CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

17th OCTOBER 2005

MAINTAINING TRUST IN PUBLIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS:

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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Maintaining trust in public assessment systems: an international perspective

1. A few weeks ago, on a Saturday morning, I drove from Geneva to Neuchâtel. In some communities it was the day of the *désalpe*, when the cows, with their floral headdresses, come down from the alpine pastures for the winter. In other communities it was the day of the *vendanges*, the vine harvest. In case this conjures up images of Swiss peasants in lederhosen treading grapes, I need to add that the centre of Neuchâtel was given over to an ugly-looking fairground full of dodgems and waltzers.

2. I was going neither to the *désalpe* nor to the *vendanges*. The purpose of my visit was to find out more about the assessment system in place for the Swiss baccalaureate – the *maturité suisse* – taken by some of my students at the International School of Geneva. That particular Saturday was the last day of the oral examinations at the University of Neuchâtel for the final part of the *maturité*. I had got special permission on a pink form which, given Swiss bureaucracy, will doubtless be filed in triplicate in offices all over the Helvetic Federation and archived until the last trump, to sit at the back of the room during the oral examinations that play such a key role in the assessment for this particular school-leaving qualification. I attended oral examinations in French and English literature. I found it a fascinating experience. I shall begin by telling you something about this, not because I think you ought to learn about the public examination system in a small far away country about which you know little, but because it is my intention to try to tease out of the story some general lessons about the nature of trust in public assessment systems.

3. There were many aspects of the arrangements for these oral examinations that I found impressive. The oral examiners in a subject were the same people who had marked the written papers for that subject and for that particular student. One of the purposes of the oral was to help them come to an overall judgment about the candidate's abilities in the subject and thus to decide on an overall subject grade (on a scale 1 to 6). Also, each individual candidate was followed around all his or her orals – across seven subjects – by a second person, called the *expert*, a moderator whose job was to validate the whole process and to form an overall judgment about the candidate's abilities. Given the function of the *maturité* as a university entrance qualification – everyone with a *matu* is entitled to access to the first year of a Swiss university course – the *expert* plays a particularly crucial role if the overall results are marginal in deciding whether this student has or has not the *maturité* – that is the origin of the name of the qualification – to undertake higher level studies. I found it in many ways a labour intensive, highly personalised and rather professional system.

4. There were some things, however, about the arrangements that I could imagine being criticised in England, were we to decide to introduce such an approach here. Some options in the *maturité* are assessed simply by means of an oral: I can imagine this being considered a far too narrow assessment approach in a subject such as history or chemistry. The length of the oral – 15 minutes – might also be felt to be a problem given the breadth of the syllabuses in some subjects. I can similarly hear voices insisting that such a form of assessment skews the validity of the assessment, turning it into an assessment of confidence and articulacy rather than of an understanding of the discipline in question. The difference between the style of the examiners – the warm empathy of one compared with the formal politeness of another – could be seen as a factor undermining reliability. On a practical level, as a candidate, I would also have found it incredibly distracting to have to prepare my unseen passage from Voltaire or Hemingway at the back of a classroom while the previous student was having his or her oral examination at the front (when I queried this arrangement I was told simply that this was how it had always been done for the last 110 years). I could also imagine the public outcry in England if we made students take their final examinations, on which university entry depends, a week before the university term is due to start.

5. Despite these possible disadvantages I have found very high levels of trust in the *maturité* assessment arrangements, both among my colleagues (my *maturité* coordinator was at Neuchâtel all day encouraging and reassuring our students as they went from one ordeal to another), among our parents and among the wider community. The purpose of my talk this afternoon is to tease out of this situation, and out of the very different public examination systems with which I am familiar in England, in France and via the International Baccalaureate, which is the main qualification taken by my students (we also take IGCSEs and the French brevet des collèges), some of the reasons for trust and for the absence of trust.

