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Identifying and Selecting Able Students for the NAGTY Summer School: Emerging Issues

and Future Considerations

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition that the educational needs of able students were not being adequately met in British schools resulting in a series of governmental educational initiatives aiming at improving the education of able students. The establishment of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) at the University of Warwick was a development aimed at enhancing able students' educational provision. An evaluation of the first Summer School, established under the auspices of NAGTY, took place to address issues of identifying and selecting able students, explore the relative value of different sources of evidence for determining eligibility, and look at the overall effectiveness of the selection process. Qualitative methods (i.e., interviews, observations, document analysis) were employed to collect data on the process of identifying and selecting able students. The evaluation yielded interesting results with regard to the criteria / eligibility for selection, decisions about what counts as evidence of giftedness and its relative value.

Identifying and Selecting Able Students for the NAGTY Summer School: Emerging Issues and Future Considerations

Introduction

Historically, in the UK, the 60s saw a rise in research on children of high ability. Projects such as The Liverpool Project by Tempest in 1966 and the Brentwood Experiment in Essex in 1969 stimulated a shift in public thinking and policy decision making regarding gifted and/or highly able pupils (Marjoram, 1997). However, for many years, able students in British schools have been marginalised in terms of identification and provision (House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, 1999). This has been particularly problematic for students who already experience social disadvantage, further hindering their entitlement to high quality education and access to opportunity.

Over the last decade, a series of government educational initiatives aiming at improving their education especially in inner cities have been implemented. These include: Excellence in Schools - the first government White Paper- (Department for Education and Employment- DfEE-, 1997); an international survey by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Freeman, 1999); the establishment of a national Gifted and Talented Advisory Group; an enquiry into the education of the highly able by the Select Committee (House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, 1999); and DfEE commissioned research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on the national provision for able students.

A number of developments aimed at enhancing the educational provision of able students include the establishment of a 'National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth'; the White Paper with emphasis on meeting the needs of highly able students (Department for Education and Skills - DfES-, 2001); and Ofsted inspection regarding schools' provision for able

students (Ofsted, 2001a). Also, an increasing emphasis is placed on 'access' and 'inclusion' in the revised national curriculum referring to the 'provision for all' according to their abilities, making support for able students a statutory responsibility.

Defining Giftedness

Current debates regarding identification and assessment of high ability have challenged stereotypical views of what giftedness entails. A major shift from considering IQ scores alone to acknowledging environmental influences on ability and performance in identifying gifted students has occurred. Definitions of giftedness based on IQ scores are expanding to include notions of artistic / sporting talents, social giftedness, and diverse cognitive talents, all encapsulated in theories of 'multiple intelligences' and 'multiple creativities' (Gardner, 2003), stressing the multifaceted nature of intelligence and the consequent need for evaluation to rely less on standardised assessments of a restricted range of skills and abilities. Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence has provided a holistic view on intelligence by discussing its analytic, creative and practical components (Sternberg, 1985).

Definitions of giftedness vary to include terms such as able, more able, highly able, gifted, talented and bright, denoting degrees of exceptionality and contentiousness, in that, as we enter the 21st century, inclusion, opportunity, access and entitlement dominate the discourse regarding able students' provision, contributing to the 'equity vs. excellence' debate. For the purpose of this paper the terms gifted and able / highly able are used interchangeably.

Identifying and Selecting Able Students

Procedures for identifying giftedness have varied widely, mainly because of lack of conceptual clarity as to what giftedness entailed. Some have used standardised IQ tests to identify ability, and others profiles and checklists, e.g., Giftedness Scale by Silverman and

Maxwell (1996), to identify personality characteristics, such as commitment, adaptability, resilience, flexibility and perseverance, that are thought to relate to giftedness.

In many UK schools, Gifted and Talented cohorts are being identified generically (Nord Anglia report). This practice has led to pupils with particular ability in one subject area being excluded if they do not comply with generic understandings of giftedness. It has also resulted in some pupils gaining little from engaging in enrichment activities that do not take into consideration their strengths by subject.

