In what way and why are the educational effects of social exclusion of long term significance for the individual.

Education is widely perceived as playing a pivotal role in the prevention of social exclusion. It would firstly seem important to assess briefly definitions of social exclusion in order to further analyse its relationship with education. The degree to which education can affect social exclusion is mediated by a number of interrelated factors, which can be broadly categorized into 'school' and non-school' elements. These factors must be analysed in order to ascertain how they effect individual attainment within the education system, which thus affects the long-term biographies of individuals and may perhaps hold some answers to the reproduction of social exclusion. Following this discussion, it would seem necessary to analyse the effects of educational attainment for the individual. The majority of literature regarding this subject has focused upon employment opportunities, an emphasis which seems justified for two reasons. Firstly, while social exclusion's multi-faceted nature is accepted as self-evident, a central component is identified with the poverty associated with limited prospects for employment. Secondly, a disassociation, or rejection by, the labour market is seen as greatly reducing both self-agency and self-esteem, compounding the problem of securing employment further. Thus, it would seem fair to concentrate upon employment and the labour market as a key area in which the educational effects of social exclusion are of long-term significance for the individual. However, poor educational attainment has also been shown to be associated with other markers of social inclusion (or exclusion), such as poorer reported general health, depression and a lower probability of voting in general elections. However, as with most elements of this subject, the issue of causality, as opposed to correlation, must be considered.

Although the term 'social exclusion' has been used to refer to existing concepts such as poverty or unemployment, a broader definition is most typically used which centres around the notion of integration rather than solely concerning the distribution of resources. Burchardt et al. (1998) have thus defined social exclusion as a long-term non-participation in 'the economic, civic and social norms that integrate and govern the society in which an individual resides.' Thus, in theory, attempts to capture the ways in which education contributes to social exclusion should seek to capture the ability of different population sub-groups to participate in a number of key dimensions of social activity. Burchardt et al. identify the key dimensions of participation as production, consumption, wealth, political activity and social life. However, as mentioned above, the area of production via employment, which is seen as creating opportunities for consumption and the building of wealth, has been, perhaps justifiably, focused upon.

As discussed later, many of the long-term risks of social exclusion for the individual are rooted in educational attainment. However, such attainment is determined by a variety of factors, many of which are, in themselves, inextricably linked with social exclusion. A number of macro-level factors can be identified as strongly influencing what both schools and pupils can achieve in the domains of formal qualifications and generic skills. Firstly, one must view changing socio-demographic factors; most notably perhaps increases in the rates of family instability, sole parenthood, teenage pregnancy and motherhood, and immigration, asylum seeking and refugee settlement (Sparkes and Glennerster 2002). Together, it has been argued, these changes create

conditions in which children and young people experience higher levels of mobility, leading to interrupted schooling, and greater insecurity. Secondly, changes in the structure of the labour market can be seen to have affected demand for labour and young people's routes to independence and adulthood. Many researchers have noted the decline in available stable and permanent employment for young people and the increasing instability of this sector of the labour market. This, in turn, has meant that the transition to work is lengthening, becoming more fragmentary and more dependent on the possession of qualifications. Green et al. (1998) have noted that, in 1986, 62 per cent of jobs required qualifications, whilst by 1997 this figure had increased to 69 per cent. Brynner (2001) has argued that such trends are likely to continue and intensify in the future, leading to increasing alienation from the labour market for those without such qualifications which, in term has long term significance for the individual in terms of social exclusion. Finally, a number of studies have highlighted the impact of policy changes geared to improving school performance and the increasing parental choice of schools in creating marked divergences in attainment between schools and between pupils of different ability levels. This argument has been supported by findings that, despite an aggregate improvement in attainment at all key stages, a long tail of underachievement remains. Low attainment has been shown to be particularly apparent among some ethnic minority groups and pupils on free school meals (West and Pennell 2003). Thus, one could argue that these macro-level changes have hindered the ability of education to prevent a cycle of social exclusion that begins in childhood and continues, and is perhaps exacerbated by, changes in socio-demographic, labour market and policy factors.

