In this article, Garry Hornby and Roger Kidd provide a follow-up to their own investigation of the outcomes of an inclusion project in Yorkshire ten years ago. Twenty-nine students were transferred from their special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties into mainstream schools. Hornby and Kidd now report high levels of unemployment amongst these young people and indications that the quality of their adult lives is less than satisfactory. The results of this small-scale survey will raise important questions for all those concerned with current trends in the education of pupils with learning difficulties and their transition into adulthood.

Current Government policy in the UK regarding the education of children with special educational needs (SEN) is one of increasing emphasis on including as many of them as possible in mainstream schools (DfEE, 1997, 1998). This is in line with an international trend towards increased inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Tiltstone, Florian & Rose, 1998).

At the forefront of moves towards increased inclusion are children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), many of whom have in the past been educated in special schools in the UK (Crowther, Dyson, Elliott & Millward, 1998; HMI, 1993). Many LEAs are now looking to close down MLD schools and cater for these pupils in mainstream schools. A recent survey of education officers for SEN and headteachers of special and mainstream schools in 11 LEAs reported that, ‘…there was a widespread view that many, or even all, children with moderate learning difficulties should ideally be in neighbourhood schools’. (Croll & Moses, 2000, p.5). This view exists despite ongoing controversy about the appropriateness of such a policy (e.g. Farrell, 2000; Feiler & Gibson, 1999; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995).

One of the major concerns about such inclusion is the lack of research on the outcomes, in terms of the quality of life, which young people with MLD who have been included are able to achieve after they leave school (Hornby, 1999).

It has been suggested that, with appropriate education, young people with MLD (termed mild mental retardation in the USA) can achieve a good quality of life in the community. Brown-Glover and Wehman (1996) state that,

'The ability of individuals with mild mental retardation to succeed in the community is directly related to the amount of training and support that they receive while they are in school. These individuals have enormous potential to be extremely successful in independent community living and a career of their choosing.’

(p.249)

That many young people with MLD have been successfully included in the community outside school in the UK has been acknowledged for many years. From his review of studies which followed-up young people with learning difficulties after they have left school, Tizard (1958) reported,

‘…even during the depression years substantial numbers of mentally subnormal children were able, upon leaving school, to find jobs for themselves and live as self-supporting, socially competent members of society’.

(p.506)

The high level of inclusion in society possible for this group was highlighted by research conducted by Edgerton in the USA in the 1960s. Edgerton (1967) used the term ‘cloak of competence’ to describe how many of these young people, who were considered mildly mentally retarded in school, later blended into the adult community. The same phenomenon was given official recognition in the USA when the President’s Committee on Mental Retardation (1970) coined the term, ‘six-hour retarded child’ to explain how prevalence estimates of mild mental retardation fell sharply in early adulthood due to young people who had been categorised as such at school appearing considerably more competent when out of school. This phenomenon has also been noted in the UK (Richardson & Koller, 1992).

So if inclusion in society as adults is the expected outcome for many if not all young people who are labelled as having MLD at school, what are the key factors in determining this outcome? It is widely accepted that employment is, ‘the essential key to independence and … eventual social integration’ (Rowan, 1985, p.8) of children with learning difficulties. Therefore, success in obtaining employment must be a major criterion in evaluating the effectiveness of educational provision for these children. It is therefore important to investigate the employment rate for young people with MLD once they have left school.

Wehman (1996) reports from a review of 21 outcome studies conducted in the USA that the average employment rate of young adults with mild mental retardation was found to be 51% and that the rate for those with severe mental retardation was 20%. 

(p.397)
Also in the USA, Blackoby and Wagner (1996) report findings from a national study of outcomes for youth with disabilities. Their findings are combined for mild and more severe forms of mental retardation (MR). For young people with MR overall 37% were found to be competitively employed three to five years after leaving school.

An Australian follow-up study of young people with disabilities (Riches, Parmenter & Robertson, 1996) has reported similar employment figures to those from the USA. The proportions of young people with intellectual disabilities found to be employed at the time of the study were: mild 57%; moderate 59%; severe 31%.