In the Nord Anglia study, schools relied on various methods to identify able pupils, including, standardised academic and ability tests, teacher nominations, self-identification checklists and parental input. Using scores from standardised tests as indicators of absolute levels of achievement may fail to identify able underachievers, i.e., pupils whose achievement is significantly lower than predicted by their general cognitive ability. Also, standardised measures of ability (e.g., IQ scores) were widely used to predict academic performance, despite reservations about the validity of their results and their liability to cultural and societal bias (Black, 2001). Hence, assessment of both academic attainment and general cognitive ability are used to make predictions about pupils' future performance despite their different conceptual bases (Naglieri and Ford, 2003).

Regarding teacher nominations, experienced teachers are well placed to identify and nominate able students by commenting upon the specific aspects of students' academic performance. Teacher nominations have implications for teacher training, requiring teachers to examine their own teaching practices and views of giftedness. Montgomery (1996) suggested that checklists are helpful in guiding teachers' identification of able pupils by offering information on traits and characteristics, e.g., resilience, persistence and interest, that able or gifted students are thought to display. However, they may be restrictive by expecting teachers to categorise students' performance rather than developing a narrative to describe

their overall academic and social profile. Also issues of checklist validity, content and predictive validity in particular, are as pertinent when checklists are used as they are for psychometric tests (Benbow, 1992).

Self-identification, although often in fact parental nomination, allows identification of able students by encouraging their enrolment in special enrichment programmes for the gifted. The assumption is that if they do well in these programmes, certain areas of ability can be identified. Students identified via this approach succeed almost as often as those identified via other ways, e.g., IQ scores (Cropley, 1997; Olszewski-Kubilius and Grant, 1996).

In the USA, Stanley and colleagues developed the "talent search" concept as a deliberate effort to find middle school pupils who did exceptionally well in the area of mathematics in certain geographical areas (Stanley, Keating and Fox, 1974). Later, the talent search was broadened to include assessment of verbal as well as mathematical talent. Stanley's talent search was built upon the idea of "off-level" testing which allows children to take tests at the level of their pre-existing knowledge and abilities rather than the level deemed appropriate for their chronological age, avoiding ceiling effects. The concept of "talent search" has evolved to mean much more than assessment, involving appropriate educational provision, and structures to maximise talent development opportunities.

 Research on the talent search model has shown that it has good predictive validity (Benbow, 1992), with SAT scores being predictive of achievement ten years after talent search participation. Moreover, students identified via talent search were likely to pursue more rigorous courses of study, participate in extra-curricular educational opportunities, and accelerate their education more than students who did not participate (Olszewski-Kubilius & Grant, 1996).

Identifying gifted and talented young people raises important issues about what counts as evidence of giftedness and talent and the validity of assessment procedures. When

identifying able students, multiple sources of evidence should be sought, including academic

performance, intelligence scores and information about certain personality characteristics

(e.g., persistence, perseverance, resilience), motivation and interest. Equally important is to

identify the discerning characteristics of the academically able, gifted and talented pupils, and

assess their ability by accounting for the social /cultural views and values placed on

giftedness, social advantage and quality of educational provision.

The Context of this Study

The present study was based on an evaluation of the first Talent Search for the

Summer School (SS) instituted by the National Academy for the Gifted and Talented Youth

(NAGTY) at the University of Warwick, England. This was the first major event of a new

high profile initiative, NAGTY, designed to address the needs of gifted and talented school

students. The Talent Search was intended to identify and select exceptional young people in

the top 1% or 5% of pupils in England in terms of their ability. In this study, the process of

identifying and selecting 100 able pupils for the SS, issues of equal opportunities (balance of

gender, ethnicity/race and disability) and the ways in which giftedness is interpreted and

understood by schools, tutors/ selectors and other key individuals were investigated to explore

issues regarding equity, access and entitlement to gifted programmes. Regarding student

recruitment, NAGTY advertised the Summer School via newspapers and letters that were sent

to schools.