In understanding factors that affect educational attainment, it seems important to acknowledge the prevalence of both school and non-school factors. Improvements in schools with disadvantaged pupils may seem one clear way in which education can reduce social exclusion and thus benefit the future of an individual. Indeed, case studies of schools with 'below average intakes' (Sparkes 1999) who succeed 'against the odds' have been found to emphasise the importance of leadership, built on a team approach, a vision of success, careful use of targets, an improved physical environment, common expectations regarding pupils' behaviour and success and investment in good parent and community relations (National Commission on Education 1996). However, it has been argued that, 'it cannot be assumed that such strategies will contribute to greater social inclusiveness….If all schools performed as well as the best schools, the stratification of attainment of achievement by social class would be even more stark than it is now. This would happen because socially advantaged children in highly effective schools would achieve even more than they do now in less conducive environments and the gap between them and their less advantaged peers would increase' (Mortimore and Whitty 1999). Furthermore, the creation of targets and league tables for schools may exacerbate this problem by encouraging teachers to focus upon those pupils most likely to reach the desired level, consequently paying little or no attention to those at lower levels. Thus, some processes explicitly designed to raise standards within the education system may exclude and create disaffection among pupils at the lowest end of the spectrum of academic ability. These factors are argued to have brought about a situation in which a large minority of troubled, disadvantaged and 'less academic' children and young people do not gain appropriate benefit from their education, and may become trapped in a cycle of low attainment and poor self-esteem, and consequently may be excluded formally from school or self-exclude via truancy. Such processes, it has been argued,

thus present the possibility that schools may, in some cases, maintain or even exacerbate problems of social exclusion that, as is argued later, have significant effects upon the long-term futures of such individuals.

Truancy and formal exclusion have been widely reported to have extremely detrimental effects for young people. The 1997 Education Bill aimed to further strengthen schools' powers of exclusion, which, when combined with the pressure upon schools to meet targets and perform well in league tables, have had dramatic effects upon the rates of exclusion. Exclusion is associated with poor levels of basic skills, poverty and unemployment, limited aspirations, family difficulties, poor relationships ad racism (Walker and Walker 1997). Although these factors should not be viewed in isolation, in combination they may form part of a pattern that may have important consequences for long-term social exclusion, especially as three quarters of pupils permanently excluded at secondary level do not return to mainstream schooling (Gillborn and Gipps 1996).

Another factor, which has emerged as an important determinent of attainment, is the quality and behaviour of teachers in the classroom. Dearden et al (1997) showed, using analysis of NCDS data, that teacher experience, which is reflected in salary level, has observable affects on pupils' earnings in later life, although not their attainment of formal qualifications. The explanation given for this disparity is that more experienced teachers are more effective in helping pupils attain the 'generic' or 'soft' skills favoured by employers. This issue brings to light the important idea that educational attainments cannot be measured simply in terms of academic qualifications. Moss and Tilley(1995) found that, amongst American employers, 86 per cent included 'soft skills' such as communication, customer handling and team working, in a list of their most important hiring criteria.

However, low educational attainment is also associated with several 'non-school' factors that can have long-term consequences for the individual. Sparkes (1999) has argued that, in order to isolate the value added by schools, 'appropriate' allowance is often made for socio-economic variables and prior attainment to control for differential school intakes. Thus, inequalities in final educational outcomes arising from background factors may be at risk of becoming acceptable and even regarded as inevitable. A child's characteristics, in terms primarily of poor health, psychological or behavioural problems and experience of institutional care, have been shown to be strongly associated with low attainment. However, the personal characteristic reported as explaining the highest proportion of variance in attainment is prior attainment. This, however has not been found to be the result of innate variations in genetic intelligence, but has been found to be strongly associated with socio-economic variables. Consequently, a broad consensus can be found in literature concerning this issue that there is potential for intervention in the early years of development that can improve later attainment (Bynner 2001). The association between poor or unstable family circumstances and children's educational attainment is long established. Bynner and Parsons (2001) have shown the powerful role of socio-economic factors in creating social exclusion. In particular low income and poverty has emerged as having a strong and independent effect on educational attainment. Hobcraft's (2000) analysis of NCDS data, which focused specifically on the roles of schooling and educational qualifications in the emergence of adulthood exclusion, has confirmed the key role of childhood poverty in predicting 'negative adult outcomes' and social

exclusion, largely via low attainment. Experience of family disruption, particularly early experience of life in a lone-parent family or in a re-constituted family before the age of five, has also been found to be of significance in relation to educational attainment, whilst children in institutional care are often pinpointed as those most affected. More than 75 per cent of children in care leave school without qualifications, whilst 80 per cent of care leavers remain unemployed for 2.5 years after leaving school, compared to 9-16 per cent of the general population.