6. There is a health warning about all of my comments. They are based on no formal research, but rather on my informal conversations with colleagues and parents of many different nationalities in Switzerland, on my work within the French education system where I have sat for years on an advisory body to the minister of education which has only marginally been concerned with public examinations, and on my increasingly hazy memory about what we did at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (I can't even remember exactly what happened during a recently notorious episode supposedly involving me and a former Secretary of State for Education – incipient Alzheimer's maybe, but not a pay-off as some disreputable former colleagues have been suggesting!). My knowledge of the International Baccalaureate is also of recent date. There are people in the audience today who, I am sure, know much more about these matters than I do.

7. A few years ago, just after its publication in 1996, I read an incredibly interesting publication about trust. I have been re-reading it for the sake of this talk, thanks to the prompt service of amazon.com. It is called, simply, *Trust* and is by Francis Fukuyama, chiefly famous, and indeed infamous, for his pre-9/11 verdict that history had come to an end following the collapse of Soviet communism and the alleged triumph of liberal democracy.

8. Fukuyama opens *Trust* with the fundamental statement that ‘a nation’s well-being….is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society’. He expands, through an analysis of different societies - the USA, the post-communist societies of eastern Europe, the ‘catholic’ societies of southern Europe, China, Japan – the idea that the effectiveness, and in particular the economic effectiveness, of societies depends on their ‘social capital’, that is their ability to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations. His central thesis is that the most effective societies are those with high levels of trust that allow the development of powerful and effective groups and organizations existing in that crucially intermediate area between governments, on the one hand, and the smallest units of society, above all the family, on the other.

9. I should like to use Fukuyama’s conclusions about trust to try to identify those characteristics of our public assessment systems that seem to be conducive of trust and those that maybe seem to have had the effect of undermining trust. I shall be talking about the influence that the nature of our various wider societies has on issues of trust, about the role of government and that of universities, about the stability of otherwise of our assessment systems, and about their relationship with other parts of our education systems.

10. First, what is the relationship between public assessment systems and the kind of societies out of which they emerge? As I have said, one of the things that most strikes me about the Swiss assessment system is the extent to which it is accepted by the various partners within the system – students, parents, teachers – by comparison, for example, with the response of, say, some of my parents to the IB Diploma results and by comparison with some attitudes towards public assessment arrangements in England.

11. To take a simple example, there are very few appeals against the results of the *maturité suisse* and these very rarely succeed. One may, on appeal, look at the marked scripts, but only, under supervision, in the offices of the federal department of education and research. These are located in the federal capital Berne. If you are from Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, this would involve a road journey of over seven hours, across several alpine passes. There are few people who take a query to such a stage. They are certainly discouraged from doing so, but they also don’t seem to feel the need.

12. The *maturité suisse* is a federal examination for private schools such as my own. It has been declared, by federal decree, the exact equivalent of what is called the *maturité cantonale* or the *maturité gymnasiale*, that is the same baccalaureate operating under similar rules but administered at cantonal level. There are 23 different responsible authorities for this qualification –the 23 cantons of the federation, each of which has full responsibility for its school system – and in many of them the responsibility for setting the papers, marking the scripts and conducting the orals, is delegated yet further, as in the canton of Geneva, to each of the canton’s secondary schools. So we have a situation in which the life-shaping decision whether or not someone can go on to higher education is delegated to large numbers of schools each of which is expected to apply the same overall assessment standards. This is an assessment system in which, from a contemporary British perspective, one might well expect low levels of trust, but in the experience of my teacher colleagues the exact reverse is the case. There are high

levels of trust in the arrangements, on the part of students, teachers, parents and the wider community.

13. Compare this with the figures for this summer's appeals against IB Diploma results in one of my two secondary schools: 75 appeals against individual subject results across 120 candidates, only 4 of which, incidentally, succeeded. Now the IB Diploma, in my experience, is a highly regarded qualification – highly regarded by parents and by universities - and one in which there is relatively little 'noise' about the workings of its assessment arrangements. Despite which, at least at my school, in a very international community, there is a high level of querying of results, very largely on parental initiative. This is partly of course because one is querying grades (or points) which, as in A levels, are crucial for entry to particular universities, rather than querying the simple pass-fail decision involved in the *maturité Suisse.* But it also has something to with the differing social context of the two qualifications.