Method

Participants

Six tutors were employed by NAGTY to teach Mathematics, Philosophy, Creative Writing,

Chemistry, Drama and Environmental Science. All of them, except for the Creative Writing

tutor, are faculty members at the University of Warwick. The NAGTY Interim Director and

the DfES manager also participated in this study. The panel of selectors for Drama, Maths,

Environmental Studies consisted of the tutor involved in the teaching of the subject only,

whereas for Creative Writing, there were two tutors and for Chemistry three tutors (the main

tutor and classroom teachers).

Research Design

To capture the complexity of the issues regarding identification and selection of able

young people attending SS, qualitative approaches were employed (interviews, observations

and application documents) for data collection. Five of the six tutors (Mathematics,

Philosophy, Creative Writing, Chemistry, Environmental Science, -the Drama tutor was

unavailable) were interviewed at the start and end of the SS to offer their views regarding the

identification and selection of gifted pupils. Interviews were also held with the NAGTY

Interim Director, about six weeks after the end of the SS, and the DfES manager.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be appropriate to explore issues regarding

tutors' experience of teaching gifted students, their views about the cognitive and social

characteristics of the target groups, and ways of differentiating teaching to meet the students'

needs in a contextualised manner (see Appendix A). A thematic analysis, using the themes of

the main questions in the interview schedule as a starting point took place. The responses

from the interviews were analysed by applying the constant comparison method (Glaser and

Straus, 1967), namely writing down the main themes as they emerge from the data and then

applying these themes to the entire data, resulting in a collection of extracts for each theme /

code. An inter-rater reliability check took place by having another rater applying the same

coding scheme to 10% of the transcripts, achieving agreement in 65% of the codes used.

Observations were carried out of the selection processes for all but one subject at the

Summer School, i.e. Maths, Creative Writing, Environmental Science, Drama and Chemistry,

focusing on the identification procedures employed by the selection panels. During the

observations, carried out by two researchers, issues regarding evidence included in the

application, the use of selection criteria and social representation were explored (see

Appendix B). Each observation took as long as the selection process, approximately an hour,

and the non-participant observers kept fieldnotes, extracting the common themes at the end of

each observation section. The information about the selection process collected via

observations was used to triangulate the data collected through interviews and document

analysis.

Results

In this section, evidence is presented regarding identification and selection gained

from observations of the selection processes for each subject; interviews with the tutors, the

Interim Director of NAGTY and the DfES project manager; and documents included in

pupils' applications. The main themes that emerged during interviews and observation include

notions of demographics and social representation, issues regarding variability in the selection

process, evidence supporting application and selection criteria and type of evidence presented

at the selection panels.

The Demographics of Selection

The ages of the 100 pupils who attended the SS ranged between 11 and 16 years. The

mean age of those accepted ($M= 14.2$) was older than that of those who had applied but were

not selected ($M=12.9$) and those who sought information from NAGTY but did not apply for

the SS ($M=12.8$). This reflects, at least in part, the decisions made by some selectors (i.e.,

Creative Writing and Drama) to take only older students (Table 1). The majority of pupils

selected for SS came from state schools (M= 69.3), although the percentage of students from

the independent sector (30.7%) is substantially higher than the size of the sector would

predict.

<Put Table 1 here>

More SS participants were boys (56% to 44% girls), and the majority were White, with the overall percentage of minority ethnic students being 22%, compared with the 17% in the state school system (see Table 1). The Interim Director noted that 22% is "great, in that it is significantly above the school population for 11-16". However, he was concerned about the small number of Black Caribbean males, stating "that's something I'm sure the Academy will want to address in the future". A small number of participants (7%) had special educational needs.