There is a long history of follow-up studies of people with learning difficulties in the UK. Tizard (1958) describes studies dating back to the 1920s. May and Hughes (1988) summarise the results of 14 studies of ex-students with moderate learning difficulties up to the 1980s. Most studies reported employment rates between 50% and 90%. For example, Walker (1982), in a survey conducted in the late 1970s, found a 64% employment rate for 152 subjects categorised as ESN (M) (now termed MLD). It is notable that many of the studies found a higher rate of employment for males than females.

In recent years in the UK there has been a paucity of research on the outcomes of education for young people with learning difficulties, a fact lamented by McConkey (1998). There have been studies which have investigated outcomes for children with disabilities in general (Ward, Thompson & Riddell, 1994) but it is not possible to extract findings for young people with learning difficulties from these. Flynn and Hirst (1992) did focus on subjects with learning difficulties but the average age of their sample was only 17 years so around half of them were still at school at the time of the survey.

Thompson, Ward and Wishart (1995) followed up 35 young people with Down’s syndrome until six years after they left school. They found that, at this time, none of them were working in open employment but 74% were attending adult training centres (now typically referred to as resource centres).

Only two recent studies could be located which specifically focused on young people with MLD; both published in the British Journal of Special Education. May and Hughes (1985) followed up 63 young people with MLD from one Scottish region until two years after they had left school. By this time only three out of the 63 were in open employment. Freshwater and Leyden (1989) followed up young people who had left an MLD school in the Midlands between three and ten years earlier. Unfortunately only 58 out of 111 could be traced and 11 refused to be interviewed so the sample of 47 used in the study may be unrepresentative. This is particularly important since some US studies have found that the ex-students who were more difficult to locate were more likely to be employed than the others (Heal & Rusch, 1995). Though the findings must therefore be treated cautiously, it is of concern that only four out of the 47 were found to be in open employment at the time of the study. These findings contrast sharply with those reported for the USA and Australia and for the UK up to the 1980s. The much lower employment rates found in recent UK studies is a cause for alarm and highlights the need for research to investigate the current employment situation of young people with MLD. This is especially important since, as stated earlier, having a job is considered to be the key to having a good quality of life and to successful social inclusion.

The aim of the current study was to investigate the outcomes of an inclusion project which took place in the East Riding of Yorkshire around ten years ago. Twenty-nine pupils who were transferred from a special school for students with MLD to mainstream schools were surveyed after just over one year in their new schools. The views of the pupils and their parents about their inclusive placements were reported in this journal (Kidd & Horny, 1993) and are summarised below.

Overall, at the time of this first follow-up around eight years ago, it was found that 19 out of the 29 parents (65%) were happy with the transfer, six were neutral about it and four regretted it. Similarly, 22 out of the 29 children (76%) were happy with the transfer, three were neutral about it and four regretted it.

However, there was a noticeable difference in responses between children transferred into units within mainstream schools and those who were included in mainstream classes. Eleven out of the 12 parents (92%) whose children transferred to a school in which most of the teaching for these children was conducted in the special unit were happy with the transfer, one of the parents was neutral and none regretted the transfer; whereas, only eight out of the 17 parents (47%) whose children spent most of their time in mainstream classes were happy with the transfer, five of them were neutral and four parents regretted the transfer.

Similarly, 11 out of the 12 children (92%) who transferred to the special unit were happy with the transfer, one of the children was neutral and none regretted the transfer; whereas, only 11 out of the 17 children (64%) who were taught mainly in mainstream classes were happy with the transfer, two were neutral about it and four of them regretted the transfer.

Thus, the findings of the survey suggest that there were generally greater levels of satisfaction, of both parents and children, for those children who were transferred to a school which used a unit model of inclusion, rather than those who were included in mainstream classes.

