pastoral, administrative and domestic - and governors were informed of the findings of the questionnaire and were invited to discuss them amongst themselves, directly with me, and with other members of the Marketing Group. It was not merely ethical but also essential that information should be made available to staff, because consideration of the findings formed the 'reflective' portion of the spiral
upon which succeeding 'actions' were to be based, and these actions required their involvement.

Lomax (1991) suggested that the absence of political action can render action research ineffective in improving practice and that the involvement of others as participants was the first step towards avoiding this difficulty. The creation of the Marketing Group and the regular publication in school of information about the research and its findings aimed to extend ownership of the outcomes.

Given that students are the primary beneficiaries of education, I would have liked to include them in the research, particularly in the survey to parents, but for ethical reasons I decided not to do so. I thought that their answers might be influenced by the fact that I was their headteacher. Furthermore, being comparatively recently appointed, I did not think they would all know me well enough to feel sufficiently comfortable to give totally honest answers, even if anonymously. Bryman (1992) pointed out that leadership styles can affect outcomes in such things as group performance and morale: my role in the school could have affected the students' responses. Moreover, a headteacher's role as gatekeeper to research in her/his school is already ethically delicate (Homan, 1991). I believed that, as gatekeeper to my own research field, it was inappropriate to use my power as headteacher to involve the students.
The issue of general confidentiality had also to be considered. Headteachers are often in possession of privileged information. On occasions it would have been unethical to share all the information I possessed with the other members of the Marketing Group, because it would have breached a professional confidence. In some cases, information which I was able to share with them was not suitable for publication. As a result I have had to omit reference to several sensitive issues. Woods (1986) made it clear that this situation can arise if trust is not to be violated. I have also disguised sources through the use of pseudonyms.

A further potential difficulty with action research is that, having found a solution to a problem, the teacher-researcher may not have sufficient access to decision-making in her/his school in order to implement innovations which s/he perceives to be beneficial to the institution. As Busher (1989a) pointed out, there is a political dimension in the practices and personal interactions within a school. Teacher-researchers may not be in a situation where they can influence decision-making to the extent that they might wish. However, my political situation was slightly different. Being the headteacher, I might have possessed the power to make essential changes, but have been unable to obtain from my colleagues, or the school governors, the support necessary to ensure their success. In the event, this situation did not arise. On the contrary, the existence of the research project alongside my professional life appeared to strengthen the credibility of my management decisions,
particularly when the school's future was debated in 1993/94 see Chapter Eight).

The collection of data

Analysing the situation at Bruford: Chapter One

I accumulated data in a variety of ways. I had received a copy of the Bruford Marketing Report in November 1990, i.e. before I arrived at the school. I had also paid several visits which gave me various subjective impressions upon which to draw. Meetings with my predecessor, for example, had given me some idea of her management style, and attendance at my first governors' meeting provided financial data and projections for student numbers.

For information about the school's history I was able to use its Archives and I also drew upon the memory of Miss Hurst, a longstanding member of staff who had worked with two of the previous headteachers (Harvey, 1994).

Marketing the school: Chapter Four

I kept a research diary (Harvey, 1992). This consisted of a file of A4 paper. I wrote on one side of the paper only, keeping a record of all families interviewed, exhibitions attended, other schools visited, visits to Bruford by
headteachers and any significant events in the school. At regular intervals I went back through the file, updating on the blank facing pages any situations which had advanced. At least once, more often twice, each term I reviewed the situation as revealed by the research diary and added a written report on it to the file.

Records were kept by the Registrar of all applications for places in the school.

I amassed a folder of press releases and newspaper cuttings and kept details of expenditure on advertising, exhibitions etc. Having instituted a half-termly newsletter in my first term (February, 1991), I retained copies of those also. I kept agreed Minutes of the Marketing Group meetings and any actions taken as a result of its deliberations, plus published staff meeting Minutes (house and academic), and my desk diaries and termly calendars for the period of time under review.

Collectively this supplied a rich resource of information about the first spiral of research.

To try to eradicate possible bias, when I had completed Chapter One (on the historic situation of Bruford) and Chapter Four (on the marketing initiatives undertaken in the school) I asked a member of the Senior Management Team to read my accounts. She affirmed that they accorded with her memory of events.
All my accumulated information about action taken within the school gave no indication about the effect of these events on Bruford's external markets: parents and the outside world. Information from the external market was needed and I discussed with the Marketing Group the possibilities of acquiring this information, either through the use of a questionnaire or by interviewing parents.

As the involvement of the researcher is integral to action research, s/he will always affect to some extent its process and progress. It was not reasonable to expect parents to give direct answers to me, as headteacher, in response to delicate questions about my colleagues and, indeed, myself. Use of a questionnaire was the obvious alternative.

Questionnaires are not an ideal way of obtaining information about a topic as subjective as parental reasons for selecting a particular school for their children. Views can be many-sided and the way a question is framed can prompt responses which favour one aspect over another (Moser & Kalton, 1985). A further problem is the intensity of feeling which a particular aspect may raise: not all respondents will feel equally strongly about every factor, and levels of intensity may not be revealed in their responses.

These difficulties can be mitigated by the scaling methods used (Moser & Kalton, 1985). Rating scales are not an absolute
measurement, but offer an efficient way of discriminating between the relative views of respondents (Hoinville & Jowell, 1985). They identify the viewpoint of each individual along a continuum, which will give some indication of the strength of the opinion held. The scale needs sufficient points to give a range of responses, though respondents may reduce their choices by avoiding the two extreme positions on the scale. A choice must be made between an odd or an even number of points: with an odd number there is a neutral mid-point whereas an even number forces the respondent to avoid neutrality.

In addition, it is important to ensure that the flow of questions maintains the interest of the respondent. The earliest questions must create the right climate and should be easy to answer (Hoinville & Jowell, 1985).

The Bruford questionnaire was designed after careful consultation with the Marketing Group. Although it was administered to parents of current students, none the less it required them to reflect on their historic decisions. The risk here was that parents may have provided evidence simply confirming in their own minds the soundness of the decision they had already taken to choose the school: an obvious weakness of retrospective surveys (Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993).

The questionnaire had four sections. Section 1 was the easiest to answer for it requested facts, not opinions. It established the length of time a student had been at Bruford, whether she was a daygirl or boarder, how the family first heard about the
school, and how many other schools they had visited before making a decision.

Section 2 presented 26 possible factors which might have influenced the initial choice of Bruford for a particular student and her family. Factors were selected for inclusion on the basis of those identified by other researchers into parental choice of schools, notably Fox (1985) and Hanford (1990), though reference was also made to the Bruford Marketing Report (1990) to ensure that all areas which were then troubling parents were included. Items listed included the school's size, location, facilities, courses, staff (academic and pastoral), and also the prospectus, behaviour of the pupils, the local grapevine and media, opinions of other parents and their own daughter's views.

In Section 3 parents were asked to rate Bruford's actual performance on 23 factors. Many of these factors were identical to those in Section 2. Those which were obviously irrelevant to current parents (e.g. prospectus, initial impressions of the school) were deleted and new factors about the school of which they had gained experience (school food, liaison between school and parents) were added.

In Section 4, parents were asked if, as assessed over the preceding 18 months (during which the changes outlined in Chapter Four had been implemented), they considered that the school's provision had improved, remained unchanged or had become less acceptable. Section 4 included the same factors as Section 3, but listed in a different order so that respondents
could not easily compare the two and copy responses from one to
the other without a conscious effort.

In both Sections 2 and 3, parents were asked to rate all factors
on a six-point scale from 'unimportant' to 'essential'. This
gave ample scope for parents to indicate levels of approval or
disapproval, while still forcing them to avoid neutrality
unless, of course, they failed entirely to respond to any
specific question. In the final section I actually wanted them
to have the choice of neutrality, so Section 4 offered a
three-point scale.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix One.

The questionnaire was piloted in May 1992 with a group of ten
families chosen from across the age-range of the girls. To
ensure confidentiality, numbered questionnaires were sent out by
the Registrar. She kept the list of numbers and families to
whom they were sent, but questionnaires were returned by post
anonymously to another member of the Marketing Group who had no
access to the original mailing list. Parents were given a
second pre-paid reply-envelope, addressed to me at the school,
and were asked to send their views about the questionnaire
itself separately from the completed questionnaire.

All ten families returned the questionnaire but only three made
separate contact about it. Two parents wrote, one to express
satisfaction with the questionnaire and one to suggest a minor
amendment to phrasing. A third parent elected to telephone me,
thus destroying my careful precautions for confidentiality, to
tell me how pleased he was to have had the opportunity to
complain fully about his various dissatisfactions with the
school! However, despite gentle prompting, he made no
suggestions about the actual format of the questionnaire.

As none of the parents who formed the pilot-group mentioned
problems with the questionnaire, and none suggested that areas
of concern to them had been omitted, in June 1992 the families
of all the remaining students on the school's roll were asked to
complete it.

Where a student's parents were separated, a questionnaire was
sent to both parents. The same confidential procedures were
followed as with the pilot group. The questionnaire was sent
out at the beginning of June, and parents were asked to respond
by early July.

The response rate was disappointing. Questionnaire response
rates vary (depending on the commitment of the respondents to
the perceived value of the survey) from 10% to 90%, typically
falling into the range 50% - 70% (Kervin, 1992). I had hoped
that parents' commitment to the school would encourage most of
them to seize the opportunity to express their views about of
it, but only 57% (including the pilot group) responded, despite
being reminded at the school's Sports Day (in late June,
attended by about 60% of parents) and Prizegiving (on the last
day of term, attended by 75% of parents). Further pressure
might have produced further responses, but there is a limit to
the amount of pressure that a headteacher can reasonably apply
to parents for a voluntary contribution to either the school's
well-being or her personal research project.

Such a low response rate carried with it the danger of extensive
non-response bias (Kervin, 1992). For marketing purposes such
bias, had it emphasised the views of dissatisfied clients, could
have been valuable in helping The Marketing Group to shape its
strategy. We had hoped that discontented parents would seize
the opportunity to complain, as one parent in the pilot survey
had done. From the results (see Chapter Five) this did not seem
to be the case.

Such responses as were received, however, proved so interesting
that, after consultation with the Marketing Group, I decided to
send out Sections 1 and 2 (asking why parents had chosen
Bruford) to the 25 families new to the school in Autumn 1992,
with a follow-up of Section 3 (perceptions of Bruford's
performance) at the beginning of the Easter vacation, 1993, when
their children had been in the school for two full terms. As
suggested by Cowan (1993b) and Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1994),
we were interested to see whether the parents with the most
recent experience of Bruford had different perceptions of it, or
priorities within it, from longer-established parents.

63% of new parents responded to the first two sections, but only
42% completed the follow-up. I learned from this that timing is
crucial to the dispatch of a questionnaire. Holiday times are
best avoided (Kervin, 1992). If I were to repeat the exercise,
I would send out Section 3 during term-time, when parents could be reminded more easily and regularly that I was hoping for a prompt response.

**Analysis of the parental questionnaires**

Responses to the questionnaires were analysed in the computer department of Loughborough University using the SPSS package. Results were crosstabulated by the number of years students had been in the school to see if there were any special factors influencing students of different ages. By 1993, daygirls formed about 15% of the total number of students in the school, and 7/15 respondents in the second survey were daygirl families. Therefore the new parents (1992) responses were also crosstabulated by boarder/daygirl to see if the daygirls' families differed in their perceptions in any way from boarders' families. These findings are outlined in Chapter Five.

**Interviewing preparatory school headteachers: Chapter Six**

Analysis of the first questionnaire to parents closed the second main spiral of the research. From this analysis it emerged that, for many parents, preparatory schools had been their first source of information about Bruford. After consultation with the Marketing Group, I decided that the next step must be to obtain information from preparatory schools about their advisory and transfer procedures. For marketing purposes, this was an accessible area of the school's external market and seemed
worthy of exploration. It offered both a potential source of information and also the opportunity to make contacts, beneficial to Bruford, with feeder schools and their heads.

Searching, in the Bodleian Library, for information in the literature about preparatory schools, I encountered the major problem already mentioned in Chapter Two: the scarcity of publications about these schools. One general history has been published about this type of school (Leinster-Mackay, 1984). There are two out-of-date books on the curriculum (Allen & Dealtry, 1951; Masters, 1966) and the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools has, over the last hundred years, published professional termly magazines for this educational sector (Preparatory Schools Review, 1895 - 1987; Prep School, since 1988). There has been a small amount of research into parental choice of independent primary education (Johnson, 1987; MORI/ISIS, 1993), and a few articles have been published in the national press on the social or educational value of preparatory school education. Taken together, these formed the modest resources of information available to me at the time of my research.

Research has shown that headteachers can be an important influence on parental perceptions of schools (Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993). In default of recent published research on parental choice and the process of transfer from independent preparatory to secondary schools, asking preparatory headteachers seemed a reasonable way of finding out what influences there might be on parental choice. Popper (quoted in
Miller, 1983) held that knowledge which is of practical significance forms the basis for deep theoretical insight and for our understanding of the world. This corresponds to Bassey's "common-sense theory of practitioners" (1990a, p36). From the perceptions of preparatory school headteachers I hoped to develop theoretical insights to help me understand further how Bruford attracted, or might in the future attract, potential students.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated the discovery of theory from data obtained systematically from social research. They felt that such grounded theory could support a practitioner trying "... to keep up with and manage the situational realities" (p242) that s/he hopes to improve. The basis on which preparatory school heads advised parents about school choice, explored through some form of ethnographic enquiry such as interviews, seemed appropriate for such a study.

The selection of headteachers

In all social science interviews, individual respondents are subject to their own personal bias. This bias cannot be wholly eliminated, but comparisons between a number of different data sources can strengthen confidence in outcomes (Cohen & Manion, 1989). To obtain reasonable triangulation on the issues of school selection and transfer, it was important to seek a sample group of heads with a broad range of experience and length of time in post. The most recently appointed (Miss Phillips) had been in post for less than two years. The most long-serving (Mr
Thomas) had been co-head for nearly sixty years (with a break for war service), and had just handed over the headship to younger relatives, though he continued to take an active part in the management of the school. Ten of the heads were male and nine were female. (I interviewed joint heads in one school, which explains why 18 schools had 19 headteachers.)

There were practical limitations on my selection of interviewees. In the pressing circumstances facing me at Bruford in 1992 and 1993, I could not afford to spend the combined travelling and interview time more than once if I were to visit eighteen schools. Reducing my sample would have reduced the value of the enquiry as I would have had a less varied group of perspectives on which to draw.

There is evidence that it is easier to interview people with whom the researcher has some prior acquaintance (Walker, 1985). It helps to establish trust and mutual respect between researcher and interviewee, particularly when sensitive professional issues must be addressed (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). With this in mind, and within the limits of the types of schools I wanted to contact, I approached headteachers whom I had met professionally at least once before.

This created a potential problem with the group: that they might share between them common knowledge about my research, which could contaminate it. However, by selecting heads of schools from a wide geographical area, I intended to avoid potential contamination of the answers of one through contact with the
others. Given the geographical dispersion of the schools (anything up to 120 miles from Bruford), it seemed reasonable to assume that the headteachers would not all know each other well, though the most local ones would certainly be acquainted, and professional contacts with their remoter colleagues through organisations like IAPS or ISIS were not impossible. I could not verify this, as to ask them about their contacts with each other would have caused a breach of the anonymity and confidentiality which I had promised them as one of the interview conditions.

The choice of preparatory schools

Between October 1992 and October 1993 I visited eighteen preparatory schools. Ideally the sample should have included all potential feeder schools for Bruford. The size of the sample, and the final choice of the schools which formed it, reflect the pressures and constraints on my research situation.

Initially, I planned to visit twelve schools, all within two hours travelling distance of Bruford, which were feeder schools or had been at some point in the past. However, as my enquiry proceeded, two external factors caused me to revise the interview programme.

Firstly, I changed my research registration from M.Phil to PhD. My sample group of twelve, thought sufficiently large to act as a snapshot for the purposes of marketing Bruford, was too small as a database for a PhD.
Secondly, by 1993 it had become obvious from both the earliest interviews with the preparatory heads and from other sources (including the parental questionnaire) that Bruford was at risk of closure. One strategy for its future was to look for a merger with a competitor school. This circumstance greatly increased my workload in the school at the same time as I was trying to complete sufficient interviews to produce an adequate spread of information from the preparatory heads. In the time available to me I was able to visit only eighteen schools. This number reflects time constraints which limited my choices within my other decisions about the headteachers selected to be interviewed.

Detailed information about the heads and their schools can be found in Appendix Two.

Apart from the breadth of the headteachers' professional profiles, the differences between the schools were also considerable. They were selected to reflect as many facets of preparatory school provision as possible: size (from small to large); gender (single-sex or co-educational); day only or day and boarding; location (from rural to urban, local or more distant); age (to 11 years or through to 12 or 13); different styles of foundation.

The smallest school had 52 students and the largest 440. Three were single-sex girls' schools. Three more took boys at pre-prep level; one up to age 7, and two up to age 8. Eleven were co-educational throughout their age-range. The remaining
school had two quite separate departments for boys and girls aged 8 - 11 years, though younger classes were co-educational. I did not interview any headteachers of boys-only schools because, since mine was a girls' school, my research interest lay with girls.

Eight of the schools took day students only, one took day students and weekly boarders, and nine took day students and full boarders. Of this last group, two were predominantly boarding schools, i.e. with 90% or more eligible students electing to board.

Two of the schools were part of larger educational foundations and might be seen by parents as the natural 'feeders' to their associated senior schools. The remaining sixteen schools were all completely independent institutions, though one had a close relationship with its local parish church, for which it provided choristers. Six were proprietorial schools, four still owned by the founding families: the rest were educational trusts.

Location - an important factor in school choice

When selecting the sample group of schools which I did visit, apart from making choices about the suitability of the headteacher for interview, I paid particular attention to their school's location. Research into parental choice in education seems to suggest varying reactions from parents about the importance of location as a factor in that choice. A brief discussion of this is to be found in Appendix Three. In view of
the diversity of the research findings about location, it was obviously important for me to consider a selection of school locations, and, in addition, to seek from the headteachers information about their catchment areas and the views which their parents seemed to hold about suitable locations for secondary schools.

Map 3.1 shows distances from Bruford of all the schools at which interviews were conducted, together with approximate driving times, assuming average traffic conditions. For the most local schools I have shown only driving times.

The furthest school from Bruford was Marlowe, a boarding school nearly two hours' drive away. Seven schools (Chesterfield, Harris, Tennyson House, Traherne Court, St John's, Hatton Park and Shelley) could supply Bruford with day-students, though parents from St John's, Hatton Park and Shelley would have to be prepared to travel some distance for this.

What the schools had in common

There were some constant factors in the sample group. All the schools were potential sources of students and most, though not all, had sent students to Bruford in the past. Five had ex-students at Bruford at the time of my research and two more had students registered for entry.
The apparent incompatibility between driving times for some of the distances is due to the rural nature of the roads to the west of Bruford, compared with ease of access to the motorway network on its east side.
To preserve anonymity, all schools and headteachers have been given pseudonyms in this thesis. I elected to name the schools after various historical literary figures. Each headteacher's pseudonym has a connection (however tenuous) with the author's name assigned to her/his school.

The choice of interview style

Research interviews can take a variety of forms, but broadly speaking they fall into three groups. The first of these is "respondent interviews" (Powney & Watts, 1987, p17), which may also be called structured or formal interviews (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). They are structured by the interests of the researcher and follow closely a pre-set pattern of questions. Such interviews have the advantage that responses can be pre-coded and that data can be analysed fairly easily. The main drawback of this method is that it does not allow the interviewer to benefit from the interviewee's knowledge of a situation beyond the actual questions asked. There is no opportunity to follow up new ideas or to probe answers.

The second method of interviewing is via "informant interviews" (Powney & Watts, 1987, idem) which may also be referred to as unstructured or informal interviews (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989), in which key issues are raised in conversational style. This method allows the interviewer to gain insight into the perceptions of the interviewee, because the latter has greater control over the interview process.
"Open-ended situations can ... result in unexpected or unanticipated answers which may suggest unthought-of relationships or hypotheses" (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p313).

The major drawback to this method is the difficulty of analysing the final data, because no two interviews will cover exactly the same ground.

There is a third style of interview, midway between the formal and the informal (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). This is the semi-formal or semi-structured interview. For this style, the interviewer plans a series of questions, but is free to modify them, change the wording, explain or add to them.

I wished to cover the same topic areas in all the interviews with the preparatory headteachers, but wanted to free them to talk about the specific aspects about which they felt strongly. so I decided to use a semi-formal interview structure. Through supplementary questions I could ask for clarification if I needed it, or test the extent of an interviewee's knowledge, or even her/his sincerity in holding a particular viewpoint. The specific interview procedures followed are described later in this chapter.

**Disadvantages and benefits from the use of interviews**

The clearest disadvantage of interviews is the increased risk of the interviewer influencing the responses of the interviewee.
The interviewer's personal background (age, education, professional status, gender) and psychological approach (perceptions, attitudes, expectations and motives) may affect responses (Powney & Watts, 1987).

Researchers working in a field in which they are themselves important gatekeepers enjoy greater power than outsiders (Kervin, 1992). My professional status as Bruford's head and consequently the potential benefits to my school of enhanced social contact with heads of possible feeder schools, may have had an effect on responses. Furthermore, my inexperience as an interviewer may have influenced interview situations, especially in the earliest interviews. As an example, at my first interview (Masefield School, see Appendix Four (b)i) Mrs Jones' responses were very concise and I might, with more experience, have obtained fuller replies. In later interviews it was easier to maintain the flow, as may be seen from a comparison of Mrs Jones' data with that of my last interviewee, Mr Barrett (Browning School, see Appendix Four (b)ii). In such circumstances, interviewers may affect both the process and the outcomes of an interview. My personal involvement in the research situation may well have affected outcomes too.

However, these disadvantages have to be balanced against two benefits. The first of these is the greater likelihood of an increased rate of return by potential participants. In my case no-one refused to be interviewed or to answer any of my questions. The second benefit is the opportunity for asking further questions to clarify and extend information-gathering.
In my research this latter benefit was increased because my professional practitioner knowledge helped me to pick up unexpected issues and probe them.

From the professional experience of the interviewees, I hoped both to discover potential hypotheses and to identify variables and meaningful relationships which might affect parents' choice of independent secondary schools. How these headteachers were selected is discussed earlier in this chapter.

The interview procedures

A research interview is a contrived social situation and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is not symmetrical. The balance of power lies with the interviewer because s/he has set the agenda (Powney & Watts, 1987). To help redress this imbalance, I elected to interview the heads in their own schools because that is where I felt they would feel most comfortable.

In addition, I wanted to establish the professional and social context of each head.

"In interpretive work there are no absolute meanings detached from any social context, so we need to know something about that context to make sense of the meanings expressed in them" (Woods, 1986, p74).

A school visit offers the opportunity to get the 'feel' of its
culture (Mauriel, 1989), so interviewing the heads' on their own campuses gave me the chance to evaluate the working environment of those schools which I had not previously seen. Such evaluations draw heavily on the use of expert practitioner knowledge (Popper, 1983; Bassey, 1990a) of what factors contribute to effective schooling.

All the heads were advised in advance by letter of the main areas of my research interest. I drew up a list of 'warm-up' questions about their school to allow them to settle, and to obtain data about the school's population, catchment area and apparent sources of students. These were followed by six questions relating to the heads' perceptions of secondary schools.

A full list of the questions asked can be found in Appendix Four (a).

Recording the heads' views

Information obtained in interviews can be recorded by technological means, using video or audio tape, or by the taking of notes. Each presents problems.

I did not possess, and lacked access to, a video-camera and in any case did not have sufficient expertise to use one comfortably, particularly in locations with which I was unfamiliar. The provision of expensive equipment, and the technical skills needed for successful video-taping, are
serious disadvantages to the use of this method (Walker, 1985).

Use of audio tape would also have been difficult in unfamiliar locations. However, I was disinclined to use a tape recorder for other reasons. The first of these was my feeling that my interviewees might be less forthcoming if they were being recorded. I also worried that, by concentrating on the machine, I might miss non-verbal cues which could contribute meaning to what was being said. Continuity may be disturbed by these practical problems during interviewing (Walker, 1985). The major difficulty, however, was the immense problem of transcription. For ethical reasons, I wished the headteachers to affirm the records of their interview as soon as possible afterwards, in case they wished to amend anything which they had said. The principle of informed consent to provide research data accords to interviewees the right to give clearance for its release (Homan, 1991). Within my research practice, this meant that the headteachers would need to receive the written documentation promptly while their memories of it were reasonably fresh. However, transcription time for an audio tape can be anything from 6:1 to 10:1 (Powney & Watts, 1987) which would have meant finding between 4 and 8 hours of transcription time for each of my interviews. Neither I nor my secretary had that time available during a school term.

Use of handwritten notes was the only practical alternative. It has the obvious disadvantage that there must be some loss of information and some potential for distortion, but methodology is constrained by what is possible within a given research
situation (Golby, 1989).

Trying to reduce potential distortion to a minimum, I planned the interview procedures as carefully as I could. To ensure that coverage of similar ground with all the interviewees, I prepared a series of sheets of paper beforehand; one sheet for the 'warm-up' questions and one sheet for each of the six main questions. I took long-hand notes of responses. I was able to swap from one sheet to another if the interviewee started to cover under one heading ideas which I had expected to cover elsewhere.

For each of the questions I had a 'prompt list' of items to mention if a respondent omitted reference to a major area of potential interest, though I did not prompt any given respondent unless s/he failed to mention a particular area. For example, Mr Barrett (Appendix Four (b)ii) gave a number of sources of information about secondary schools but did not spontaneously mention prospectuses or school magazines. When he appeared to have finished describing his sources of information, I prompted him to establish whether or not he read these publications. Furthermore, if a topic was mentioned but merely skimmed over, I probed to find out more. As an example, Mrs Jones (see Appendix Four) listed "caring", "discipline" and "standards" as the three essential qualities which she wished to find in a secondary school: I asked her to define her meanings for each of these.

Immediately upon my return from each interview I transferred my notes to dictaphone while my memory was still fresh. My
secretary typed up the first draft as promptly as possible, usually on the same day or at latest the following morning. I then sent the draft by first class post to my interviewee for approval. I made it clear before each interview that I would not quote from anything other than the final agreed text, and that any such quotations would be published anonymously.

Responsible researchers value truth and aim to record facts accurately (Homan, 1991). The procedure outlined above overcame, to some extent, my difficulty in checking on the validity of the facts given to me by the interviewees. Firstly, it offered them a second opportunity to consider the issues discussed. I hoped they would correct any errors or omissions which they had made. Secondly, it gave them the chance to eliminate any possible misconceptions arising out of my poor memory, inaccurate recording or personal bias. A third outcome of this process was ethical. As Homan (ibid) recommended, respondents' ownership of the data was acknowledged and they were given the power of approval or withdrawal of information which had been recorded for possible publication.

Of eighteen interviews undertaken, eleven drafts were accepted as true records. Two heads wished to clarify their observations further; one added to his comments; three withdrew remarks. This last group presented me with problems. To maintain confidentiality and relationships of professional trust (Pring, 1987) I had to delete interesting material. As Simons (1981) found, participant control can lead to prohibitions on the use of data. This may also raise questions about which of two views
was a true reflection of a head's opinions.

Samples of interview records can be found in Appendix Four (b).

Analysis of the interviews

To analyse the headteacher interviews I had to extrapolate themes from the data and construct categories under appropriate topic headings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This analysis was undertaken on innumerable sheets of paper. I listed all the factors mentioned under each of the six questions about which I had asked, made eighteen columns, and ticked under each school to indicate which head had said what. I then aggregated comments which were identical or almost identical in meaning into categories. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) described this as thematic analysis and suggested that a researcher should regularly examine the kinds of themes which are emerging from the material and relate them to the aims of the research project. This method has certain similarities with the analysis of a large musical work, such as a symphony, where themes have individual importance but also contribute to the overarching whole of the entire work. I tried to consider emerging themes: one outcome of this process was an interim report on the first twelve interviews (Harvey & Busher, 1993).

I did not assign pseudonyms until all interviews had been completed. Consequently, I did not discuss the raw data with the whole Marketing Group, because the original drafts indicated clearly whence the information had come. However, it was part
of the Registrar's job to have regular contact with all Bruford's feeder schools, and to advise me before I visited any of them of the names of all their former students who had subsequently moved to Bruford. She therefore had to know which schools I was visiting and I was thus able to discuss the interview drafts with her when I returned. From the point of view of Bruford's marketing, it was most important that I should do this, particularly with reference to the final question, which sought to expose both positive and negative feelings about the school. Between us, the Registrar and I presented feedback from the interviews to the Marketing Group.

The results of this enquiry can be found in Chapter Six. It was not possible for me to discuss with the Registrar the final analysis presented in that chapter, though she did advise on the contents of the interim report mentioned earlier (Harvey & Busher, 1993).

Was this spiral of the enquiry really Action Research?

It could be argued that this substantial section of my research left the domain of action research and became simply a qualitative ethnographic enquiry into the perspectives of the preparatory headteachers. While this view is not unreasonable, I refute it for several reasons.

Firstly, I continued to frame my enquiry around the reflective spiral of action research, which also remained the mental focus for the Marketing Group. However much subsequent events may
appear to have altered the methodological perspective, at the time I believed myself to be carrying out action research, and this influenced my thinking and ways of working with the Marketing Group.

Secondly, in the headteacher interviews my final topic area (requesting information about their views of Bruford) continued to anchor my research to my working environment, and remained an element which may possibly have influenced the replies which I received. It should not be forgotten that my status as Bruford's headteacher was always a factor in the power relationships between myself and my interviewees.

Thirdly, the circumstances under which I was working continued to have a direct influence on me, not least because of the pressures of time. The comparatively small size of my sample of interviewees is a direct example of this, as is the sample size for the final section of the research: the questionnaire enquiry to girls' secondary schools.

The girls' schools' questionnaire: Chapter Seven

This final stage of the enquiry was a straightforward piece of qualitative research which sought to validate the views of the preparatory headteachers about various aspects of school transfer. The findings from the interview enquiry to the preparatory headteachers suggested that they had certain perceptions of independent girls' secondary schools and their
policies. They were particularly concerned about the advice which headteachers of girls' schools give to prospective parents about the best age of transfer for a girl into secondary schooling.

In order to test the preparatory headteachers' theories about this issue I needed to obtain information from girls' schools' headteachers. The pressure of events dictated that this information should be obtained quickly, for by this stage of the research (December 1993) Bruford's merger was already in train. I felt that if this became public knowledge before my enquiries were completed it would affect responses to my questions. On reflection, I now wonder if this would necessarily have happened but, in the difficult circumstances under which I was working, extensive time for reflection on this point was not available. I elected to use a second questionnaire, feeling that this was potentially the swiftest method of collecting the data needed.

Griffiths (1991) has pointed out the disadvantages of questionnaire enquiries to headteachers: the opportunity for considered response allows them to give the impression they wish and no more. I regret that use of a questionnaire at this stage precluded the use of follow-up questions, but at the time there seemed to be no other choice. A further disadvantage of the limited focus of this final phase was the absence of co-educational and boys' schools from the survey sample. It would have been valuable to extend the enquiry to these schools, to explore their heads' perspectives on the age of transfer and on the establishment of 'junior houses' for students between the
ages of 11 and 13. These areas remain to be investigated.

The girls' schools' questionnaire was constructed following similar theoretical principles to those underpinning the questionnaire to parents, but the format was simpler. Analysis of the preparatory headteacher interviews suggested that their major areas of anxiety about the transfer of their female students to secondary school were policies on the age of admission for girls; the potential pressure which secondary headteachers might be applying to parents to persuade them to conform to those policies; and changing standards in the level of academic ability required for admission. The questionnaire to the secondary heads therefore sought to elicit information on these topics. Its construction was discussed with the Marketing Group and the final version was piloted on a headteacher working outside Bruford's immediate catchment area. She suggested amendments to the covering letter but none to the research instrument itself. More extensive piloting was not possible in the time available.

First the questionnaire asked straightforward questions about the age ranges for which each school offered provision. Subsequent questions explored policies on the age of admission and on methods of examination/assessment of students seeking admission, together with any recent changes in either. Perceived changes in the views of parents and of the heads of their own feeder schools were also requested. Finally, the girls' headteachers were asked to indicate what professional advice they gave to prospective parents about the best age of
transfer to secondary school for a female student.

A sample questionnaire can be found in Appendix Five.