14. The *maturité suisse* is a qualification serving a relatively stable and traditional society, what Fukuyama would call a 'high trust society'. The IB Diploma, at least at my school and at many other IB schools, is a qualification for a relatively rootless international or cosmopolitan group of people many of whom also come originally from what Fukuyama would call 'low trust societies' (he includes the USA, the countries of the former Soviet bloc and the countries of southern Europe in this category). We have many US families in our school. For some of them the IB Diploma is less important than the school's own high school diploma which is sufficient for entry to US universities. Because the high school diploma is built up from a process of continuous assessment within the school, over a number of years, all of a student's grades count. These grades, however, are far from simply being accepted. They are quite often contested and sometimes changed. I refuse to believe, however, that this is because the processes of assessment used in my school are inferior to those used in a local Swiss school. In my opinion it has more to do with the different social attitudes prevailing in different societies. Switzerland is a less individualistic society less driven by a preoccupation with individuals' rights than the USA or the UK (though the USA and the UK are far from being the same in this respect). There is a greater acceptance of authority: when I lived, for a year, in Switzerland before moving over the border into France, I was amazed to receive little notes from the commune through my letter box, warning me that someone was going to come and inspect the plants in my garden, reminding me that I couldn't hang my washing out on Sundays, couldn't cut my lawn on public holidays, and so on. One reason for this acceptance of authority, and the high level of trust that is associated with it, is the Swiss system of direct democracy: one is choosing the people who make the rules or, as often happens, one is making the rules oneself through referenda. Attitudes towards public assessment systems are thus bound to vary widely *because of* these widely different social contexts.

15. My first point therefore about what is conducive to trust, or indeed to mistrust, has concerned the nature of the wider social context. Those who run public assessment systems need to make their decisions in the knowledge of this context, anticipating likely responses to new initiatives and seeing where they can play to those elements in a society that are most likely to maximise, rather than minimise, trust. My second point is a linked one about the role of governments in public assessment systems.

16. My first contact with a public assessment system was as a pupil at a state secondary school in the north of England in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was taken for

granted that we did our O levels and A levels with the JMB (the Joint Matriculation Board). This was located at a strange flat brick-built place called Manchester on the wrong side of the Pennines, but one could get there fairly quickly, one knew that the JMB had links with one's local university (I remember going to Leeds University to do an A level General Studies Spoken English oral, not totally dissimilar to what I experienced the other week in Neuchâtel), and it all seemed part of a fairly cosy and well-regarded local establishment. And no one, as far as I know, ever thought to challenge the results. These were simply accepted as absolutely unchangeable, almost as if they had been brought down from the mountain and inscribed on tablets by Moses himself. It was of course a less individualistic society, less conscious of its rights, more deferential to authority, more 'high trust'. That relates back to my first general point about social context. But it was also a public assessment system that appeared to have nothing to do with government. One of the questions for this conference is to what extent the huge increase in government involvement in the English public assessment system that has taken place since that time has increased or diminished trust and what lessons from this experience can be learned for the future.

17. It isn't, however, a simple matter of public assessment systems that are free from government control being trusted and those that are under government control being mistrusted. It depends on wider attitudes towards government and on the exact nature of the government's role. It is certainly helpful that the IB Diploma is unconnected with any government, that it is run by an international organisation based in neutral Switzerland, and that it is teachers and academics rather than state officials who make decisions about the contents of programmes and how they are assessed. It is not irrelevant, as regards trust in the qualification, that it has been accepted in England by the regulatory body, QCA, and thus implicitly by government, but that is of minor significance by comparison with the fact that it has been accepted by English universities, that is by people who make the important decisions about the value of different qualifications and who have the added benefit of being relatively free from government interference.