This article reports a follow-up study of these same 29 young people who are now from three to nine years out of the school system. An interview survey was conducted in order to investigate the quality of life enjoyed by the young people in terms of their employment status, post-school education, independence and social life.
Methodology

Subjects
Subjects were 24 young people (12 males and 12 females) who were transferred from a school for students with moderate learning difficulties to mainstream schools in 1990. All subjects were Statemented for learning difficulties. Sixteen subjects were reported to have moderate learning difficulties, six severe learning difficulties and two to be functioning around the borderline of the two.

The subjects had spent an average of seven years in special schools (range two to 12 years). Following the transfer they completed their education in mainstream schools, spending an average of three years there (range one to six years). The subjects left school between 1991 and 1997 and were aged between 18 and 25 years (mean 22 years) at the time of the study in January 2000.

Subjects were located by means of telephone tracing and calling in person using lists of names and addresses supplied by the LEA and the secondary schools which they last attended. All of the five who could not be located were reported to have moved out of the area and no address or phone contact could be found. Twenty-four of the 29 who were involved in the previous study (Kidd & Hornby, 1993) were contacted and all agreed to be interviewed, giving a response rate of 83%.

Interviews
All interviews were conducted by the second author who was the person who arranged the transfer of the young people from special to mainstream schools in 1990. He had interviewed all parents and students at the time of the transfer as well as in the previous study conducted a year after the transfer. Twenty of the interviews were conducted in person at the young person’s or their parent’s home, four were conducted by telephone. Sixteen interviews were conducted with parents (or guardians) and ex-students together, six with ex-students alone and two with parents alone. Previous research has shown that there is a high level of agreement between responses of parents and ex-students on variables such as employment status and post-school education which are investigated in this study (Levine & Edgar, 1994).

The interviews were conducted using an interview schedule designed to address the important aspects of quality of life highlighted in the literature on transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Halpern, 1993; Riches, 1996; Ward et al, 1994) particularly those included in previous studies of special school graduates (e.g. Flynn & Hirst, 1992; Haring & Lovett, 1990; May & Hughes, 1988). The major areas included were: demographic data; post-school study; educational achievements; work experience; employment status and history; personal independence; criminal record; social life; and students’ views of their schooling. The interview pro-forma was constructed so that the interviewer had to simply circle one of several options but also provided space for recording additional information. Sixteen of the 20 interviews conducted face to face were tape recorded so that the tapes could be used to monitor the reliability of the data collected and capture any further issues which emerged.

Results

Employment: At the time of the survey 17 out of the 24 ex-students were unemployed. Of the other seven, one was at home with her children aged two and three years. Two were attending resource centres which provided sheltered employment. One was working part-time and receiving the severe disability allowance. Three were working full-time.

The three subjects working full-time were each being paid the minimum wage of £3.60 an hour. One worked on a pig farm, another as a care assistant in a residential home and the other as a packer in a pill factory. The one working part-time did 16 hours per week at a supermarket and was paid £4.30 an hour. The overall employment rate, just counting those working full-time and excluding the one homemaker, was 13% (3 out of 23).

The overall unemployment rate for the sample, excluding the homemaker, the part-time worker and the two at resource centres was 17 out of 24 or 71% whereas the unemployment rate in the East Riding at the time of the study was reported to be 4.6 %. (This is the overall rate for all age groups as an unemployment rate for the 18 to 24 year age group was not available.)

A further five ex-students had worked in at least one job since leaving school but were currently unemployed. Their length of time in work ranged from five months to five and a half years. Of the nine young people who had had jobs since leaving school six were males and three females. Five of them reported that they had found these with the help of various agencies, three with help from their parents and one reported having found his first job with help from his father and his latest job by himself from an advert in the local newspaper.

The nine young people who had held jobs since leaving school were all from the group of 16 considered to have moderate learning difficulties. None of the eight subjects considered to have SLD or borderline MLD/SLD had worked at any time in open employment, although two attended resource centres which provided sheltered work. Of the nine who had been employed six had transferred to mainstream classes and three to the special unit within a mainstream school.

Two of the young men without regular jobs reported that they had found alternative ways of earning money. One kept ferrets and used them to catch rabbits which he then skinned and gutted and sold to a local butcher. The other bought old bicycles cheaply, fixed them up and sold them for a healthy profit. This demonstration of entrepreneurial skills contrasts with reports from four parents that they had been told by professionals that their children were ‘unemployable’!