Moreover, the Interim Director stated that "it was very important that as far as is possible we did get a representative group... I didn't want us to see a disproportionate number from independent schools because they happened to be quicker off the mark". He considered that with respect to the outcome, comparing the 550 applicants with the 100 on the SS, "the proportions from ethnic minority backgrounds, male and female split, independent versus state sector were broadly in line". Although the Director did not want to do "a lot of social engineering", he stressed the importance of getting an "appropriate representation". Our analysis indicates that this was only approximately achieved, in that there were a number of significant variations in terms of ethnic representation among SS pupils.

Issues regarding Selection

A number of organisational / structural and practical issues influenced the selection process. The Interim Director stated that only six of the eight courses originally advertised were available, many applicants misinterpreted the preference specification when choosing their subject, and 45% of all applicants put Maths as their first choice, creating an unanticipated problem requiring "arbitrary decisions reallocating applicants to other courses". A further issue concerned the plan to run three courses (i.e., Environmental Science, Maths and Creative Writing) for the applicants whose ability was considered to fall within the top 1% and three for those in the top 5%. Difficulties in identifying these separate groups in the

absence of a common metric became apparent, and in practice, tutors decided to use a range of evidence that they considered to be appropriate for their own subject to inform selection.

Tutors' diverse views about giftedness further complicated the selection process. One tutor commented that the "the whole language of gifted and talented [was] disturbing". He felt that rather than labelling children in such a way and, by inference, making them appear to be exceptional in all areas, it would be more appropriate to say that they were "gifted at ... ". Other selectors felt disappointed with what they could deduce regarding applicants' ability based on the presented evidence. One selector in particular noted before the start of the Summer School "I thought there was going to be clear evidence of excellence. And if you asked me to bet a hundred pounds that these students were excellent, I'd sadly decline".

Evidence Supporting Application

Applicants were not required to submit a standardised set of supporting documentation, resulting in various difficulties for the selectors. Teachers were encouraged to provide reference letters, records of academic performance and examples of work. Evidence in the form of examples of the applicants' work varied with regard to its relevance to the chosen subject. There were examples, of Drama applicants submitting Chemistry work and Chemistry applicants submitting musical scores. In one case, a Mathematics applicant provided basic test results and a letter written by his mother, explaining his disadvantaged background and their family circumstances (e.g., homelessness), and requesting that her son be accepted to attend SS. This child was accepted; however, we have no means of knowing whether other applicants with similar but untold stories were rejected.

Often submitted material was coursework or homework. Original work, in the sense of that done by the applicant in their own rather than school time was rare. Some selectors placed an emphasis on pupils' original pieces of work and personal statements, thought to provide evidence of pupils' "personal engagement" in terms of their interests and ability. A

strong preference was expressed towards "students who could put together, hopefully in not too polished a way which would rather imply it was their parents who did it, some sort of statement about their interests and abilities which formed a coherent intellectual structure".

For certain subjects, such as Chemistry, this was perhaps understandable as "taking the subject further" is difficult in the absence of special equipment. However, in the case of creative writing, mathematical and environmental investigations, it would seem plausible that children with a genuine enthusiasm, interest and talent would produce relevant work in their own time. The Creative Writing tutor stated that he "would like some original work out of school, even if it's a load of rubbish, if it shows they have thought about it [the subject]". It was also said that an original piece of work would have helped tutors to establish "what the student was like", largely in terms of their character, keenness to learn and aptitude for the subject.

The selectors stated that applicants would have benefited from submitting pieces of independently produced work, related to their own subject area. Personal statements were favoured as they gave selectors "a well-rounded sense" of the applicants, in terms of their general nature / personality and willingness to learn and participate. These qualitative and intuitive selection criteria carried weight in four of the selection panels that were observed.

Regarding evidence from standardised tests, a minority of applicants had submitted SAT1 (15 participants) or World Class (5 participants) test results. SAT1 has been extensively used in the USA to assess students' verbal reasoning and mathematical ability. The World Class test was developed to support learning and achievement in UK schools and aims at identifying gifted students in the top 10% by assessing their mathematical ability and problem solving skills.