18. But this does not mean that one cannot have a public assessment system run by the government in which there are high levels of trust. The *maturité suisse* is run under an *Ordonnance* issued by the Federal Council. The Federal Council has laid down which subjects must be studied, the form of assessment (written or oral or both, and the marking system to be used) and the number of marks needed to pass. Some of this is even more prescriptive than the instructions of a regulatory body such as QCA. The examinations also take place outside school in university buildings under the supervision of officials of the federal department of education and research. And yet, as I have said, it is widely trusted. This is for two reasons. First, the Swiss government is more trusted by its citizens than the British government. There are many reasons for this: it is a much more consensual system lacking a dominant head (one forgets the name of the president of the Confederation); decisions when finally made have most people's and most major parties' backing; there are high levels of public involvement through elections and referenda; and in a small country government is closer to the people than it can be in a country like Britain.

19. The second reason why there is greater trust in Swiss government involvement in the public assessment system is that the people who visibly run the system are people who in themselves are generally trusted: the teachers. In the *maturité suisse* all the examiners and moderators are teachers, as they are in the school-based *maturité*. The

knowledge that the final decision about your child is going to be made on the advice of a teacher moderator who has sat in on all your child's orals and looked at all their written papers is reassuring.

20. The system in France is in some ways similar, despite the enormous differences between France and Switzerland. The state is much less trusted than it is in Switzerland, but it is the people's state – for all its faults – in a way that it is perhaps not in Britain and there is a respect for the rituals of a uniform national education system that is one of the key symbols of a *République* of which people feel proud whatever they may think of the current government in power. This is one reason for the relatively high levels of trust in the current arrangements for assessing the French Baccalaureate despite some of its obvious problems (it is marked by conscripted teachers as part of their duties as civil servants, working to tight mark schemes under supervision in large halls, but with less training than that provided by English awarding bodies).

21. There was a huge controversy in France last year over the proposal by François Fillon, then minister of education, to introduce an element of coursework into the Baccalaureate. Lycée students went on strike and occupied their schools, and teachers marched in the streets. The proposal was withdrawn and Fillon, like most of his immediate predecessors, soon fell (the worst job in the world for any politician who wants to change anything is to be French minister of education). Why didn't they want some element of coursework? It wasn't because students didn't trust their teachers, as far as I could see. It was because the idea was felt to undermine the supposedly egalitarian nature of the French education system. Students from privileged backgrounds would be able to get help from home that was denied to others and would be unfairly advantaged. Travelling around, as I do, in my car from one of my campuses to another, I listened to endless debates about this on French radio over many weeks. Only once in all that time did I hear a student voice in support of Fillon's proposal: someone tentatively saying that, yes, he thought he might perhaps be able to show rather better his real ability in mathematics if he were allowed to be assessed, at least in part, on what he knew he could do in situations where he wasn't under huge pressure from a timed written test.

22. The lesson from this episode in France is that it might be easier to maintain public trust in an examination system by choosing a system of assessment that has less real validity but more perceived reliability. It is not easy to persuade the public that coursework is a necessary part of a public assessment system, except in a subject such as art, and despite the strong assessment and curriculum arguments in its favour, the continued use of a (much reduced) coursework component has not helped the maintenance of trust in England's public assessment system. It is interesting that the most negative comments I have received from colleagues and parents about the IB assessment system also concern the internal assessment component and its moderation. Similarly, the main new element of the recently revised Swiss *maturité* (the main features of the qualification were retained, but there have been a number of new requirements) was the introduction of a major individual study which doesn't generate marks that but which has to be passed in order for the qualification to be awarded. It led last summer, in the first year of the new qualification, to a highly publicised case of alleged plagiarism at one of the Geneva secondary schools. This hit the headlines over a number of weeks and did not do a great deal to help to establish the credibility of what, educationally, is a valuable part of the new programme.

