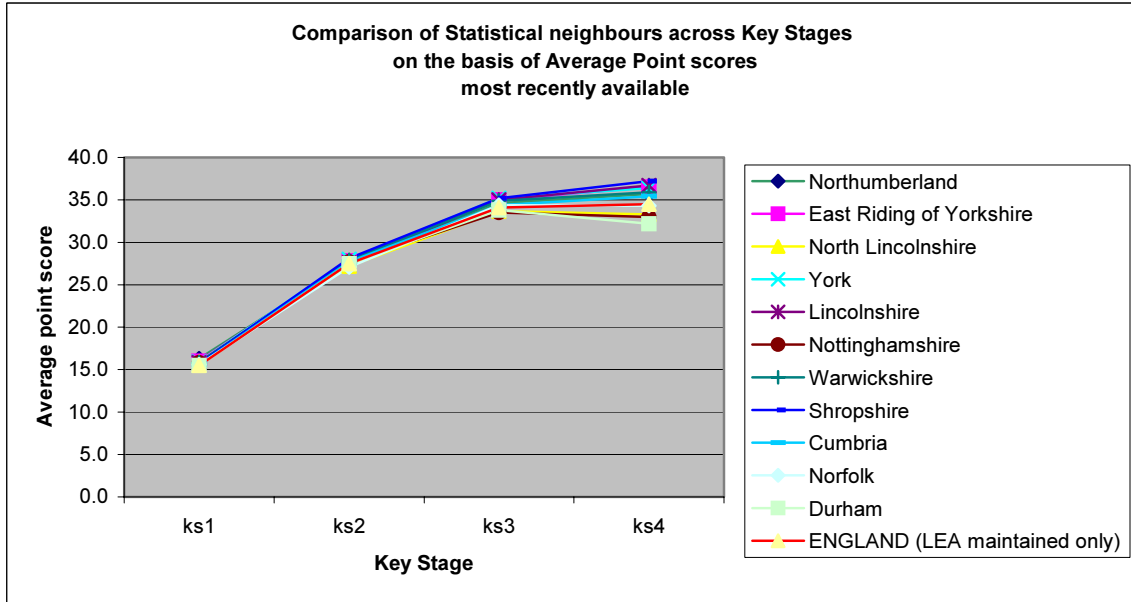


## Educational Standards

### *So is Northumberland's 3-tier system the black sheep of the English Educational system?*

No, of course it isn't. It follows in the same path as approximately the top third of the national LEAS, as well as holding its own amongst our statistical neighbours. Figure 1 demonstrates the closeness of results between the neighbours at KS1, KS2 and it is only in the latter key Stages that a wider variation appears between our neighbours.

Fig.1

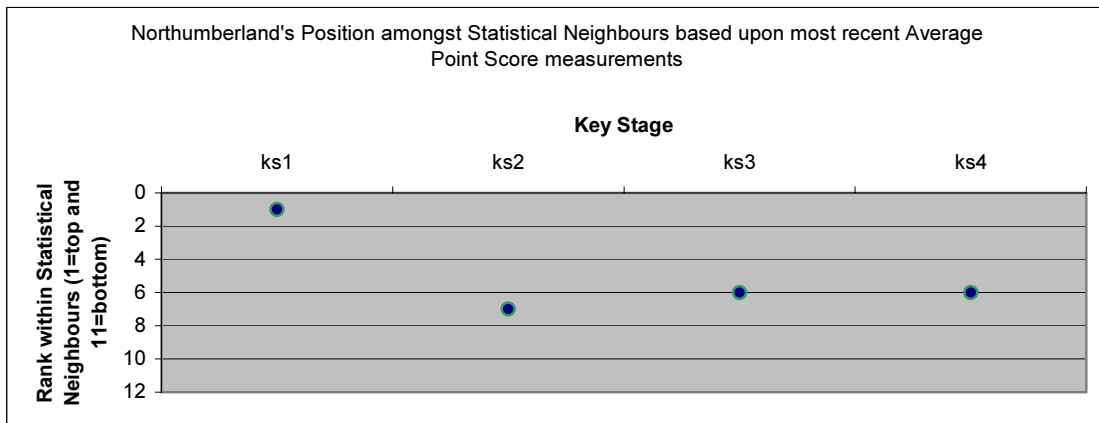


### *What are Statistical Neighbours?*

The legend in Fig 1 details our statistical neighbours. We do not have any neighbours that are classed as “extremely close”, but Cumbria, York, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Warwickshire and East Riding of Yorkshire are considered “very close”, with our “close” neighbours being Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Durham and North Lincolnshire.

Amongst our statistical neighbours we are top at KS1 and then settle in to a mid-range placement for KS2, KS3 and KS4 (Fig 2). Our statistical neighbours are just that – neighbours based upon 18 variables considered by OfSTED to have an influence upon education – they are not clones and the neighbour arrangement is not reciprocal with all of them. As neighbours, they do tend to group within the same parts of national league tables.

Fig 2.



### ***How do we compare on the national scale?***

A wider perspective of Northumberland's performance is required, beyond that of just national average comparison and statistical neighbours. How do we compare on the national stage? Based upon average point score as a comparator, in the most recent sets of national data, our pupils achieved results to enable the LEA to be placed in the top 2% (KS1), 37% (ks2), 32% (KS3) and 31% (KS4) of the 150 Local Education Authorities in England. This 3-tier system that performs alongside the top third of all LEAs in the country, and is not languishing at the bottom of the league because we are different and have Middle schools.