Certain pieces of evidence enclosed in the applications raised questions regarding verifiability. Specifically, one applicant had only lived in England for three years and had not

spoken any English on entry to the country. The use of English in the personal statement was, given these circumstances, exceptional. However, it was typed in the same typeface as the teacher's recommendation and, whilst considered probably entirely genuine, questions were raised by the selector as to whether the applicant had a sufficient grasp of English to cope with the course demands. Other pieces of supporting evidence were highly edited, most obviously in the case of a patchwork of comments from a school report. This may just have been for practical reasons, making highlights of a report fit onto one sheet of A4 paper, but it may have been a means of 'hiding' less favourable school comments. Finally, evidence was not always dated. Comments on a piece of work from a 13 year-old appeared to be those of a primary school teacher, and hence at least two years out of date. A small number of schools though had appropriate mechanisms including a school stamp with staff signature and date for verification purposes.

The Selection Panels

Moderation did not take place between panel members, increasing the possibility of bias, and the selectors reported that they had not been briefed as to what constitutes supporting evidence in the applications. There was a limited prior consideration about the selection criteria, hampering consistency and increasing the difficulty of evaluating applications. Selectors with a school-based teaching background were better equipped in that they understood terms such as 'Key Stage' of the National Curriculum for schools. Others were not familiar with the subtleties of the Key Stage Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). In some cases, the results of less commonly used tests were not understood and some selectors struggled to understand terms such as dyspraxia and Asperger's syndrome, used to describe applicants' Special Educational Needs (SEN). Also, some selectors displayed difficulties understanding the relative value of different tests.   In selecting for Mathematics, applications had been pre-sorted so that only first-choice applicants judged by the Interim

Director to fall into the top one per cent in terms of ability were passed to the selector for consideration. Initially, selection criteria relating to test results were viewed as important by the mathematics tutor, but as the process went on, the selector based his judgements on supporting statements from applicants, their parents and teachers. In selecting for Creative Writing, promising student profiles were those that showed, according to one tutor, a "sense of adventure", "flexibility in mind" and "flair", not just a strong academic background and good essay writing skills. Only applicants aged 14 to 16 who listed Creative Writing as their first choice were considered.

In selecting for Chemistry, initially only students in Years 10 and 11 on GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education) courses who had put Chemistry as a first choice were considered, extending to students who put Chemistry as a second choice, as well as younger applicants. For Drama, the main criteria for selection were age, with only 14 to 16 year olds judged eligible, and social balance, without examining other evidence. Finally, for Environmental Science, the tutor retained the full spread of ages, 11 to 16, and based her judgements on IQ scores as well as personal statements. It was clear that, having a school background, she was committed to ensuring a balance of social background, ethnicity and gender, favouring pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

These accounts pointed to a substantial variability in the selection process, due to lack of a common metric to judge each applicant, some selectors' limited training and knowledge with regard to certain test scores provided by applicants, and diversity in the selectors' views of what counts as evidence for giftedness. This raises issues of social equity and equal opportunity in terms of including children with SEN, children who experience social disadvantage as well as children of a wide age range.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the process of identifying and selecting able students for the first NAGTY summer school (SS), and draw implications regarding the identification of gifted students. The main thrust of the findings is the variability in the selection process in terms of assessing applicants, e.g., lack of a common metric, inconsistency in handling diverse pieces of evidence and variable selectors' expertise to judge the documentation provided by the applicants. Moreover, variability was apparent in the selectors' interpretations of what constituted evidence including the validity and usefulness of test scores, personal statements and original pieces of work and, finally, variability in the selectors' views of access and entitlement to the summer school (e.g., social disadvantage, reduced opportunities, SEN provision).