Post-school study: Nineteen out of the 24 young people had attended Further Education (FE) College after leaving school and one had attended Adult Education classes.
Educational achievements: Two subjects had reported gaining a GCSE in Art while at school, nine had obtained various college certificates and four had reported gaining NVQs while at FE college. Two of the three subjects who were in employment had gained college certificates but none of them had any GCSEs or NVQs.

Work experience: Six out of 24 subjects reported that they had been on work experience placement at school, although four commented that this was for just a few days and no visits were made by school staff. A further six subjects reported being on work experience at FE college.

It was noted that eight out of the nine subjects who had held jobs had had work experience at either school or college whereas only four out of the 15 who had never worked had been given work experience.

Personal independence: Seventeen of the ex-students lived with their parents, one lived with her sister, one with her partner and two lived alone in rented flats. Two were in residential care and one was held in a psychiatric unit.

None of the subjects was married, although one female ex-student was living with her partner and their two children. Another one had given birth to five children, four of whom were in care and the fifth was with its father. One male ex-student reported he had fathered one child who lived with its mother.

Twelve of the subjects owned bicycles but none owned a car or motorcycle or had obtained their driving licence, although two were currently taking driving lessons.

Sixteen of the 24 young people were reported to be on severe disability allowance.

Criminal record: Three of the subjects reported that they had been convicted for various offences and one had served a brief prison term.

Social life: Eleven subjects reported having no friends, six having one friend, four having two or three friends and three having more than three friends.

Leisure activities: Seventeen subjects reported watching TV or videos, 13 listening to music, six going to the pub, five playing computer games, five swimming, four bike riding, three going shopping, three attending youth clubs and two reading.

Views of schooling: Eleven subjects rated the time they had spent in special schools or special units as the most useful part of their education. Four rated the most useful time as that spent in Further Education, while three rated the time they spent in mainstream schools as most useful. Four subjects rated the time they had spent in special and mainstream schools as being equally useful. One subject rated the time she had spent in Adult Education as the most useful.

When asked to comment on the transfer from special to mainstream school for their final years of schooling, 15 rated it positively (from helpful to extremely helpful) while nine rated it negatively (from unhelpful to extremely unhelpful). When these ratings were analysed separately for subjects who had been included in mainstream classes and those who had been included in a unit within a mainstream school, a clear pattern emerged. Eleven of the twelve subjects who had been included in units viewed the transfer positively while this was the case for only four out of the 12 subjects who had been included in mainstream classes.

The greater satisfaction of ex-unit pupils was born out by many of their spontaneous comments during the interviews. For example, six subjects mentioned that they had been bullied in their mainstream schools whereas only one of the ex-unit subjects mentioned this. When the interviewer asked whether subjects had been teased or bullied in their communities when they were attending special schools none of them or their parents could remember this occurring.

Discussion
It must be emphasised that this was a small-scale study in which the sample was possibly unrepresentative of young people with MLD in general. Also, the subjects involved in the study were only included in mainstream schools for the last three years (on average) of their secondary schooling after spending an average of seven years in special schools. Further research is needed to follow up young people with MLD who have experienced inclusion throughout their school careers in comparison with those who have spent all their school lives in special schools. Therefore, although the results of this study highlight the urgent need for further research to investigate the effectiveness of educational provisions for young people with MLD, these findings must be interpreted cautiously.

However, even taking into account these limitations, the results of the current study are alarming, both in terms of the low number of subjects in employment and with regard to the poor quality of life being experienced by most of these young people. That only three subjects were found to be working full-time and one part-time out of a total of 24 is a concern when much higher rates of employment were the case in the past in the UK and are currently found overseas for young people with learning difficulties who were educated in special schools or special classes (May & Hughes, 1988; Riches et al, 1996; Wehman, 1996).