The girls' schools sample

I selected a sample of 26 girls' secondary schools, 25 of them spread geographically across England and 1 school in Scotland (whence Bruford had, in the past, drawn a number of students). Some schools were day schools, others offered boarding provision, and some had preparatory departments. Their heads had been in post for varying lengths of time and several were in their second headship. All but one of the schools were in membership of the Girls Schools' Association (GSA). The sample chosen represented 10% of the total membership of the GSA. I lacked the resources to survey a larger sample. 25 schools responded within three weeks.

All the girls' schools were potential clients of at least some of the preparatory schools at which I had conducted interviews, and all the most local competitor schools to Bruford were included. Inevitably some of the sample schools were in competition with each other, which could have affected responses. However, all independent schools are technically in competition both with each other and with local authority and grant maintained schools, and therefore competition is likely to be a factor in the responses of all heads of independent schools to questions about marketing. Some of their comments (see Chapter Seven) indicate awareness of this.

- 130 -
To avoid confusion with the sample of preparatory schools, the secondary schools were not given pseudonyms, but were assigned numbers, at random, from 1 to 26 and reference is made to them by number throughout this text.

Analysis of the data followed a similar pattern to that used for the preparatory headteacher interviews, but was more straightforward because the questions asked defined the categories into which the answers fell. The results are given in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER FOUR

Marketing Bruford School
CHAPTER FOUR

Marketing Bruford School

Our vision of the future must build on the strength of the past. Yet we must anticipate new challenges and opportunities. Roberts, p 94.

In this chapter, consideration is given first to the practical problems which Bruford School was facing when I was appointed as its headteacher, and to the contents of an independent marketing report which addressed those problems. Some of the solutions which the staff sought to implement are then described. Finally, reasons are given for the research path subsequently followed to assess the effects of the action taken.

The Bruford Marketing Report

In the summer of 1990 the governors of Bruford commissioned a marketing consultant to undertake a performance audit of the school. He was briefed to consider both internal and external factors which might be having an adverse effect on recruitment of students and to advise on measures to reverse the decline in numbers.

The Bruford Marketing Report (BMR) (1990) covered a number of areas including the premises, location, internal and external communications of the school; a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats); a consideration of the market situation; a survey of a small sample of past, present
and future parents including some who had visited the school but elected to send their daughters elsewhere; and an assessment of the views of governors. This was followed by a proposed action plan.

Potential clients need to be aware, not only of a service's existence, but also of the benefits and opportunities which it can offer them (Gray, 1991). Bruford's consultant had found the school lacking in competitive edge, despite "... many attractive features and a strong appealing message for potential pupils" (BMR, p7). He decided that its decline was largely due "... to the generally low level of exposure the school has created for itself" (idem).

Factors in the external environment of an institution can affect it profoundly (Majaro, 1982) and schools are no exception (Fidler, 1989). The consultant identified pressures in the external market which might pose problems for Bruford. Among these, declining birthrates might be offset by the increase in students attending independent schools: economic and political factors were more difficult to judge and "... should at best be considered neutral" (BMR, p20). He felt that the trend away from boarding towards day schools, combined with the expansion in Sixth-form provision, both in the maintained sector and in those boys' schools which had become co-educational, might offer Bruford serious competition. He admitted the possible over-provision of girls' schools locally, but felt that Bruford's style was sufficiently differentiated to find enough demand amongst parents.
The consultant had formed the view that Bruford was academically sound. Senior girls, and their parents, frequently expressed the view that they had done better than they had expected in external examinations, and there was praise for the academic staff. The consultant considered the school's location good, but felt that its teaching facilities were not particularly outstanding and he recommended that at least one department should be improved to "state of the art" (BMR, p50).

Any service business needs innovations which enable it to work in new, better ways (Doyle, 1994a). The consultant's idea was for Bruford to create that Unique Selling Point (USP) which every product or service must have to attract its share of the market. In education, expansion may come through offering new courses to existing students or by attracting new customers through diversification (Gray, 1991). The consultant suggested developing Design Technology, pointing out that this would have an impact on both internal (students) and external (potential parents) markets.

Internal communications are vital for successful marketing (Devlin & Knight, 1990). The consultant found an obvious need for improvement in communication: between governors and the school; between headteacher and staff; between school and parents. He suggested the formation of a 'Friends of Bruford' group.

Girls who had left Bruford at the end of Year 11 had offered a wide variety of reasons for leaving, but basically these fell
into two categories: peer pressure and a feeling that they had outgrown the school. To solve the latter problem, the consultant suggested that increasing girls' privileges as they acquired seniority in the school might be beneficial.

Student perceptions about food can vary widely, particularly amongst younger pupils (Morgan; 1993). Some Bruford girls did not like the school food. This was felt by the staff to be an historic reaction, but the consultant advised that options for improvement should be evaluated.

Traditional schools can be perceived as being out of touch with reality and giving an education which is not useful to their students' futures (Jones, 1987). Parents who had visited Bruford but taken their custom elsewhere were complimentary about their reception, but felt that their daughters might not be offered sufficient academic challenge; that Bruford had an old-fashioned atmosphere; and that there were insufficient weekend activities for the students.

The governors' views of the situation

The governors had made a wide range of comments to the consultant, covering everything from the pupil population (too many foreign students, too many with marked learning difficulties - both, as I found on arrival, conspicuously untrue) to the decor of the buildings. Demographic changes were blamed and the view was expressed by some that news of the impending retirement of the head had affected numbers.
The decline in Bruford's intake should be considered in a national context. The 1991 Annual Census of the Independent Schools' Information Service (ISIS) indicated that for the eighth successive year total student numbers in independent schools had increased (ISIS, 1991). Between 1984 and 1991 the independent sector as a whole expanded by almost 9% (ISIS, 1994). However, there had been an overall decline of 4% in full boarding. This decline was greatest in boys' boarding schools: within all-girls' boarding schools the decline was only 2.9%. There had been a corresponding increase of 4.7% in weekly boarding in girls' schools (ISIS, 1991).

Bruford's decline in numbers in the late 1980s was therefore in line with the decline in boarding, but against the overall trend towards independent education, and much greater than the trend within all-girls schools. Also it had commenced before the previous head's retirement became imminent. Potentially it could have been counteracted by more flexible boarding arrangements and by the earlier admission of daygirls but daygirls were not admitted until September 1990.

The consultant seemed to feel that the governing body might not be wholly in touch with the situation as it existed at the time of his Report. He contented himself with asking three questions of the governors. Was the governing body of the optimum size and composition? Did it meet often enough? Could financial performance be improved by marketing alone? After the official presentation of the BMR to the full governing body in November 1990 its membership was eventually reduced from eleven to nine,
three of them new governors.

This raises questions about the optimum size for a committee or team. Everard and Morris (1985) described a team as "... a group of people that can effectively tackle any task which it has been set up to do" (p124). Quoting the work of Belbin (1981), they identified 8 team-member roles which they considered necessary to the efficient operation of a team. A mixture of personalities and mental abilities is required, and it is their interaction rather than their technical expertise which matters most. Everard and Morris pointed out that if the team had fewer than 8 members, some of them would have to play more than one role, but that a team which had too many members trying to fill certain roles might encounter problems. From personal experience I would suggest that teams much larger than 8 might also be carrying some passengers.

However fortuitous it was that the governing body which I served came close to the ideal size for a team, its members were committed to the school, and they worked well together. They had breadth of technical expertise ranging across legal, financial, educational and business management backgrounds, and equal diversity of personalities.

The consultant's suggested programme for action

Presenting the Bruford Marketing Report to the school's governors in November 1990, the consultant recommended positive marketing action internally and externally. He advised that the
first step must be to assess Bruford's unique balance of qualities, agree its focus and prepare a mission statement. He suggested that a group of six people should be drawn from the school community, including two governors (at least one of them female and preferably one of them a parent-governor), the Headmistress and Deputy, the Head Girl and an external Public Relations consultant. He recommended an open and consultative style, possibly including a questionnaire to all parents, and that the final mission statement should be drawn up by the end of December 1990.

All this accords with marketing practice in service industries, where both 'producers' and 'consumers' are considered to have important contributions to make to identifying needs and planning the delivery of the service (Thomas & Donaldson, 1989; Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991). I agreed with the consultant's idea but felt his timescale was unrealistic and that the proposed membership of the committee was inappropriate. The target date given excluded me as head-elect and overlooked the time constraints on schools in December.

Mauriel (1989) suggested that a mission statement, while taking account of the views of many, should actually be drafted by one individual. I preferred this method, and also wished to work on the school's focus with staff and governors rather than with parents. I felt it was better to work with those with whom I already had points of contact than with those whom I did not yet know very well.
Internal marketing

The first staff meeting

A school's internal market is that body of people regularly involved with it: students, staff, governors, parents and suppliers (Devlin & Knight, 1990). As my new colleagues were the ones I would meet first, I elected to use the need for a structured student privilege system and for a school mission statement as ways of establishing good communications with staff.

It was customary at Bruford to hold a staff meeting on the morning of the first day of term, to deal with administrative matters before the boarding students returned. I arranged that this meeting should be followed in the afternoon by some In-Service Training (INSET) for the academic, pastoral and administrative staff. The marketing consultant presented a precis of his report in the presence of two of the governors, after which staff were asked to review the girls' current privileges and to suggest and discuss improvements.

Brighouse (1991) recommended that new headteachers wishing to launch new initiatives should invite the whole staff to contribute their views. He pointed out that this can enable a new headteacher to evaluate the personal characteristics of her/his new colleagues. Working with the Bruford staff on the first day of term allowed me to get a feeling for the professional and social interactions within the group. It also
gave them some idea of what to expect from me. This latter point was important. A clear philosophy of education is essential for a headteacher if s/he wishes to lead a successful school (Brighouse, ibid). Shared visions are not easily constructed with a new leader. Staff require an unambiguous lead and a good example if they are to work at their maximum potential. Weindling and Earley (1987) emphasised the importance of the first staff meeting.

Commitment to procedures and methods is built into an organisation and together these procedures and methods create its character (Selznick, 1957). Changes to them alter this character. Such change can be traumatic for those within the organisation; they must forget old ways and acquire new ones. Duignan and Macpherson (1992) called this "cultural realignment" (p176), taking the view that it is the responsibility of an educative leader to legitimate change, so that there is justification for alterations to professional practices and organisation. Peters and Waterman (1982) saw such "coalition-building" (p82) as integral to leadership of an institution. Those working within it must be involved in the task of defining its purposes (Selznick, 1957; Fullan, 1992).

If Bruford was to survive, it seemed essential that my new colleagues should engage in the task of redefining the school's practices and routines, so that they could give wholehearted support to the new systems.

I had chosen student privileges for the INSET agenda because I had felt, after my September visit to Bruford, that
student-dissatisfaction with rather old-fashioned ideas such as
not watching television on weekday evenings was a serious
problem and the consultant had shared my concern on this point.
Morgan (1993) confirmed that a clear privilege system is
perceived by students as "right and appropriate" (p55), with
more senior pupils able to enjoy privileges achieved and younger
pupils seeing such privileges as markers of their progress
through the school. A structured privilege system was produced
for Bruford, evolved from the experience of staff, particularly
housestaff, who had worked in other schools, and from the home
routines of those academic staff who had teenage children.

The INSET meeting also considered the school's mission
statement. Colleagues were asked to identify, either
individually or in groups, the factors which made Bruford's USP
(Unique Selling Point) and to submit suggestions for inclusion
in the first draft which would be discussed at the next staff
meeting. This item on the agenda gave me an opportunity which
would otherwise have been lacking; a chance to praise the past
work of the school.

Brighouse (1991) indicated that "Wise new headteachers find
something to celebrate in the school's past" (p19) and I
thought Bruford had much to celebrate. I wished to acknowledge
to my colleagues their ownership of all that they had already
created in the school. The Marketing Report supported the view
that Bruford had many strengths. In defining its current USP as
its mission statement we were merely making formal expression of
the underlying philosophy and practices which already existed,
and were endorsing their value.

After this first discussion, the mission statement was drawn up during my first term (Spring 1991). Reviews of each draft were presented for discussion at staff meetings and a final review was held at the March 1991 governors' meeting. The ultimate version became the basis for the new prospectus.

**Further internal marketing initiatives**

The remaining six internal marketing points suggested by the consultant for immediate action were:

a) Strengthening the weekend activities programme
b) Making Years 12 and 13 more challenging
c) Sending promotional items with each invoice to parents
d) Refurbishment of a key focus area of the school
e) Setting up an Enterprise Business to sell tuck
f) Evaluation of options for improved food

To these I added uniform, which the consultant mentioned but to which he had ascribed lower priority. Changes to uniform had been under consideration for a year before my arrival but no final decision had been made. Uniform can be almost as emotive an issue as food (Chapman, 1993; Morgan, 1993), and both suppliers and parents need plenty of advance warning if changes are to be implemented smoothly. I felt that choices should be made and decisions published at the earliest possible moment.

The deputy headteacher took action over weekend activities,
point (a) of the consultant's list, involving girls wherever possible by getting them to suggest activities they would like to pursue. Weekends became much busier. The increased calendar of events seemed to meet with parental approval.

The deputy head also took on the co-ordination of Sixth-form activities, point (b) above. To involve Years 12 and 13 in as many decision processes as possible, a School Council was elected.

According to Brandes and Ginnis (1986), active learning requires change in the traditional teacher/students relationships. Teachers must become facilitators and students need to take more responsibility for themselves. The Bruford School Council met twice in the first half of the Spring term 1991 and was responsible for co-ordinating the collection of views from students in Years 7 to 11 about the proposed new school uniform. The School Council also ratified the new student privileges which had been suggested by staff on the first day of term. It was made clear to the Sixth-form that the staff had proposed the changes. I wished them to understand that any changes taking place in the school were not simply the whim of the new head, but had been made after consultation with those staff who would be affected by them, and were proposals not impositions on students. Murgatroyd and Gray (1989) found "a strong relationship" (p93) between style of leadership and negotiation within the classroom and in the school as a whole, and Jones (1987) suggested that the example set by the head who demonstrates a corporate management style makes it easier for
staff to use more empowering methods of teaching. The foundation of the Bruford School Council indicated to the students a commitment to the philosophy that they had a contribution to make to every aspect of their community and that new, appropriate ways to foster this contribution would be sought. The School Council continued to meet twice or thrice each term and to suggest further changes within the school.

Point (c) of the consultant's plan was aimed at parents. He suggested that promotional items should be sent regularly to this important sector of the school's internal market. Every school should provide parents with information about its aims, organisation, curriculum, administration and welfare (Weeks, 1987). Moreover, news about a school can reach external markets, i.e. those who do not have regular contact with it, through the parental network. I tackled this myself by sending half-termly newsletters to all parents. This was an important form of regular communication with parents who, in a boarding school, can be very far-flung and have little regular personal contact with the school. The newsletters enabled us to reach every parent, including those who lived abroad and those who were separated and who therefore did not attend school functions regularly.

As a longer-term project, the Bruford staff put together a 'Parents' Handbook', copies of which were eventually distributed to all current parents and given to new parents when their children became students at the school.
Hanford's research (1990) indicated that the interest of parents must be engaged positively to ensure take-up of places. Her findings suggested that, if this does not happen, potential parents may be as much influenced by the neighbourhood grapevine as by their own personal experience of the school. If that were the case at Bruford, we could not afford to lose any opportunity to make a good impression on current parents, directly or via their daughters' grapevine, and thus through them to our external market of potential parents and students.

In the first weeks of my first term decisions were made about the use of buildings. This addressed point (d) of the consultant's report, which referred to facilities. The introduction of the National Curriculum had a considerable impact on Design Technology and there was need for more equipment and more space in which to use it. This seemed to be the "key area of the school" (BMR, 1990, p8) upon which to focus development, for it required refurbishment for strong educational reasons. Bruford's longstanding reputation for excellence in the Arts enabled the school to build on one of its strengths by expanding into Design Technology. Within the year it was indeed "state of the art" (ibid, p50), thanks to two very hardworking members of staff and some strategic funding.

Changes arising out of the introduction of Design Technology into the curriculum demonstrate the impact of the external environment on schools. Fidler (1989) made reference to the importance of matching the activities of an organisation to its environment. The environment in this context is not merely
physical, but includes legal, political, economic, social and technological pressures and the needs of the local community. Adapting to these pressures is a constant process.

Improvement of leisure facilities was also possible at Bruford because the decline in numbers had created extra space. An unused dormitory in the Junior House was turned into an indoor games room. In addition, extra space created the opportunity for repainting all the dormitories in the school between Spring 1991 and Summer 1992. These gave Bruford the internal benefits of better facilities and more attractive bedrooms which were also external marketing assets when viewed by prospective parents.

Divergence of priorities within internal marketing strategies

There were three areas of internal marketing where my priorities differed from those of the consultant: the tuck shop, the need to improve the food, and uniform.

His suggestion about a tuck shop, point (e) of his report, proved redundant when I discovered that there was already a flourishing tuck shop in existence. A small tuck shop had been extant at the time of his visit, but after his report the previous head had requested the Business Studies teacher to expand it. She had done this efficiently, entrusting its day-to-day operation to Sixth-formers, who thus had some responsibility for an important leisure facility of the kind which the consultant had recommended in point (b). The tuck
shop also encouraged contact between Sixth-formers and the Juniors who were the shop's main customers, which increased the friendly family atmosphere of the school - an essential part of its ethos.

Point (f) of the report, about school food, was tackled through an external audit of the catering staffing and equipment and in March 1991 the number one cook was promoted to Catering Officer. The School Council elected from amongst its membership representatives to meet the Catering Officer to discuss menus. If the girls disliked the food they were encouraged to send a representative from the Council to discuss the situation with the Catering Officer. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) advocated that student involvement was integral to school improvement. Getting the Bruford students to work with the Catering Officer empowered them to seek directly any improvements which they themselves desired.

The new uniform turned out to be a diplomatic minefield. When I arrived to take up my post all that remained was the final choice of styles from a selection of samples, which selection I understood to have been agreed by staff. Because uniform can arouse strong opinions (Chapman, 1993; Morgan, 1993), I wanted the students to be involved in this decision. A 'fashion show' was planned in which girls modelled the clothes from which the whole school was to make its selection. However, I discovered that staff had no real knowledge of what was going on and that this was a source of some resentment. They were offended by their apparent exclusion from a decision in which the students
were to be fully involved.

Such chance occurrences can be symbolically significant to staff (Hoyle, 1986). This incident reinforces the view of power expressed by Handy and Aitken (1986). If a leader's resource and position power are to be exercised effectively, they require compliance among those who must actually carry out the work. An instigator in a school needs to influence colleagues in order to implement change successfully, and this applies as much to headteachers as it does to other members of staff (Busher, 1990). Furthermore, I needed the students' support as well because of their interest in the outcome (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991).

I immediately arranged for the academic and pastoral staff to see all the samples and requested feedback as a matter of urgency. By a happy coincidence, one colleague made a suggestion about jackets to which the students responded by selecting that proposed style. This occasion gave me a further opportunity to reinforce staff perceptions of the change to a more consultative management style (Brighouse, 1991).

**External marketing**

Although improvement of internal marketing was essential because of its

"... impact upon the self esteem of the staff and pupils and
therefore on the self image which inevitably influences external perceptions" (BMR, p10), it was equally important not to neglect the management of external relations. Jones (1987) pointed out that schools do not work in isolation and must be relevant to the society they serve.

As Peters (1987) indicated, a planned, systematic approach is as necessary for a word-of-mouth campaign about an institution or a product as it is for any other business activity. It is most important to contact potential customers and those whose opinion may carry weight with them. Bruford's consultant made many recommendations on external marketing but he listed four as "CRITICAL AND URGENT" (BMR, p53).

1) An intensive programme of visits to feeder schools with previous connections with Bruford and all other potential feeder schools within a 50 mile radius
2) Invitations to preparatory school heads to visit Bruford
3) Production of a new prospectus
4) Creation of a Friends of Bruford organisation to keep parents (past and present), ex-governors, staff and employees "... in touch with developments and progress at the school" (p52).

Contacts with feeder schools

As Bruford's head, I agreed wholeheartedly with the consultant's first and second external marketing points: that it was vital to establish good links with headteachers of feeder schools. The
transfer of students from one school to another should be managed in such a way as to ensure continuity of meaningful learning for them (Gorwood, 1991) and this can only be achieved by inter-school liaison (HMSO, 1985). In state schools the National Curriculum has strengthened the need for this (Busher & Hodgkinson, 1995), but it is no less important for students in independent schools. It was also desirable that the heads of potential feeder schools should recommend Bruford to their parents. Furthermore, if they did not themselves have favourable views of Bruford, they might actively discourage potential parents. Hanford (1990) and Webster, Owen and Crome (1993) identified the importance of headteachers in the eyes of parents choosing secondary schools. According to Rae (1981), many preparatory school headteachers have established close relationships with parents, through parents' associations and parental representation on governing bodies, and therefore they might be sources of influence on potential parents, both directly and via their own local grapevines (Hanford, 1990).

Such headteachers would need reassurance that the essential caring ethos of Bruford remained unchanged, while old-fashioned and outmoded approaches to students would be reviewed and replaced. The best way to convey this seemed to be by personal contact, supported by appropriate literature including the school prospectus and annual magazines, backed up by contact with the school itself. Bruford's students and staff could then reinforce the message.

The Secretary/Registrar arranged for me to commence a programme
of visits and entertaining. In 1991 I visited, or welcomed at Bruford, the heads of twenty-two preparatory schools which were feeder schools of longstanding, and several more who had never sent a student to Bruford. 1992 saw a number of return visits and new contacts with nearly twenty more schools. At this point my research enquiry added a new dimension, as I visited a number of schools to interview their headteachers (see Chapter Six).

During 1992 several prospective parents indicated that they had been recommended to consider Bruford by the headteacher of their child's current school - who had also been a recent visitor to Bruford. A number of these headteachers had no record of previous contact with us. One school, which had sent no students for over seven years, recommended four potential pupils for 1993 and, of the 1993 September intake, half were from preparatory schools with which we had had recent contacts and two-thirds of the rest had been recommended by parents or students with recent personal experience of the school.

Prospectus

Public Relations and the projection of a corporate image are an important part of marketing. Effective materials must be used to promote a school's Unique Selling Point (Gray, 1991). The consultant's third external marketing point indicated the need for a new prospectus to replace the rather dowdy extant publication.

Unfortunately it can take months to produce a full prospectus
and we could not go ahead with one until the mission statement, as discussed earlier, had been finalised to form the basis on which we could draft text and select photographs which matched our agreed corporate image. In view of these difficulties, it was decided that our first new publication should be a leaflet mini-prospectus, which could easily be mailed to all preparatory schools and to any other professional or business contacts we made.

By means of the mini-prospectus we were able to sample the quality of the work of a local photographer before being committed to the contract for the full prospectus. We established a good relationship with him. As a specialist in school photography he had many contacts in local preparatory schools. It seemed sensible to bring him into our internal market in the hope that he might be a good carrier of news about Bruford.

As a matter of course the mini-prospectus was included in any letter sent to a first-time contact of the school. Annual requests to local employers for work-experience placements for our students, for example, were always accompanied by a copy. Estate agents in the town also took them for distribution to clients with children of school age. By this means we reached a wide cross-section of our most local external markets.

Mobilising the supporters' club

The fourth part of the consultant's Critical and Urgent external
marketing programme was to set up the Friends of Bruford. This was not a task for the headteacher. To attract the loyalty and support of parents, the leader of such a group should not be seen to hold office through position power (Handy & Aitken, 1986) such as a headteacher has. What is required is the personal power which leads to the support of others who identify with the aims of the group or organisation. A parent seemed the obvious choice, as other parents would most easily identify with one of their number. It had to be someone in whom parents and governors had confidence and who could also work with me. As my knowledge of the parents was insufficient to suggest a suitable candidate, the Chair of Governors asked a parent-governor to organise the first meetings and act as Chair for the first twelve months. A Secretary and committee were elected from among those parents who attended the inaugural meeting.

Smith (1990) identified some of the unintended consequences which can affect outcomes. One unintentional outcome of this ad hoc election was that the Friends' Committee lacked coherence as a team, despite much hard work by its Secretary. It had not been selected to reflect any particular pattern of skills. Everard and Morris (1985) pointed out the various roles which are needed within an effective team and added that:

"Teams are trained by encouraging them to follow a systematic approach to getting things done" (p132).

Initially only the Secretary appeared to have the time or the necessary skills to focus the approach of the Friends'
committee. It therefore took some time for the group to find its identity, though the Secretary kept it firmly looking to the future by regular communication with the school, and ensured that functions organised had support and input from other parents. The lack of leadership was eventually resolved in 1992 when a capable new parent seemed to have potential as Chair of the Friends. He and his wife were conspicuous by their commitment to the education of their daughters and to the support which they had given to their daughters' previous school. I advised the Secretary of the arrival and apparent abilities of this parent and made sure that he attended the second Annual General Meeting of the Friends in November 1992. He was duly elected.

When faced with the problems of the Friends of Bruford, I experienced a clash of cultural values. Jones (1987) identified four styles of school culture: monarchic (centred on the head as leader), bureaucratic (organised through detailed planning and role allocation), organic (a task culture based on teams) and anarchic (based on each person working as an individual professional). Individual leaders will favour a particular style of management, though Jones (ibid) and Handy (1978) both pointed out that successful leadership requires a mixture of styles, selected according to the needs of any specific situation. My personal preference is for the organic style, but the weak leadership of the Friends prompted me to use a monarchic approach to ensure the election of a strong Chair. Functions arranged by the Friends proved to fulfil both external and internal marketing objectives. They increased the
commitment and enthusiasm of staff and parents, who were perceived to be working together, and they offered opportunities to attract outsiders onto the campus. Once registered, new students and their parents were automatically invited to such occasions as bonfire parties or barn dances, as well as to purely school functions such as carol services or school plays.

**The need for proactive Public Relations**

Weindling and Earley (1987) found that new headteachers thought external relations presented no problems, but Jones (1987), looking at a larger group of headteachers with greater breadth of experience, identified a tendency to overlook the importance of managing the environmental boundaries of the school, a problem noted also by Gaunt (1991) and Cowan (1993b). The Bruford consultant's recommendations indicated the need to manage its external environment more efficiently and effectively. His suggestions covered the use of an external PR expert to help with the placing of newspaper articles and to assist with the prospectus; the building of relationships with outside organisations such as education agencies, relocation companies, and local businesses; more extensive use of the Independent Schools Information Service (ISIS) exhibitions; careful monitoring of the processing and follow-up of parental enquiries to the school; and the installation of a facsimile machine.
Media Relations

We had difficulty finding a suitable PR consultant. The problem was solved by using the school's Secretary to collate items of news which all staff - academic, pastoral, administrative and domestic - were asked to forward to her. A freelance former journalist was employed to advise on distribution. This involved all staff in thinking about the need to promote the school but it was difficult to keep up the momentum and sometimes opportunities were missed. However, liaison with the journalist enabled us to respond promptly to the unexpected, for which we had not budgeted time.

Contacts with the outside world were a major and ongoing focus of our efforts. The marketing consultant considered that it was vital that our local community should have a positive image of the school. Word of mouth is thought to be a powerful force on potential purchasers of any product. Within educational contexts, however, while the views of other parents may be important, the media are not a primary influence on parental choice (Hanford, 1990; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993; West et al, 1995). What cannot be gauged is the subliminal effect of advertising and newspaper articles in establishing or in reinforcing a view, favourable or otherwise, of a school.

ISIS exhibitions

Bruford continued to promote itself at the regional exhibitions organised by ISIS. These occasions also presented a good
opportunity to contact preparatory schools and to find out what competitor schools were doing.

Presentation of an institution in a public exhibition requires a distinctive approach and sophisticated skills (Gray, 1991) and those representing their school on a trade stand must embody and project its ethos (ibid). Bruford's display stand was re-equipped, using photographs and titles to match those in the new Prospectus. ISIS exhibitions were usually attended by a member of the Senior Management Team or a long-serving teacher with good PR skills and/or the Registrar. Bearing in mind the importance of the headteacher in any public relations programme (Devlin & Knight, 1990), I tried to attend at least part of as many exhibitions as possible. Governor support was always welcome, particularly from parent-governors: that they valued the school sufficiently to devote so much time to its welfare carried an implicit message to prospective parents.

Bruford's attendance at exhibitions, however, seemed to be beneficial more for contact with those preparatory schools which were also represented than for initiating direct contact with prospective parents. Later, from my research findings, this suspicion was to be confirmed (Chapter Five; Chapter Six).

**Maintaining contacts with prospective students**

Suggestions made by the consultant about the processing and follow-up of parental enquiries proved to be standard practice in the school. As a concomitant to my research, a simple
tabular form of notation was introduced, to reveal at a glance the number of enquiries converted into registrations.

Peters (1987) indicated the value of modern technology in maintaining "total customer responsiveness" (p112). Bruford's new facsimile machine was invaluable as an aid to communication. An early example of its usefulness was the registration over an Easter vacation of two sisters, whose school references and applications from Hong Kong came by fax, and whose offer of places travelled back to them by the same means. An unexpected benefit of its installation was the ease with which contacts with the Chair and other governors could be maintained. A procedure adopted for external marketing purposes produced an improvement in internal efficiency and convenience.

**Issues not tackled by the Bruford Marketing Report**

There were two issues which the consultant considered only briefly and one upon which he did not touch at all. They were major areas of concern to me, and were related to internal marketing: staff morale, In-Service Training, and the headteacher's support staff.

**Staffing the curriculum: effects on staff morale**

Dennison (1985) pointed out that contraction of a school brings with it the need to use staff as effectively as possible. All talents must be mobilised. It does not make economic sense to
employ part-time staff to teach anything which could be covered within the expertise of full-time staff. Many Bruford staff were worried, justifiably, about their future at the school. They were aware that the school was overstaffed for its numbers and that the curriculum was overloaded. It included, for example, four modern languages at GCSE, for two of which part-time staff had been employed for very small numbers of students. It was a major task of internal marketing to carry the staff through timetable reforms without loss of confidence.

Stenning (1990) recognised that flexibility, both numerical and financial, in the employment of teachers is likely to be achieved only by a reduction in the core number of them in a school, buttressed by supply staff as need arises. Of the four modern languages offered at Bruford, two continued to be part of the core curriculum of the school and remained within the inclusive fees. The other two were transferred to being charged as extras, and staff to teach them were employed on annual contracts renewable according to the number of children requiring lessons.

Bruford's situation was further complicated by the introduction of the National Curriculum. As an independent school, Bruford was not required by law to follow the National Curriculum. However, in 1991 it was preparing to do so, both in order to ease the transfer of students into and out of the state sector, and also because an impending General Election, had it led to a change of government, might well have seen the National Curriculum summarily imposed on independent schools. It was
sensible to be prepared. In fact, the school's staff wished the students to follow as broad a curriculum as possible and therefore a number of components, including a second foreign language in Year 9, were added to the framework of the National Curriculum. These circumstances compelled a complete review of lesson allocation for all subjects within the timetable for Years 7 to 9 and also affected GCSE choices in Years 10 and 11.

Stenning (1990) hypothesised that a core curriculum, with a narrower scope than heretofore, might well lead to a drastic reduction in staffing levels of full-time, permanent staff in all schools. There was some evidence of this at Bruford, though the main cause of the school's situation was its falling roll.

It proved possible to prune the staffing largely by natural wastage, but it was necessary to negotiate reductions in the number of hours worked by many part-time staff, who consequently saw their incomes decline.

**In-Service Training**

My second anxiety was the absence of a policy, and official budget, for In-Service Training (INSET). Dennison (1985) reasoned that, in a contracting school, working conditions must be such as to maximise commitment and performance and these conditions can only be achieved through professional development of personnel. Staff development was important at Bruford because it contributed to the improvement of the educational 'product' offered to students. Moreover, it ensured
that, in the last resort, staff would be up-to-date in educational thinking and practice and therefore more likely to secure posts elsewhere if their redundancy became unavoidable.

Consequently, increased INSET provision was planned. National Curriculum training was undertaken, through both the local authority and area Ellis Committee meetings (subject-based meetings for staff of independent schools), and close contact was maintained by staff with their subject specialist organisations. As examples, the Science staff availed themselves of day conferences run at low cost by the Association for Science in Education (ASE) and the Careers Teacher was in constant touch with the Independent Schools Careers Organisation (ISCO).

Assessed on the basis of relevance to the school's curriculum and pastoral provision, and matched against it's mission statement, no request for essential training was refused, but courses were carefully selected to avoid duplication. All staff who went on courses wrote a short report on their return, and circulation of these led to sharing of information, which in turn bolstered professional interaction. Housestaff and other non-teaching staff were also included in INSET.

**Support staff for the head**

A third area of difficulty with staffing was the use of clerical staff. The school's Registrar was also the Headteacher's Personal Assistant and the school's Secretary. She had
insufficient time to undertake all the tasks allocated and the problem was compounded by her lack of audio-typing skills. She showed all prospective parents round the school, and during her working hours I often had other commitments, so it was frequently difficult to find time in which to dictate letters to her.