23. But I have drifted from my second main point which is about trust in relation to the government's involvement in the public assessment system. Let me return to Fukuyama. According to him 'high trust' societies, and thus by implication effective societies, are ones where there are strong and trusted intermediate institutions between government on the one hand and small units like the family on the other. One of the effects of government policies and actions over the last thirty years in England has been to weaken the autonomy of some of these intermediate institutions – local government, judiciary, the notion of an independent civil service, universities, and, yes, examining bodies – and increase the power and control of central government. This has often been with the intention of increasing trust in the services being provided. Its effect, however, has sometimes been the reverse. Either we need a British state that is more trusted – because it can set up institutions that come to be identified with the nation in the way that French people can feel proud of France's national education system and qualifications because they can be dissociated in their minds from those currently in power – or we need the state to back off and let the intermediate institutions flourish once again. We may not be able to return to the golden age of the JMB that I have in the back of my memory – we have a different society, a different education system and different needs – but we are a very long way off having a state that could be trusted, in the eyes of its citizens, with taking charge of a single national awarding system along the lines of the one run by the French ministry of education.

24. One of the problems of course is that we aren't 'citizens'. We are 'subjects', but no longer really 'subjects' of our wholly benign constitutional monarchy, but 'subjects' instead of an over-powerful government. We are moving, in Fukuyama's words, from a 'high trust' to a 'low trust' society in which the state intervenes more and more, often with beneficent motives, but in doing so creates (and I quote) 'distinct risks, since (state intervention) can all too easily undermine the spontaneous communities established in civil society'. That can make difficult the work of those trying hard, semi-autonomously and within the tentacles of this kind of government, to create an atmosphere of trust. (This, of course, is the former head of our national regulatory system speaking, but, as Julie Burchill once famously said of Princess Diana, one moves on).

25. I am in danger of drifting off into questions of national identity that also interest me. I shall move on therefore to my third point which concerns the role of universities.

26. One of the strengths of the IB Diploma is its close links with universities. Chief examiners are almost invariably university academics and work in close partnership with their assistant chief examiners who are teachers. This has helped, I am sure, in establishing such a high level of credibility among universities for this qualification, although clearly this credibility is largely based on the intrinsic features of the qualification: the fact that it is a whole curriculum, its academic standards, together with the possibility of a fine discrimination among the very able that it offers to selectors. I have heard the criticism that university involvement in the IB exerts a conservative influence that is educationally unhelpful. There is of course a balance to be struck between what it is appropriate to provide for a particular phase of education, because of demands appropriate to that phase, and what is needed as a foundation for the following phase. Any attempt to re-involve universities more closely in the governance of public assessment in England would need to bear this in mind. The role

of universities was clearer when A levels had a simpler function and were taken by a much smaller proportion of the population. The function of the *maturité suisse* is not dissimilar to that exercised by A levels at the time when I took them myself. It is a minority qualification targeted at the c. 20% of the population who go to universities in Switzerland. The role of the general baccalaureate in France, though catering for a wider group, is not fundamentally dissimilar. It is easier to maintain trust in qualifications when they have a clear single purpose than when they serve a multitude of purposes and a wide ability range as they do in England. There may be very good reasons for having these types of qualification, but the more dispersed one's purposes and target groups are the more intrinsically difficult it can become to create trust.

27. My fourth point about trust is that it is most evident when there are high levels of teacher involvement in the process. The *maturité suisse* is trusted partly because it is wholly in the hands of teachers and, within a school, handled consistently: everyone does the same written exams, set by the teachers; everyone has the same type of orals, conducted by their teachers; everyone has one of their teachers as their personal moderator during the whole process; and final decisions in marginal cases are made in a meeting when all these teachers are gathered together. French secondary teachers have a high knowledge and understanding of the baccalaureate assessment arrangements because all of them at one time or another will have been instructed to take part, many of them year after year. The IB is of course a very different kind of system, using volunteer markers as with English awarding bodies. The world of IBO, however, is a relatively small one, despite being so geographically dispersed, by comparison with that of some English awarding bodies. The sense of teacher involvement in all aspects of IBO's work is very strong; my IB coordinators seem to have close direct links with people in the IBO Assessment Centre in Cardiff; people seem to feel that their voice can be heard; there is a sense of being part of a worldwide community with shared aims.