The relationship between social exclusion and education is necessarily affected by factors outside the confines of the school. In this way, it seems possible to gain some understanding of the limits of the educational system, in itself, to prevent a continuous cycle of social exclusion throughout an individual's life course, and how education can benefit young people in highly variable ways. Furthermore, non-school variables are highly interdependent, whilst their cumulative effect may be greater than the simple sum of separate factors. In this way, it is possible to view multiple disadvantage as having devastating implications for educational attainment. Thus, education can be seen in some ways as an uneven mediating factor between childhood and adult social exclusion, which may serve to widen, or at least reinforce such divisions, rather than preventing them.

Having assessed the ways in which rates of educational attainment can vary according to both macro and micro level factors, it would now seem important to assess how these differential attainments have long-term significance for individuals. Educational attainment, in the form of qualifications and test scores, during compulsory schooling has been identified as 'the most frequent and effective childhood predictor of adult outcomes', and of social exclusion (Hobscraft 1998). Brynner and Parsons (1998) have also emphasised the impact on adult outcomes of poor basic skills, especially for individuals at high risk of social exclusion from other factors. Thus indicating that, 'individuals who leave schools with low levels of educational attainment and poor basic skills are at a high risk of experiencing social exclusion as adults, with those who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills at particular risk' (Sparkes 1999). This assertion is supported by evidence that only 2 per cent of jobs are open to those with Basic Skills Agency 'entry-level skill', and only fifty per cent of jobs to those with skill level one (Sparkes and Glennerster 2002). This study reports evidence not only of strong associations between low attainment and poor access to the labour market in the early stages of working life, but also higher risks of spells of unemployment between the ages of 16 and 21, low earnings and housing tenure at the age of 37. Robinson and Oppenheim (1998) found that attainment of 1 to 4 GCSEs at grades A to C increased earnings by 17 percent, whilst five or more increased earnings by 41 per cent compared with individuals with no qualifications. In terms of post compulsory education, two or more A-levels increased earnings by 67 per cent, whilst a degree led to a 111 per cent increase. Thus, one can conclude that the educational effects of social exclusion, and subsequent variations in attainment, can have serious effects upon employment opportunities which affect individuals in the long-term, not only economically, but also in terms of self-identity and self-esteem.

An important division has thus emerged between education per se, and educational attainment. The latter gives an individual the possibility of long-term success and social inclusion; however, the former whilst attempting to give this opportunity to the

majority of young people, stratifies such possibilities and seemingly holds them elusive to a significant minority of pupils who are most at risk of longer-term social exclusion. Whilst general levels of educational attainment have improved in Britain, significant numbers of young people continue to leave school without attaining qualifications. An analysis of GCSE attainment shows a year on year improvement in the proportion of young people attaining five GCSEs at grade A to C, however, the proportion leaving with no GCSEs has remained stable since the late 1980s (Sparkes 1999). Thus, in recent years, the gap between the highest and lowest attaining pupils has grown. Furthermore, the more consistent level of those leaving school with no qualifications is not matched by a consistent availability within the labour market of employment opportunities for such individuals.

In conclusion, educational attainment has the capacity to have far-reaching and significant positive long-term effects for the individual. However, the ability of education to offer such opportunities is highly influenced by an existing social structure which continues to reproduce itself due not only to the fact that non-school factors and, in particular existing familial social exclusion, have a large impact upon the likelihood of such attainment, but also because the education system itself may serve to strengthen and promote these divides. Whilst levels of educational qualifications are increasing in Britain overall, there continues to be a section of society which is, it seems, not able to reap the rewards of these opportunities, and who remain socially excluded due largely to measures seemingly designed to benefit the majority of young people and reinforce the barrier between them and this significant minority.