The pressures of this kind of situation force the reappraisal of existing roles (Mortimore, Mortimore & Thomas, 1994). We arranged for Sixth-formers to show parents round but, though they proved popular with parents, they did not always know the answers to more obscure questions and my own subsequent interviews with parents became longer as I dealt with these details. Additionally, there were not enough students to ensure that one was always available to act as guide.

Eventually the existing Secretary took on the Registrar's post full-time and a new Secretary was appointed to run the school office and the Headteacher. This proved to be a successful solution to the problem and also offered the Registrar the chance to concentrate on one job and do it well. Riches (1988) affirmed that managers must re-allocate the responsibilities of support staff to offer different challenges where these are appropriate.

The next stage

As indicated above, considerable changes were made at Bruford
between January 1991 and July 1992. The school's curriculum had been revised, facilities updated, pastoral care reviewed and management structures expanded to empower staff. An all-round, positive marketing approach had been adopted. It was decided to try and assess the impact on Bruford's parents of these recent initiatives. This next stage of the research is described in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

Asking the Customers
Asking The Customers

Wise chieftains often extract from obscure places the critical elements for making the right decision. The key is learning to find the obscure places and to recognize the critical elements. Roberts, p69

The only way to find out from clients how they feel about an organisation is to ask them. During the summer of 1992 I asked all current Bruford parents (67 boarding families, 6 daygirl families), through a questionnaire enquiry, for their views of the school (see Appendix One). This was followed in September by a further survey of 24 new families joining the school then.

In the first part of this chapter, I present the findings from these surveys, in chronological order, referring to them respectively as the first survey and the new parents' survey. In the latter part of the chapter I outline the conclusions which were drawn from the data for the specific purposes of the marketing of Bruford School. This case study, being the study of a singularity (Bassey, 1990b), may not be a valid source from which to generalise. Nevertheless, there could be sufficient similarities between Bruford's situation and that of other small schools to provide some comparison (Bassey, ibid), and reference is made in the text to possible implications for school marketing generally which arise out of the data.

Finally, I indicate how the findings shaped the third, and final, research spiral.
The questionnaire enquiries

The first survey - Summer 1992

75 questionnaires were sent out and 43 were returned; 39 from boarders' families and 4 from daygirls' families (Table 5.1). Despite the fact that separated parents each received their own questionnaire, only one response was received from each family.

This response rate of 57% falls within the average for questionnaire surveys (Kervin, 1992) but the Marketing Group found it disappointing. Questionnaires about matters which are important to the self-interests or well-being of the population sampled can enjoy a response rate as high as 90% (Kervin, ibid) and we had expected Bruford parents to be very concerned about the school. For marketing purposes a high return would have been preferable.

Among the respondents there was a reasonable spread of experience of the school; 7 had had daughters in the school for less than one year, 8 for 1 - 2 years, 17 for 3 - 4 years and 11 for 5 or more years (see Table 5.1). The absence of any daygirls at the top of the school is explained by the fact that Bruford had only started taking daygirls in 1990, therefore most daygirls were still in the younger age groups.

It was of particular value that so many families in the 3 - 4 years category had replied. This included the 'bulge year' of 19 girls in Year 10, whose determination to remain at Bruford
beyond Year 11 was crucial to the school's survival. It was most important to identify any dissatisfying factors expressed within this year group.

Table 5.1 - Length of time at Bruford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boarders</th>
<th>Daygirls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 4 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other schools visited

Bruford parents (Table 5.2) varied in the number of other schools which they had visited before reaching a decision about their final choice for their daughters. This compares with the findings of West (1992a) and MORI/ISIS (1993). The MORI/ISIS survey reported that 34% of parents visited only one school, though the average was two and the proportion of parents visiting three or more schools had increased since 1989.

Among Bruford parents, 10 respondents had visited no school apart from Bruford, 6 respondents had visited one other school, and 11 respondents had visited two other schools. The remaining
16 respondents had visited three or more other schools. However, the MORI/ISIS (1993) figures indicated that parents selecting a boarding school were more likely to have 'shopped around', whereas at Bruford the 10 respondents who had visited no other school were all parents of boarders. This confirmed the generally appreciative response to their welcome expressed by parents through the Bruford Marketing Report (1990).

Table 5.2 - The number of other schools visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of schools</th>
<th>Boarders</th>
<th>Daygirls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than four</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How parents heard about Bruford

Parents were given a list of possible sources of information and asked to recall their first source about Bruford (Table 5.3). 33 out of 43 respondents indicated a single source, of which the main one mentioned (15/33) was recommendation from a previous school. Longstanding local knowledge was the second most frequently mentioned source (7/33). Other sources mentioned included the ISIS handbook (3) and exhibitions (1), other
parents (2) and an education agency (1).

Of the remaining 10 respondents, 8 gave two sources of information. Amongst these sources, 5 respondents included other parents, 5 included ISIS, 4 included a previous school and 2 included local knowledge.

2 respondents could not recall their first point of contact with Bruford.

Table 5.3 - Sources of information about Bruford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Respondents giving factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As sole source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous school</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education agency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS handbook</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other schools guide</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS exhibition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longstanding local knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interesting discovery made from these figures was the influence of a child's previous school on prospective parents. In the MORI/ISIS (1993) survey only a quarter of parents
indicated that information from the preparatory school had influenced them at the start of the selection process, whereas at Bruford 19/43 did so (Table 5.3). The emphasis suggested that contacts between Bruford and its 'feeder schools' might be of great importance. This illustrates the individual nature of the relationship between a school and its particular client group.

The next largest sources of initial information for Bruford parents were informal; either longstanding local knowledge (9/43) or other parents (7/43). Longstanding local knowledge is difficult to define. It ranges from articles in the local press to hearsay around dinner tables. However, despite its vague definition it is a factor which can be influenced by a school. Devlin and Knight (1990), Gray (1991), Foskett (1992) and others have pointed out that schools can develop positive strategies for good public relations, and Jones (1987) believed that the management of the external environment and its boundary with a school is one of the most important tasks of a headteacher.

West (1992a) found that 85% of parents seeking independent education consulted ISIS or at least its guide book(s). The MORI/ISIS survey (1993) indicated that 29% of parents had made reference to either its national or regional handbooks: such parents were more likely to be looking for a boarding school. The Bruford research offers only one sample population, and it would be inappropriate to make sweeping generalisations from it (Bassey, 1990b), but only 16% (7/43) parents mentioned ISIS guidebooks and only 4.7% (2/43) had used ISIS exhibitions as a
starting point for finding a school. This implies that ISIS was not a good direct source of students for Bruford, though it may have had value as a secondary source.

What made them choose Bruford?

In Section 2 of the questionnaire, parents were asked to consider a number of factors which might have influenced their choice of school. The factors were selected after consideration of the Bruford Marketing Report (1990), which had identified some areas of importance to Bruford parents and potential parents, and also of the work of Fox (1985) and Hanford (1990). Parents were asked to indicate how influential those factors had been on their perceptions of schools (see Table 5.4). Factors were rated on the scale 1 - 6, with 1 indicating the lowest level of importance and 6 indicating maximum importance.

Most of the factors included were rated between 4 and 6 by the respondents (Table 5.4). Their responses indicated clearly the importance of subjective factors in the first impressions made on them. It was the people-related areas which scored most highly. Comparison with other studies (Johnson & Ransom, 1980; Elliott, 1981; Hanford, 1990; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; West et al, 1993) shows that Bruford parents shared similar perspectives on school choice with other parents.
Table 5.4 - Factors influencing the choice of Bruford parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance of campus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-sex school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of uniform</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses offered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence/academic staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral care/housestaff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headteacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at weekends:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist teaching facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential accommodation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils' behaviour</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education prospects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press/media reports</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions of other parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local grapevine</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial contacts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own daughter's opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 43
A school's ethos is the crucial intangible which it must identify and manage (Rushton & Carson, 1985) in order to attract students. 21/43 respondents indicated specifically that Bruford's ethos was one of the most important direct factors on them, and other factors related to the ethos of Bruford were most likely to have been rated 6 (most important) in parental choice. Both the quality of the staff and the behaviour of the students contribute to a school's ethos. Key influences on parental perceptions of Bruford's ethos included the headteacher (29/43), initial contacts with the school (29/42), the pupils' behaviour (26/43) and the housestaff (23/43).

Choice factors for parents specifically selecting independent schools have shown emphasis on well-behaved students, together with good academic results, the encouragement of a responsible attitude to work and the reputation of the school (Hight, 1969; Fox, 1985; MORI/ISIS, 1993). All these factors appeared also to have been important to the Bruford parents when they made their choice.

Location can be an important factor affecting parental choice (Adler & Raab, 1988; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993; West et al, 1993; see also Appendix Three). However, research into location has concentrated on day schools. The parents in the Bruford first survey were largely parents of boarders. 30/43 of the Bruford parents placed location high among their priorities and 10/43 gave it top rating for importance. This supports the "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1967, p6) of boarding school heads that distance from home has become a greater consideration for
parents of boarders in recent years. MORI/ISIS (1993) found nearness to home important for 52% of parents, which represented an increase of 6% on the 1989 findings but unfortunately their surveys did not segment responses to show the boarding/day split so it is not possible to see if distance was equally important to parents of boarders and parents of day students.

According to some researchers, children's views are influential in guiding parental choice of schools. Webster, Owen and Crome (1993) found that 80% of parents in their survey had taken into account their children's views when choosing a secondary school. In West et al's (1995) survey 99% of parents had discussed the choice with their child. At Bruford, 38/43 respondents placed importance on their daughter's opinion, with 19/43 respondents giving it maximum priority. It would have been useful to have more direct knowledge of the students' views and the factors which may have influenced them. For ethical reasons (see Chapter Three), Bruford students were not involved in the survey, but I regret that it was not possible to ask them.

**Strength of feelings about particular factors**

Dennison (1990) pointed out that decision-making about the allocation of resources will be inefficient if it is not based on information about performance. In the Bruford survey, factors rated only 1, 2 or 3 in Table 5.4 were obviously of lesser importance to parents than factors rated 4, 5 or 6. I looked at these lower ratings carefully to see if Bruford might be emphasising any aspect in its marketing campaign which was
really not important to parents and on which we could therefore spend less in terms of time or resources. If 10 or more respondents (i.e. at least a quarter of the sample) rated any factor at 3 or below, I rejected it as an important influence on parental choice. It seemed unlikely that 10 or more respondents sharing a view could be a statistical accident. Factors which emerged in this category included the location of the school (11/43 parents rated this at 3 or less), its single-sex nature (11/43), academic results (11/43), sports facilities (12/43), the opinions of other parents (16/43), the level of fees (19/43), press/media reports (33/43), and the local grapevine (25/43).

On reflection, I realised that none of these things could be regarded as being of lesser importance. The location of the school was not, in any case, susceptible of change, but I suspected that even apparent disregard of the local grapevine or the opinions of other parents might well be a myth. Parents cannot avoid being influenced by what they hear even if they do not consciously recall where they heard it.

Parental perceptions change over time (Cowan, 1993b; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994). Parents' responses elsewhere in this section of the questionnaire, and in the two succeeding sections, suggested that academic results, the level of fees, and sports facilities, while they may not appear to matter to parents who are selecting a school initially, develop in importance once their child has become a student within it. Those parents who thought they rated these factors as less
significant were, in any case, balanced by the number of other parents placing higher value on them.

**How had Bruford matched up to parental expectations?**

Section 3 of the questionnaire asked parents how Bruford's current performance matched their expectations. Their responses to 23 factors are shown in Table 5.5.

Although most of the factors listed in this section were the same as in Section 2 some, for obvious reasons, were changed. For example, instead of being asked about initial contacts with Bruford, parents were asked to evaluate the quality of liaison between school and parents. Previous references to press/media reports, the prospectus, and the local grapevine were aggregated into a single factor: the public image of the school. Additional factors were also included for consideration, such as provision of medical care, school food and school rules. As pastoral care at Bruford was shared by housestaff and academic tutors, the parents were asked to evaluate it under two headings: the overall quality of care and, specifically, the quality of the housestaff. New or altered factors are marked in Table 5.5 with an asterisk *.

Table 5.5 registers levels of satisfaction, with column 1 indicating those respondents who found provision unsatisfactory and column 6 showing those who found the provision entirely acceptable.
Table 5.5 - Parents' responses to Bruford's current performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of uniform</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses offered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Quality of academic staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Overall pastoral care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Quality of housestaff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headteacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at weekends:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist teaching facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential accommodation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pupils' behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Public image of the school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Liaison between school and parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Medical care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School rules</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates a new factor, or one renamed.

N = 43
The figures in Table 5.5 suggested a high overall level of satisfaction with the school, both in terms of the academic curriculum and its delivery and also in terms of the accommodation and extra-curricular activities offered. The ethos, public image of the school, and school/parent liaison were generally approved. The positive image of careers guidance was particularly impressive as the teacher in charge of careers had only taken on this responsibility in the term prior to the despatch of the questionnaire. Many younger girls and their parents could have had no experience of her work. Word of mouth amongst the senior girls about the new teacher's approach must have been positive. A comparison with Table 5.6 suggests that this may have been the case.

Personal anxiety about the school's future led me to focus on those factors which were causing serious parental dissatisfaction. These included the sports facilities, the uniform and the size of the school.

Bruford's sports facilities were adequate for the curriculum, but the gymnasium was over 20 years old and the same hall was also used for drama, morning assemblies and other whole-school meetings. The school did not possess and could not afford to build its own swimming pool, though the local town had generous provision for leisure activities, including a swimming pool which the students used for recreation, and another independent school nearby allowed Bruford to use its pool for swimming lessons. Almost half the respondents (20/41) who expressed an opinion about this factor thought that these facilities were
Uniform is often an emotive issue (Boyson, 1974; Chapman, 1993; Morgan, 1993). Bruford's uniform had been a source of discontent for some time, being mentioned in the Bruford Marketing Report (1990). At the time of the survey the school was transferring students from the old style to the new style and their appearance was somewhat varied. 4/42 respondents who commented on the uniform indicated maximum dissatisfaction with uniform and 20/42 were less than happy with the students' appearance.

The Plowden Report (1967) suggested that smaller schools might be restricted in their strategies by their size, though good pupil progress and successful curriculum development can be related positively to small schools (Mortimore et al, 1988; Vulliamy & Webb, 1995). However, parental confidence must be retained, particularly if a school is contracting (Dennison, 1985). In the Bruford Marketing Report (1990), Bruford parents were beginning to register disquiet about the declining size of the school, so 4 respondents also expressing unhappiness about this came as no surprise. Views became clearer still in the final section of the questionnaire (see Table 5.6), which focussed on how parents' views had changed since their daughters had been at Bruford.

High standards of discipline appear to be important to parents selecting independent schools (Highet, 1976; Fox, 1985; Griffiths, 1991; West 1992a; MORI/ISIS, 1993). At Bruford a
small groundswell of objection to pupil's behaviour was indicated (5/41). This was mystifying. Students who overstepped Bruford's rules on, for example, alcohol and smoking had been firmly dealt with and parental support had been quickly expressed for its policies. Possibly the problem of uniform may have been linked to perceptions about discipline, for the students' appearance could have been seen as a pointer to their attitudes to the school and to standards of discipline.

Competent, sympathetic medical care is essential for students, particularly in boarding schools (Morgan, 1993). Medical care at Bruford was a further area with which some parents were unimpressed, with 2/42 rating its care at minimum satisfaction level and 7/42 feeling it could be better. Parental perception of the housestaff could also have been more positive, for 9/42 were less than content. Negative views here were traceable to staffing problems.

Food "... is clearly a key welfare issue" (Morgan, 1993, p25). The figures about food in Table 5.5 seem to include some dissatisfaction, though balanced by general approval from the majority. However, parents who actually participated in school meals (occasionally at very short notice, therefore receiving no special diet or concessions), almost without exception departed expressing fulsome praise for what they had eaten. Food is, literally, so much a matter of taste!

Headteachers are vital points of contact with parents, being "... the most important influence on them" (Webster, Owen &
Crome, 1993, p87) and perceived as "... the experts in all aspects of the life and work of their schools" (Bernbaum, 1976, p17). It is therefore important for a school's marketing that parents should have good working relationships with the head. 4/42 respondents were less than happy with the headteacher. Although this might have been of concern, responses in the final section (Table 5.6) showed that most respondents were either equally happy with, or actively preferred, my management style to that of my predecessor.

Were we getting any better?

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate Bruford's performance specifically within the 18 months that I had been headteacher (Table 5.6). Parents were asked about the same 23 factors as for Section 3. These factors were listed in a different order in the questionnaire but for comparison with Table 5.5 are given in the same order here. Parents were requested to say if they thought Bruford was doing worse, the same, or better, than in the past.

In previous Sections, most parents had made a response to all questions and there were virtually no nil returns. In this last Section there were more nil returns so I have included them also. I found it strange that parents were able to express a view on such matters as medical care in Section 3 but did not feel able to evaluate whether or not there had been a change in their perceptions within recent months. It is one of the disadvantages of a questionnaire enquiry that such points cannot
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Better</th>
<th>Nil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fees</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of uniform</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses offered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of academic staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall pastoral care of girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of housestaff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headteacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at weekends:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist teaching facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential accommodation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pupils' behaviour</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public image of the school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison between school and parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School food</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School rules</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 43
be followed up with supplementary questions.

The two areas of greatest dissatisfaction to parents were obviously the size of the school (17/43) and the level of fees (10/43). The number of students in the school had declined steadily since many parents had selected it and anxieties about its viability were entirely justified.

Section 4 responses to the questionnaire showed an improvement in parental opinion about many areas in which staff had been making strong efforts since January 1991. A particular focus had been school/home liaison, with half-termly newsletters, more invitations to parents to attend functions at Bruford, and the formation of the Friends of Bruford. 27/41 parents replying noted these efforts with approval and many (22/39) also indicated a preference for the management style of the new headteacher. Another factor noted with approval was the new uniform, which for 21/40 respondents appeared to have created a more positive image, possibly as a result of students' involvement in its selection.

The school's public image (18/39), weekend activities (16/39), rules (15/40), food (13/40) and careers' guidance (13/37) had also been received positively.

Comparison of results

Parents' perceptions of schools change over time (Cowan, 1993b; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994). To enable comparison of year
groups, the results in Sections Three and Four were
crosstabulated by year, to see if there were any areas in which
changes of view could be detected. The Marketing Group was
particularly anxious about the 'bulge' year containing 17
respondents whose daughters had been in the school 3 - 4 years
(Table 5.7). Their imminent decisions about post-compulsory
education had the potential to affect Burford's viability profoundly.

This group of parents had noted improvements in academic courses
offered (5/16), overall pastoral care of girls (5/17), rules
(5/17), careers guidance (6/17), food (7/17), the public image
of the school (7/17), and the style of the uniform (8/17). On
these factors other respondents were, in the main, neutral. Even
more positive responses were registered about weekend
extra-curricular activities (9/17), the headteacher (10/17) and
liaison between school and parents (12/17). Interestingly, these
more positive feelings did not influence the views of most of
them about the school's ethos, which for 13/17 remained the
same. As within the survey sample as a whole, the size of the
school was the strongest dissatisfier with this group of parents
(8/17), which constituted nearly half of all those unhappy with
the size of the school. Fee-levels (4/17) were also a matter of
concern to them. The implications of these final facts were
worrying, as the school was unlikely to be able to replace
students lost from amongst this group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of uniform</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses offered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of academic staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall pastoral care of girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of housestaff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headteacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at weekends:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist teaching facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential accommodation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pupils' behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public image of the school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison between school and parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School food</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School rules</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 17
In September 1992 the daughters of 24 new families entered Bruford, most of them registered for entry in the preceding 12 months. Wishing to see if they been influenced in their choice of school by similar factors to those which had been important to current parents, I asked the new parents to complete the first two sections of the questionnaire immediately upon arrival. Asking them at the start of their daughter's school life at Bruford had the advantage that they lacked the perspective of time to colour their perceptions of the school. Not only had they had little opportunity to forget their original criteria for selecting a school, but also most had no family connection with Bruford and would therefore be bringing a fresh perspective to the school, uninfluenced by its past.

24 questionnaires were despatched, all to different families i.e. there were no 'split' families. After some prompting through the school's newsletters, 15 questionnaires were returned (see Table 5.8): 8 from boarding families, 6 from daygirl families and one with a nil return on that question! 9 students were new into Year 7, 4 into Year 10, and there were single admissions into Years 8, 9 and 12, two with sisters in Year 7. There were no new students in either Year 11 or Year 13. One boarding student's parents did not know her year group.
Table 5.8 - New parents' survey responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year group of student</th>
<th>Boarders</th>
<th>Daygirls</th>
<th>D/B status not given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>1 (sister)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (sister)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 15 (i.e. 15 families; 17 children)

As in the first survey, parents varied in the number of other schools which they had visited before reaching a decision (Table 5.9). 5 respondents (2 daygirl, 3 boarder) had visited no other schools, 2 respondents had visited one other school, and 4 respondents had visited two other schools. The remaining 4 respondents had visited four or more other schools. As before (see Table 5.2), some families had been prepared to register their daughters on the basis of seeing only one school.

Table 5.9 - The number of other schools visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of schools</th>
<th>Boarders</th>
<th>Daygirls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than four</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 15
How they heard about Bruford

Table 5.10 indicates how the new parents had first heard about Bruford. Parents again mentioned the influence of the previous school (3/15) or of longstanding local knowledge (4/15) as either their first source of information or one of two initial sources. Other sources were less frequently mentioned: other parents (2); agencies (2, both for overseas students); ISIS handbook (1); ISIS exhibitions (2, both from the most local exhibition); 2 respondents had had relatives at the school; and 1 had first had contact through a charity concert given by the school. Four responses listed more than one source of information.

Table 5.10 - Sources of information about Bruford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Respondents giving factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As sole source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education agency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS handbook</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other schools guide</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS exhibition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longstanding local knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variations between the first survey (see Table 5.3) and the new parents' survey (Table 5.10) show how client groups can vary from year to year.

What the new parents had looked for

Although small in itself, and both smaller and of different composition to the previous sample of parents, this group of parents offered responses which presented an interesting comparison with the figures obtained previously. Table 5.11 shows the factors which had influenced their choice of school.

Reaction to most factors was similar in both surveys. However, the second sample of parents seemed more polarised in favour of single-sex schools (10/15 rating this factor at 5 or 6). This may have been due to a greater level of public debate about the academic value of single-sex education for girls (Burgess, 1990; Hymas & Nelson, 1992; Clare, 1993; Jefferson, 1993; O'Leary, 1993) or a reaction prompted by media reports about co-educational boarding schools and their policies for girls (Staples, Iliff & Salmon, 1992; Torode, 1993). It could also just be a chance result.

One third (7/15) of the respondents in the new parents' survey indicated that the level of fees was an important influence on their choice. This was a much higher proportion than in the previous sample group (14/43), though hardly surprising at a time of national recession and financial pressures.
Table 5.11 - Factors influencing the new parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance of campus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-sex school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fees</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of uniform</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses offered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos of school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence/academic staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral care/housestaff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headteacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
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<td>at weekends:</td>
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<td>Opinions of other parents</td>
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</table>

N = 15

- 191 -
There was a lower level of concern (4/15) compared with the first survey (24/43) about academic results but a greater interest in academic courses offered (11/15 compared with 25/43). Bruford was introducing vocational education for sixth-formers at that time (Dean, 1993) and parents, including new parents, were given considerable information about this development.

Residential accommodation (5/14 respondents) was of lesser importance to the newest parents, compared with the earlier survey (25/43). Almost half of the total intake of new students to Bruford in 1992 was daygirls, which had increased the number of daygirls to about 15% of the school's total population. Crosstabulation of the results by daygirl/boarder revealed that the wider spread of responses to the factor of residential accommodation was a reflection of the larger daygirl component in the new parents' survey.

However, many of the single responses at the lowest level of importance (level 1) to factors which were usually of greater importance to most boarding families came from a boarding family, which had made its decision based almost entirely on the prospectus and their daughter's perceptions of it. This drew attention to the need to look at marketing from the various viewpoints of all potential parents, including those from overseas, as advocated by Hart (1985), and also to the value of producing an attractive prospectus which could appeal both to potential parents and to potential students.
How did Bruford match their expectations?

After two terms, all the new families were asked to complete the third section of the questionnaire, to see how the school had matched their expectations. To my great regret, and despite further prompting through the school's newsletters, only 10/24 families eventually completed the final section, giving the slightest of statistical pointers (Table 5.12). This may well have been due to the timing of its dispatch, as it was sent out at the end of the spring term, which coincided with the Easter holidays, overlooking Kervin's (1992) advice to avoid holiday times.

Despite the small size of the response, it gave an indication that the newest parents were generally happy with the school. Most responses were rated 4, 5 or 6, i.e. at the higher levels of approval, while the responses below 3 were sparse. This was not surprising, because the most recent arrivals were likely to have found the closest fit between what they had been looking for in a school, the school they had finally chosen, and what the school was like six months after their child arrived (Cowan, 1993b; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994). The Bruford Marketing Report (1990) had indicated that Bruford was usually popular with new arrivals. Disenchantment, if it set in, came later.
Table 5.12 - New parents' responses to Bruford's current performance

<table>
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<td>Style of uniform</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>*Quality of academic staff</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Overall pastoral care</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Quality of housestaff</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the week:</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>at weekends:</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist teaching facilities</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>The pupils' behaviour</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Public image of the school</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Liaison between school and parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Medical care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School food</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School rules</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N = 10
Responses to a few factors were biased towards lower levels of satisfaction: level of fees; size and location of the school; the quality of housestaff; weekday and weekend extra-curricular activities; and school food; but the new parents were, on the whole, happier with the size of the school than the longer-standing parents who had seen its size decline.

Crosstabulation of results by daygirl/boarder revealed that the single incidences of dissatisfaction with extra-curricular activities were from different families, one boarding and one daygirl, and the two apparent problems with housestaff were from daygirls in different age-groups which therefore involved different housestaff. There were no other differences between responses from daygirl and from boarder families: the spread of responses appeared to be similar.

Conclusions drawn from the findings

The findings of any case study apply to the singularity under scrutiny (Bassey, 1991a). The data from the Bruford questionnaires applies only to Bruford. However, comparison of findings from one case study can sometimes open up critical perspectives on others (Stenhouse, 1985b). Some of the conclusions which emerged from the Bruford enquiry may have general marketing implications for educational institutions: others are more situation specific. They are discussed below in that order. Finally I indicate the personal conclusions which I drew from the exercise, and the effect which the findings had on
the final spiral of research.

Factors affecting parental choice of Bruford

The indication by parents that preparatory schools were a major source of initial recommendation to Bruford prompted the thought that preparatory schools' influence on parental choice might be greater than surveys such as MORI/ISIS (1993) have found. Bruford needed to explore its client base more fully, and the next spiral of the research was therefore planned to establish the strength of its feeder schools' influence.

Variation in results from the two different surveys of Bruford's parents revealed that a change in Bruford's population, i.e. the increase in daygirls, was affecting responses. Residential accommodation, for example, was declining in importance, whereas there seemed to be growing concern about the actual academic courses offered. Client groups were changing and required regular monitoring to ensure that alterations were noted and that educational provision was amended as needed (Cowan, 1993b; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994).

Both Bruford surveys produced examples of individual boarding families which had had no chance to visit the school before placing their daughter in it. This drew clear attention to the need to look at marketing with the eyes of all potential parents, and to provide as much information as possible by means other than personal contact. Furthermore, both surveys
supported the MORI/ISIS findings (1989; 1993) that some families register their child for admission after a visiting only one school. Bearing in mind the crucial importance of the earliest contacts with families, and that a proportion of parents might be prepared to make a decision on the occasion of their first visit, the decision was taken at Bruford to make the Registrar's job full-time so that she could concentrate on communications with prospective parents and feeder schools (see Chapter Four).

Over the question of handbooks, the Bruford results indicated that schools guides were rarely used by parents, at least as initial sources of information. It followed that, at least for Bruford, advertising in such publications would have been an unwise allocation of the school's resources. This confirmed the good sense of our earlier decision to concentrate on free media publicity through regular press releases.

In this case study, the overwhelming importance to prospective parents of subjective factors such as the school's ethos, pastoral care, pupils' behaviour and the headteacher made it difficult for Bruford to direct a specific marketing focus. A similar situation may arise in other schools. All parents will perceive these factors in different ways. The intangibility of the product, and the heterogeneity of the clients, make a focus problematic (Gray, 1991). At Bruford, the solution to this problem was to try and promote a coherent ethos and to reflect it in all aspects of school life. Only if all staff contribute to school policy, and reflect by their words and actions a commitment to this common policy, will parents have a clear
basis for their value judgments (Davies & Ellison, 1991). Starting with the school's mission statement, standards and ways of dealing with students and parents were developed and agreed by all staff (see Chapter Four), so that they had ownership of the concepts involved (Fullan, 1992).

Maintaining customer satisfaction

In the commercial world, sales decline when a product has been available for some time. This appears to be mirrored in the world of education, where, as students and their parents become more familiar with institutions, and as the students mature, they become less happy with their school or college (Cowan, 1993b; Hughes, Wikeley & Nash, 1994). At Bruford, the new parents' survey indicated clearly that new parents were very happy with the school they had chosen. However, the first survey and the original Bruford Marketing Report (1990) both indicated that older students and longer-established families were not all still equally enthusiastic about the school. Different provision was required to tune in with their altered perceptions. Bruford staff were already reviewing the sixth-form curriculum, and this culminated in the introduction of a vocational course, linked to careers guidance and the development of Information Technology skills, alongside traditional academic courses in September 1993. However, the impact of this on student and parental views was not tested.

The most difficult aspect of parental discontent to solve was
dissatisfaction with staff. Some parents were unhappy with the medical care. The first survey showed that parental perception of the housestaff at Bruford could also have been more positive. To achieve client satisfaction, effective marketing requires the application of agreed policy at all client interfaces (Kotler, 1994) and for all staff to take responsibility for good relationships with clients (Wilce, 1995). As an example, the Bruford housestaff were invited to consider why some parents were not happy with the quality of housestaff. They identified inconsistencies in their operation of routines and systems and established a new framework within which to work. This also addressed to some extent parental anxieties about discipline, which was maintained more equably.

These outcomes emphasise the importance of staff appointments, and also of appraisal and training. Staff may need support to develop their strengths, counselling to achieve their potential, or general encouragement to find a squarer hole elsewhere (Higginbotham, 1989).

Positive perceptions of parents

A number of research surveys have found the headteacher to be an important figure in parental perceptions of schools. Webster, Owen and Crome (1993), for example, highlighted the headteacher's role in communicating the school's image, achievements and objectives. Interpersonal relationships between heads and prospective parents are a vital marketing point for a school (ibid). Parents seemed, on the whole, to be
happy with my management style. The Marketing Group hoped that this was the outcome of improved school/home liaison. In particular the newsletters, which were written as direct correspondence to parents, may have been important in projecting both my style and the school's image. Clearly, heads must be proactive in managing the external environment of their schools (Fidler, 1989).

Though parents of Bruford's Year 10 and Year 11 students had noted changes in the school which they registered as improvements, their views of its ethos were largely unaltered. Some length of time may be needed for people to grasp the fact that change is fundamental and not merely transitory or cosmetic.

School uniform had not been a strong factor in parental choice of Bruford by respondents in the first survey (Table 5.4), but once their daughters had become students in the school, parents were not enthusiastic about the uniform (Table 5.5), though apparently they felt that changes to it were an improvement (Table 5.6). The changeover period (April 1991 - September 1993) for the new uniform had created a student population of piebald appearance, which may have affected parental opinions. The new parents' survey showed some improvement in perceptions, possibly because the intake of new students in September 1992, all of whom were wearing the complete new uniform, contributed to a smarter image for the school.

A few respondents in each survey were unhappy with the food.
However, one of the preparatory heads interviewed (see Chapter Six) praised the Bruford 'match teas' (Mr Paul, Traherne Court), so the school's reputation for culinary excellence was carried outside Bruford by contemporaries of the students at the same time as a few of them seemed to be expressing dissatisfaction to their parents. Disliking school food is a tradition, fuelled by stories from the past, both fact and fiction (Morgan, 1993). High standards of catering may not be noticed or appreciated.

Both Bruford surveys revealed some parental unhappiness with sports facilities. There were limitations, physically and financially, on solutions to this problem.