28. This takes me on to my fifth point. All the things that I have said about IBO could also be said in part about English awarding bodies. They involve large numbers of teachers; they encourage feedback; they make great efforts to provide customer service. But the English national system is huge by comparison with that of the IBO or of a national qualification in a country like Switzerland with a population of only 7.5 million. The greater the size the more risks you run in terms of trust. The development of awarding bodies with wholly national roles, and the sense that a regional service that you automatically use, like the old JMB, has been replaced by a market place in which you shop around, has not enhanced trust even if it may have improved service. Competition and choice have been assumed to be an important part of the public assessment system in England. They play no part whatsoever in the public assessment systems of France and Switzerland. Ironically, it may be the case that, because of this element of choice in England, and also because of the regulatory mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure consistency within the marketplace, we have a better functioning assessment system than that in some other countries but at the same time less public trust in what we are doing. How we get out of that trap must be one of the key issues for this conference.

29. My sixth point – please keep going, there are only three more – concerns the degree of stability of an assessment system. The chief features of the Swiss *maturité* have been in place for over a hundred years. There are elements of the French baccalaureate that are also extremely old. Trust does not always cling to what is old and established

hence we would not have always experienced all the revolutions, political, social and cultural that we have experienced over the last hundred years. But where something is felt to be working and is continuing to be serving the purposes for which it was intended (for example the Swiss *maturité* as a university entrance qualification for a small minority of the population) it can acquire and retain a currency – and qualifications are currencies – which attracts trust. This is where the instincts of this and previous English governments with regard to the retention of A levels, and even to a lesser extent GCSEs, are entirely understandable. Given the thirst for endless innovation and meddling by the state in so many areas there is a certain solace when one finds something that has been left alone.

30. But of course the system hasn't been left alone – for example we have seen the introduction of new AS levels – and it has been tinkered with because it was created to serve an educational world that no longer exists and has been looking increasingly unmanageable. And of course the White Paper earlier in the year promised a lot of further tinkering to tackle further identified weaknesses.

31. Maintaining trust in a qualification is thus more difficult where key elements of the wider education system have radically changed and the qualification itself is constantly evolving. There is a strong case now in England for more radical change than what the government envisages, but given that levels of trust in our public assessment system are not what they used to be such change is always going to be extremely difficult if it is to enhance trust rather than diminish it further. There is also a great challenge facing both governments and schools in explaining to the public in simple terms what our qualifications structure is all about. As someone living abroad during the whole debate over the Tomlinson report I only dipped into the issues occasionally and found it extremely difficult a lot of the time to understand the proposals and counter-proposals. If there is ever to be a radical change to our qualification system along similar lines to those proposed by Tomlinson trust in the new arrangements is likely to depend heavily on their degree of simplicity and the clarity with which the purposes and features of the new arrangements are communicated.

32. One feature of our public assessment system always mentioned by English parents when I ask them how much they trust the current system of qualifications is alleged 'grade inflation'. The proportions of the population in Switzerland gaining a *maturité* are remarkably consistent over time despite the fact, as I was assured the other weekend by the federal official responsible for the examinations centre I visited, assessment is entirely criterion-referenced and not normative. I know all the reasons that explain the rise in the proportions of the population gaining high grades in A levels and GCSEs and believe most of them. There have been major changes in the nature of A levels which are educationally disputable but nowhere have I seen evidence for an unequivocal 'dumbing down' or, at least, where there have been losses, there have also often been some corresponding gains. And yet this rise in proportions gaining top grades is neither credible to a lay audience nor is it desirable in terms of the function of the A level qualification to ensure effective discrimination between candidates, especially at the top end of the attainment range. I sometimes have the unworthy thought that the main attraction of the IB diploma for many admissions tutors is not so much the quality of the overall IB programme but the way it makes a low cost selection process a lot easier because of the extended nature of the IB diploma scale. All the suggestions for introducing finer discrimination in A levels that were discussed when I was working at QCA carried disadvantages, above all in

terms of negative backwash effects on students' broader educational programme. The Advanced Extension Awards, which I was always keen on, were proving educationally very valuable, but when I last heard of them were completely failing to serve any useful function in terms of providing data for university entrance simply because so few people were taking them.