In addition to the four subjects in work at the time of the study, five others had held jobs for some of the time since they left school. All of these nine subjects were classified as having MLD. Of the nine subjects who had been employed at some stage six were males and three females. Since there were an even number of males and females in the sample this finding suggests that unemployment was greater among young women with learning difficulties, as has been found in previous studies (May & Hughes, 1988).
Having a job not only provides money which increases the potential to live more independently of parents, it also helps in making friends and increasing recreational options (McConkey, 1998). Only four out of 24 could be said to be living independently of their parents. Also, 11 subjects reported having no friends and six having only one friend. In addition, the most frequently reported leisure activities were watching TV and listening to music, which are essentially solitary activities. These findings suggest that many young people in the sample had achieved limited independence and were experiencing a poor quality of social life.

Another concern is that none of the subjects were married and only one was living with her partner and their children. It appears that the majority of subjects had made little progress in finding partners and establishing families which are key developmental tasks for this age group.

Of grave concern is that 16 young people, two-thirds of the sample, were receiving severe disability allowance. This must to some extent act as a disincentive to finding jobs for the young people themselves and the various employment agencies. In the authors’ opinion, the majority, if not all, of these 16 would be capable of working in either open employment or some kind of supported work setting. Also, of grave concern is that parents of four subjects were told by professionals that their children were ‘unemployable’. In all four cases the young people concerned were in good health and functioning within the MLD range of abilities which suggests that this gloomy assessment of their employment prospects was clearly unwarranted.

A positive finding is that the majority (19 out of 24) of the subjects had attended FE colleges and around half of them reported obtaining either college certificates or NVQs while at FE college. But although FE college had provided many subjects with their only qualifications it had apparently not led to most of them finding jobs. These findings emphasise the importance of FE colleges offering courses catering to young people with learning difficulties which include careers guidance, vocational training and opportunities for work experience.

It was notable that nearly all the subjects who had participated in work experience at either school or college had managed to find jobs whereas the majority of those who had not had work experience were unable to find jobs. This finding is in line with that from a major review of studies of transition from school to work for students with disabilities (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). The review found that the two factors most closely correlated with the likelihood of finding employment were having participated in work experience and having followed a vocationally oriented curriculum in the last few years of secondary school.

Another important factor is considered to be having strong links between work experience and the school or college curriculum (Benz & Lindstrom, 1997; McGinty & Fish, 1992). This enables difficulties which emerge on work experience to be highlighted and worked on when the student returns to school. For example, one parent reported that her son had lost his job because he stormed off when he was reprimanded by his supervisor. Difficulty in using appropriate social skills in such situations is common with young people with MLD. This is why it is useful for staff who teach these students to be involved in supervising work experience and to liaise closely with on-the-job supervisors. The finding that four out of the six students who were given work experience at school reported that no visits were made by school staff suggests that the supervision was inadequate and that links back into the school curriculum were limited or non-existent.

Concerning the benefit of having a vocationally oriented curriculum, it must be remembered that these young people spent their last few years in mainstream secondary schools during the early 1990s. This was shortly after the National Curriculum was implemented and before the review by Dearing (1993) which brought about greater flexibility at Key Stage 4. Therefore, it is possible that the vast majority of the curricula which they followed were more academically than vocationally oriented which would not have adequately prepared them for the world of work.

It is tempting to wonder how different the curricula they followed and possible outcomes would have been if the subjects had remained at their special school. Special schools also had to follow the new National Curriculum but may have had more flexibility to adapt this to fit with the students’ vocational needs at Key Stage 4. It is known that the special school they left had in place a well supervised intensive work experience scheme which involved all pupils in their final two years. So it is possible that they may have been better prepared for seeking and keeping jobs had they not transferred to mainstream schools. There is no reason why mainstream schools cannot deliver suitable vocational curricula and effective work experience schemes, it is just that for most of these subjects this appears not to have happened.

A concern raised by many of the parents during the interviews was the lack of advice and help they received after their child had left school. Two had received help from MENCAP. In the case of one young woman with SLD, MENCAP helped with transport so she could continue at FE college and also helped with recreational activities so that she was very happy with her social life. In the case of a young man with MLD, MENCAP helped in finding a part-time job and also helped parents to access the disability allowance. Two others had received help from a private employment agency. However, most parents who were interviewed reported that they had had little or no guidance since their child had left school.