Both surveys also revealed some dissatisfaction with fee levels. Compared with other boarding schools in the area, Bruford's fees were modest. They undercut the nearest small girls' day/boarding school by a few pounds per term, though Bruford was not directly competitive financially with local independent day schools which had lower termly fees and offered Assisted Places (BMR, 1990). Balanced against this, however, was the longer working day and the evening and weekend activities which all Bruford students, day and boarding, were able to pursue. Parents seeking an extended day or the facility of occasional boarding for their day-student daughter were getting as good value with Bruford as was possible with any other school within travelling distance. Parental perception here seemed to focus on an instrumental comparison of fees in cash terms, taking no account of value for money.
Bruford had shrunk in size since many parents had selected it, i.e. from 150 students to just under 100 within the preceding seven years, and parents' anxieties about its viability were justified. On the other hand, this was producing the positive, if unsought, benefits of individual attention in small classes (Gray, 1991).

Bearing in mind parental views on the fee levels and the size of the school, the final obvious conclusion to be drawn was the need for a hard look at the long-term viability of Bruford.

**Personal conclusions**

All but one of the Bruford respondents had involved their children to some extent in the final choice of secondary schooling and for 19/43 respondents maximum importance was ascribed to their daughter's opinion. I did not involve the students in my survey because I thought that their answers might be influenced by the fact that I was their headteacher, though I recognised that many of them would be consulted by their parents as they completed the questionnaire. Students have insights to contribute to ways in which their school constrains, or can support, their learning (Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996) and I regret that it was inappropriate to involve them directly. More research is needed into student perceptions of schools and into how and why these change over time.

On reflection, I think I should have sent Section 3 (for views
of current performance) of the survey to all parents in 1993. A comparison with the new parents and the rest might have been interesting if both had been sampled together, so that any further change in perceptions of the latter could have been identified at the same time.

Finally, I learned from the responses to the final mailing of the new parents' survey a salutary lesson about timing. It is better to send out such a questionnaire when the school is in session so that personal encouragement can be given to parents to respond promptly.

The next spiral

In September 1992, after the first survey had been completed and analysed, the Marketing Group reviewed the findings and considered the way forward.

There was still a pressing need for Bruford to attract more students. As this chapter shows, internal marketing strategies had been surveyed and they seemed to be generally satisfactory. Current clients of some years' standing, though not totally happy with all aspects of the school, were becoming happier with it, and the most recent arrivals were largely content. As indicated in Chapter Four and in this chapter, internal marketing continued to be addressed, in response both to the parental views expressed via the questionnaires and also as the result of staff and student initiatives.
Some assessment of perspectives of Bruford from outside the school now appeared necessary. Having found from the questionnaire responses that the students' previous schools had often first alerted potential parents to the existence of Bruford, the appropriate direction for the next spiral of the research seemed to be to focus on the ways in which preparatory schools might influence the choices of their current parents. Consequently I sought interviews with preparatory school headteachers. Findings from this enquiry appear in the following chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

Interviewing Preparatory School Heads
CHAPTER SIX

Interviewing Preparatory School Heads

A wise chieftain never asks a question for which he
doesn't want to hear the answer. Roberts, p101

As a sizeable number (19/43) of the Bruford parents claimed that they had first heard of Bruford through their daughter's preparatory school, it seemed reasonable to try to discover what advice parents might receive at these schools and the basis on which that advice was being given. The contact with the preparatory schools which this required also served the needs of professional practice, helping me, as head of Bruford, to make closer contact with some of Bruford's actual or potential feeder schools.

Preparatory schools have not been the subject of much research (see Chapter Two) and the paucity of literature on these schools, together with their individual diversity, makes their world remote to those who have not personally experienced it. Because this sector of education is not well known, the first section of this chapter sets in some detail the institutional context of the headteachers' interviews, presenting comparisons between the schools in respect of their populations, location and other factors which might influence the perceptions of the heads.

The second section considers the factors mentioned by the heads as being, in their view, likely to affect the transfer of
students from their schools into secondary education. The last part of this section outlines their views of Bruford.

Finally, the conclusions drawn from this chapter about the relationships between preparatory and secondary independent schools are summarised and show how they led to the final phase of the research which follows in Chapter Seven.

A full list of schools and details about them and their headteachers can be found in Appendix Two. A list of the main topic areas covered is given in Appendix Four and the full texts of two interviewees' responses are reproduced in Appendix Four. The historic background to transfer procedures in independent schools is given in Appendix Six.

**The schools**

It is important to set social science enquiries in their context (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Preparatory schools are independent (i.e. private) primary schools. Most of them now offer provision for children aged from 2 or 3 years of age up to either 11 (day schools) or 12/13 (boarding schools). "Pre-prep" departments cater for the younger age groups (up to age 7/8) and the main "Prep" departments are for the older children.

The diversity of provision offered within preparatory schools makes it difficult to generalise about them, or to select a 'typical' school or group of schools. The 18 schools selected
therefore cannot be taken as representative, either of the total prep school population or of Bruford's feeder schools. The schools' common attribute was their relationship to Bruford. They were selected from among the population of schools which offered possible sources of students and were chosen to represent the widest possible client base for Bruford.

The schools as organisations can be classified in many different ways: by intake profile, administrative divisions, provision of places by gender, day/boarding provision, location, catchment, the final destinations of students, foundation and headteacher profile.

Intake profiles and administrative divisions

The schools ranged in size from 52 to 440 students. Generally the smaller schools were organised as one unit, while the larger ones were sub-divided into pre-prep (pupils aged up to 7 or 8) and prep (pupils over the age of 7 or 8) departments. The largest (Wordsworth) and the smallest (Shelley) were both girls' day schools, but the next largest (Lord Byron School) and the next smallest (Middleton) were both co-educational boarding schools.

Since 1984 the number of students in preparatory schools has more than doubled (Dean, 1995), and much of this increase has come through expansion in nursery provision. ISIS surveys (1991; 1994) revealed an increase of nearly 11% in under-fives in schools belonging to the Incorporated Association of
Preparatory Schools (IAPS) over that three-year period. Advice on pre-preparatory provision has been shared by teachers through IAPS for a much longer period (Langton, 1977; Boucher, 1983; Bowles, 1983; IAPS, 1994). The age at which students were admitted to the sample schools varied but all of them except Middleton admitted children (though not boarders) below the age of 5 years. For eleven of the eighteen schools the youngest age for admission was 3+ and for one school it was 2+. The minimum age for boarders was 6 (Chesterfield, Middleton) or older. Middleton was the only school to delay all admissions to the age of 6, and this was a minimum age: 7 or even 8 was more usual. The head, Mr Thomas, saw Middleton as an all-boarding school (86 of 90 students boarded) and felt children should not board below that age.

Purves (1993), commenting as a parent, pointed out that teachers tend to forget that parents do not always understand educational jargon. An interesting variation in terminology appeared at Shakespeare, which was the most recently founded of all the schools in the sample. Its founder-head (Mrs Arden) had elected to use the terms "Infant" and "Junior" rather than "Pre-prep" and "Prep". These could be more instantly comprehensible to her prospective parents, particularly first-time buyers of independent education, because they relate directly to the contemporary usage in state-provided primary schools with which parents may be more familiar. Other day schools such as Harris and Gaskell retained traditional independent school usage for older students, but were two of the three schools using "nursery" to define the classes for their youngest students. At
one (Hatton Park) the term "kindergarten" was used for this group.

Table 6.1 - Student numbers and administrative divisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Total Nos.</th>
<th>Administrative Divisions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>Pre-prep (4 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer</td>
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<td>Prep (3 - 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 6) Prep (7 - 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell</td>
<td>147</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>Nursery (3) Pre-prep (4 - 7) Prep (8 - 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>170</td>
<td>Kindergarten (3) Prep (4 - 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawkins Jnr</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Byron</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>Prep (4 - 13)</td>
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<td>Masefield</td>
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<td>Prep (4 - 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Prep (6 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hall</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>Nursery (2 - 4) Infants (5 - 7) Junior (7 - 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Prep (4 - 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Prep (4 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson Hse</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traherne Ct</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>Pre-prep (3 - 7) Prep (8 - 11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provision of places by gender

Co-education has always been more common in preparatory schools
than at secondary level (Walford, 1993) and the further trend in this direction has been an underlying pattern for some years (ibid). In 1985, a joint HMC/IAPS committee found that, of the responding IAPS schools, only 18 had been "fully co-educational" (HMC/IAPS, 1985, p2) before 1970, but the figure had risen to 130 by 1985. 'Fully co-educational' was taken by HMC to be schools with at least 25% girls, though it could be argued that the term is used, at best, loosely if 75% of students are male. By 1985, of the total of 561 IAPS schools, 290 were thought to be co-educational to some degree (HMC/IAPS, 1985). The 1993 Independent Schools Yearbook (Harries, 1993) listed 521 IAPS schools in the United Kingdom (including Ireland), of which 303 were co-educational. That figure does not include all those girls' preparatory schools which also offered education to boys up to the age of 8, but it does include a number of schools where the female population was less than 25%. Despite this expansion in co-educational provision, however, the MORI/ISIS (1993) research into parental choice showed that, since 1989, there had been an overall increase from 53% to 56% in the number of children at independent secondary schools whose preparatory school had been single-sex.

Table 6.2 indicates division by gender within my sample of schools. Amongst Bruford's feeder preparatory schools, provision for girls only was rare. Gaskell had been a single-sex girls' school but recently, for financial reasons, it had become co-educational. At Harris the school consisted of two separate junior departments for boys and for girls, though their nursery and pre-prep sections were co-educational. Seven
of the other co-educational preparatory schools were originally boys-only schools, which had diversified their markets in recent years by admitting girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Boys (Age)</th>
<th>Girls (Age)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td>Boys 3 - 8, Girls 3 - 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>Boys 3 - 6, Girls 3 - 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(except at top of school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>co-ed but sep depts</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatton Park</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkins Jnr</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Byron</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>girls only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masefield</td>
<td>girls only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hall</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>Boys 4 - 8, Girls 4 - 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson Hse</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traherne Ct</td>
<td>co-ed throughout</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>Boys 3 - 7, Girls 3 - 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The boy/girl ratio in co-educational schools is given for the prep (i.e. junior) department where this was separated administratively from the pre-prep (i.e. infant) department, or for the whole school if the school was administered as one unit.
Many preparatory schools were founded to prepare students for transfer to public schools and were boarding schools themselves (Leinster-Mackay, 1984). Frequently they were established in rural areas, originally attractive to parents looking for the health benefits of country living for their children (Gilbert, 1991; Chapman, 1993), or for good rail communications (Chapman, ibid) or for geographical proximity to a particular public school (Leinster-MacKay, 1984). Social changes, however, have affected boarding schools in recent years. The annual ISIS Censuses indicate a steady decline in full boarding across the whole of the independent sector: by 4% in 1991, 3.7% in 1992, 6.2% in 1993, 5.2% in 1994, and a further 4.1% in 1995. For the same five years, boys-only boarding declined by 4.6% (1991), 4.7% (1992), 6.7% (1993), 5.6% (1994) and 5.1% (1995). The 1991 decline in boarding should be viewed in conjunction with the fact that 1991 was the eighth successive year in which overall student numbers in independent education had risen. Taking a longer time-span, Trafford (1992) observed that numbers in IAPS schools in the last 50 years had risen from 69,000 to 117,000, but the percentage of boarders had declined from 50% to 15%.

Most boarding schools now take day students. All the boarding schools in this survey took at least some day children. Table 6.3 shows what proportion of students within schools which offered boarding actually elected to board.

Among the Bruford feeder schools the overall decline in boarding was replicated. In his 5 years at Milton Hall, Mr Powell had
seen the number of boarding students in his school decline from 120 to 80. Within that time the catchment area from which most of them came had shrunk from a 50 mile to a 30 mile radius and many of these students were weekly boarders. Overseas boarding numbers had also declined. Given the current numbers of boarding students and the inevitable staff costs of caring for them round the clock, heads such as Mrs Drayton (Marlowe) were questioning the viability of their boarding facilities.

Table 6.3 - Day/boarder division of students within boarding schools

| School                | % day | % boarding *
|-----------------------|-------|----------------
| Browning              | 55    | 45             |
| Chesterfield          | 50    | 50             |
| Hawkins College Jnr   | 67    | 33             |
| Lord Byron            | 67    | 33             |
| Marlowe               | 82    | 18             |
| Middleton             | 4.5   | 95.5           |
| Milton Hall           | 75    | 25             |
| St John's             | 80    | 20 (weekly)    |
| Tennyson House        | 10    | 90             |
| Traherne Court        | 50    | 50             |

* These percentages are percentages of the numbers of students permitted to board (i.e from age 7 or 8), not percentages of the total numbers in the school. When the pre-prep day children are taken into account, most of the boarding schools had a very substantial proportion of day children.
A further factor to be considered in respect of changing student populations is the location of each school and its likely catchment area. If boarding continues to decline in popularity, as recent ISIS Censuses imply, schools in rural areas with a smaller population of potential clients may not find it easy to replace boarding students with day pupils. Table 6.4 shows how the various headteachers of boarding schools identified their catchment areas. The catchment areas for both boarding and day students are shown.

Table 6.4 - Boarding school locations & catchment areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Day catchment</th>
<th>Boarding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>15-mile radius</td>
<td>Most within 40 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>Maximum 10 miles</td>
<td>Mostly local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkins Jnr</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>&quot;mainly local&quot;</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Byron</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>10-mile radius</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>Maximum 15 miles</td>
<td>Mostly local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton*</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>&quot;very local&quot;</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hall</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Maximum 20 miles</td>
<td>Most within 50 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's**</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>15-mile radius</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson House</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12-15 mile radius</td>
<td>Within 60 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traherne Court</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>15-mile radius</td>
<td>Within 100 miles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Middleton preferred to take only boarders.

** St John's was predominantly a day school. Weekly boarders were usually chorister students. At the time of my interview, there were no female boarders.
These are not the potential catchments (which for all such schools is technically worldwide) but the actual areas from which at least 90% of current boarders came. Children of expatriates and foreign nationals were a very tiny proportion of most boarding populations. Many boarders lived close enough to their school to have been day students if they had wished.

Griffiths (1991), and to a certain extent Adler and Raab (1988), found that parents were prepared to consider more inconvenient or longer journeys for secondary day school students if they felt that the school to which their child travelled offered the best educational provision. Seekings (1993) suggested that an increase in two-car families may have increased the range of potential day schools available to them. Table 6.5 shows the day schools' catchment areas.

Table 6.5 - Day school catchment areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Day catchment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Maximum 17 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Maximum 25 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>Maximum 25 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatton Park</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Maximum 20 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masefield</td>
<td>County town</td>
<td>Maximum 35 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>15-mile radius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Maximum 10 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>County town</td>
<td>20-mile radius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within this sample group, a comparison of the boarding schools' catchments for day students with the day-only schools reveals that some of the latter had larger catchment areas. Day schools which were centrally located in largely rural counties (Gaskell, Masefield) attracted students from considerable distances.

There is an interesting comparison with Milton Hall, which was similarly situated geographically and had a slightly larger day catchment than the other boarding schools.

Language is central to the process of constructing meanings (Hoyle, 1986). How the heads described the problems of travel and location is a case in point. Mrs Williams, for example, referred to her school's 20-mile radius of catchment as "vast", while Mrs Arden viewed Shakespeare's 15-mile radius as making it "a very local school". They worked in day schools which shared the same catchment area. Such differences of perception might colour the advice they give to parents looking for a 'local' secondary school.

The destinations of preparatory school students

Most of the schools in this study sent students on to a wide range of senior schools. Table 6.6 shows the spread of destinations. The day preparatory schools sent most pupils on to day secondary schools. Usually, though not always, these were independent schools. Heads whose catchment areas had a wide range of secondary provision usually mentioned these schools first, but one or two suggested that financial pressures were compelling some parents to move into the maintained
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>In the last three years, to about 30 different schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td>50% to 5 day schools, 50% to a variety of boarding schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>A large proportion to one nearby boarding school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell</td>
<td>80% to 5 day schools, 20% to a variety of boarding schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>Almost 100% to about a dozen local day schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatton Park</td>
<td>50 - 75% to 4 day schools, rest to local boarding schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkins Jnr</td>
<td>Most move on to senior foundation school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Byron</td>
<td>In 1992, 70 leavers to 40 different schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>Approximately 21 schools on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masefield</td>
<td>In 1992, 20 leavers to 10 schools, 9 to 1 day school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>Almost 100% to a variety of boarding schools: no pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hall</td>
<td>90% to boarding schools, often R.C. or within 40 miles of Milton Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>50% to maintained schools, 50% to independent day schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>100% to 6 or 7 (mostly independent) day schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's</td>
<td>In 1992, 13 leavers to 10 schools, 3 of them boarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson Hse</td>
<td>In 1992, 23 leavers to 17 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traherne Ct</td>
<td>In 1992, 26 children to 14 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>67% to senior school in same foundation, rest to other day schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures applied to students leaving at the top of the schools. They took no account of students who left from younger age groups to transfer to maintained primary schools because their parents were unable to continue to pay school fees or for other personal reasons.
maintained sector, usually when their children reached the age of 11 years. Mrs Franks (Harris) observed that many of the parents of her students were first-time buyers of independent education. They had therefore no traditional links with boarding schools.

**Schools grouped by foundation**

Though many preparatory schools were originally in private ownership, by 1979 most schools had a board of governors or trustees (Rae, 1981; Leinster-Mackay, 1984). The prep schools in this study were managed financially in various ways: as proprietorial schools; as members of larger foundations; or as independent educational trusts.

Six of the schools were proprietorial schools, mostly of longstanding, two being run by the second generation of the same family and one by the third generation. On the other hand, one privately owned school (Shakespeare) had opened only five years previously. The remaining twelve schools were administered as charitable educational trusts, with a governing body acting as trustees. Two of these schools (Hawkins College Junior, Wordsworth) belonged to educational foundations which included senior schools and might well be seen by parents as the natural 'feeders' to these associated schools.
A practice and its practitioners are interdependent and inseparable (Langford, 1985). Some understanding of the headteachers' professional situations is necessary for an understanding of their various personal perspectives.

Longevity in post is not uncommon amongst headteachers (Earley, Baker & Weindling, 1995) and certainly not amongst preparatory heads (Leinster-MacKay; 1984). Table 6.7 indicates the various periods of tenure of the heads in this sample group.

Nine of them had been in service for ten or more years. Length of service did not appear to be related to school size, nor to the gender of its students or of its head, nor to whether or not it offered boarding. Only four heads had held more than one headship.

A comparison with primary heads in the maintained sector would be interesting, though there are too many variables (difference in age-range of students, lack of ownership potential, absence of the boarding element) for an exact comparison.
Table 6.7 - Headteachers' periods of tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Headteacher</th>
<th>Years in post</th>
<th>Previous headships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>Mr Barrett</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td>Miss Jefferies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>Miss Phillips</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell</td>
<td>Mrs Cleghorn</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>Mrs Franks</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Franks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatton Park</td>
<td>Mr Kitt</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkins Jnr</td>
<td>Mr Hope</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Byron</td>
<td>Mr Gordon</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2, both overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>Mrs Drayton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masefield</td>
<td>Mrs Jones</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>Mr Thomas</td>
<td>59*</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hall</td>
<td>Mr Powell</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Mrs Arden</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>Mrs Westbrook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's</td>
<td>Mr Tate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson Hse</td>
<td>Mr Somersby</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traherne Ct</td>
<td>Mr Paul</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>Mrs Williams</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With a gap for army service during World War 2

The views of the headteachers

How the headteachers recruited their own students

Evaluating the views of the heads about the issues of secondary transfer requires not only consideration of their professional
contexts but also some knowledge of their perceptions of marketing. Their views about the recruitment of their own students shed light on their relationships with parents as clients. However, at only seven schools were parents routinely asked how they had heard about the school. This means that much of the information given here about sources of students was anecdotal, albeit drawing on the professional experience (Popper, 1983; Bassey, 1990a) of the heads.

Plowden (1967) found that word-of-mouth reports, location, religious ethos and prior family contacts with a school were important factors in parents' choice of a state primary school. All the preparatory heads indicated that personal, and specifically parental, recommendation, was the main stimulus to their own student recruitment. Five schools had recruited children of alumni, but only in two (Harris, Browning) were these "a significant number" (Mrs Franks, Harris). At Browning, visible through its magazine, there was a strong element of family loyalty, into the third generation.

All schools in this survey except Harris and Shelley were members of the Independent Schools Information Service (ISIS), and ISIS was acknowledged by most heads to be an occasional, but not regular, source of students. Miss Jefferies (Chaucer) felt that ISIS and other handbooks (she instanced SFIA and the IAPS handbook) were useful for parents who were newcomers to an area, but the heads of Chesterfield, Masefield and St John's found that parents did not mention guidebooks. Views on the value of attendance at ISIS exhibitions varied from head to head. Eight
schools were represented regularly at their respective local exhibitions and claimed it was worthwhile to go, though Mr Tate (St John's) and Miss Phillips (Chesterfield) saw these more as a flag-flying exercise and an opportunity to contact other schools than as a direct source of students. Of the sixteen ISIS member school in this study, only two, as a matter of policy, did not send representatives to ISIS exhibitions.

Paid advertising was used by fifteen heads. They said this was an important way of keeping their school's name before the public but that they had no evidence that it brought in students. No school used any other form of direct media representation, though at St John's the choir was considered to be an advertisement wherever it sings.

Free media attention took many forms. Two heads regularly informed the local press of any events which they considered newsworthy. At one rural school (Tennyson House), riding was one of the major recreations and the school had sponsored a horse race and activities at an annual country fair.

Only one school used direct mailing to potential customers: from Hatton Park leaflets were sent to new housing estates in its local area. These were coded to allow the school to identify which mailings had drawn a response. The response was minimal.

One school, Milton Hall, had a specifically Roman Catholic ethos which had influenced some, though not all, of its students to apply for admission.
What preparatory heads valued in secondary schools

An institution's procedures and methods convey its culture (Handy, 1978; Jones, 1987; see also Chapter Four) to an outsider, but it is not always easy for outsiders to identify the specific things which create a particular impression on them (Jones, 1987; Mauriel, 1989). The headteachers interviewed had mental visions of what they looked for in schools but did not find it easy to put them into words. However, they eventually identified five factors which commanded their approval in secondary schools, of which four were social and the fifth academic.

Fifteen of the eighteen headteachers mentioned a holistic approach to the students' welfare as the most important factor. They endeavoured to describe this by using a wide variety of different terms such as "atmosphere" (6 heads), "ambience" (6 heads), "ethos" (6 heads) and "caring" (5 heads). Six mentioned the fulfilment of the individual talents of students, two looked for happy students, two looked for a supportive and disciplined environment and one mentioned standards, which she defined as "acceptable modes of behaviour" and in which she included respect for other people, respect for the environment and acceptable standards of work. These definitions match some of those intangibles valued by Bruford parents (Chapter Five): ethos, quality of staff, and pupils' behaviour.

Headteachers emphasised different aspects of the welfare of the students, but typically reference was made to:-
* the quality of pastoral care
* the cleanliness of facilities
* the maintenance of comfortable accommodation
* day student access to facilities and care, which must equal that of boarders

Most heads stressed that they were not looking for luxurious accommodation, but for buildings that were well-maintained and appropriate for the students' use. Only Mrs Drayton (Marlowe) said that her parents expected "three-star" accommodation for boarders as a matter of course these days.

The second factor of great importance to heads was the quality of discipline in a secondary school. Seven heads made direct reference to standards of discipline, defined variously as courtesy or good manners; an attitude to work; "basic decency" (Mrs Gordon, Lord Byron School); "underlying values in community" (Mr Powell, Milton Hall); "surveillance, moral guidance" (Mrs Westbrook, Shelley). Most other heads made reference to a quality of effort, output or conduct expected of each child which must be the best of which that child is capable. Several heads mentioned also the attitude of staff and students to the environment, within the school and outside it.

The third important factor mentioned was the security of the school environment, referring not to the physical security of students but to their emotional security. Here again definitions varied, but all the heads conveyed the idea that students must feel valued, must feel that they can achieve and that they can make a useful contribution to their school. Two
heads referred directly to the 'safety factor' of a school; that students need the sensation of a secure community if they are to be able to work happily and successfully.

Headteachers also mentioned other qualities, but with differences of emphasis. Of these, only location commanded some general support as a factor of importance. Eight heads mentioned location, but four of these said that location mattered more to parents than to them. When counselling individual families in specific circumstances they took account of location, but not as a general rule.

Fifteen heads mentioned the need for high academic standards, but did so in terms of what would be appropriate for individual students, offering "different things for different children" (Mr Somersby, Tennyson House). Miss Phillips (Chesterfield) felt that academic standards in most schools were similar anyway, but that there could be a lot of difference between them when it came to pastoral care. To Mr Gordon (Lord Byron School) academic aspects were less important in a boarding school than caring.

Only three heads put academic standards per se at the top of their list of essential qualities and appeared to lay great stress on them. One (Mrs Drayton, Marlowe) defined them as "academic opportunities" for her students. The rest of her list of essentials, however, followed the same broad outlines as those given by other heads, and if parents emphasised pastoral care she said she revised her personal priorities when advising
them. Mrs Williams (Wordsworth) defined a different set of priorities. After academic standards came the need for a good range of activities for music, sport, drama and art, supported by good facilities and top quality staff. She preferred schools with a high proportion of full-time staff. She observed that she did not tend to look for pastoral care in a day school. Mrs Arden (Shakespeare) also put "academia first of all" but, for a child who was weak or under-confident academically, she would also look for a caring atmosphere in a school. Her other essential for a school was cleanliness.

Other factors considered important by some, though not all, heads were:-

* empathy with a secondary school's headteacher
* the approachability (for themselves and for parents) of a secondary headteacher
* the age range of the staff
* extra-curricular activities and how many students were really involved in them
* the financial stability of a school

How the heads formed their views of secondary schools

The headteacher of any school is its "culture bearer" (Mauriel, 1989, p235), closely identified with its philosophy, goals and expectations. However subconscious the process may be, heads of preparatory schools are likely to compare the culture of their own institutions with those of potential senior schools for
their students. They use several sources of information.

Personal visits

Without exception, the heads visited potential schools. They expected to have personal contact with local secondary schools and with those remoter schools to which students regularly transferred. Several stated categorically that if they had a student considering a particular school they would, if they had not visited it recently, inspect it immediately. Most mentioned that they tried to view each school from the standpoint of putative students. The importance heads attached to this altruistic stance is discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

This policy was not always an easy one to maintain. Mr Kitt (Hatton Park), for example, described the difficulty of finding sufficient travelling time when a student decided to apply to Gordonstoun. One third of the heads interviewed felt that they did not have enough time to visit all the schools that they might wish.

Mauriel (1989) observed that it is possible to sense a school's culture simply by walking through its buildings and observing lessons within it. The relative emphasis placed on different activities shapes a school's climate. Whatever indicators they used, the preparatory heads were trying to pick up on the ethos of the school they were visiting, and how they were received on such visits was important to them. Miss Phillips (Chesterfield)
expressed a preference for being shown round by an ex-student of her own school, wherever this was possible: "One can then ask one's own questions". Several other heads mentioned that this opportunity was appreciated. Four looked for meaningful contact with the headteacher: "... essentially meeting the head" (Mrs Arden), identifying "... the humanity of the headteacher" (Mr Thomas). Two said that the general quality of their reception by the head, staff and students of a school was a strong influence on them. Mr Barrett (Browning) was also anxious to meet former students together with their housestaff.

With preparatory heads, as with the Bruford parents, the headteacher of the secondary school was an important figure. Time and again during the interviews, interviewees returned to the importance of head-to-head relationships. Confidence in a secondary school's head is essential to preparatory heads' confidence in the school itself (Mr Paul, Traherne Court). This may, of course, be a reflection of the fact that I, as interviewer, was head of a secondary school for which their own schools were potential feeders.

News of former students

The second source of information which all but one of the headteachers mentioned was that of former students or their parents, a source whose value was acknowledged by Silk (1988). Some heads asked the children directly. Others relied on news transmitted through parents.
Apart from personal impressions and the use of former students, the preparatory heads did not share a consensus about other sources of information. A number said that they use the 'prep heads' grapevine' and might well ring a fellow head if they were seeking information about a particular school, but others mentioned the idea only to dismiss it, saying this would be an unlikely course of action for them.

Mrs Jones (Masefield), one of the heads who mentioned visits from former students, also said how much she and her staff appreciated receiving news directly from senior schools about former pupils. She said that Bruford used to be the only school which showed this courtesy: others were now doing likewise.

Some heads read with interest the prospectuses and magazines of senior schools, obtaining through these publications a feel for a school, or at least an idea of how a school sees itself. Others rated such publications almost at the level of undesirable propaganda, and apparently consigned them to the waste bin immediately on arrival. A middle way was pursued by a third group, who sent these items straight to the staffroom!

Three heads who took a keen interest in senior schools' publications also took note of advertising and press coverage as well. One of them, Mr Paul (Traherne Court), commented that he "... liked to see how a school conducts itself".
Those preparatory heads who regularly attended educational conferences and joint meetings of organisations such as the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS) with the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) and the Headmasters' Conference (HMC) regarded these as good opportunities to strengthen personal and professional links with secondary heads. Two heads (Mr Hope, Mrs Williams) belonged to larger educational foundations and consequently had regular contacts, formal and informal, with the heads of the foundation senior schools.

Where schools were sufficiently close geographically to share cultural and sporting activities, there was some evidence that headteachers judged other schools by how their own students were received there. Mr Paul (Traherne Court) said that this spoke volumes to him about those schools.

Several heads mentioned 'league tables', usually only to deny that these had any influence on their views. However, Mr Tate (St John's) commented thoughtfully that, however much one might wish to ignore them, league tables may well make a subconscious impression.

What preparatory school parents look for in senior schools

Parents are remarkably consistent in their reasons for rejecting a school but may not be consistent in their reasons for making a positive choice (Smedley, 1993). However, preparatory heads' experience of parents leads them to make certain suppositions
about what parents want, both in respect of the education offered within their own schools and, eventually, in respect of the secondary schools which they may recommend for a particular student. They act on this knowledge and advise parents on the basis of it.

The evidence in this section relies heavily on headteachers' professional judgments and experience. What they 'know' about parents' views cannot be measured in any critical sense because they cannot offer any evidence except their own knowledge, based on experience. Polanyi (1967) called this "tacit knowledge" (p6). It is "... the active shaping of experience performed in the pursuit of knowledge" (p6) and is the way "... by which all knowledge is discovered and, once discovered, is held to be true" (idem). Bassey (1990a) referred to this kind of knowledge as "knowledge-in-action" (p36) because it informs the actions of practitioners even if it has not been expressed in written form. From comparisons with my findings from the Bruford parents (Chapter Five) and those of MORI/ISIS (1993), it would seem that the preparatory heads' professional knowledge has enabled them to develop accurate perceptions of what their parents were seeking in a secondary school.

Broadly speaking, the preparatory heads interviewed fell into two categories: those who felt that parents put their child's happiness at the top of the list of essential factors; and those who believed that parents were more anxious about examination results and league tables. Emphasis on academic standards was claimed most strongly by heads of day schools. However, an
interesting variety of topics was mentioned by heads when they were first asked what they thought their current parents looked for in a school: "They can have outlandish ideas" (Mrs Jones); "The quality of the boarding environment" (Mr Gordon); "Very much what I look for" (Mr Hope); "An environment similar to this school" (Mr Somersby, Mr Kitt, Mr Tate); "A school that will get their children through the next examinations" (Mrs Drayton); "At the end of the day, results" (Mrs Williams).

These findings correspond to those of Johnson and Ransom (1983), West (1992) and many others.

Those preparatory headteachers who thought that parents were looking for 'a happy school' felt they looked carefully at facilities, extra-curricular and (for boarders) weekend activities, a convenient location, the quality of the food and medical care, and any special needs for their own child, such as sporting, musical or artistic activities. My own research (see Chapter Five) confirmed that Bruford parents placed importance on location, specialist teaching facilities, residential accommodation and extra-curricular activities, particularly weekend activities, when seeking a secondary school.

Preparatory headteachers found that parents with an academic agenda would ask first about league tables. They looked for evidence of academic achievements and standards.

In any given preparatory school, the preponderance of parents favouring either pastoral care or academic achievement may well be related to the ethos of that school. Since, as Bernbaum
(1976) and Watts (1986) have indicated, headteachers strongly influence the objectives and values of a school, the possibility arises that parents choose a school because they share, or at least approve, the headteacher's values. Those headteachers who stressed the importance of academic standards as an influence on their own views about secondary schools were the same heads who found that the majority of their parents had this priority. However, it is not possible to deduce from my research findings whether or not the parents arrived with such a priority, nor the extent to which their contact with the preparatory school had affected their views, nor indeed whether the parents really held this view.