The notion of variability is discussed in the context of defensibility, equity, advocacy and pluralism that, according to Davis and Rimm (1998), should underlie the identification and selection of able pupils. Davis and Rimm's typology enables an examination of variability through the lens of accuracy / consistency and thus defensibility of the procedures put in place to identify and select able pupils; equity in terms of access and entitlement to SS; advocacy in terms of safeguarding applicants' interests and rights; and pluralism in terms of engaging in on-going debates on giftedness.

Defensibility: Accuracy / Consistency

Defensibility stresses the need to defend the procedures implemented to assess able pupils' performance to ensure accuracy and consistency in identification and selection. To this end, defensibility requires an understanding of the relative value of different assessment procedures and a consensus on what counts as evidence of giftedness. In this study, tutors argued that National Curriculum Key Stage test results formed an impractical basis for selection, in that all students were of a good standard, and, thus, distinguishing between them on this basis was impossible. Moreover, not all tutors were convinced of the standards pupils

had to attain for statutory tests, with one tutor being surprised at the low-level content of the statutory tests. Finally, variability in tutors' expertise in interpreting test scores posed obstacles in differentiating between test results and other types of evidence.

Variability in the use and interpretation of standardised tests raises a number of issues including the focus of assessment (academic performance or intellectual ability) and the validity and appropriateness of standardised measures and the decision about what counts as evidence (academic or intelligence / IQ scores). Some selectors argued that one-instance, fixed assessments are likely to be problematic in identifying able pupils, requiring a more flexible approach to evaluation. Moreover, using scores from standardized tests as evidence was not consistent within subjects. For example, in Maths, the initial reliance on standardised assessment scores gave away to the use of supporting statements from teachers or parents.

Furthermore, the selection processes observed were not consistent across subjects, partly because selectors attempted to evaluate the information available in the context of their subject. For example, for Creative Writing, submitting an original piece of writing, other than homework, was seen as a marker of creativity and independent learning that goes beyond passing exams and adhering to the syllabus. Using subject-based parameters to evaluate applicants' eligibility was an attempt by some selectors to reach a 'perfect fit' between applicants' profiles and course demands. Variability in tutors' consideration of the application documents was also evident. In addition to the personal statements, some selectors argued that supporting statements from parents and teachers were important as long as they are not generic but individually tailored.

These findings suggest that the selection was made problematic owing to the lack of clarity with regard to the nature of evidence submitted by the applicants, and inconsistency and limited expertise in handling diverse pieces of evidence. Furthermore, concerns were raised regarding the cultural fairness of the standardised assessment used, and the adequacy of

the portfolio of evidence (e.g., teacher statements, personal statements, original pieces of work). Finally, some selectors argued that it was difficult and perhaps pedagogically inappropriate to have a common metric of what constitutes giftedness. The degree to which applicants' interests and rights were defended is therefore questionable as this would require selectors to ensure that the selection process is informed by a valid assessment of the evidence provided, and that the applicants' skills and ability are relevant to the intended gifted programme.

Advocacy

In this study, advocacy refers to the process of taking into consideration and safeguarding the interests of all young people who applied for the SS. The principle of advocacy requires selectors to consider gifted children's characteristics / needs and the type of the provision available in a particular gifted programme and maximise the potential for the 'perfect fit'. The findings suggest that applicants' interests may have been compromised due to lack of clarity and inconsistency in judging evidence.

Advocacy for the applicants should also concern their schools, with their teachers supporting them to compile a strong application of relevant evidence to accompany their application for gifted programmes; however, this support appears to have been hugely variable. Some applications included very few supporting documents whereas others provided diverse pieces of information, despite teachers being encouraged by NAGTY to avoid "thinking in terms of the bare minimum" and to "put in as much positive evidence that these are bright students as they possibly can". Moreover, advocating for the applicants' rights requires teachers to reflect on issues of giftedness and reach a consensus with regard to the type of evidence that should be included in the applications. Sternberg and Lubart (1991) suggest that evidence regarding the applicants' ability to engage in independent thinking; explore, justify and explain ideas; engage in debates and form reasoned arguments;

understand the wider context of learning by drawing connections and transferring knowledge; and undertake intellectual challenge is required to delineate their profiles.