Yet again one has to wonder whether the high level of support and guidance typically offered by special school staff when students are about to leave and, in many cases,
the continued availability of their help after this would have provided more help to parents in accessing the appropriate agencies than they in fact received from the staff of the mainstream schools and FE colleges which their children attended.

A most important finding of the study was the differences among subjects’ views on their transfer to these mainstream schools ten years earlier. The previous survey (Kidd & Hornby, 1993) had found that more of the students who were transferred into a unit within a mainstream school were satisfied than those moved into mainstream classes. The current survey found that this preference was maintained and appeared even stronger than earlier. Nearly all the subjects who spent their final years of secondary schooling in a unit within a mainstream school had found this experience helpful whereas the majority of subjects who were in mainstream classes had found it unhelpful. However, the greater satisfaction of unit subjects did not appear to have resulted in increased employment success since six of the nine subjects who had held jobs attended mainstream classes and only three came from the unit. The importance of work experience may be a factor in this as subjects did not get work experience while in the unit and, as indicated above, having had work experience was related to employment success.

These findings are important in considering the overall effectiveness of educational provision for pupils with learning difficulties. It has been estimated that £2.5 billion per year is spent on provision for SEN (DfEE, 1997, p.5). Of that, children with Statements of SEN make the greatest financial demands. Because it is very expensive to educate these children it is essential to ensure that the money spent on them is invested prudently. It is therefore surprising that there are so few studies evaluating the effectiveness of SEN provision in helping young people with SEN achieve a good quality of life as adults.

With regard to the current sample, despite the considerable effort which was expended in ensuring that they were provided with an inclusive education for the last few years of their schooling, as adults they have not achieved a similar level of inclusion into the communities in which they live. Yet, according to the literature this need not be the case. According to Edgar (1992),

‘Education programs can make a difference in the quality of lives of persons with mild mental retardation. To be effective these programs must offer the appropriate curriculum and provide effective instruction. For secondary level students with mild mental retardation this curriculum needs to focus on functional life skills and on-the-job training.’

(p.109)

Such programmes may be most successfully provided in either special schools or within mainstream schools which employ a unit model for teaching pupils with MLD. Guidelines for these programmes are widely available (Warner, Cheney & Pienkowski, 1996; Wehman & Kregel, 1997) and their effective implementation is well within the capabilities of trained special education teachers.

Findings from our study, therefore, suggest that the type of secondary school education which is most likely to optimise social inclusion for young people with MLD may be one in which inclusion at school is more locational and social than curricular. There is no reason why pupils with MLD cannot be educated on the same site as other pupils and be socially integrated as much as possible as long as they have a curriculum suited to their needs and teachers with the specialist training necessary for teaching them effectively.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have highlighted the importance of focusing attention on the main educational components which young people with MLD need to help them become independent and fully included in society as adults. The literature on transition discussed earlier in the article suggests that these include:

- functional curricula which teach them the skills they need
- comprehensive, well-supervised work experience schemes
- effective transition planning which involves parents and the young people
- support networks of agencies to provide guidance to parents and the young people themselves before and after they leave school.

Transition planning and support networks are being highlighted at present due to the introduction of the Connexions Service (DfEE, 2000) which aims to improve the transition of young people with Statements to post-16 education and training. However, attention must also to be paid to the need for these young people to follow functional curricula and be given work experience during their final years of schooling.

If students with MLD are to be successfully included in mainstream schools then these schools need to develop the ethos, resources and procedures necessary to provide appropriately for such pupils. This means transferring all that is best about special schools and units into mainstream schools, including specialised curricula and specialist teachers. Otherwise, the ‘six-hour retarded child’ of the past will become the ‘six-hour included child’ of the future. That is, young people with MLD will be included in mainstream schools for their school lives only to be excluded from the mainstream of society as adults.

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