Other factors which headteachers claimed that parents considered important in secondary schools were the headteacher, the school's reputation, and finance.

Research has shown that headteachers are critical to successful school marketing (Davies & Braund, 1989; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993). Purves (1993), speaking as a parent, confirmed that the headteacher of a school is a vital factor in parental choice. Mrs Gordon (Lord Byron School), among others, said that the headteacher is of crucial importance to parents. Facilities can be immaterial, and there is not much to choose between schools in this respect, but if parents don't like the head they won't choose the school.

The reputation of a school was apparently an important selling point for some parents. Miss Phillips (Chesterfield) observed
that some parents were looking for a school with "a good name" and judging solely by reputation. Another (Mrs Drayton) commented that the snob-value of a school on the dinner-party circuit was a consideration for parents living in the London area.

Five heads mentioned that money was a significant factor and that financial considerations might weigh heavily with some parents. All were heads of day schools or had a very high proportion of day students. The head of Lord Byron School, which was a charitable foundation with a large number of boarders, also mentioned financial pressures on parents.

The MORI/ISIS survey (1993) identified good discipline as the factor mentioned by the largest number (84%) of parents choosing an independent school. It is surprising that, although most of the preparatory heads also mentioned discipline as one of their own priorities, they did not say that they had identified any strength of parental feeling for schools which are well disciplined.

The process of parental choice

The MORI/ISIS survey (1993) found that only 24% of parents said they had consulted the head or staff of preparatory schools when seeking a secondary school, and only 18% of parents considered this source of information to be the most influential one on their final choice. This is not reflected in my findings at
Bruford (see Chapter Five) nor by the preparatory heads themselves. As Heazell (1971) suggested, they considered that their contribution to the transfer process was important for the future well-being of the children. Miss Jefferies (Chaucer), for example, expressed the view that "The essential part of being a junior school headteacher is giving thought to secondary transfer". All but two of the heads indicated similar involvement in the process of assisting the majority of their parents to choose their child's next school. They seemed to regard this responsibility as a major element in their partnership with parents.

On the other hand, in certain circumstances heads were not greatly involved in school choice. At Lord Byron School, for example, children were sometimes admitted at the age of 11 to prepare for Common Entrance (C.E.) at 13+, and these families were more likely to have made their decision already. One head (Miss Phillips, Chesterfield) felt that parents did not yet consult her fully, and she attributed this to the fact that she had only recently taken up her post (i.e. 18 months previously). She also commented that many parents in the past had assumed that her school would send most of its students on to one particular school (a large boarding school in the same town, with a strong academic reputation). She speculated that parents with these expectations might not see the need to discuss secondary schooling for their daughters, taking their transfer as a matter of course.

Where schools were part of a larger foundation there was some
evidence that heads thought parents assumed that their children would automatically transfer to the foundation secondary school. From Wordsworth School, 67% of students move on to its partner school and Mrs Williams felt that her contribution to the process of selecting the next school was a comparatively minor one, largely confined to those occasions when parents were looking for a boarding secondary school.

Chapman (1993) and Gillard (1993) indicated the potential pressures which shared membership of a foundation can create for a preparatory school head. However, Mr Hope (Hawkins College Junior) stressed the point that transfer in his school was not automatic and that he and his staff gave careful thought to the best destination for each student.

The conflict between these sources suggests that there is a case for further research into parental choice of independent secondary schooling, assessing this process as parents actually make their choices rather than, as with the MORI/ISIS surveys (1989; 1993), gathering information retrospectively.

The procedure for advising parents followed roughly the same pattern in all the schools. Initially, parents met the headteacher and then compiled a shortlist of possible secondary schools. After visiting these schools, they made their final choice, usually (though not always) after further consultation with the preparatory headteacher.

Most schools had a regular programme of parental interviews
built into their annual timetable and the heads saw parents one or two years before their child was due to move on. The shape and degree of formality of this programme varied from school to school. Mr Somersby (Tennyson House), for example, regularly invited parents to the school for an informal supper, or he visited them at their home, and he monitored closely their progress from first considerations to registration and transfer. Most other heads had an open meeting for parents at which they offered general advice before counselling families individually. All the heads clearly indicated, however, that they expected to consider every child's requirements separately.

Most heads recommended parents to visit three schools. Initial discussions might have covered five or six schools but heads tried to persuade parents to narrow the choice down to three. In some cases parents had already decided where they wished their child to try for entry, but such parents were in a minority, ranging from 20%-25% (Tennyson House) to "a few" (Hatton Park).

When they had visited their shortlisted schools, most parents returned to see the preparatory heads. Views were aired and the best school for each child was selected. Problems arose (see below) if parents wished to make a choice of school for their child which the headteacher considered unrealistic in the light of the child's capabilities, but all heads said they reached agreement with most parents.
Advising on future schooling needs was perceived by preparatory heads to be an important function, and to do this satisfactorily they needed to understand their clients' needs and preferences i.e. both the needs of the student and the preferences of the parents. This is part of management of the external environment of a preparatory school, mediating to parents the world of secondary education. It would seem to be of particular importance to first-time buyers of independent education; four heads (Mr Gordon, Mrs Franks, Mrs Westbrook, Mrs Jones) said that it was to those parents that they had had to give most support.

As Rees (1992) commented, parents "... may ... display a lethal mixture of ignorance, knowledge and prejudice" (p34) about educational matters. Although most heads seemed to feel that there was basically very little difference between what they looked for and what parents looked for in a school, they mentioned four problems which could arise with those families in which the parents made a school-focussed choice which seemed to overlook the specific needs of their child. Two of the heads' anxieties were concerned with, respectively, the most appropriate academic and pastoral provision for individual students. The other two problems concerned practicalities: location and finance.
Unrealistic expectations

The heads seemed to worry most about unrealistic parental expectations of a child's academic potential. Mr Gordon expressed this view cogently: that parents were sometimes willing to risk a child's failure by entering him/her for a school with unreasonably high academic standards for that individual. The attitude was "... let him have a go" (Mr Gordon).

Several heads identified family connections with a school as one reason for this problem. Fox (1985) found that Headmasters' Conference (HMC) schools were still self-recruiting and that one-third of the boys had followed their fathers into HMC schools, often boarding schools. Despite the fact that a change of head since a father was at school would mean his old school had changed (Gilbert, 1991), some preparatory heads had found that fathers can be anxious for their sons or, given the expansion in co-education, their daughters to attend their own former schools, which will not always be right for them.

Fox (1985) indicated that fewer mothers of independent school children had boarding experience, which may explain why headteachers did not mention such preferences in connection with girls transferring to girls' schools. Mrs Franks (Harris) said that it was now unusual for mothers of her students to have attended independent schools. It is not possible to say whether this was due to changes in society or to changes in the clientele of Harris School.
All the heads mentioning problems of unrealistic expectations seemed to have faced them in the same way. They tried to persuade parents to include a more realistic choice of school on their list of potential schools to be visited, and they stood by to reassure the child if s/he failed to achieve entry to the first choice of school. It worried heads that children should be exposed to the risk of apparent academic failure, which did nothing for their self-esteem, when a wiser choice of school could offer such students a boost in confidence through the chance of passing the C.E. examination into their first choice.

**League tables v pastoral care?**

Their second cause for concern is, perhaps, allied to the first. Heads worried that a small minority of their parents looked at academic performance tables rather than essential human factors in education, notably pastoral care. Miss Phillips (Chesterfield) in particular expressed great anxiety that some parents did not look beyond the classroom or a school's academic standards. They did not ask sufficiently searching questions about the freedom offered to students, the activities, their social lives, or even what provision there was for laundry. Miss Phillips considered that, in a boarding institution, these things - or, more accurately, their absence - could affect profoundly the comfort and happiness of a student, and, by implication, that some parents did not think sufficiently carefully about them.

This did not appear to be true of the Bruford parents surveyed
(see Chapter Five). However, the literature on students' worries prior to school transfer supports Miss Phillips' view of students' needs. Studies of day students (Brown & Armstrong, 1982 & 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984) have found that children transferring from junior to senior day schools worried about interpersonal relationships, routines, and the goals of their new schools. Fisher, Frazer and Murray (1984; 1986) found that comparatively little research had been done on the transition from home to boarding school, but their studies identified that many of the students' main worries were similar to those of day students, i.e. mainly about work, sports, discipline, being late, finding their way round a new institution and school routines. Concerns specifically centred on boarding included the security of their personal possessions, anxieties about the family at home and about ways of contacting relatives. In Morgan's (1993) survey, 37% of students in the boarding schools were, at some time, homesick, though the level of depression varied and many students said they were given support when homesickness set in. There is a need for more extensive research into the education of children in boarding schools, particularly in the area of pastoral support: such work as has been published is, with the exception of Morgan (1993), rather dated.

Location

A third area where parental views may differ from those of headteachers was in the importance placed on location. A school's location may be crucially important to parents, who
select it because it is convenient for travel e.g. near a sibling's school or on a parent's route to work. Mrs Westbrook (Shelley) indicated that her major area of disagreement with parents was usually over the question of location. She understood its importance but, in an area well-provided with choice of day schools, she did not think that the question of location should take precedence over the educational benefit which a particular school might give to a child. Other heads said they tried to take parental preferences about location into account when advising parents on which schools to visit, but several expressed anxiety at the level of importance placed on location by parents.

Finance

Fees and the financial comparison of schools was the fourth area which heads realised might inhibit parents from choosing the ideal school for their child. They tried to establish beforehand what parents might be prepared, or able, to pay. Individual children might be able to 'earn' part of their school fees through scholarships, or academic, musical or sporting bursaries, or the Assisted Places scheme. Sometimes, however, it was impossible for parents to meet the fees of the most appropriate school and the nearest available match in the right price bracket would have to be substituted. Mrs Arden (Shakespeare) and Mr Barrett (Browne) mentioned the benefits of good grammar schools in their respective areas: these were alternatives for those parents whose resources did not run to independent education beyond 11+.
Other perceived influences on parents

Headteachers thought that informal sources of information were of some influence on parents. Miss Phillips (Chesterfield) indicated that a school's reputation could be important, as Hanford (1990) found. Some Bruford parents (Chapter Five) had admitted that the views of other parents had influenced their choice of school.

This influence was not regarded by all the headteachers as beneficial. Mrs Jones (Masefield) commented that a number of parents obtained information "... unfortunately by listening to other parents", and relied too much on each other (see Appendix Four). Two other heads (Mr Somersby, Tennyson House; Mrs Drayton, Marlowe) pointed out that the social standing of certain schools carried a cachet for parents with which they themselves were not in sympathy. Given that all the headteachers believed that their own student recruitment was largely achieved through parental networks, it is interesting that some of them viewed this source as suspect when it was used for information about secondary schools.

The influence of gender on independent schooling

In the co-educational schools I tried to establish if there was any gender bias in the advice or procedures which heads follow. I could detect no difference in the methods by which heads advised parents about choices of school for a son or a daughter. However, the gender of the student is a factor which may affect
the age of transfer. This is a legacy from the past (see Appendix Six).

**Gender and the age of transfer to secondary schools**

Bound up with the problem of the most appropriate age for pre-pubescent boys and girls to transfer from preparatory to secondary schools is the organisational problem for preparatory schools of retaining viable numbers of students in the most senior classes of the school. In co-educational schools this is not merely a matter of finance but also one of gender balance in those classes. Mr Powell, for example, commented wryly that the loss of one or two girls at the age of 11 could leave spaces in classes which could not be filled, and a gender imbalance at the top end of the school which discouraged other female students from staying on beyond that age.

The preparatory heads of all the schools which offered provision beyond the age of 11 years perceived increasing pressure from the headteachers of girls' schools on parents and students for girls to transfer at 11+. Even girls-only preparatory schools such as Chesterfield, where students have been expected to stay until 12+, were losing many students at 11+ because parents feared there might not be a place for their daughter at her chosen secondary school if she waited until she was 12.

In all, the heads of five of the twelve preparatory schools which offered education to the age of 12+ or 13+ indicated discontent over the age of transfer of female students to
secondary schools. To four of the preparatory heads interviewed, secondary school heads were perceived as wishing to admit students at the age of 11 for purely financial reasons, and therefore as 'poaching' students earlier in their school careers than heretofore. Two of the heads mentioning this were from single-sex girls' preparatory schools (Chesterfield, Marlowe), and two were referring to day students (Hatton Park, Marlowe), so the phenomenon is not confined to girls' schools or to boarding schools.

As a result of this pressure, some of the heads of the co-educational boarding preparatory schools indicated that they were aware of the temptation to advise parents to send both sons and daughters to those former boys-only public schools which had recently become co-educational throughout, as most of these schools had kept the age of admission for students at 13+. Such a strategy would enable the preparatory heads to retain many more female students and have correspondingly better balanced classes at the senior end of their schools. However, they indicated professional reluctance to succumb to this temptation, though they were divided on the issue.

Some heads genuinely appeared to think that there is no difference in maturity between 13-year-old girls and boys. Others believed that a difference exists but felt nevertheless that it is not a problem for girls to change schools at 13+. Mr Paul (Traherne Court) expressed this view and it was, to a certain extent, held by Mr Somersby (Tennyson House). At Middleton, 13+ was the traditional age of transfer to secondary
school and the children were prepared for no other examination than the 13+ Common Entrance (C.E.).

Five heads indicated that they preferred to counsel parents individually, depending on the daughter involved. Mr Barrett (Browning School) regretted that the girls missed out on the last year or two of preparatory school life but acknowledged that what mattered most was what was right for each individual. He added that transfer at 11+ or 12+ was "... what the girls' schools want". Mr Hope (Hawkins College Junior) agreed with Baxter (1994) and Johns (1994) that the best time for a boy to transfer was 13+, but he considered it true that most girls mature earlier than most boys and this made him suspect that 11+ was better for a girl's transfer.

Declining admission standards

However vigorously secondary schools might deny reducing their admission standards for students, 7/18 of the preparatory heads interviewed had noted changes, particularly in those schools using the C.E. examination. Changes in the pass standards set by various schools have led to two anxieties amongst preparatory heads.

The first was the difference between what schools say they will do and what they actually do. Preparatory heads were given the standards required by different secondary schools but some have found that children whom they believed to be incapable of performing to a particular standard were still admitted. This
created resentment. "Statements made about intake at C.E. should be backed by their actual admission standards" (Miss Phillips). Harvey-Jones (1988) indicated that manipulation can arouse antagonism. Preparatory heads were unhappy when their professional judgment about their students, and their advice to parents about admission standards for secondary schools, was made to appear incorrect by colleagues in those schools who were perceived to have moved the goal posts. Such conduct had an adverse effect on relationships of trust between senior schools and their feeder preps. Mr Paul (Traherne Court), for example, indicated that he would not recommend one or two schools because of the lack of professional courtesy in their dealings with him.

The second anxiety was caused when less academic students were admitted to schools which were not thought equipped to offer the right provision to support them. Mr Powell (Milton Hall) and Mr Barrett (Browning) spoke particularly forcefully about this problem. Both saw that such students might be overwhelmed academically in their secondary school. With the squeeze on schools at 16+ to produce good academic results at A-level, they wondered if less academic children would be forced out at 16?

Curriculum

Several heads shared concern about the breadth of the curriculum. Miss Jefferies (Chaucer) suggested that "The approach to future employment... is sadly neglected by a large number of secondary (independent) schools." Only Mrs Arden (Shakespeare) had found parents anxious about breadth of
curriculum, whereas Miss Phillips (Chesterfield), Mrs Franks (Harris) and Mrs Drayton (Marlowe) had all found parents much more anxious about academic results and they were unhappy about this order of priority.

Allied to the problem of curriculum was the difficulty of the official academic performance (league) tables and their potential influence on parents. The heads found 'league tables' unsatisfactory because they gave no comparison between input and output. Some said they would be happy to substitute more helpful information for parents if secondary schools could find a way to present this.

What did the preparatory heads think of Bruford?

Although this was the most important question for the marketing of my school, it was perhaps the least important for the wider research which I was pursuing. Bruford was being consciously promoted as a small school, able to cater for a wide range of academic abilities, but particularly suitable for less confident girls who needed support and encouragement. I was anxious to see if this was the ethos perceived by the heads.

In three cases the heads had not, at the time of interview, made recent visits to Bruford. Mr Paul (Traherne Court) and Mr Hope (Hawkins College Junior) had not been for 3 years, and Mr Somersby (Tennyson House) had not visited for 5 years. Two of these three admitted immediately that they were aware that their
perceptions might be inaccurate because of this. However, all lived locally and therefore had access to the local press and the local grapevine. The other fifteen heads had all visited within the preceding two years i.e. within my time as head.

The positive comments on Bruford

Mortimore et al (1988) found that smaller schools were effective in promoting pupil progress. Vulliamy and Webb (1995) also found that smaller schools offered more realistic knowledge of individual children because all the staff knew all the pupils. Ten of the heads questioned identified Bruford as appropriate for students who needed individual attention if they were to achieve their maximum potential. Two heads spoke directly of Bruford's suitability for students who needed greater confidence. Factors considered to be part of Bruford's ethos included the fact that it was a small friendly community and its "happy feel" (Mr Paul, Traherne Court). Mrs Franks (Harris) felt that the girls were well-taught and happy and received a good education. Mrs Jones (Masefield) and Mr Tate (St John's) used the word "safe" to describe Bruford, for boarding and for day students. Both felt that Bruford could give students a feeling of security within which they could work confidently. Three heads believed that Bruford had a similar ethos to their own school. One of these (Mrs Jones) said she would recommend Bruford for her "one-offs", for whom the (day) schools in her town could not offer sufficiently supportive provision, and for whom boarding at Bruford was the nearest alternative. Two other heads took similar views, though Mrs Williams (Wordsworth)
expressed doubts as to whether such girls should go on to boarding school at all: they might be better off at home.

Two heads spoke approvingly of the standards of courtesy which they had noted in Bruford students, and a third indicated satisfaction with the hospitable welcome extended to his own students when they visited Bruford for games fixtures. Another head said that the Bruford girls always looked neat and tidy. A fifth said that the previous deputy head, "a splendid lady", had perhaps been its best recommendation! Two heads mentioned that Bruford was receiving good publicity in the local press and another liked the new prospectus.

Various individual comments suggested that there was a perceived change in Bruford's public image. One headteacher thought that recently instituted changes to curriculum and student privileges had been beneficial; another, that opening Bruford to daygirls had made it a welcome extra option to local parents; others again felt that the school's rooms, especially its dormitories, were clean and that the grounds were well-kept.

Silk (1988) suggested that preparatory headteachers welcomed news of former students. Mrs Jones (Masefield) and Mrs Westbrook (Shelley) indicated that Bruford had always taken trouble to give feedback to their schools about students who had transferred, which they valued, and Mrs Westbrook added that Bruford's current parents continued to speak well of the school to her.
Views of Bruford's academic standards were more diverse. Mr Gordon (Lord Byron School) said that Bruford could cater for a wide range of students, particularly those whose interests extended beyond the purely academic. He spoke with approval of the practical curriculum which Bruford offered to less academic children. Mrs Drayton (Marlowe) agreed. Two heads specifically mentioned Bruford's improved accommodation for Art and Design Technology. It was good to hear that the decision to upgrade the Design Technology facilities (see Chapter Four) had been noted with approval by heads in our external market.

However, four heads said that they considered Bruford to be more suitable for less academic children, while Miss Jefferies (Chaucer) and the joint heads of Harris School said they would be most likely to recommend Bruford to their "middle ranking girls" (Mrs Franks).

These views were in conflict with Bruford's vision of what it could offer academically, and could have led some of the headteachers to recommend other schools for students who would, in fact, have benefitted from Bruford's educational provision. The variety of responses indicated that Bruford needed to look carefully at how the academic standards of the school were communicated to preparatory school heads.

When considering the marketing implications of the positive comments made by the heads, the Bruford Marketing Group had to remember that the responses had been given verbally to Bruford's own headteacher. Remarks may have been made from considerations
of tact or courtesy rather than out of direct honesty. However, there were sufficient negative comments to suggest that the heads were not inhibited by the circumstances of their interviews.

The negative comments on Bruford

The literature on small schools reveals many anxieties about the quality of their educational provision. Dunning (1993) found that main concerns included the limitations placed on peer/social groupings, the adequacy of the curriculum, the availability of appropriate teacher expertise, potential professional isolation of staff, cost-effectiveness and viability. Mrs Williams (Wordsworth) and Mrs Drayton (Marlowe), both heads of larger schools than Bruford, felt that such a small school as Bruford could not offer a sufficiently wide choice of friends to each student. Mrs Williams considered this to be a real disadvantage and queried whether small class sizes created sufficient competition to stimulate students to achieve their maximum academic potential. Mrs Drayton thought parents would worry about the limited choice of friendships.

In addition, Mrs Williams felt that the small size of the school would limit opportunities for membership of sporting teams. Mr Tate (St John's) also observed that Bruford was "... not a school for the sporty".

Sabben-Clare (1984) indicated that the student clientele for Winchester was drawn from a wider social base in recent times,
and this was true also for Bruford. Mrs Drayton (Marlowe) mentioned that parents in her school could find the current lack of exclusivity of Bruford to be off-putting. The changes in social status of Bruford parents over the preceding 40 years had been noted also by Mrs Franks, though with approval, as she felt it made education at Bruford attractive and accessible to many more of her students than had been possible in the past.

Two heads (Mr Somersby, Tennyson House; Mr Tate, St Johns) worried about the financial stability of a school as small as Bruford, and Mr Somersby added that he had not, in the past, been impressed by the Bruford Governing Council, though he admitted that his knowledge of its composition was out of date. This statement reinforces the need for secondary schools to have positive regular contacts with possible feeder preparatory schools.

One head (Mr Barrett, Browning) wondered if sufficient breadth of staff expertise could be provided, particularly for minority subjects, in so small a school.

**Conclusions about Bruford**

A comparison of the positive and negative comments of the heads interviewed indicated that they were largely impressed with Bruford and felt it could offer a good education to its students, though their views as to the type of student who might benefit most were not identical. All but one of the heads seemed to feel that Bruford was a useful school to have on their
list of choices for parents, and they seemed likely to recommend it to parents whose daughter needed a small and supportive school. It appeared that this ethos, which Bruford had been striving to project, had been clearly communicated.

One head (Mrs Williams, Wordsworth) was obviously unimpressed with Bruford and made it clear that she would be most unlikely to recommend it to parents of her students, because of its size and the resulting lack of competitive edge. As head of a day school which emphasised academic performance, her values may have been in conflict with those of Bruford. Furthermore, Mrs Williams' school (Wordsworth) was part of a larger foundation. She may have preferred to send students to the senior school and the philosophy of the senior school may have matched more closely with her own and that of her school. Heads of schools with an ethos more akin to Bruford were more likely to approve of its style and values.

Marketing implications for Bruford

Bruford seemed to emerge with a positive image from most heads. This supported the parents' perceptions of the school and its new directions (Chapter Five). However, preparatory heads' views of the school's academic status and potential were not wholly accurate and there was need to improve communication about these. The school's size was also a major problem to some heads, in terms of the potential lack of academic or sporting competition, or of breadth of curriculum, or of financial viability.
Preparatory/secondary relationships: marketing implications

The preparatory heads seemed to be well-informed about secondary schools. Their orders of priority, balancing pastoral/social factors and purely academic ones, differed from one head to another, with the heads of day preparatory schools tending towards a more academic emphasis, but for most heads a major priority was compatibility between their philosophy and that of a secondary head, and between the ambience of a secondary school and that of their own school. The heads were, above all, student-focused, i.e. whatever their personal preferences they looked at schools with individual students in mind. They wanted to have a portfolio of secondary schools to recommend to meet the needs of specific students.

Despite the MORI/ISIS (1993) findings, preparatory heads believed themselves to be closely involved in the process of their students' transfer into secondary schools. They thought they looked for the same things as parents and my findings indicate that they probably do. Whatever their professional background or experience, they appeared to have evolved very similar methods of guiding and supporting parental choice. These may be such a routine part of a school's life that not all parents may realise the extent to which their head is involved. Secondary heads, however, should not fall into the same error. Shared perspectives on the problems of transfer would be a useful way to cultivate that good relationship which the prep heads seek to maintain with secondary heads. Their anxieties about transfer include:
* the worry that parents have unrealistic academic expectations of their children;
* parental disregard of the pastoral needs of children;
* the unreasonable emphasis placed on location; and
* financial limitations which may reduce parents' choice of suitable schools.

Developing good channels of communication with preparatory heads, particularly for the discussion of how any of these factors might affect the admission of individual students, is beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes a good professional relationship. Secondly, it encourages an inflow of students, but can also enable each secondary school to avoid admitting a student for whom that school would be unsuitable. This maximises the chances of attracting students who go on to become satisfied clients of their new school, and consequently become good ambassadors for that school to staff and students in their former schools. The relationship between preparatory and secondary heads is therefore cyclical: good professional relationship --> consultation --> transfer of suitable students --> happy/successful students --> positive feedback to preparatory heads --> good professional relationship. Ways to develop these relationships, and constraints which may hinder them, are discussed more fully in Chapter Eight.

Validating the prep headteachers' views

The quality of the relationships between preparatory and
secondary schools, the problem of the most appropriate age of
transfer for a female student from preparatory to secondary
school and the question of admission standards raised important
potential differences of opinion between preparatory and
secondary school headteachers. These could obviously affect
relationships between a secondary school and its feeder schools.
To assess the validity of the preparatory headteachers'
perceptions about the secondary heads views on these issues, I
undertook a questionnaire enquiry to a representative sample of
headteachers of girls' secondary schools, to try and identify
their attitudes. The findings from this enquiry can be found in
Chapter Seven.
Asking the Secondary Girls' Schools' Heads
CHAPTER SEVEN

Asking the secondary girls' schools' heads

Agreement in principle does not dictate agreement in practice.
Roberts, p84

In this chapter information is presented about the assessment and transfer procedures for students moving from preparatory schools to secondary independent girls' schools. In the first section, the schools represented in the survey are briefly described. In the second section, information obtained about the schools' admission procedures is given, together with the heads' views about the best age of transfer to secondary school for a female student. The concluding section outlines the marketing implications for girls' schools which the findings suggest.

Comparison of the findings from Chapters Six and Seven indicates that marketing problems arise because of professional tension between the preparatory and secondary sectors of independent education. These problems are examined in Chapter Eight.

The schools

25 of the schools selected belonged to the Girls Schools' Association (GSA) and 24 responses were obtained, forming a 10% sample of the overall GSA membership of 243 schools. The 26th
school was a Scottish day school, chosen because of Scottish links with Bruford. The head of this school was not a member of GSA. All but one of the schools took students across the age range from 11-year-olds to 18-year-olds: the odd one out took students only to the age of 16.

The questionnaire sought information on various topics associated with the transfer of students between primary and secondary schools in the independent sector. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix Five. 25 of the 26 schools replied, most by return of post. A response rate of 96% suggests that respondents had considerable interest in the subject of the questionnaire (Kervin, 1992).

Obtaining a gender balance amongst the headteachers was impossible, given the overall weighting towards females amongst girls' schools' headteachers. However, there is a small number of male headteachers in GSA and two of them (from Schools 3 and 5) responded to the enquiry. Such a small sample is insufficient for accurate detection of gender bias, but there seemed to be no difference in their approach to or understanding of the issues of transfer.

Table 7.1 gives basic information about the schools. They were numbered at random and the original numbers have been retained. To avoid identification, their real geographical locations have been replaced with an indication of the kind of catchment area which they have for day students. However, the heads were not asked for detailed information about catchment areas, because
exploration of this topic would have made the questionnaire too long and would have distracted attention from the main focus of enquiry.

Four of the five city schools were in the London conurbation. As it transpired, all of the day-only schools were situated in well-populated areas. Schools offering provision for both day and full-boarding students were in smaller centres of population, five of them in rural locations. Many of these schools were founded as boarding schools and had admitted day students more recently, as Bruford had done.

Table 7.1 - Girls' secondary schools whose heads responded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Day or Day &amp; Boarding</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Own prep school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14, 18, 26</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 10, 15, 17, 23</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>County town</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>County town</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 13</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>D &amp; WB</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>D &amp; B</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 11, 19, 25</td>
<td>D &amp; B</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>D &amp; B</td>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5, 9, 20, 21</td>
<td>D &amp; B</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>D &amp; B</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 262 -
The single school offering boarding only on a weekly basis (School 22) provided residential facilities, run like a hostel, for a very small number of students. To all intents and purposes the school operated as a day school and is referred to as such hereafter. All the other schools offering boarding were full boarding schools, even if they also took some weekly boarders.

Junior/preparatory departments

Of this sample of twenty-five schools, nineteen had their own junior/preparatory departments and six did not. Ten of the fourteen day-only schools, and nine of the eleven schools which offered full boarding, had junior/preparatory departments.

Bearing in mind the expansion down the age-range already discovered in preparatory schools (see Chapter Six) heads were asked if there had been changes in the admissions policies for pre-prep and prep departments. Changes in policy in the secondary schools proved to echo developments in freestanding preparatory schools. Like preparatory heads, those in independent girls' secondary schools had identified expanding demand amongst parents for nursery-age education i.e. for under-fives. Most of those schools which admitted students younger than the age of 11 were competing with preparatory schools across the full age-range which the latter offer. Table 7.2 shows the ages at which those schools which had junior departments admitted students, and any recent changes in the age of admission.
Of the nineteen schools which had preparatory departments, eight had changed their admissions policies within the preceding five years. Six schools had lowered the age of admission: one school had raised it. School 9 had made an unspecified change, but by implication it must have been to a lower age of admission, because demand from parents with daughters already in the school was given as the reason for the alteration. Of the eleven schools which had made no change in the age of admission, six had, of longstanding, admitted pupils at the ages of 4 or 3 years.

Table 7.2 - Age of admission to junior/preparatory schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Minimum entry age</th>
<th>Recent changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>Yes, by adding a nursery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Day 2+ Boarding 8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes, from 4 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes, from 8 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5, 11, 19, 23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15, 18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes, from 5 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes (downwards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes, upwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, 17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five of the eight headteachers whose schools had changed the age of admission clearly identified local demand as the reason. The head of School 25 said local nursery provision was overstretched "... therefore a gap existed in the market and we took it". The head of School 18 indicated that a lower age of admission at her school saved her students a change of school between nursery and preparatory departments, thus giving continuity to the education of the children. However, School 20's head had felt obliged to close her school's nursery and pre-prep departments: "The pre-prep and nursery were too small and had too high a turnover to be educationally or financially viable". Given the remote location of that school, the problem could have been due to a limited catchment.

Location/size of catchment, however, did not seem generally to have been an important factor in changes of provision. Of the seven schools which had lowered the age of admission for junior/preparatory departments, four (all day schools) were situated in large centres of population and three (all offering boarding) were in less well populated areas. The day/boarding factor might be significant, but it may merely reflect the fact that most of the day schools were situated in urban locations whereas the boarding schools were usually on more rural sites. Very few boarding schools admit boarders below the age of 8, therefore a reduction in the age of admission from 5 or 4 to 3 is unlikely to be related to the boarding factor.

One head cited recent ISIS surveys, which:
"... showed that parents, if having to choose which stage of education to pay for, if they cannot afford fees from 3-18, are choosing to pay for earlier years" (School 21).

It was on the basis of this information that School 21 had made the decision to move the minimum age of admission from 8 back to 3.

Only six schools currently admitted children at the age of five or above: Schools 9 and 14 at 5+; Schools 10, 17 and 20 at 7+; and School 2 at 8+. These six schools appeared to share no common factors, being divided equally between day and boarding schools and from a wide spread of different kinds of location. Local factors may account for the differences: the research findings can give no indication.

Transfer from preparatory departments into senior schools

Secondary schools which have preparatory departments on-site have an obvious source of potential students. If many of their available places were filled from this source, it would lead to strong competition for the remaining places offered to students from other prep schools, with concomitant anxieties for both the heads of those schools and the parents of their students. Heads of secondary schools with junior departments were asked if transfer from preparatory to senior schools was automatic for students. Table 7.3 shows the responses.
Five schools gave an absolute right of transfer into their senior departments. Four offered places unless a student had special needs which the school could not meet. Two headteachers (Schools 15 & 19) appeared to have misunderstood the question: they were asked if the students had the right of transfer but they responded as if they had been asked whether students elected to transfer. Their answers suggested but did not absolutely confirm that students had this right. This confusion indicates one of the disadvantages of using a questionnaire rather than some form of interview. Face-to-face contact could have eliminated this misunderstanding (Cohen & Manion, 1989).