Advocacy is particularly important for applicants who present unusual intellectual, educational and social / emotional needs, able students with learning difficulties. The paradoxical nature of these young people's needs contributes to teachers' confusion about their strengths and weaknesses, posing obstacles in acknowledging their ability and supporting them to access gifted programmes.

Equity

There are tensions between notions of equity and excellence, of ability and opportunity and of social/educational inclusion and provision for able students (Porter, 1999). Underestimating the important role that opportunity, access and entitlement play may perpetuate the notion that excellence can be found only in areas of social / cultural privilege. Linking excellence with access, inclusion and opportunity has become increasingly important, in that academic achievement is shaped by factors such as opportunity, support, motivation and encouragement, as well as cognitive ability (Potter, 1999).

The findings from this study suggest diversity in the selectors' perceptions of what constitutes giftedness and talent, and variability in their decisions about access and entitlement to the first NAGTY summer school. Hence, selection was influenced in many instances, sometimes considerably, by selectors' social constructions of giftedness based on their knowledge of applicants' ethnicity and social circumstances, rather than an agreed-upon definition, or a consistent body of evidence. Moreover, some selectors viewed certain non-cognitive characteristics, such as social cohesion of the group, group diversity, age and maturity as being important factors for selecting pupils. For example, the Drama tutor selected in order to establish a, "socially and ethnically diverse" group, with diversity being "more important than any other attribute for the group". Similarly, age was identified as an

important characteristic for selection for Creative Writing, in that older students were perceived as being more emotionally mature, having gained life experiences to enable them to tackle personal, social and ideological issues and explore them in their writing. According to a tutor, maturity is crucial as "the emotional risks are considerable when stretching students".

The proportion from ethnic minorities among those who attended the Summer School was higher than their numbers would nationally suggest except for Black Caribbean males. In terms of social representation, the results suggest that there may have been a bias in the selection procedure towards older and male applicants, and applicants from the private/independent sector, consistently with previous research (Marjoram, 1997). It is important to note though that about 50% of the pupils attending SS did not have parents who were graduates, pointing to social diversity in the total group of successful applicants. Some selectors stated that "if they are selecting on the basis of ability then they should be inclusive and use the same criteria regardless of class and social background". It appears that positive action was understood in terms of giving able students who experience social disadvantage and reduced opportunities a "chance to shine", with some selectors arguing that children's family, educational and social circumstances, in addition to ability, should be considered.

Unlike the positive action taken for social disadvantage, SEN were not accounted for during the selection process; furthermore, no differences were found with respect to SEN between pupils who attended Summer School and those who did not. However, this may be explained by some selectors' limited knowledge about applicants' SEN and their implications for provision, including safety issues, learning support in the context of individual subjects.

Pluralism

Pluralism, in this context, refers to public debate on decisions to assess ability and academic performance, and grant access to gifted programmes. Recently, debates with regard to what constitutes giftedness and access to gifted programmes, as well as the extent to which

these programmes sit comfortably with the current trends towards inclusive education have become increasingly dominant. In this study, pluralism was observed in selectors' discussions about giftedness and its contested nature. The contested nature of giftedness is highlighted, especially when placed in the context of opportunity and educational provision.

There is an expectation that able and highly able students have the faculty to acquire, demonstrate and transfer knowledge successfully (Porter, 1999). In practice however this may not always be the case. It has been argued that a bizarre notion of equality has permeated the British education system in terms of putting pressure on able students to under-perform to achieve 'sameness' (Eyre, 1997). Eyre has argued against adopting a 'colour-blind' approach to difference, but to provide educational experiences capable of meeting students' diverse needs and abilities. Manifestations of giftedness are wide-ranging and likely to challenge traditional notions of academic competence and social/emotional maturity. In this study, selectors' discussions on what constitutes giftedness suggest the need to widen definitions of giftedness; one tutor stated that SS pupils were "certainly gifted . .." qualified his definition of giftedness by stating that they were "enthusiastic", "self-disciplining", "good at talking to each other" and consequently "really quite mature". It seems that giftedness was linked to motivation and maturity rather than to a special aptitude for the subject. Applying the principle of pluralism requires selectors to acknowledge that not all gifted children are alike, taking a holistic approach towards describing their diverse characteristics and needs.