33. My last two points are both quite short. First, I have been struck by how much easier it is for parents, students and the public to grasp the idea of a qualification and to trust the assessment arrangements associated with it when the whole thing comes as a package. The IB diploma is a curriculum, not just a set of examinations. So are the French baccalaureate and the Swiss *maturité*. The difference between these and England's à la carte qualifications system –GCSEs, AS levels, A levels, and all those modules –and the IB diploma or the *maturité Suisse* is a bit like the difference between the village store which is highly familiar and intimate, where the layout is easy to grasp, where you feel at home because you are known, and the large supermarket with its vastly superior but somewhat impersonal and rather confusing choice. Embarking on a programme, even though there are many choices within it, generates a greater sense of knowing where one is and where one is going than selecting qualifications from an à la carte list. When one is talking of trust, in a restaurant one knows well – if I may extend the metaphor - there can be advantages in the table d'hôte.

34. Second, and finally, there is one other crucial difference between the IB diploma and a public assessment system within a nation state. In the latter anything that goes wrong with the examinations is liable, and especially of course in England, to hit the headlines and undermine trust even when the problems are minor. IB diploma results, by contrast, only ever affect small minorities in the countries in which students take the examinations and will never be of interest to the national press. This is a blessed relief for which those working within the IBO must feel eternally grateful, although I must add that I am not aware of any major problems that would have been worth reporting even if they had been part of a national system. Incidentally, we also find that there is high trust among our parents and teachers with our IGCSE examinations and results, partly because we ourselves have experienced few problems with them but maybe partly also because being abroad and not reading the British press daily we are likely not to pick up any of the scare stories that there might have been about UK-based awarding bodies.

35. As far as media coverage of assessment issues in England is concerned I can think of a number of occasions when sections of the press did a disservice to the credibility of the country's public assessment system, through a sometimes careless and sometimes wilful failure to understand the issues (with a view to stimulating one of those exciting little panics that are so necessary to persuade bored readers that with each new day something fresh and interesting has happened in the world). In doing this they have on occasion made their own small contribution to pushing us out of Fukuyama's list of 'high trust' societies into his list of 'low trust' ones.

36. In conclusion therefore I have tried to identify some of the factors that are conducive to trust or mistrust with regard to public assessment systems: attitudes within the wider society, and in particular the degree of individualism and of deference to authority; the role of the state and of government in the assessment arrangements and how the effects of this can be both positive and negative, depending on attitudes towards the state and the nature of government; the relationship between universities and examinations; the

degree of direct involvement by teachers and the sense of ownership of the system; the stability or otherwise of the arrangements and the relationship between this and the stability or otherwise of the wider education system; the impact of the size of the school community being served by a public assessment system; the differences between a qualification based on a programme and an à la carte system; and finally, the contribution of the media.

37. I have started on the assumption that there have been and are problems of trust to be addressed in England's public assessment system. If that weren't so we wouldn't be having this conference. However, I have no hard evidence about the extent of this trust or mistrust. Indeed, I have a lot of qualitative evidence of a high level of trust on the part of many people. While I have focused on why there might be mistrust and what more we might do to increase trust I would not want to be adding to the problem that I have been trying to analyse. I have worked in the English and Scottish public assessment systems for many years, beginning as an O level and GCSE chief examiner for the London examinations board in the early 1980s and ending up as a senior official with national assessment responsibilities, successively, at the School Examinations and Assessment Council, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. I have absolutely no doubt that the systems of paper development, marking, moderation, awarding and customer service that were in place by the time I ceased to have these responsibilities in 2000 were vastly superior to the ones that I found when I started working in this area twenty years earlier. I would attribute this in part to the regulatory system that was put in place, and that I was so closely involved in, but even more to the spontaneous work of the awarding bodies themselves. There is much in place to suggest that we ought, in this area at least, to be one of Fukuyama's 'high trust' societies. I very much hope that the discussions that follow on from this conference can start on this basis.

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