Table 7.3 - Rights of transfer from junior to senior departments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unequivocal responses</th>
<th>Conditional responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (all may transfer)</td>
<td>No (transfer not automatic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9, 13, 1, 11</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20, 23, 17, 18, 21, 25</td>
<td>5, 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no response from School 2 to this question but the answers to other questions about transfer indicated that the response here should have been Yes.

Policies on rights of transfer seemed unaffected by differences in style of provision or in location. The schools giving right of transfer were a mixture of day only and day/boarding schools in a variety of locations, as were those which did not give automatic right of transfer. However, a school which has a
preparatory department giving absolute right of transfer, or even just the strong likelihood of transfer, into its senior department is creating a pool of potential clients on its campus well under the age of 11. This is perhaps the closest the educational world gets to a commercial marketing situation, where the inter-relationship between provider and customer is a potential source of future 'sales' (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991).

Entry to secondary or senior school departments

The question of the appropriate age of transfer for students is a thorny issue between heads of preparatory and secondary schools (see Appendix Six). The preparatory heads, by raising this topic as an area of major concern (see Chapter Six), had prompted further enquiry about it. I began by exploring the traditions of transfer and the mechanics of the girls' schools' assessment and admissions procedures.

Most students entering independent girls' secondary schools do so the age of 11 (Walford, 1993), with only small groups transferring at 12 or 13 (Jefferson, 1988). The preparatory heads whose schools took girls beyond the age of 11 (see Chapter Six; Appendices Four & Six) attributed this to the strong preference of the secondary schools for admitting students at 11+.

The secondary heads' responses supported this assumption.
Sixteen heads gave 11 or 11+ as their only response. Another admitted students at "11 mostly". For the remaining schools, 11 was the age of the main entry. However, there was sufficient variety among the admission procedures of most of the girls' schools to suggest that, while the preferred age of admission might be 11, admission at other ages is acceptable. School 11, for example, always had a small intake at 12+ and School 2 at 13+. At four schools, students would be admitted into any year group if there were vacancies. The heads of six schools said they admitted students at 16+. It is strange that the other heads did not mention the possibility of admissions at 16+, as all but one of the schools offered sixth-form courses. Table 7.4 shows the ages at which the secondary heads expected to admit students into their schools or senior school departments.

Table 7.4 - Ages of admission into senior schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Ages of admission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>11(mostly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11+(main) 13+(small) elsewhere if vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>11+ 16+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10+ to 16+ inclusive where space allows; main entry 11+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, 15</td>
<td>11+ or 16+: intermediate ages if vacancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>11 12 13 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11+ 12+ 13+ 14+ 16+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 269 -
The schools' locations did not seem to affect the age of admission, nor, with one exception, did the existence of a preparatory department. In School 4, however, students transferred from the preparatory department to the senior department at 10+. The reason given was pressures on space, presumably in the junior department, though specific details were not given. Intake from other preparatory schools was made at 11+. This policy must have the advantage that the head can be certain of the numbers transferring from the internal junior school before the examination procedures which admit other students are undertaken. It follows that the precise number of vacancies for 11-year-olds from other schools will be known a year in advance.

The diversity of practice amongst secondary schools was further complicated by the variety of their admission procedures. Table 7.5 indicates the range of these. From Table 7.5 it can be seen that only three schools (12, 18, 26) had admissions procedures geared solely to 11+ candidates. Two of these were city schools with, in terms of available population, a very large catchment area. Both these schools had their own preparatory departments. The third was a former direct-grant grammar school with a 'traditional' admission age of 11+. It did not have a preparatory department but drew substantially on a single local feeder school (which was in fact one of the schools chosen for a research interview for Chapter Six). Such schools may well be able to dictate their policy to parents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Common Entrance</th>
<th>Own exam</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2, 4, 5, 15, 24</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 7, 20,</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Head's report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Head's report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Head's report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>12 &amp; 13</td>
<td>11+ group work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>School's report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Day in school (12+ and 13+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>11 only</td>
<td>Day in school (11+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>IQ test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C = London Consortium school exam

N.B. All schools offered all procedures indicated by an asterisk (*) for candidates aged 11, and 12, and 13, unless otherwise stated.
At other schools, whatever the expressed preferences of the heads about the age of transfer/admission, more choice would appear to have been offered. This breadth of choice may even have been forced upon schools wishing to expand their market segment, though no respondent said so. They would be unlikely to admit this to an apparent competitor such as myself even if it were the case: this is a field where an independent researcher might well obtain less biased and more extensive information.

**Common Entrance examinations and other written tests**

The Common Entrance (C.E.) Examinations were established for girls in the late 1940s to facilitate the transfer of students from preparatory school to boarding school, and to many of those boarding schools offering day places, and were widely adopted (Leigh, 1972). C.E. was still the main method of assessment for admission into boarding schools in the early 1980s (Pearson, 1981). However, its importance would seem to have declined, for many girls' schools are now opting to set their own entrance and/or scholarship examinations (Jefferson, 1988). None of the day schools and only seven of the twelve boarding schools surveyed used Common Entrance. Only two of these seven boarding schools (11, 25) used C.E. as the sole examination: at both the examination was supplemented by interviews. The other five schools set their own examinations for at least some of their candidates. School 21 used C.E. only at 11+; its own exam was set for entry at 12+ and 13+. At the remaining four schools, internally-set papers as well as C.E. were used across the age
range 11 - 13.

Five of the boarding schools using C.E. had their own preparatory departments, and the schools were situated in diverse locations. Neither of these factors seemed likely to have affected their admission procedures.

The four London day schools all belonged to the London Consortium which, since 1991, has co-ordinated admissions to London day schools. Participating schools are divided into two groups and each group sets common papers using the same mark scheme. Parents may apply for several schools, in order of preference. A student takes the examination at her first-choice school, where her paper is marked and passed on down the line if a place is not offered. Effectively, the system is similar to C.E. but is confined to London day schools, and within the list of participating schools there appears to be no limit to the number of schools within a group to which a candidate can apply.

Other methods of assessment

All but three of the schools surveyed used interviews as part of their admission procedures. At School 24, every candidate was interviewed, and at School 10 all candidates except 11+ candidates (for whom group work was used as an alternative assessment procedure) were interviewed.

Given the importance which preparatory heads placed on their contacts with secondary schools (see Chapter Six), it might have
been expected that references from students' current schools would be important to secondary heads selecting them for admission but few of them mentioned these. Only four (Schools 9, 12, 16, 17) indicated that a report from the student's present school was a significant contribution to the selection process and only three (Schools 9, 16, 17) specified that they expected such a report to come from the headteacher. Schools using Common Entrance automatically receive from preparatory schools a statement of academic achievement giving brief comments on all subjects studied by students, and, depending on the choice of English syllabus, possibly samples of coursework as well. The heads in the survey who used C.E. may well have assumed (correctly, since C.E. was used at Bruford) that I would know this. However, no head mentioned requirements to see students' coursework from current schools.

Four schools used their own school-based assessment procedures to assist in selecting students: group teaching for two short lessons (School 10); an informal assessment day in school (Schools 23 & 26); and an IQ test (School 25).

Reasons for admissions procedures were not sought in the questionnaire: it would have become of unmanageable length if it had been extended fully into this area of policy. However, these procedures would appear to have diversified so much since the last research was undertaken (by Jefferson, 1988) that there is a need for further enquiry to establish the current situation across the whole secondary independent sector.
Changes in admissions policies in secondary/senior schools

The preparatory school headteachers felt that the secondary schools had adopted more aggressive policies on transfer in recent years. Alterations to age criteria or admission procedures might have affected their perceptions about secondary schools' policies.

The secondary heads were asked if, within the preceding five years, any changes had been made in the age at which secondary schools/senior departments expected to admit students. Uniformly, the answer to this question was no.

They were also asked if, within the preceding five years, any changes had been made in admission procedures. Four schools indicated procedural changes within the preceding five years. School 15 had changed the format of its interviews. Students were all interviewed individually, whereas formerly there had been group interviews. Schools 23 and 26 had instituted day-long assessments. School 23 held an Entrance Day, in which short examinations were interspersed with activities. School 26 invited prospective students to spend a day in school, in which various informal assessments were made. The head of School 24 indicated that the new London Consortium system had been inaugurated in January 1991, replacing individually set examinations at each of the participating schools. Presumably this constituted a change for the other three London Consortium schools also, though none of their heads mentioned it.
It was difficult to see how any of these comparatively minor amendments to procedures could have affected the preparatory heads' perceptions about age of intake. However, some of the new procedures could have given the secondary schools greater contact with parents and therefore more opportunities to influence their choice of transfer date (though in practice this is unlikely to have happened, because by the time students were actually attending for assessment the date of their admission would usually have been agreed).

Preferences about the age of transfer

Three aspects of possible preferences about the age of transfer were raised with the secondary heads: parents' perceived preferences; the prep heads' perceived preferences; and the secondary heads' own views.

Parental preferences

The secondary heads were asked if they had noticed any change in parental attitudes to the age of transfer, specifying the preceding five years as the time span. Secondary heads did not, on the whole, perceive that parents had changed their views. Twenty of the twenty-five heads said that parental attitudes were unchanged, though one (School 5) qualified this by adding that there seemed to be "... increasing flexibility as more boys' schools take girls."
Of the five heads who did perceive changes in parental preferences, the head of School 6 mentioned the same factor as the head of School 5: that boys' preparatory schools going co-educational led to the retention of female students until 13+ or at least 12+. On the other hand, the head of School 9 had identified a trend in senior school admissions from 13+ back to 11+, which was shadowed by younger age admissions to the preparatory department of the same school.

Increased demand for places from the parents of 7 or 8-year-olds was the only change noted by the third head (School 17), while the fourth (School 19) indicated that a reduction in the admission age to 3+ in the pre-prep had sometimes prompted girls to look elsewhere at 11+, thus depriving the senior school of follow-on intake between preparatory and senior departments. This head pointed out that her school's situation was complicated by the fact that it took senior students only up to the age of 16, therefore those planning to continue into the sixth-form and wishing to have continuity from 11 - 18 might have changed school at 11 for that reason.

The last headteacher to mention changes in parental preferences (School 7) thought that the reasons were financial. Preparatory school fees are usually cheaper than those of secondary schools and this might well be encouraging some parents to delay transfer. This headteacher had noted a significant degree of postponement within the last five years, mainly to 12+ but some to 13+.
Preparatory headteachers' perceived preferences

When asked about their perceptions of the views of preparatory headteachers, a much stronger picture emerged. Twelve of the secondary heads indicated that they had observed changes in preparatory headteachers' preferences, and ten of these twelve specifically mentioned the wishes of co-educational preparatory heads to retain female students to 13+. Comments varied from the observation of "... a slight indication of wish to keep pupils until 12 or 13 (all part of the pressure on numbers?)" (School 12) to "They try to hang on to them to 13+ - at all costs!" (School 5). One head (School 7) pointed out that the reason given for this was usually the benefits to the students of taking responsibility at the top of the preparatory school. She felt that there was truth in this point of view. However, the same head expressed concern that many co-educational preparatory heads "... require/advise girls to fit their norm".

Many arguments have been put forward suggesting that co-educational schools place girls at a disadvantage, both socially and academically (Deem, 1984; Mahony, 1985; Burgess, 1990; French, 1990; Measor & Sikes, 1992; Price, 1993; Larkin, 1994). The problems of fitting girls into a basically boys-orientated school emerged in maintained education in the 1960s and 1970s, when co-educational comprehensive schools replaced many single-sex schools (Bradbury, 1977). In independent schools, financial implications also became an ingredient in the arguments, following the decision of Marlborough School's headmaster, John Dancy, to admit girls into
his sixth-form. He gave educational reasons for his decision, but he acknowledged that the outcome had been financially advantageous (Dancy, 1969). Many heads of boys' schools followed Marlborough's example (Rae, 1981; Tucker, 1994). This move towards co-education was resented by the heads of girls' secondary schools, particularly boarding schools, because it was achieved at their expense in terms of lost students at the top of their age range (Tucker, 1994). Their situation, in fact, paralleled that currently facing preparatory schools. Kiggell (1989) questioned the philosophical convictions of the heads of boys' schools which became co-educational, and the heads of almost half of the girls' secondary schools seemed to share her scepticism about the preparatory headteachers whose schools have followed suit.

Of the two heads who did not directly cite the problem of co-educational preparatory schools, one (School 4) had observed a marked trend away from 12+ entry from all private schools. That school's intake was now almost entirely at 11+. The remaining head (School 24) had found that preparatory heads were tending to delay the application of borderline candidates. This was not attributed to altruism, but to a wish to increase fee income by retaining such students for a further year.

Twelve of the secondary heads indicated that they had perceived no change in preparatory headteachers' views on the age of transfer over the preceding five years. One (School 2) qualified this by pointing out that relatively few students entered her school from preparatory schools anyway. These
twelve schools were preponderantly day schools. Eight of them were situated in the south of England, either in London or within easy reach of the capital. Two of the remainder were in large northern conurbations. All but one of these schools had their own junior/preparatory departments, therefore their closest relationships will be with their own feeder school and they may also have an influence on its policies.

**Professional advice given to parents**

Preparatory headteachers feel that parents can be subjected to direct personal persuasion from secondary schools to transfer their daughters as 11+ (Johns, 1994; Syers-Gibson & Syers-Gibson, 1994; see also Chapter Six & Appendix Four). Many parents will already have been advised by the headteacher of their daughter's preparatory school about the best age for transfer, but they may raise the question with the head of the school to which they seek to transfer their daughter. Conflict of advice might signal to parents conflict of interests between the two schools. Secondary heads were asked how they responded to this question which, given that their declared personal preferences were mostly for 11+ transfer, was a delicate one.

Fourteen of the secondary heads confirmed that they do advise parents to seek transfer for girls at the age of 11+. Some qualified this by expanding on it:

"Our curriculum is 11 - 18" (School 2).
"As ex-direct grant grammar we are geared to start at 11" (School 12).

"I recommend starting at 11 when everyone else is new" (School 21).

At two schools (7, 9) the heads were prepared to settle for 11+ or 12+. Seven heads declined to give a specific age and, though the question had referred to secondary schooling, two heads (Schools 23, 26) ignored this and indicated that their advice to parents was always for transfer into their preparatory/junior department before 11.

The secondary heads' reasons for their views

The preparatory heads attributed the secondary heads' preference for transfer at 11+ either to financial motives, or to the traditional reason that girls mature earlier than boys. The secondary heads, however, though some of them mentioned these two reasons, painted a much more diverse picture, ranging across curricular issues, social factors and the individual circumstances of the families involved.

Within the curriculum, modern languages can be a major problem (McClure, 1993). The head of School 26 advised entry at the age of 8 or 9 years because that was the age at which its students started studying French. The problems presented by differing experiences of modern languages were the reason that the heads of three other schools (1, 18, 25) recommended transfer at 11.
"During Year 7 a foundation course for four foreign languages is carried out. This helps in deciding the two modern languages to be studied to GCSE" (School 1).

"... I express reservations about 13+ transfer from prep schools which do not start a second modern language at 12 as we do" (School 25).

The head of School 18 added that difficulties could also arise in Maths and Science.

Curriculum issues were of concern in other ways in two schools (1, 12) whose heads pointed out that there was a natural break in the National Curriculum between Key Stages 2 and 3. Though at the time of this research it was not incumbent upon independent schools to follow the National Curriculum, it appeared that these schools did so, or at least used it as a framework for their own curriculum.

The head of School 26 made a point about the Scottish 5 - 14 programme of learning, indicating concern that preparatory schools might not have the resources to teach it in sufficient breadth beyond the age of 11, or even, in some cases, beyond 8 or 9. The head of School 17 also said that facilities at the preparatory school attended by any given candidate would affect her answer to a question about the most suitable age of transfer. If a particular preparatory school could not offer facilities to enable students to follow an appropriate curriculum beyond 11 (or 12), she would encourage parents to
transfer their daughter at a younger age than she might otherwise recommend.

Social factors were another source of some anxiety over transfer delayed beyond the age of 11. Two different problems were outlined: the difficulties of arriving in secondary school after most others have settled into friendship groups; and the social deprivation of being part of a dwindling number of girls at the top of a co-educational preparatory school. Five heads expressed concern about the former and two about the latter.

The headteachers of six schools mentioned the fact that independent girls' day schools have traditions of transfer at 11, which go back to the days of the 11+ examination in the maintained sector. Some boarding schools have also followed this tradition. These heads recommended entry at the age of 11 because their schools have always admitted the majority of students at that age.

Four other headteachers stressed that decisions about transfer were individual. They took into account financial factors, social and family circumstances, and also the current preparatory school and what it was able to offer. The head of School 2 mentioned the need to keep places for students who transferred from (maintained) middle schools (but did not say whether the LEA middle schools in School 2's locality took students from 8 - 12 or 9 - 13). One head indicated succinctly that her recommendations were based on two factors:

- 283 -
"(i) When the girl is ready for boarding,
(ii) When the mother is ready for boarding" (School 6).

The headteachers of two schools (14, 24) raised the question of 'young' transfer. Both preferred not to accept students as early admissions if they had borderline birthdays, thinking it better for them to wait for the correct academic year, but the headteacher of School 24 added "... not at risk of losing a good candidate to another school".

Tucker (1994) pointed out the influence of preparatory school heads on senior school choice and warned that this influence is stronger when senior schools are in competition for students. The importance of good relationships with feeder preparatory schools was mentioned by several heads of boarding schools and the impact of their policies on the prep schools had not gone unnoticed. Some gave very qualified responses about transfer. These varied from the diplomatic:

"We have very strong relationships with the Heads of our prep school feeders and are very happy to receive the girls at the age as agreed between the Head of the prep school and parents. There is no pressure on girls to join us before the age of 13, but some do" (School 3).

to the pragmatic:

"I'm very careful! We don't want to fall out with our feeder preps, do we... so I recommend according to
preferred age of feeder prep where I know it, although I express reservations about 13+ transfer from prep schools which do not start a second modern language at 12 as we do" (School 25).

There were no differences in emphasis between the heads of day schools and of those which offered boarding. Similarly, there was no particular pattern of different responses between those heads who could draw on the students from their own preparatory school to fill some of their senior school places and those whose sources were all external to their institution. Location did not seem to make any difference, either. Even the heads of the London day schools, who shared the admission procedures of the London Consortium, all had different views about the age of transfer. These seemed to be their personal professional perspectives, evolved out of their individual tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) and life experiences (Popper, 1972) rather than out of any shared circumstances.

**Bruford's competitors - a source of marketing information**

At Bruford I had noted that most applicants tended to be registering for 11+ entry. It was my practice to indicate to parents that this decision should be based on their daughter's maturity and on the suitability of her preparatory school to educate her appropriately beyond the age of 11, suggesting that the current headteacher could be a useful source of advice but that the final decision should be made by them. The responses
of the schools most local to Bruford were scrutinised carefully to see if their policies and advice to parents might be a point of difference. The policies at three schools (4, 6, 7), if different, might have affected Bruford's entry.

At School 4, the age of transfer was regarded as "... an individual decision". Factors affecting it might include LEA policy (for those girls transferring from state primary schools); friendship patterns in co-educational preparatory schools (what one girl or group of girls in any academic year decided to do, the rest followed); and financial matters.

At School 6, the head advised that earlier transfer was preferable if a girl were at a co-educational preparatory school.

The head of School 7 gave a clear indication that transfer at 11, or at the latest 12, was preferable. She indicated that transfer from co-educational preparatory schools did occur at 13+ but that this is not a result of her advice - it is what happens!

Bruford's other main competitor was Hawkins College, a co-educational school which admitted students to the senior department at 13+. At its Junior School, Mr Hope had been interviewed (see Chapter Six). He had made it clear that he thought in terms of individual needs. He did not have a fixed policy on the transfer age for girls but inclined to the view that transfer at 11+ might be more appropriate for them.
From these responses, it did not seem that a 'hard line' at another school might be winning students at 11+ who might otherwise have been considering entry to Bruford at 12 or 13.

Conclusions

The aim of this final part of the research project was to establish the veracity of aspects of the preparatory headteachers' views, discussed in Chapter Six, with particular reference to the appropriate age of transfer for a female student. The major finding of this chapter is confirmation of the preparatory heads' perceptions that heads of secondary girls' school do expect to admit all, or at least the vast majority, of their students at the age of 11. This is their official policy and it is what they tell parents. However, the secondary heads' personal and professional reasons for this preference were far more complex than those ascribed to them by the prep heads. Furthermore, despite this preference, most of the girls' schools also had admission procedures for older students. Comparatively few secondary schools had made changes in their procedures for admission and methods of assessment at 11+, and such changes as they had made were modest. The changes likely to have had the greatest impact on the preparatory schools had not been made at secondary level, but in those schools which had their own junior/preparatory department where the age range for admission had been expanded downwards, thus offering direct competition to local freestanding prep schools.
The implications for the relationships between preparatory and secondary schools arising from the information given by the two groups of heads are considered in Chapter Eight. However, exploration of the issue of transfer with the secondary heads led to the discovery of information and to the formulation of conclusions on other aspects of the marketing of independent girls' secondary schools.

**Marketing implications for girls' schools**

A number of issues emerged from the secondary heads' responses. Consideration is given first to the post-sixteen segment of the girls' schools' market. The current place of the Common Entrance examinations is examined, together with the possible future for these which the research data suggests. Pressures on marketing exerted by competition from the maintained sector are then explored.

**The post-sixteen market**

Secondary heads appeared to concentrate on the admission of 11-year-olds and they did not all think of post-16 provision as a potential market. This argues a lack of awareness of their school's external environment (Jones, 1987), where greater diversity of opportunity is developing to attract post-16 students (Stephen, 1992). Heads of girls' schools faced a similar situation in the 1970s and 1980s when boys' schools attracted many of their students post-16 because the girls'
schools were not sensitive to market needs (Tucker, 1994). Constant attention to the developing needs of students already within the school is essential if these valuable current clients are not to be lost (Gray, 1991; Golder, 1995). Moreover, attracting new sixth-formers (i.e. Years 12 and 13) is also a possible way of increasing student numbers. Secondary heads may need to re-orientate their own thinking in order to avoid missing opportunities. This supports Gaunt's (1991) insistence that marketing is not just a strategy but a management orientation.

The decline of the Common Entrance examinations

The heads indicated that most secondary schools have used their own admission tests for some or all of their students. The Common Entrance examination for girls seems to have declined in popularity with secondary schools. The introduction of the National Curriculum in many independent preparatory schools could lead to greater comparability of syllabi with those of state schools and the relationship of the National Curriculum to the Common Entrance examination will be important (McClure, 1993). If C.E. were based on the National Curriculum, this could have one of two quite opposite effects. Either C.E. would enjoy a resurgence of popularity and be rapidly reinstated in many schools which have recently abandoned it, or the independent schools would find less need to set separate assessment tests in the future, adopting Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) as their benchmark, and thus C.E. would dwindle further. The latter possibility would have a further
effect on preparatory schools: that transfer at the age of 11 would become standard, whatever the schools try to do (Major & Prichard, 1992; Johns, 1994). Some of the preparatory heads themselves foresaw this (Mr Barrett, for example, see Appendix Four).

The use of National Curriculum documentation might have a further effect on secondary schools. Currently, they do not seem to make much use of references from previous schools, or to use coursework to assist assessment (though schools using C.E. 'Mode A' papers must transfer some coursework for assessment). If Key Stage 2 assessments became standard procedure in preparatory schools, secondary schools would almost certainly have to adapt their admission systems to take account of the information which SATs provide.

**Competition with the maintained sector**

Greater parity of curriculum with maintained schools could pose a threat to independent schools. Major changes in education, driven by government legislation, have forced maintained schools to become more competitive (Tucker, 1994). It is already clear (MORI/ISIS, 1993; Tucker, 1994) that parents are selecting different kinds of schools to meet their children's needs at different stages of their lives, and preparatory heads with good state schools in their area were obviously happy to recommend these to parents as possible choices of secondary school (see Chapter Six). Widespread adoption of the National Curriculum could make transfer across the independent/maintained divide
much easier in future. After all, independent secondary schools already follow syllabi which shadow Key Stages 3 and 4, in order to prepare candidates for GCSE examinations. State provision could seem an increasingly attractive alternative, particularly if continued financial pressures on parents limit their capacity to meet fees in the independent sector.

Alternatively, continued 'independence' of curriculum (if this freedom is not at some future time removed by further government legislation), may remain one of the features of private schools which parents are willing to purchase, in which case they would be seeking schools which have not adopted the National Curriculum in its entirety. Independent schools, at both preparatory and secondary level, must scan their environments and analyse their markets carefully on this factor, and take account of all possibilities when planning curriculum development.
Conclusions
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions

Always maintain the diplomatic initiative in all negotiations.
Roberts, p83

In Chapter Three, I outlined the philosophy which underpinned my development of an appropriate research methodology for my thesis. As suggested by Delamont (1992), I planned to undertake a voyage of discovery to acquire information about client needs at my school, to develop an understanding of the ways in which students and parents viewed its practices, and to build upon these for the school's future.

Initially I set off in search of perspectives on Bruford's practice, to develop understandings which would facilitate informed decision-making (Gurney, 1989; Simons, 1989) and bring about change (Lomax, 1990). I chose the action research model (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1988; Elliott, 1991) because I was researching my own working environment and also because the cyclic nature of action research allows for changes in direction if the data generated by the enquiry suggests new paths (McNiff, 1988; Loftus, 1991).

The first two spirals of research concentrated on Bruford's internal markets. For the first spiral, with colleagues and governors I focussed on the school's provision for its
students. Procedures and resources were analysed and various changes were made in the curriculum, pastoral care, physical facilities and management structure to try and improve that provision. This process is examined in Chapter Four.

Parental opinions, including their reactions to these changes, were evaluated in the second spiral. Generally, parents were happy with the school, but the enquiry pinpointed two key areas of interest. One, a growing dissatisfaction with the level of the fees and with the shrinking size of the school, prompted a review of the school's future which is discussed in the final section of this chapter. The other important response from parents was an indication that, for many of them, awareness of Bruford had been raised initially in their daughter's previous school. This prompted me to extend my enquiry to include key agents in Bruford's external market.

In the third cycle of research I sought information about the professional advice which families are given about secondary schools, and the procedures they are encouraged to follow to select them. The data was gathered through interviews with preparatory headteachers. Findings about various factors, such as their perceptions of the policies of girls' secondary schools on the age of transfer, led me to test the validity of the views of the prep heads. The questionnaires sent to the secondary heads confirmed many of the prep heads' views, and particularly that girls' schools
do favour admission at 11+, but responses also indicated that the reasons for their policies are far more complex than the prep heads appear to have realised. The main finding of this final cycle of research is the distance in professional understanding between these two groups of heads.

This research explored a series of relationships which can be conceptualised as client/supplier relationships (Davies & Ellison, 1995). The complex web of contacts and relationships between Bruford and its stakeholders, its suppliers and its competitors, formed the market from which the school was seeking to attract students. I hoped to draw from the data information which would assist Bruford's recruitment strategies. Bruford's relationships with its parents and their satisfaction with its provision of education to their children were discussed in Chapter Five. For many of them, their earliest awareness of Bruford turned out to have been prompted by the schools their children attended before coming to Bruford. Therefore it was important to explore the influence which such schools had on potential clients of Bruford. Bruford's direct contacts with preparatory schools, and the wider context of those schools and their relationships with the other secondary schools to which their students transfer, were explored in Chapter Six. This raised questions about the quality of the relationships between supplier and receiver schools. The perspectives which the heads of Bruford's competitor schools brought to the process of student transfer and the
implications of these for professional partnerships with the prep schools were examined in Chapter Seven.

This final chapter draws conclusions about the relationships between independent preparatory and secondary schools and their implications for marketing schools. It leads to a consideration of possible areas of further research which might generate greater understanding of the marketing of schools. The fate of Bruford is described and the importance to that decision of the research data gathered through this study is revealed.

**Some marketing problems in independent schools**

According to Hoyle (1986), human problems can only be solved through social interaction and the development of common understandings. Good personal relationships between headteachers are the soundest basis for successful inter-school networks (Busher & Hodgkinson, 1995). Ginnever (1986) found that such relationships were crucial to the success of transfer arrangements from state primary to secondary schools. They appear to be equally important in the independent sector. Preparatory and independent secondary schools are mutually interdependent, for the former are suppliers of students to the latter and their influence on prospective parents can be profound, yet the latter operate the admission 'gate' and the success-rate of students passing into them can be a major measure by which parents judge the preparatory schools. The findings of this
enquiry show areas of potential conflict between the two sectors.

Both groups of headteachers identified pressures on the relationships between preparatory and secondary schools in such areas as competition, social factors, breadth of curriculum, leadership training, and finance, though they did not always see these problems from the same perspective. The prep heads also identified a practical constraint on their relationships with secondary schools: limitations on their time. These matters are considered in order below.

To clarify responses and differentiate between the sectors, heads of preparatory schools are referred to by name (as in Chapter Six) and heads of secondary schools by school number (as in Chapter Seven).

Competition

Competition between institutions is a consequence of the operation of market forces within education (Ball, 1994). For independent schools such competition is not new. As long ago as 1919, a conference of the Association of Preparatory Schools recorded its dissatisfaction with public schools' attempts to persuade parents to transfer their children early (IAPS, 1920). Many of the replies given by the headteachers in this study, both preparatory and secondary, indicated that they were aware of the interdependence of the two groups of schools (see Chapters
Six & Seven), but at the same time all their schools need to maintain viable numbers. While attempting to co-exist amicably, secondary schools are in competition with many prep schools for students aged 11 to 13 years. To the preparatory headteachers, this competition was made manifest by the behaviour of secondary heads, whom they perceived as placing undue pressure on parents and students to transfer at the age of 11. To the heads of girls' secondary schools, competition was visible as preparatory heads "... hanging on to girls until 13 - at all costs" (School 6). One of the secondary heads openly recognised the dangers of this area of potential contention: "We don't want to fall out with our feeder preps, do we?" (School 25).

The absence of agreement on the issue of transfer is destructive of professional trust and confidence between heads of preparatory and secondary schools. Mr Paul, for example, was quite emphatic that there were senior schools which he would never recommend to parents because he felt the heads of those schools had not treated him with appropriate professional courtesy when dealing with the transfer of students.

My research findings also indicate that girls' schools with junior departments have, like most of the prep schools, expanded into nursery/pre-prep provision, therefore competition for students may start at that stage.

- 298 -
Social factors affecting girls

The secondary heads were worried about two social factors arising out of post-11 transfer. The first of these was the difficulties which girls may experience if they join secondary schools at the age of 12 or 13, when the friendship groups of students admitted previously have already been formed. None of the preparatory heads made any reference to this. It is a situation of which they may have no personal knowledge: most of them had worked only in the preparatory sector.

The other anxiety of the secondary heads was directed towards the social deprivation which they perceived existing for girls at the top of co-educational preparatory schools, where a dwindling female population above the age of 11 reduces choice of friendship groups.

Smith (1990) indicated that decisions and strategies can sometimes have unexpected consequences. Policies in both secondary and preparatory schools contribute to the imbalance of gender in the top classes of the prep schools. Social difficulties occur because some girls leave and some do not. The admission policies of the girls' secondary schools, by supporting so strongly their preferred age of transfer at 11+, are helping to create the conditions of gender imbalance in preparatory schools which the secondary heads deplore.
On the other hand, not all preparatory schools in this study calling themselves 'co-educational' have balanced gender intakes. Like many prep schools (Leinster-Mackay, 1984), seven of the co-educational schools were originally founded as boys' schools. They still had populations biased towards males: in two only 25% of the student population was female. By becoming co-educational, by expecting female students to conform to the traditional transfer pattern of male students (changing schools at 13+), and by failing to foresee that they might prefer to follow the traditional transfer pattern of female students (changing schools at 11+), these preparatory schools may have contributed to the creation of their own problem. The method by which they have increased their market has thus had at least one outcome which may not have been foreseen. This reinforces the need for market audit in strategic planning for schools, as advocated by Cowan (1993a).

Burgess (1990) drew attention to the potential problems which an unbalanced gender intake could create for co-educational schools, but studies of the effects of gender on education have not extended to preparatory/secondary transfer in the independent sector. This is an example of the scarcity of literature in this field, a topic to which I return later in this chapter.

Despite the gender imbalance which is created, boys' preparatory schools which become co-educational do succeed in attracting some female students. This gives an
indication that some parents of girls are willing to accept such an imbalance. Secondary heads unhappy with this are therefore differing in viewpoint not only from preparatory heads but also from some parents of potential students.

**Breadth of academic curriculum**

The secondary heads expressed anxiety about the breadth of the post-11 curriculum in preparatory schools, and also about the resources necessary to provide it, particularly for modern languages, maths and science.