<div align="center">Conclusions and Recommendations</div>

Effective identification and selection of able pupils depends, to a large extent, on whether selectors are able to evaluate evidence regarding pupils' ability and personality characteristics that are conducive to learning, and be aware of their own views of giftedness and the demands of the courses offered. The findings from this study indicate variability in the selection process for the first NAGTY SS. The lack of accuracy and consistency in

handling evidence, the limited validity of assessment procedures, the lack of clarity with regard to what giftedness entails and what counts as evidence of giftedness, and the diverse views of giftedness all made the selection and identification process problematic. To ensure that identification and selection of able pupils is underpinned by the principles of defensibility, advocacy, equity and pluralism, areas that are potentially problematic should be recognised and issues of equality and opportunity should be addressed.

To this end, the development of a cohesive theoretical framework and effective assessment practices are recommended for the future functioning of the programme. Clarity in definitions of giftedness, and the cognitive and social / cultural characteristics of the target population is required. Moreover, a detailed delineation of the capabilities that are considered to be gifted (a common metric), as well as an understanding of diversity in giftedness, as manifested in the interplay between advanced capacity for learning, gender, ethnicity and social circumstances are required to achieve consistency and social representation. The development of a cohesive theoretical framework to underpin decisions about identification and selection should rely on integrating important theories such as Moon's Personal Talent Theory, Sternberg's Triarchic Theory and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory. In terms of assessment, moderation in selection panels and application of multiple methods for collecting evidence (eg, observation in various settings, interviews, standardised tests) is required to triangulate information and reduce bias. With regard to standardised tests, it is important to differentiate between giftedness as the result of rapid development and giftedness as a qualitatively different set of behaviours, attributes and characteristics. This can be achieved by comparing young people who are considered to be gifted with both chronological-age and mental-age peers. Finally, understanding that giftedness is not fixed but fluid, blossoming in contexts defined by educational opportunity and pluralism, is crucial to move identification of able students further.

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Table 1

	Information-only Applicants[a] (%)	Non-Summer School Applicants[b] (%)	Summer School Applicants (%)
Mean age	12.8 (SD:4.1)	12.9 (SD:3.9)	14.2 (SD:3.7)
Male	51.8	44.1	55.8
Female	48.2	55.9	44.2
State School	70.6	80.7	69.3
Private & Independent School	29.4	19.3	30.7
Special Needs	12.0	5.9	6.8
No Special Needs	88.0	94.1	93.2

Notes. [a] These are applicants who obtained information from NAGTY and did not apply.

[b] These are applicants who applied for the summer school but were not selected.

Acknowledgement

Appendix A

National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth

Summer School 2002

Tutor / Director interview schedule (excerpts)

1. Are you finding it a valuable experience for you personally?

2. How are you finding the group of students?
   - age range?
   - gifted?
   - Academically able?
   - grasp of the subject matter?
   - cohesion as a group?
   - Social maturity

3. How did you ensure representativeness in the group?

4. Have you shaped your teaching in any specific way to suit working with gifted young people?
   - if so, in what ways and why?

5. What are your views on giftedness?

6. Have you any suggestions for changes to your course or to the summer school generally?
   - course
   - summer school itself (social and residential aspect)

Appendix B

Observation main themes:

The type of evidence typically accompanied the application;

What type of applicants selectors looked for;

Selectors' views about the characteristics of gift and talent;

The application of specific selection criteria;

The type of evidence that influences the selection panels; and

Ways of ensuring social / demographic representation of the schools