On my visits to preparatory schools I did not form the view that students over the age of 11 lacked either facilities or breadth of curriculum. I found that Bruford's feeder schools were generally well-equipped. They followed the broad outline of the National Curriculum, usually enhancing it with extra provision in areas such as modern languages and P.E., with Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 subjects often taught by specialists. However, other secondary heads may have contacts with preparatory schools which are not so well provided. The preparatory heads themselves, when considering secondary schools to recommend to parents, looked for breadth of curriculum, appropriate facilities and well-qualified staff, but none of them made reference to continuity of curriculum for students transferring to senior schools. This issue seemed to be one about which there was an absence of shared professional understandings between the primary and secondary sectors of independent education.
The advent of the National Curriculum not only strengthens the need for good inter-school liaison (Busher & Hodgkinson, 1995) but also begins to tackle the problem of curricular continuity. Without an agreed curriculum difficulties arise because, as this research shows (Chapter Six), preparatory schools 'feed' more than one senior school and some of them can send students on to a very wide range of senior schools. McClure (1993) suggested that adoption of the National Curriculum by all independent schools might go a long way to resolve problems with curricular continuity, though it would not address the secondary heads' anxieties about the adequacy of facilities and resources. In the absence of an agreed framework used by all independent schools, no preparatory school can offer a curriculum which dovetails exactly with those of all potential senior schools to which its students transfer, and there will always be some dislocation of learning when students move on.

One anxiety which a small number of preparatory heads raised about breadth of curriculum concerned children who had learning difficulties. Two heads in particular (Mr Barrett, Mr Powell) felt that some secondary schools might be admitting weak Common Entrance candidates simply to keep up student numbers, without offering the curricular support which such students would need.

An aspect of the pastoral curriculum

Another area in which preparatory and secondary heads
differed was in their views of the value for students of leadership experience at the top of the prep school. Part of the 'hidden curriculum' in preparatory schools is that of leadership training for senior pupils (Johns, 1994), by giving them responsibilities as prefects and school leaders. Some of the preparatory heads regretted that girls who left early missed these opportunities. This did not seem to be an issue of interest to secondary heads. Their anxieties about the breadth of the curriculum seemed to be centred on purely academic considerations, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Only one secondary head (School 7) felt that there might be some value for students in these pastoral experiences. The remaining secondary heads made no mention of this kind of training as desirable for potential students and this outcome of a preparatory school education did not seem to be valued by them.

**Parental finance**

Most heads from both kinds of schools made reference to financial pressures on parents. Finance is certainly an issue for parents (MORI/ISIS, 1989 & 1993; ISIS, 1995). Preparatory school fees are usually lower than those of secondary schools, and the head of School 4, for example, indicated that the lower fees of preparatory schools might encourage parents to delay transfer. However, no conclusive evidence was offered by either preparatory or secondary heads to prove that financial considerations have affected decisions about the age of transfer made by parents in their
schools, though this possibility cannot be ruled out. It may be part of the "common-sense theory of practitioners" (Bassey, 1990a, p35) or even a matter which they considered too confidential to discuss in detail with an outsider and, moreover, one who was head of a competitor school.

Financial pressures on the schools

From the preparatory heads' perspectives, the issue of finance was straightforward. Attracting students at the age of 11 was viewed as a ploy by secondary schools to 'poach' students as early as possible in order to secure both student numbers and income. Secondary heads attributed a similar financial motive to those prep heads who wished to retain girls in their schools until they reached the age of 13.

Promoting student transfer

Heazell (1971) considered that supporting parents as they made their choices of secondary schooling was an important responsibility for a prep school head. All the preparatory heads indicated that they took their role as advisers very seriously: "The essential part of being a junior school headteacher is giving thought to secondary transfer" (Miss Jefferies). Without exception the preparatory heads visited all the schools to which their students might consider transferring. All were involved to some extent in the transfer process and all but three of them felt that their...
contribution to it was considerable. They all recommended schools on an individual basis and therefore their views on the suitability of a school for a particular candidate for admission were carefully considered.

Heazell (1971) advocated that each student should be given a full headteacher reference to assist their transfer. Few secondary heads in this study, however, mentioned using preparatory headteachers' references and views as resources to help them to select students. The failure of most of the secondary heads to indicate the use of prep heads' references could be attributed to several causes. It may be mere oversight of the very familiar, or show an insensitivity to or lack of respect for the views of preparatory heads, or it may be that references have actually been of little value, however much care prep heads may have given to them.

Working with competitive partners

Bowles (1989) indicated the need for a school to assess its catchment not only in terms of prospective students and their parents but also in terms of competitor schools. Nowhere is the relationship between potential competitors more finely balanced than in the independent sector, where a preparatory school may be in competition with a secondary school for 11-year-olds, and acting as a feeder to the same secondary school for students transferring at the age of 13.
Misunderstandings and lack of common meanings would seem to present major difficulties to the smooth working of relationships between preparatory and secondary heads. A factor contributing to this situation may well be the infrequency of contacts between them. Many of the prep heads lamented constraints on their time, which hampered them from visiting secondary schools as often as they might have wished. As a consequence, they may not keep abreast of innovations in secondary schools. One obvious solution to this problem is for secondary heads to visit their feeder schools.

Gray (1991) indicated that it is important for schools to consider the quality of the service which they offer to all their customers. Cowan (1993a) recommended that school leaders should undertake regular audit of their institutions' external environments. In the context of feeder-school contacts, my findings suggest that secondary heads should monitor carefully their relationships with preparatory schools, including research into the professional circumstances and preferences of the individual preparatory heads of as many potential feeder schools as possible. The preparatory headteachers were in general agreement about the qualities for which they look in secondary schools, including students' welfare, discipline, the security of the school environment, academic standards and the calibre of the head and staff, but the 'mix' of factors which they used was different for each individual. For secondary heads, detailed knowledge of prep heads'
preferences would be invaluable in enabling them to shape the profiles of their respective schools to attract the interest of particular prep schools, thus orienting their schools towards specific niches in the educational market. Silk (1988) suggested that larger secondary schools might find it helpful to use other staff to maintain links but, bearing in mind the importance which I have found that prep heads placed on good working relationships with secondary heads, the regular contact of head with head is not really susceptible of substitution.

Preparatory and secondary heads are the gatekeepers for their institutions, not only for the staff, students and parents but also for each other. Appropriate management of their external boundaries (Jones, 1987; Mauriel, 1989) must be the concern of heads in both sectors, if friction over the element of competition between them is not to sour their relationships and inhibit the recommendation and transfer of students. Even if they cannot reach agreement on all the issues discussed in this, and the previous, chapters, both groups need to be sensitive to their existence. Tactful searching for as much common ground as possible, and sympathetic understanding of differing perspectives (even if they cannot be fully shared or supported), appear to be an essential part of boundary management for schools in both sectors.

Understanding about external factors is also necessary if sensible management strategies are to be adopted within
educational institutions (Cowan, 1993a). For example, the problems encountered by the boys' preps schools which have become co-educational, as shown earlier in this chapter, indicate clearly the need for marketing audit before new policies are irrevocably launched. Projected change to market segmentation should always be preceded by careful analysis of the potential effects (Tonks, 1989; Cowell, 1994), and careful analysis of the possible responses of customers is as important for a school as it is for any other service organisation (Pardey, 1991). In any new situation there will always be weaknesses and threats as well as strengths and opportunities.

Implications for further research

My research suffered many limitations, resulting both from pressures on time and from other factors such as the ethical constraints on a headteacher researching her own school. The surveys of the preparatory and secondary schools were undertaken only with small sample groups, largely because of time constraints. However, the findings are such as to suggest that further research into various areas would be interesting.

Preparatory schools

The preparatory school sector as a whole has been seriously neglected as a research field. Since Leinster-Mackay
(1984), no major research has been done on independent primary schooling. This study has revealed several aspects of the preparatory school sector, of which the preparatory heads' insights into the process of school transfer, and their perceptions of the current environment of independent schools (presented in Chapter Six), are arguably the most interesting. I was unable to find comparable data anywhere in the literature. This study has identified many changes in preparatory schools since 1984, raising questions about how widespread these are. These include the expansion of nursery provision; the move to co-education; and the interaction of location and catchment at a time when there is a general decline in the popularity of boarding schools. Several of the prep heads were gravely concerned that the survival of their schools was threatened by current trends. Further research is needed to evaluate the situation.

The absence of any published data on the factors which influence parental choice of preparatory schools for their children (not on whether or not pursue private education, but the reasons which lead them to choose one school in preference to another) leaves unchallenged the prep heads' assertions that word-of-mouth is the strongest source of influence. Comparison with the maintained sector (Plowden, 1967; Johnson, 1990) suggests that they could be right, but a wider survey than this study is needed to establish the validity of these assumptions.
Aspects of boarding

Location and notional catchment areas are relevant to all schools. Location was considered by the prep heads to be an increasingly important factor in school choice, especially to parents choosing a boarding school for their daughter’s secondary education. Catchment areas for preparatory schools, particularly boarding schools, seem to be shrinking, with most schools now drawing as boarders many students who could, if they wished, travel as day students. These factors will affect secondary transfer.

Furthermore, research into other aspects of the education of children in boarding schools is sparse, particularly in respect of pastoral support (Fisher, Frazer & Murray, 1984) and, with the exception of Morgan’s work (1993), is rather dated.

Both of these, therefore, are areas where the absence of current research for comparison suggests that further enquiry is overdue.

Independent secondary schools

The heads of girls’ secondary schools showed strong preferences for admitting girls at the age of 11 years. This is not a new development (Jefferson, 1988; Walford, 1993) but there have been other changes in girls’ secondary schools over the last five years: for example, expansion
within their junior departments to include nursery provision. Limitations on time and other resources confined this study to the collection of data by questionnaires from a small sample of heads of girls' secondary schools. It would have been valuable to have extended the enquiry to the heads of co-educational and boys-only schools, to explore their links with prep schools and their perspectives on the age of transfer and on the establishment of 'junior houses' for students between the ages of 11 and 13.

The girls' schools in my sample group have also expanded the range of assessment procedures for the admission of students. Extension of this enquiry to the whole of the GSA membership would make it possible to see if this greater diversity of admission procedures is widespread.

Wider perspectives on parental choice

The broad question of parental choice has been explored by a number of surveys (Highter, 1969; Elliott, 1981; Fox, 1985; Adler & Raab, 1988; Edwards, Fitz & Whitty, 1989; Hanford, 1990; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Griffiths, 1991; Hunter, 1991; West & Varlaam, 1991: West, 1992a; West et al, 1993, 1995; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993), but most of these enquiries were undertaken retrospectively, as was my own. Researchers have been dependent on parents' memories, and these views may have altered with the passage of time, as found by Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1994). Research undertaken with parents as they make their choices, whether
for independent or maintained schools, would be useful for comparison with the retrospective studies.

**Students' views**

Ethical considerations inhibited me from involving my own students in my survey of Bruford (see Chapter Three). Responses from many parents (Chapter Five) indicated that their daughters had been involved in the family's choice of secondary school for them. Other research studies, such as those of Webster, Owen & Crome (1993) and West et al (1995), have also found evidence of students' influence on school choice. Students can have insights to offer about their schools (Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1995) and their involvement is integral to school improvement (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991). More research is needed into students' contributions to the process of selecting a school, into their perceptions of schools before and after joining them, and into the ways in which their views change over time.
Afterword – Bruford's future

This research enquiry was triggered by Bruford's needs, though my research path eventually led in directions unforeseen at its commencement, as can happen in action research (McNiff, 1988; Loftus, 1991). Exploration of the literature, and scanning of Bruford's environment through the accumulated data, not only influenced my actions and decisions as Bruford's head (see Chapters Four & Five) but also enabled me to make clear, if unpalatable, judgments about the school's future.

One aspect of marketing, and indeed of all strategic management, is the need to consider long-term perspectives (Majaro, 1982; Mauriel, 1989). The survival of the independent sector of education as a whole may be due to its capacity to adapt to social change (Walford, 1983), and boarding schools in particular must adapt to survive (Seekings, 1993). Sometimes, despite their best endeavours and precautions, institutions may find that disaster cannot be avoided (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1984). External events and social change may pose insuperable threats (Majaro, ibid). Recent changes in their external environment have made small girls' schools very vulnerable (Tucker, 1994).

To understand the final outcome for Bruford, it is necessary to understand the school's problems as they existed in 1993. Rationalisation of staffing and more efficient use of buildings had reduced Bruford's costs (see Chapter Four),
but a greater inflow of students in 1992 had not matched the outflow. Daygirl numbers had continued to rise but, as their fees were considerably lower than boarding fees, not sufficiently fast to replace lost revenue from a shrinking number of boarders. The ISIS Census (1993) confirmed that the decline in boarding was not confined to Bruford but was replicated in the independent boarding sector as a whole. Schools like Bruford were particularly vulnerable as a small school's profit margins quickly come under pressure. Not surprisingly, as indicated in Chapter Five, some of Bruford's parents had begun to worry about the school's decline in size. Some parents withdrew their daughters post-GCSE because of this factor. Furthermore, some of the preparatory heads interviewed (see Chapter Six) doubted that small schools could survive. From this I drew the inference that they would not recommend small schools like Bruford to parents of potential students.

Accordingly, in 1993 I advised the Chair of Governors of the evidence which I had accumulated through the research presented in this study, and I indicated that Bruford's closure would be inevitable within two years. The alternative was to merge with one of the neighbouring schools. Of these choices, the latter was my preferred solution to the financial problems which Bruford faced, since merger would allow the school to exercise some measure of control over curricular continuity for the students, whereas closure, by scattering them, would make this impossible. Merger would also provide continuity of
employment for some staff, though not for all.

In action research reflection is interdependent with decision-making (Somekh, 1995). My research into the marketing of Bruford directly influenced a series of major organisational decisions. The findings were disseminated to colleagues (both teaching and associate staff), and to governors, as a result of my efforts to validate my research processes. Perceptions of the problems which faced Bruford, shared amongst the governors, showed that the proposed solution to the problem was congruent with the needs of the situation (Busher, 1989b). Hence the decision by the governing board to seek a merger can be seen to have been influenced by the outcomes of the research. The merger took place in August 1994.

Research outcomes are not predictable (Smith, 1990). A consequence of the merger was my own redundancy. That the research would lead the researcher to recommend actions leading directly to her redundancy was a conclusion unforeseen at the commencement of the enquiry.

Effects of the merger on the research

To some degree the merger created a methodological problem: that of checking the validity of the accounts of the internal processes of Bruford School after the staff and governors had dispersed. With one exception, there was no interview data available, only my personal recollections and
research diary notes, therefore the documentary evidence was relatively slight. Social science research can face many of the problems of historical research (Stenhouse, 1978).

Some validation was possible. One colleague, a former member of the Bruford Senior Management Team, has affirmed that Chapters One and Four accord with her own memories of events. The findings described in Chapter Five were shared with all staff at the time. Management decisions based upon the questionnaire responses were taken in full consultation with staff and governors. However, after the merger I did not feel I could pursue further efforts at verification through triangulation of other participants' views. Such a proceeding would have raised awkward ethical questions, by requiring other ex-staff or ex-governors to re-engage with memories which the merger may have made traumatic for them.

On the other hand, the merger helped to solve one ethical problem. A common difficulty in school-based action research is the selection of material for publication (Kelly, 1989). Teachers, when they reflect on their practice and write about it, are inevitably revealing information about the practices of those with whom they have worked, and for headteachers there are further problems related to their position power as gatekeepers (Handy & Aitken, 1986; Winston, 1990; Homan 1991). In the pursuit of scientific truth, as presented through this thesis, I had to publish sufficient information to substantiate and explain the findings, while still respecting my colleagues' right to
privacy and professional confidence (Smith, 1980). Despite the use of a pseudonym for the school, my own connections with it make it easy to identify. By erasing the identity of the institution in which the research was based, the merger, which has led to dispersal of staff, makes it very difficult for individuals to be identified.

Nevertheless, in view of the merger and its traumatic effect on all staff, I felt obliged to reflect profoundly on the issues involved in presenting data before publishing my analysis of the school's situation in 1991, as it now appears in Chapter One, and before writing up Chapters Four and Five. All three chapters are only as full as I felt able to make them while protecting the anonymity of individual participants. In addition to being unethical, it would have been profoundly ungracious to approach publication in a less sensitive way. The staff and governors gave me considerable personal and professional support for this research project. Their support continued even when it became clear that our shared objective, i.e. to secure Bruford's future as an autonomous institution, was not to be realised.

A thesis is a cultural artefact, and a thesis by a teacher-researcher will inevitably reflect to some extent the author's relationship to her/his project (Golby, 1992). Nevertheless, it is only by presenting evidence to others, verbally or through the written word, that we can validate our experiences by comparison with theirs, and they with
ours (Stenhouse, 1985b). That has been my aim.
APPENDIX ONE

Parents' Questionnaire

N.B. The original questionnaires were produced on foolscap sheets. The copy printed here has been reproduced with smaller characters than in the originals, to accommodate the altered size of page.
Section One

These questions are intended to establish the length of your acquaintance with Bruford. If you have, or have had, more than one daughter at the school, please answer all questions based on the oldest daughter who is still a pupil.

1) How long has your daughter been at Bruford? Please tick the appropriate box.
   1--l less than 1 year
   1--l 1 - 2 years
   1--l 3 - 4 years
   1--l 5 or more years

2) Is she a daygirl or a boarder? Daygirl / Boarder

3) How did you first hear about Bruford?
   1--l Recommendation from previous school
   1--l Recommendation from other parents
   1--l Education Agency
       if so, which one?......................
   1--l ISIS handbook
   1--l Other schools guide
       if so, which one?......................
   1--l ISIS exhibition
       if so, which one?......................
   1--l Longstanding local knowledge of school
   1--l Other
       if so, please specify ................

   ........................................

4) How many other prospective schools did you visit in addition to Bruford?
   1--l None
   1--l One
   1--l Two
   1--l Three
   1--l Four
   1--l More than four

Thank you. Please will you now proceed to Section Two.

- 320 -
Here you are asked to consider the factors which influenced your original choice of school for your daughter. When you considered moving her from her previous school, which of the items listed below influenced your thinking? Please mark with a tick the appropriate box to indicate the significance of each factor. The left-hand box indicates items of no importance to your decision, and the most right-hand box indicates essential, with the intervening boxes indicating various degrees of importance in between.

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- 321 -
Section Three

Since your daughter has been at Bruford you will have formed opinions about many aspects of it. Please will you indicate, again on the scale 1-6, how you feel about the school on the following points. The left-hand box indicates the level of least satisfaction and the right-hand box total approval.

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<td>a) Academic results</td>
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<td>v) Quality of academic staff</td>
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- 322 -
Section Four

In this final section, please will you indicate how your view of Bruford has changed in the last 18 months. Has your view of any of the following factors altered at all?

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<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
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Thank you very much for taking time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it in the addressed envelope provided by 1st July.
7th May 1992

Thank you very much for agreeing to assist my research by joining the pilot-study for the proposed questionnaire.

I enclose a copy of all the documents which will be sent to parents. I would be grateful if you would read the letter attached to them and then complete the questionnaire.

Then would you please re-read both letter and questionnaire. Have I missed anything out? Are the instructions clear and have I given sufficient information to parents? Have I failed to enquire about any topic which might be considered important by prospective parents? Am I asking about things which seem irrelevant? If anything strikes you as significant I would like to know.

When you have completed your deliberations, please will you post the questionnaire itself to Jonathan Lee in the envelope addressed him, and your views of the questionnaire and letter to me in the other envelope provided. This procedure is a little cumbersome but it gives your questionnaire answers some degree of anonymity.

If you could get your reply to me by 21st May I can make any necessary amendments to the questionnaire over half-term and launch the full enquiry immediately afterwards.

It would be appreciated if you would not mention the contents of the questionnaire to other parents whom you know until after the whole survey has been completed.

I am most grateful to you for your assistance with my enquiries and I value your contribution of the time required.

Yours sincerely,

Janet A Harvey
May 1992

Dear Bruford parents,

I am writing to ask for your help. My reasons are twofold. The first concerns the school. You may be aware of the positive steps which the Bruford staff are taking to promote the school and it would help us to evaluate the success of our efforts if you would give us some feedback. You are, after all, the people who are closest to us and also those with the greatest interest in the success of the school. Your honest appraisal would be of immense value.

Secondly, I personally would value your assistance. I am undertaking a part-time research degree, for which I am registered at Loughborough University of Technology. My subject is educational marketing. Marketing is a familiar concept in the business world but it is a comparatively new field as regards education and so far little research has been done into its effects. I am specifically studying the effect of the more positive marketing strategy which Bruford has recently adopted and over a period of time I shall be questioning a number of different groups of people who have connections with Bruford. It would therefore be to the benefit of both the school and my research if you could find time to answer the attached questionnaire.

It is essential for my research purposes that you should be totally honest in your answers. No considerations of tact should inhibit you! For this reason the questionnaire must be answered anonymously, and returned to Bruford in the envelope provided. Please do not enclose any other documents in the envelope; there must be nothing to identify the senders. If you have any further comments or suggestions which you wish to offer me, please write a separate letter direct to me at Bruford. It would also be helpful to know if you would be willing to be interviewed at a later date, should additional information be needed for my research. Again, however, such an offer should be made separately from the return of the questionnaire.

For statistical reasons the questionnaires are numbered but the envelopes are not addressed to me and the records of their return (though not the contents) will be kept by Mr Jonathan Lee. Mr Lee is a marketing consultant and accustomed to handling confidential data of this kind.

Realistically, I cannot expect to complete my research in less than two years, and I shall probably take at least one further year to write up my thesis, but I should be happy to make available to you the results of my enquiries as they proceed.

I am most grateful to you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Janet A Harvey (Miss)
Headmistress
APPENDIX TWO

Preparatory School Profiles

In independent schools, the term 'prep' can have three connotations. It may be used adjectivally to describe either a type of school and or a department within such a school. Used as a noun, it means students' homework. In this thesis, the word prep is used solely as an adjective.

A preparatory (prep) school is a fee-paying primary school. It may be a completely independent institution or a separate department within a large secondary school. Prep schools may take pupils at the age of 8 or younger, but if they take children below the age of 8 such children are likely, though not always, to be called pre-prep students, while those aged 8 and above are the prep students. Pre-prep children may start at the age of 5, 4 or even 3 years.

Students aged 3 - 5 may also, in different institutions, be referred to as 'nursery' or 'kindergarten' students, or they may be called pre-prep so that the school can use the term nursery for even younger children in the school's playgroups. In the school profiles given below I have tried to make it clear how each institution used its terminology.

In all cases, 'competitor schools' indicated are other independent schools. All these preparatory schools will also be
competitors of state-provided primary schools, and those offering provision beyond the age of 11 will also be in competition with state secondary schools.

The schools' pseudonyms are all borrowed from the surnames of literary figures from the past and each head's pseudonym has some connection with the writer whose name was used for her/his school.

Schools are listed in the order in which I visited them.
School: Masefield

Day/Boarding: Day only
Age-range: 4 - 11
Gender of intake: Girls
No. of students: 140
Location: Large market town. Students also travelled from the surrounding rural area, up to 35 miles.
Competitor schools: Co-ed prep of an independent senior school. Otherwise none: Masefield was the only all-girls' preparatory school in its county.
Destinations of students: Independent senior school (see above), some to local comprehensive schools, a few into boarding.
Headteacher: Mrs Jones, 13 years in post. Previously Head of Drama in a secondary school.

Masefield's main accommodation was a converted Victorian house, with additional modern classrooms alongside a small playground area. Space was at a premium on the site. Both children and staff were welcoming and friendly. Mrs Jones expressed the view that Masefield's ethos was similar to that of Bruford and that is a view I would share. She had clearly considered the issues I had mentioned beforehand in my letter. Her replies to questions were concise: she gave a short but thoughtful reply to each question. This was my first interview and I may well not have encouraged her to be as responsive as I might.
Lord Byron School

Day/Boarding: Day (2/3rds) Boarding (1/3rd)
Age-range: 3 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 60% boys, 40% girls
No. of students: 387, 200 in main prep, 157 in pre-prep
Location: Large conurbation. Day students commuted a maximum of 10 miles but the boarding catchment was worldwide.
Competitor schools: Numerous, but mostly day schools.
Destinations of students: Either to local day schools (choice plentiful in both maintained and independent sectors), or to a diversity of boarding schools. In 1992, 70 leavers to 40 different schools.
Headteacher: Mr Gordon, 14 years in post. 2 previous headships, both overseas. Mrs Gordon, who dealt with school’s PR and marketing, was also present at the interview.

A charity foundation several hundred years old, Lord Byron School was a thriving community. Buildings were varied, from late 19th-century (when it moved to its current site) to more recent constructions. There was evidence of on-going modernisation of facilities. A wide range of extra-curricular activities was offered and contacts with parents appeared to be excellent. Lord Byron School was obviously larger than Bruford. It enjoyed a high reputation academically although it had an open admission policy.
Chesterfield

Day/Boarding: Day (50%) Boarding (50%)

Age-range: 3 - 12

Gender of intake: Girls only in main prep, also boys (aged 3 - 6) in pre-prep

No. of students: 100

Location: Same small market town as Bruford. Day students travelled a maximum of 10 miles. Most boarders also lived within that distance but there were a few from abroad, mostly armed forces' families.

Competitor schools: Tennyson House, Traherne Court, Hawkins College Junior (all co-ed), Harris (girls' division). Several more co-ed prep schools within 15 miles. However, Chesterfield was the only all-girls boarding prep school for about 40 miles.

Destinations of students: Many to a large, highly academic boarding school in the same town, a few to Bruford, a few elsewhere.

Headteacher: Miss Phillips. 18 months in post, first headship. Previously she had been head of department in another preparatory school.

Chesterfield's main building was a Victorian house but it had many modern buildings cleverly designed to fit its small, steep site. The facilities had been carefully updated over the years.
Hawkins College Junior

Day/Boarding: Day (2/3rds) Boarding (1/3rd)
Age-range: 3 – 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 75% boys, 25% girls
No. of students: 138, 101 in main prep, 37 in pre-prep
Location: Same small market town as Bruford. Day students might travel "a few miles". Most boarders were also local, with a few from further afield in UK or overseas.
Competitor schools: Tennyson House, Traherne Court (both co-ed), Harris (separate boys/girls divisions), Chesterfield (girls only). Several other co-ed preparatory schools within 15 miles.
Destinations of students: Most, but not all, to Hawkins College.
Headteacher: Mr Hope. 9 years in post, first headship.

Hawkins College Junior had admitted girls in 1991 and in 1992 had merged with two senior schools, moving to share a campus with them. It had a mixture of buildings, with access to some of the main College facilities. Appointed to the original boys-only school, Mr Hope admitted to having enjoyed the challenge of co-education. Though his school was now part of a larger institution, he was still reasonably autonomous, stressing that he would not necessarily transfer all his pupils automatically to the senior school. He felt particularly sensitive to the needs of girls, for whom the larger school might not be right academically or because of its size. In the past a considerable number of boys had transferred to what was now their senior school, but some had always gone elsewhere.
Day/Boarding: Day (10%) Boarding (90%)
Age-range: 3 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 75% boys, 25% girls
No. of students: 221, 169 in main prep, 52 in pre-prep
Location: About 4 miles from Bruford. Day students lived very locally as travelling to Tennyson House means using country lanes. 90% of boarders lived within 60 miles of the school.
Competitor schools: Hawkins College Junior, Traherne Court (both co-ed), Harris (separate boys/girls divisions), Chesterfield (girls only). Several other co-ed prep schools within 20 miles.
Destinations of students: Secondary schools were chosen for children individually. Students had transferred to an almost uncountable list of boarding schools: in 1992, 23 leavers to 17 different schools. For day students, schools in the same town as Bruford (Hawkins College; three girls' schools) or in a larger town 10 miles away (single-sex or co-ed).
Headteacher: Mr Somersby. 7 years in post, first headship.

Tennyson House was the one school round which I have never been offered a formal tour. It occupied a collection of buildings round a converted country house. They appeared to be well-maintained. There were stables for students' ponies. Mr Somersby was something of an individualist and freely admitted that, being unmarried and having no children of his own, his school was his family and his way of life. He was closely involved in the selection of a secondary school for each child.
Traherne Court

Day/Boarding: Day (50%) Boarding (50%)
Age-range: 3 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 60% boys, 40% girls
No. of students: 206, 123 in main prep, 83 in pre-prep
Location: About 3 miles from Bruford. Day catchment about 15 miles, boarders mostly from within 100 miles.
Competitor schools: Hawkins College Junior, Tennyson House (both co-ed), Harris (separate boys/girls divisions), Chesterfield (girls only). Several other co-ed prep schools within 20 miles.
Destinations of students: In 1992, 26 children to 14 schools. Boarding advised individually. For day students, schools in the same town as Bruford (Hawkins College; three girls' schools) or in a larger town 10 miles away (single-sex or co-ed).
Headteacher: Mr Paul, starting 4th year in post, first headship. Formerly head of department in a large public school. I knew Mr Paul from the days when I had held a similar appointment.

Traherne Court was a converted country house, now surrounded by more modern facilities, which were up-to-date and well-kept. Mr Paul had obviously given a lot of prior thought to my questions and was alert to the need for pro-active public relations. When talking of school transfer, particularly with reference to the education of boys, he made frequent mention of the previous school where he had taught. It was obvious that this school set a standard by which he may judge others.
St John's

Day/Boarding: Day, a few weekly boarding (choristers only)
Age-range: 4 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 67% boys, 33% girls
No. of students: 101
Location: Small market town. Day students travelled in from a
radius of 15 miles. Weekly boarders (choristers) came from
all over UK.
Competitor schools: None in the same town, a few within 15 miles.
Destinations of students: Usually to independent secondary day
schools (co-ed or single-sex) in larger towns 10 - 15 miles
from St John's. In 1992, of 13 leavers, 3 went on to boarding
schools.
Headteacher: Mr Tate, 2 years in post, first headship. He had
taught previously at St John's, gaining experience elsewhere
before returning to take the headship. Mr Tate was another
professional acquaintance from my work prior to Bruford.

St John's occupied an 18th-century house, to which various modern
additions had been made. The school had a strong choral
tradition, having been founded to supply choristers for week-day
sung services in the town's parish church. Most of the weekly
boarders were choristers: many of the staff were lay-clerks in
the choir. The unique nature of St John's meant that it had no
direct look-a-like local competitors. Its nearest neighbours
offering cathedral-style choral training were 10-15 miles away
and required the attendance of choristers at weekends, which St
John's did not.
Harris

Day/Boarding: Day only
Age-range: 3 - 11
Gender of intake: Co-ed, but with separate divisions for girls (50%) and boys (50%) in the main prep
No. of students: 223, 70 (girls' division) & 68 (boys' division) in main prep, 50 pre-prep (age 5 - 7), 35 nursery (age 3 - 5).
Location: Same town as Bruford. Students travelled in from a radius of 25 miles.
Competitor schools: Hawkins College Junior, Tennyson House, Traherne Court (all co-ed), Chesterfield (girls only).
Several other co-ed preparatory schools within 15 miles.
Destinations of students: Almost 100% to a dozen independent schools offering day places, either in the same town, or in a larger town 7 miles away.
Headteachers: Mrs Franks, 40 years in post, first headship: Mr Franks (her son), 3 years in post. Mr Franks had also spent 5 years as co-principal during his father's last illness some years previously. Prior to that, and in the gap since, Mr Franks had been headteacher of 3 other schools.

Harris occupied two converted Victorian houses on a busy main road. Every available space was utilised. Facilities were basic but there was a real 'buzz' in the atmosphere of the school. Mrs Franks and her husband had come to Harris in 1953. Over a professional lifetime in the area she had noted many social changes affecting education, about which she was a useful source of reference.
Marlowe

Day/Boarding: Day (82%) Boarding (18%)
Age-range: 4 - 13
Gender of intake: Girls only
No. of students: 327
Location: On the edge of Outer London. Students travelled a maximum of 15 miles but most, even boarders, lived much more locally.
Competitor schools: Numerous.
Destinations of students: Regularly to about 21 schools: either local or London day schools, or into boarding.
Headteacher: Mrs Drayton, 5 years in post, first headship.
Formerly a housemistress in a large, well-known girls' boarding school.

Marlowe's reception area and head's office were in a former country house, but most of the school's facilities were more modern. There had obviously been a regular programme of building over the last few years, some of it initiated by Mrs Drayton. Marlowe's catchment area differed socially from any of the schools which I had visited up to that time, being within the 'London social circuit' which is a recognised phenomenon in the south-east of England. Shortly after my interview at Marlowe, Mrs Drayton wrote to inform me of her decision to close her boarding house at the end of the next academic year, though she assured me of her own continued commitment to the value of boarding at secondary level.
Hatton Park

Day/Boarding: Day
Age-range: 3 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 75% boys, 25% girls
No. of students: 170
Location: About 3 miles north of a large town. Its catchment was approximately 2/3rds of a circle with a 20-mile radius around this town: the remaining 1/3rd of the circle was cut off from Hatton Park by a major river whose limited bridges were difficult to cross at peak traffic times.
Competitor schools: Several locally, including junior departments of three secondary schools. However, Hatton Park was the only school in its area to offer a prep school education to the age of 13 and its nearest competitors offering this provision were across the river and inconvenient of access.
Destinations of students: Mostly to the local secondary day schools mentioned above, or to others which admitted students from 11. Boarders went "all over the place!" but not usually more than an hour and a half of driving time from Hatton Park.
Headteacher: Mr Kitt, 10 years in post, first headship. Promoted from within.

Hatton Park's original country house had been extended by converting a variety of outbuildings for use as classrooms, a workshop, art-room, technology room etc. Mr Kitt showed keen interest in my research: of all the heads interviewed, he was the only one who commented critically on my interpretation of his remarks, as opposed merely to correcting factual statements.
Shelley

Day/Boarding: Day
Age-range: 4 - 11
Gender of intake: Girls only in main prep, also boys (aged 4 - 8) in pre-prep
No. of students: 52
Location: In a tiny hamlet about 2 miles from a small market town. The catchment was extremely rural. Most children lived within 10 miles.
Competitor schools: A number, all but one co-ed and much larger than Shelley: 2 were R.C. foundations. The exception was similar to Shelley, but about 12 miles further west.
Destinations of students: Mostly to independent day schools on the perimeter of Shelley's catchment. A few into boarding; fewer than previously. One or two now enter state schools.
Headteacher: Mrs Westbrook, 5 years in post, first headship. Promoted from within.

Shelley occupied a rambling converted country house and every available space within it was used. The head's study doubled as the staffroom at break and usefully so as it commanded a fine view of the playground! Facilities and equipment were limited: for example, the school possessed only one computer, which seemed to be kept in a cupboard for most of the time. However, Shelley had been sending students to Bruford for as long as anyone in either school could remember, and Shelley's students were well grounded in basic subjects and skills. They had also learned to join in with whatever activities were offered.
Wordsworth

Day/Boarding: Day

Age-range: 3 - 11

Gender of intake: Girls only in main prep, also boys (aged 3 - 7) in pre-prep

No. of students: 440, 176 in main prep, 264 in pre-prep

Location: Large market town in central England. Students travelled from a 20-mile radius, which included several other small towns and a large number of villages.

Competitor schools: Nine, of which 2 were single-sex and 9 were co-ed. Shakespeare School was among the latter.

Destinations of students: Mostly to the senior school in the same foundation, or as day students to another independent school about 5 miles away, or to an LEA grammar school.

Headteacher: Mrs Williams, 13 years in post, first headship.

The facilities at Wordsworth were modern. The school had moved to its present site in 1971, and it had grown considerably in the last 10 years. Development had included buildings for the nursery (3+) and kindergarten (4+), an Art Area, Music School and Dining Room. A huge Sports Hall at the end of the site was shared with the girls' senior school in the same foundation.
Shakespeare

Day/Boarding: Day only
Age-range: 2 - 12
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 50% boys, 50% girls
No. of students: 155
Competitor schools: Numerous, including Wordsworth School.
Destinations of students: 50% to local grammar schools (a selective system was still operated by the LEA) and the rest to the same independent day schools as Wordsworth.
Headteacher: Mrs Arden, 5 years in post, first headship.

Shakespeare was the newest school I visited, having been founded five years previously. Shakespeare occupied an old house near the centre of a market town, with classrooms at the end of the garden for the youngest children. The site was fully used, though not cramped. Mrs Arden had started the school because she found so many parents dissatisfied with other local provision. She seemed to be extremely alert to the external environment of prep schools.
Chaucer Prep

Day/Boarding: Day only
Age-range: 3 - 11
Gender of intake: Girls only in main prep, also boys (aged 3 - 8) in pre-prep
No. of students: 130
Location: Rural site, but adjacent to a motorway exit and good road links. Students travel as far as 17 miles.
Competitor schools: Several co-ed preps but no other girls-only schools within Chaucer's catchment.
Destinations of students: Several girls' day schools but no local co-ed schools. Only 50% of students went on to board, to a maximum of one and a half hour's travelling time.
Headteacher: Miss Jefferies. 5 years in post, first headship. Formerly a secondary school English teacher.

Chaucer Prep was founded by Mrs Jefferies in 1952 and she retired in favour of her daughter after 35 years as Principal. The school occupied a former country house and grounds. Chaucer had a mixed-ability intake, including children with special needs. Miss Jefferies was well-informed of current trends but not over-impressed by any new ideas (e.g. league tables) that do not help teachers to focus on the needs of children. For her "the right kind of headteacher" was one who knows all the children in the school as individuals. She enjoyed classroom observation: "To watch teachers teaching should be an inspiring activity".
Milton Hall

Day/Boarding: Day (75%) Boarding (25%)
Age-range: 3 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 60% boys, 40% girls
No. of students: 216
Location: Rural, 4 miles from a small market town. Day students travelled up to 20 miles. Most boarders lived within 30 miles.
Competitor schools: Several, including another R.C. school, and also Shelley.
Destinations of students: 90% to various boarding schools.
Headteacher: Mr Powell, 5 years in post, second headship.

Milton Hall occupied a large country house, with extensively modernised outbuildings. It was a Roman Catholic school. In the year prior to my visit, Mr Powell had conducted a marketing survey, and could therefore speak from knowledge about his two main sources of students: "the traditional Catholic upper class" (these appeared to be decreasing in number) and the local population. The absence of a local independent day school (the nearest was about 25 miles away) caused 90% of parents to seek boarding secondary schools within 30-40 miles. This brought them within the Bruford catchment. Any parents looking further afield would be seeking "the smarter national Catholic schools". Mr Powell had considerable vision. He did not merely answer my questions but explored the philosophy behind his responses, and their implications, particularly for boarding schools.
Middleton

Day/Boarding: Day (4.5%) Boarding (95.5%)
Age-range: 6 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 50% boys, 50% girls
No. of students: 90
Location: Extremely remote - about a mile from a metalled road, 3 miles from the nearest village and 15 miles from any larger centre of population. The boarding catchment was worldwide.
Competitor schools: None nearby, though technically, given the number of overseas children, any boarding prep school could be a competitor.
Destinations of students: Most go on to board, some to state boarding schools. One or two go to state day comprehensives.
Headteacher: Mr Thomas, 59 years in post (with a break for war service), only headship.

Middleton was founded, as a co-educational school, before World War II, by Mr Thomas, his mother and his brother. On his return from war service, Mr Thomas purchased Middleton Hall (an 18th-century Grade A listed building, complete with stables for students' ponies) and moved the school into it. Discreet modern additions had been made. At the time of the interview, Mr Thomas had just handed over the headship to his daughter and son-in-law but continued to teach in the school: 11 family members were involved in running Middleton. It was a very traditional prep school. Students' departure prior to the age of 13 was strongly discouraged by the simple expedient of preparing them only for 13+ Common Entrance and for no other examinations.
Day/Boarding: Day only
Age-range: 3 - 11
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 50% boys, 50% girls (except in the top classes)
No. of students: 147, 130 in main prep, 17 in nursery
Location: A village about 4 miles from a city. The catchment was approximately half of a large Midlands county, including the nearby city and several large towns. Some children travelled as far as 30 miles.
Competitor schools: Numerous.
Destinations of students: About 30 different schools, some boarding. One or two to local grammar schools (a selective system was still operated by the LEA).
Headteacher: Mrs Cleghorn, in post 17 years, second headship. Mrs Cleghorn requested that her deputy head should also be present at the interview, in case I asked any questions which she herself could not answer.

Gaskell was originally a girls-only school which had recently become co-ed: this change had been made for financial reasons. The school occupied a large early 20th-century house, with various modern outbuildings. Mrs Cleghorn was the owner of Gaskell and had been its headteacher since 1976. She had been educated at one of Bruford's neighbouring schools. Her perspective seemed to be historical: some of the things which she remembered about Bruford dated from her own schooldays. She admitted that she preferred to recommend larger schools.
Browning School

Day/Boarding: Day (55%) Boarding (45%)
Age-range: 4 - 13
Gender of intake: Co-ed, 60% boys, 40% girls
No. of students: 245, 166 in main prep, 79 in pre-prep
Location: About 2 miles from a small town. Day students lived within 15 miles and most boarders within 40 miles.
Competitor schools: Several other co-ed prep schools.
Destinations of students: About 30 different schools, many of them boarding. One local boarding school offered day places.
One or two students went on to state schools.
Headteacher: Mr Barrett, 23 years in post, only headship.

Browning's buildings surrounded a large country house. Facilities included an indoor swimming pool which had been the school's most recent project. Mr Barrett described his county as a good one for independent education: many London families had second homes in the area and some had elected to live locally while the father (and sometimes mother too) commuted to London. Though Mr Barrett was the third generation in his family to be Browning's head, the school was an educational trust. Mr Barrett became sole head in 1970, expanding Browning's market segment over time by admitting day students (1972), girls (1980), and pre-prep children (1985). However, he regretted that the expansion of his own school had squeezed other small schools. His reflective responses to my questions indicated that he was still alert to educational trends even though he envisaged retiring within two years.
APPENDIX THREE

The influence of location on parental choice of schools
APPENDIX THREE

The influence of location on parental choice of schools

Many surveys have indicated that parents are unwilling for their children to undertake tiring, expensive, inconvenient or potentially dangerous journeys to school (Johnson & Ransom, 1983; Adler & Raab, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Hunter, 1991; West & Varlaam, 1991; Webster, Owen & Crome, 1993; West, 1995). Prior to the 1988 Education Reform Act, LEAs recognised the 'family convenience factor', and gave priority in most of their admissions policies to students with siblings already at particular schools (Johnson, 1990). MORI/ISIS (1993) found that, since their 1989 survey, "closeness to home" had increased in importance (from 46% to 52%) as a factor for parents seeking independent education. On the other hand, some parents seeking a particular kind of schooling are also prepared to accept extra travelling time and to pay for travelling (Adler & Raab, 1988; Griffiths, 1991). Edwards, Fitz and Whitty (1989) felt that increasing competition between both maintained and independent schools was expanding their potential catchment areas and they even identified some parents willing to move house to enable their children to attend the (comprehensive) school of their choice.

Quite possibly there are regional variations. West and Varlaam's (1991) survey in London found parents resistant to long journeys, and Adler and Raab (1988) encountered a similar situation in Edinburgh and Dundee, but Griffiths (1991), working
in South Wales, found greater willingness to travel. Views about travelling conditions and students' safety may vary in different parts of the country, or even between rural and urban areas in the same region. Furthermore, all these surveys were of day schools. Boarding was not an ingredient in the 'marketing mix' except in the MORI/ISIS enquiries (1989; 1993), which did not separate out responses from day and boarding families, so the influence of boarding as a factor cannot be gauged.

The variety of these findings influenced my decisions when choosing schools to visit and when considering what information to seek from their headteachers (see Chapters Three & Six).
The interview structure for the preparatory headteachers
The interview structure for the preparatory headteachers

Warm-up questions

a) Does your school offer places to day students, boarders or both?

b) Is your student intake male, female or co-educational? (If co-educational, what is the proportion of males to females?)

c) How long have you been in your present post?

d) Is this your first headship? (If not, how many previous headships have you held?)

e) Where (geographically) do your own students come from?

f) How do your students hear about your school?

Main interview questions

1) What do you look for in a secondary school - what qualities do you think such a school should have?

2) How do you form your views on secondary schools?

3) What do you think parents look for in a secondary school?

4) How do you think parents form their views of a school?

5) Do you see any obvious differences between what you look for and what parents look for when they select their child's next school?

6) Can you give an objective assessment of Bruford? For what sort of students (if any) do you think Bruford is most appropriate?
Research records of two sample interviews
Research records of two sample interviews

Appendix 4(b)1

Interviewee: Mrs Jones

School: Masefield School

Date: 12th October 1992

School information:

Masefield School is a day school for girls aged 4 - 11. The total numbers in the school are normally 140. The catchment area is ( ... a rural west country one centred on its county town ... ). Students travel as far as 35 miles to attend Masefield.

Mrs Jones has been in her present post 13 or 14 years. It is her first headship.

Mrs Jones has formed the view that parents at Masefield School hear about it by word of mouth, either directly from current parents, or through gossip in the area. Masefield is a member of ISIS but neither their exhibitions nor their handbooks seem to be a source of students. Other guidebooks are not mentioned...
by parents either. Masefield advertises only in its most local newspaper. No other forms of direct promotion are used.

Mrs Jones gave concise replies to questions: she considered carefully and gave a short but thoughtful reply to each question.

N.B. At this interview I did not ask about the secondary school destinations of students because Mrs Jones gave me a complete list of the destinations of her 1992 leavers when I arrived. She indicated that the choices of schools and the number of girls transferring to each school were similar to those of previous years.

From previous experience of the school, I also knew that Masefield is owned by a parents' co-operative. Parents become 'shareholders' when their daughters join the school, though their liability if the school closes is limited to £1 per family. The larger portion of the governing body is parent governors.
1. Asked what qualities she thought a secondary school should have, Mrs Jones listed three specific areas: a) caring, b) discipline, c) standards.

Asked to define (a), she said that she considered caring is absolutely critical. She defined discipline as "a structured environment" and standards as "acceptable modes of behaviour". Under acceptable modes of behaviour she includes work output, as she takes the view that it is anti-social to hand in poor work, but acceptable modes of behaviour also covers behaviour towards other people and the student's attitude to the environment.

2. Asked how she formed her own views on secondary schools, Mrs Jones listed four items, of which personal visits sprang first to her mind. She attempts to visit every senior school to which she normally sends students at least once every three years.

Mrs Jones' second source of information is feedback from old girls, and she stressed that it was former students rather than their parents to whom she turns for such information. She has found that, if they are happy, her former students tend to return to her school and say so.

A third source of information is contact with the headteachers of secondary schools. It was stressed that it is not the 'public relations lunch' occasions which are important in this context: it is informal contact through
telephone calls, shared meetings (via such groups as GSA/IAPS joint meetings), and the school magazines which are sent to her which give her the opportunity to form an all-round view of a secondary school. She observed that school magazines give a wonderful overview of a year's activities within a school. She also considered it important that she should find herself empathising with the headteacher of any school which she visits, and she considered the approachability of the secondary headteacher to be a significant factor also.

Her fourth point was the amount of continued follow-up that there is from secondary schools to prep schools about their former pupils. She pointed out that Bruford used to be the only school that sent reports about ex-students to previous school's headteacher: others have now jumped on this bandwagon. It is always appreciated that news is sent back to former schools.

3. Mrs Jones had forthright views on what parents look for in a secondary school. She observed that they can have "outlandish ideas". She observed further that league tables and results seem to influence parents to an almost unreasonable degree. However, she has noticed that more and more parents are looking also for extra-curricular activities, small class sizes, and the overall pupil/teacher ratio. In boarding schools adequate supervision and pastoral care are also important to parents: day parents are less anxious about this.
Parents also take a careful look at facilities. Mrs Jones considers however that most schools are coming out at level pegging in such areas as provision of computers, sports halls etc. She feels that most senior schools are now starting, or shortly will be starting, from much the same point. What swings the balance in future is likely to be the people-friendly elements within a school.

Mrs Jones also wonders if the more discerning parents look for a healthy number of younger staff: she feels that some parents, like herself, will look at the age range of the staff when considering a school.

Asked how parents form their view of the school, Mrs Jones observed "... unfortunately by listening to other parents". She also feels that they are unnecessarily swayed by what they see on schools' Open Days. Her parents appear to go hunting in packs! She takes the view that parents are often very insecure people and finds that the group instinct gives them all courage.

Parents do consult Mrs Jones. She finds that quite often they want her to make the decision about their daughter's future but she refuses to make this for them. She does find however that from time to time she leads them very close, leaving them to make the final choice between two schools. She herself puts the child's needs first.

At Masefield School staff are talking to parents about their
child's next school from the age of 8 onwards. In their penultimate year at school, Mrs Jones convenes all the parents of the year-group and addressed them about the local availability of schools; their respective sizes; the provision within them for day, boarding or weekly boarding facilities. For boarders she reckons to have visited within the last three years all senior boarding schools to which parents may go to ensure that she is up-to-date with progress there.

Mrs Jones pointed out that it is very difficult to avoid unprofessional conduct: there is the need to give parents appropriate advice and to support them but one must not make the decision for them. She added that she has to keep abreast of Common Entrance standards, and what standards senior schools set for entry, as the examination is a qualifying examination and not one which has a fixed pass point.

5. Asked to identify any obvious differences between her views of a secondary school and what parents look for, Mrs Jones observed that she would be far more discerning about league tables than parents might be. She would look, for example, at the average IQ of the children entering the school. She would also look carefully at syllabi and schemes of work, and would be thinking about the National Curriculum, which parents still don't understand very fully. A further area where she might give more careful consideration than prospective parents is the balance within the curriculum.
Mrs Jones would look at a school offering a very academic A-level course to see what additional curriculum enrichment there might, for example in current affairs, the use of language, PSME etc.

6. Asked for her objective assessment of Bruford and what sort of students she might recommend for Bruford, she observed that she would send her "one offs". These are the children who do not obviously fit a category of school, and who will not be likely to go to school locally in (... town name... ) because the local schools do not provide for their needs, being too large, too academic or whatever. Her pupils' decision to board is often a very big step and they need "safe" boarding. Mrs Jones feels that the Bruford ethos is similar to that of Masefield School, therefore she might well recommend children who could find secondary transfer difficult because of their lack of confidence or perhaps because of their immaturity. Mrs Jones also admires the strong practical curriculum which Bruford offers to the less academic child.
Appendix 4(b)2

Interviewee: Mr Barrett

School: Browning School

Date: 8th October 1993

School information:

Browning School is a co-educational school taking students from the ages of 4 to 13. The pre-preparatory department is for day children only, and contains 79 children. The preparatory school takes children from 7 - 13. 90 of these students are day students and 76 board. The gender split is 40% girls/60% boys. Mr Barrett pointed out that these percentages change at the top of the school, as some girls leave at the ages of 11 or 12. At the top of the school the split may be 80% boys and 20% girls: it varies from year to year according to the ages at which individual girls transfer to their secondary schools.

The catchment area for Browning School is a radius of about 10 miles for day children in the pre-prep department. As day students get older, they may come from as far away as 15 miles, and some then transfer into weekly boarding. 90% of students come from no more than 30 to 40 miles away. The odd London family may have two homes, one of which is in ( ... Browning's county), and children from such families may be placed at Browning School. Often the family moves its base entirely to
( ... county name ... ) and father commutes to London. Mr Barrett pointed out that ( ... county name ... ) is well served by rail links and also by road links via the ( ... local motorways). ( County name ... ) is a good centre for an independent school: a lot of local families support independent education.

Mr Barrett asks parents on their first visit how they heard about the school. The majority parents hear about Browning School via other parents. The school is mentioned at local dinner tables. Many use the educational publications and ISIS. One or two parents have found the school through the Daily Telegraph's Schools Guide or even the Good Schools Guide. The school does a modest amount of advertising, which is seen as reinforcement of other sources of information rather than a major source in its own right. Other forms of promotion are not used.

Current students go on to a huge range of schools. Mr Barrett thinks that he has probably sent students to about 30 different schools over the last three year period. Boys go on to Malvern College, Cheltenham College, Marlborough, Radley (of which Mr Barrett himself is an ex-student), Clifton, Shiplake etc. Girls go on to Cheltenham Ladies' College, all the Malvern schools which take girls, Badminton, Westonbirt, Downe House, Sherborne, Wycombe Abbey - "all over". ( Local independent school name ... ) takes day students and is an attractive choice for day places. Recently, one or two students have left to attend a local grammar school when parents could no longer afford
independent education.

Approximately one-third of the girls at Browning School stay on till the age of 13 and transfer to co-educational secondary schools. The rest transfer at 11 or 12 to girls' schools. Mr Barrett thinks it is sad that these girls miss out on the last year or two of prep school life. However, he thinks it is important to do whatever is right for an individual child, or to support parental wishes. He observed that transfer at 11 or 12 is "... what girls' school want". Often pressure is being applied to girls to move on to secondary education at 11 or 12. Girls who remain at Browning until 13 transfer to a co-educational secondary school.

The history of Browning School is most interesting. It was originally a family-owned school, and Mr Barrett is the third generation of his family to be headmaster. ( ... Details given of school's history, covering its change from single-sex all-boarding boys' school with an age-range of 8 - 13 years to its present co-educational day and boarding provision for students aged 3 - 13 ... ). Mr Barrett has been responsible for introducing all these changes in the school's population. He has obviously always taken a long view of the future of education and he continues so to do. He is currently keen to fill up his school at the bottom end, because he can see that preparatory schools are being squeezed by a number of education trends. He observed, "11 to 16 is where all schools are grabbing". His local grammar schools take students at 11+ and parents short of money are obviously electing to take free
grammar school places in preference to expensive independent school places. Mr Barrett thinks that co-educational and boys' secondary schools may drop their admission age to 12 or even 11. Mr Barrett would hate to lose the 11 - 13 year old students at Browning School but he feels it is important to keep an eye on trends in education because this may be forced upon him. He pointed out that Rugby has already started a Junior House, and other schools are looking at this option. Through his contacts with HMC, Mr Barrett has formed the view that secondary schools are not anxious to change the status quo, but in some areas of the country they may be forced to change their policy. Much will depend on the nature of each secondary schools' catchment area.

Mr Barrett knows that his own feeder schools do not like to lose their boy students to him at the age of 8. He feels, however, that smaller schools may not offer the range of facilities to boys which are essential to keep them usefully occupied and stretched.
1. Asked what he looked for in a secondary school, Mr Barrett said that he looks for confident children, who are well occupied with supportive staff. Basically what he is looking for is ethos. He likes well-mannered children, and children who are comfortable talking to adults. He is looking for staff/pupil interaction.

Buildings come after the consideration of ethos but are still important: in order to teach at their best, staff need facilities. Children also need good facilities to enable them to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum.

Schools also need to offer breadth of choice, both in the classroom and outside. Mr Barrett like to see some choice offered in a secondary school curriculum. He observed that some of the "frills" may be important for some children and he gave the example of minority sports such as sailing which might be attractive to those children who are not athletic.

2. Mr Barrett forms his views on secondary schools by visiting schools. He expects to visit at least 5 girls' schools, possibly more, and 8 to 9 boys' schools, every year. In some years he may well exceed this total. Mr Barrett tries to accept all invitations which he receives to visit secondary schools, though occasionally he has to refuse. His timetable on Tuesdays and Thursdays enables him to visit schools.

Mr Barrett is interested to follow up former students, and
to meet their Housemasters or Housemistresses. He maintains close contacts with Browning former students. Every year he invites them to write back to the school with their news, which is then included in the school magazine.

Mr Barrett is interested to read in the national press any articles about schools. This can be a useful source of information about rival prep schools as well as secondary schools!

Mr Barrett also values IAPS/HMC meetings each year. He values discussion with other headteachers about shared problems.

Of prospectuses and magazines, Mr Barrett said, "It's good to see those". He tries to read at least the editorials, recent additions (to buildings), as well as the contributions by his former pupils. Given the number of magazines which he receives, Mr Barrett points out that it is impossible for him to read from cover to cover, but he does try to absorb the flavour of each publication which is sent to him.

However, the atmosphere in a school can only be assessed by visiting it.

3. Asked what he thinks parents look for in a secondary school, Mr Barrett said that he felt they are looking for a similar ethos to Browning School. Many of his parents are now
looking for co-educational schools, but some parents of girls are concerned about the 11 - 16 years. Single-sex schools are popular with some parents and they do get results. Mr Barrett feels that the head of Cheltenham Ladies' College, Enid Castle, has done a good PR job promoting these facts. Mr Barrett himself feels that girls in Maths and Sciences may suffer, particularly if they are in a minority in a class, during the years 14 - 16. He wonders if co-educational schools will, in the future, follow the lead recently announced by a maintained school and teach students in separate boy and girl groups.

Mr Barrett feels that some parents are looking very carefully at their 10 years of investment in an independent school. Long-term, they are looking for University entrance and ultimately for employment for their children.

Parents are also looking for opportunities for their own children to pursue specialist interests.

4. Asked how parents formed their views of school, Mr Barrett feels that most parents will probably air their thinking with him. He discusses ultimate choices of schools with parents two or three time during their children's time at Browning School. Children who are planning to go into boarding are encouraged to try it for one year, or better still two years, at Browning School.

The pastoral organisation of Browning School gives parents
access to form tutors early in the academic year. Formal parent meetings are held in the Spring. At the Spring meetings, Mr Barrett will invite parents to visit him if they need advice about choosing a secondary school.

Mr Barrett finds that he has to give most assistance to parents who are first generation users of independent schools. He asks them whether or not they would prefer a town school or a country school. He finds that some parents prefer small town schools because of the opportunities which they offer students. Mr Barrett also asks whether parents want boarding or day schools, and whether they want co-education or single-sex. He encourages them to compare large schools such as Marlborough with smaller schools, to ensure that they make informed choices.

Several Browning School girls go on at 12+, and the girls' schools to which they go are happy with this. Mr Barrett agrees with the heads of girls' schools that at 13+ some girls are too mature to remain at their prep school: often 12+ seems to be the ideal age.

Mr Barrett feels that the final choice must be made by the parents. He encourages them to get four or five prospectuses, and then to visit at least two schools. They then return to discuss the final choice with Mr Barrett. At this stage, he encourages parents to allow their children to visit the shortlisted schools. He feels that children should be involved in the final choice of secondary school,
and he finds that most parents agree with him.

5. Asked to identify any obvious differences between what he looks for and what parents look for in the selection of their child's secondary school, Mr Barrett at first said no. He thinks both he and parents are looking at the ethos of a secondary school. Their views are likely to coincide. He pointed out that a student who had not been happy at Browning School might need extra care and support at his/her secondary school and the choice of the next school might need particular care.

Thinking further, Mr Barrett observed that sometimes fathers want to insist that their children go on to their own old school. Mr Barrett suspects that some schools are now taking in a much wider ability range, and worries that these larger schools won't necessarily look after less academic children particularly well. Children who transfer to them may be over-faced. If this situation arises, Mr Barrett encourages parents to take their children to the schools concerned for pre-Common Entrance testing. He also encourages them to find out what remedial support will be available if the child does go to that school. Mr Barrett hates seeing a child "crash" at Common Entrance and does all he can to ensure that this does not happen.

6. Asked for an objective assessment of Bruford, Mr Barrett felt that the sort of student who would find Bruford most beneficial would be somebody who needed their confidence to
be boosted. A child who needed to find something at which they could excel might find Bruford a most suitable school.

Mr Barrett is, however, worried about the size of Bruford. He pointed out that it is no bigger than a prep school. This limits the number of staff available and he wonders if "single specialists" are always available to teach subjects. He also worries whether the school can offer sufficiently wide facilities. Can it offer unusual options at A-level? He also wonders if girls at Bruford feel oppressed by the size and academic success of its neighbouring schools. He expressed the view that he thought that Bruford and ( ... girls' school name ... ) must be struggling in the present financial climate.
APPENDIX FIVE

The questionnaire sent to the girls' schools' headteachers
Admissions to senior schools

1) Do you have a separate junior school/preparatory dept? Yes/No

If the answer is no please ignore questions 2 - 4 and go straight to question 5 (on page 2).

2)a) What is the youngest age at which children are admitted? .......

b) Has this changed within the last 5 years? Yes/No

c) If the answer to 2(b) was Yes, please give briefly the reasons for the change of policy.

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.................................................................
.................................................................
.................................................................

3) At what age are students admitted to your senior school? .......

4) Do students have automatic right of transfer to your senior school? Yes/No

Now please continue with QUESTION 6. All the remaining questions apply to your senior school.

Please turn over
5) At what age are students admitted to your school? .......

6) What methods of admission do you use? Please indicate all applicable:
   a) Common Entrance at 11+ .... at 12+ .... at 13+ ....
   b) Your own exam at 11+ .... at 12+ .... at 13+ ....
   c) Interviews at 11+ .... at 12+ .... at 13+ ....
   d) Other procedures at 11+ .... at 12+ .... at 13+ ....

If (d) please specify means ....................................
...........................................................................
...........................................................................

7) Has there been any recent change in your age of admission (i.e. within the last 5 years)?
   Yes/No

If yes, please indicate the nature of the change......................
...........................................................................
...........................................................................

8) Have there been any changes in your admission procedures recently (i.e. within the last 5 years)?
   Yes/No

If yes, please specify .................................................................
9) Have you noted any significant changes during the last 5 years in the preferences of parents about the age of transfer? 

Yes/No

If yes, please state what .................................................. 

............................................................................. 

............................................................................. 

10) Have you noted any significant changes during the last 5 years in the preferences of prep school headteachers about the age of transfer? 

Yes/No

If yes, please elucidate .................................................. 

............................................................................. 

............................................................................. 

11) If prospective parents ask your professional advice about the best age of transfer (for a girl) from prep/primary school to secondary school, what do you say? 

............................................................................. 

............................................................................. 

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............................................................................. 

Thank you for your help, which is very much appreciated. 
Please return the questionnaire to me in the envelope provided.
13th January 1994

I am writing to ask for your help. As you may know, I am currently working for a part-time research degree, for which I am registered at Loughborough University. My topic is educational marketing and I am exploring the ways in which parents select secondary schools in the independent sector for their daughters. I would be most grateful if you could find time to answer the enclosed questionnaire.

This questionnaire is being sent to a group of GSA heads. I shall not be publishing the information from individual schools. I am merely seeking a representative sample of perspectives, to compare with data which I have already collected from prep school headteachers and from parents of my own students. I would wish to be able to quote your comments in my thesis, if it is appropriate to do so, but anonymously.

I do hope you will not object to my request and that you will feel able to assist me. An s.a.e. is enclosed for your response.

With best wishes for 1994,

Yours sincerely,

Janet A Harvey (Miss)
Traditions of transfer from preparatory to secondary schools
Traditions of transfer from preparatory to secondary schools

In the independent sector, Arnold’s reforms at Rugby in 1837 and 1838, followed by the recommendations of the Clarendon Commission in 1861, led to a standardisation in the age of transfer for boys to secondary school at the age of 13 years (Leinster-MacKay, 1984). This tradition has continued in most of those former boys’ schools which have become co-educational, though there are exceptions (Ellis, 1969; Baxter, 1994). Girls, however, in the past more often moved on at the age of 11 (Walford, 1991) or 12 years. A survey of new entrants into Girls’ Schools’ Association schools in 1987 found that 78% of girls had entered at 11+. 14.2% entered at 12+ and only 7.7% at 13+ (Jefferson, 1988).

Boys who went first to day schools (which replaced the governesses or private tutors who would have been their first teachers in the last century), then transferred to a boarding prep school at 8 and moved to their secondary schools at 13+, thus changing schools three times. Historically, the majority of girls' preparatory schools have been day schools (Pearson, 1981). Girls usually attended them for at least six years, starting at the age of 5. They were considered ready to move on to another day school at 11+, or into boarding at 11+ or (for some boarding-only schools) 12+. Nowadays, girls may well start their schooling at the age of 4, or younger, and most secondary boarding schools admit both daygirls and boarders at 11+. These
trends explain Jefferson's (1988) findings and show why boys' preparatory schools which have become co-educational tend to lose their girls at the age of 11 or 12, i.e. one or two years before their boys. This distorts the gender balance at the top end of these schools.

The reason usually suggested for the difference in policies between girls' and boys' schools has been the earlier onset of puberty in females, which makes it desirable for them to be settled in their new schools before they face the further problems of adolescence.

Syers-Gibson and Syers-Gibson (1994), however, were given another reason by the parents of female students for transfer at 11+; the fact that secondary schools "... insist on her going" (p14). Parents became anxious that their daughter would not secure admission to the school of their choice if she delayed her application beyond the age of 11. Johns (1994) also identified this anxiety among parents of boys.

Preparatory heads, particularly of co-educational schools, prefer students to transfer at the age of 13 (Johns, 1994; Syers-Gibson & Syers-Gibson, 1994) while heads of secondary schools are progressively looking to recruit students at 11+ (Rae, 1981; Earle, 1983; Major & Prichard, 1992). Some secondary heads, by differentiating between candidates admitted from traditional preparatory schools (i.e. offering provision up to the age of 13) and elsewhere (i.e. from schools, whether independent or maintained primary, whose students must transfer
at 11), manage to maintain a foot in both camps (Ellis, 1969; Baxter, 1994).


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- 394 -


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