### ***Key Stage 1 results are in the top 10% of all LEAS. Our performance drops to average beyond this. Therefore change the system!***

Northumberland has achieved the top spot amongst our statistical neighbours since 1999 for reading, writing and maths in KS1 assessments. The county has persistently achieved above the national average and over time has tended to reflect the same trends. Within the national picture the reading, writing and maths KS1 results have maintained this 3-tier county within the top 8% of LEAs nationally since 1999. Our 3-tier system has produced the best KS1 results in the North East since 1999.

Examination of the individual schools starts to indicate that not all First schools are surpassing national averages. In 2004 for example, of the 106 First schools (remaining after those with small cohorts are removed from the analysis) up to 30 (Level 2+), 39 (Level 2b+) and 43 (Level 3+) First schools achieved results below the national average. Was 2004 any different to other years? No, it wasn't. Since 2000 between 27 and 33 First schools had lower percentages of pupils achieving a Level 2b+ reading score than the national average. The same pattern arises for both writing and maths, with up to 39 and 34 First schools respectively falling below the national average.

Examination of the Key Stage 1 data for individual First schools in Northumberland since 1999 reveals that the overwhelming majority of schools that perform below national averages come from a handful of partnerships. It is these same partnerships that contain the Middle schools and High schools that perform more frequently below national averages. Doesn't this indicate that this is more to do with partnership issues than the over- pedalled story of the under-performance of a 3-tier system?

On a national scale, if we perform in line with approximately the top third of all authorities, which are predominantly 2-tier, then why are the other two thirds all not rushing to change their system? Perhaps it is because, as Ministers have stated, there is no evidence to indicate a difference between the standards within a 2-tier and 3-tier system. Changing Northumberland to a 2-tier authority will not necessarily alter the County's standing.

One aspect that deserves attention within KS1 is the apparent difference in performance between the genders in reading and writing. This does not require an entire system to be re-organised, can be undertaken county wide and would have knock on beneficial effects to all schools for future Key Stage results.

### ***We are in the top 10% of LEAs at KS1 and then the bottom of the table for Key Stage 1-2 value added scores.***

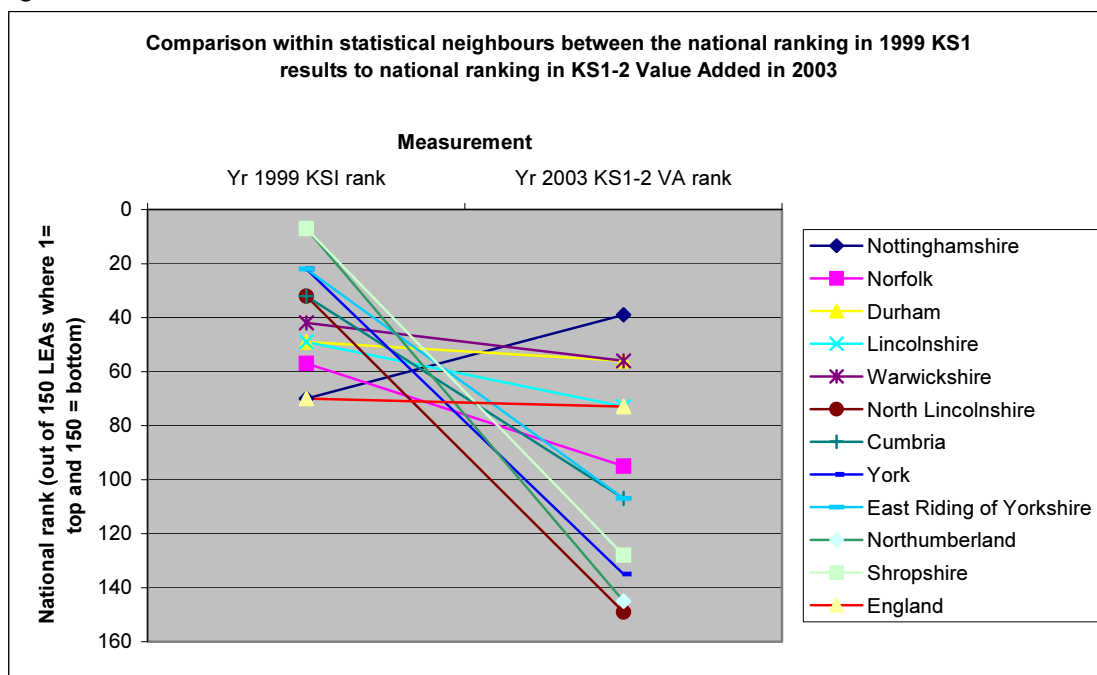
Northumberland is not unusual in this apparent reversal of fortune. Figure 3 below fully demonstrates that this pattern also occurs to all but one of our statistical neighbours. The cohorts associated with the 2003 KS1-2 Value added scores transformed all but one of our statistical neighbours from placements within the top 50 % of LEAs at KS1 in 1999 to bottom 50% LEAs at KS1-2 Value Added. Will Shropshire, York and North Lincolnshire be re-considering their 2-tier system of education on the basis of these national rankings?

Concerns have been raised nationally<sup>1</sup> regarding the statistical methodology used as it appears to generate surprisingly large errors of measurement and therefore biases the published results: schools with high-achieving pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, like Northumberland, are prevented from achieving high value-added scores at the end of Key Stage 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Value-Added in the Primary School League Tables. A Report for the National Association of Head Teachers Prof. Peter Tymms and Dr. Colin Dean. CEM Centre, University of Durham. May 2004

Fig 3



**Transfer between schools produces a dip in performance.**

If this is the case then this should be most apparent at KS3 when our pupils have spent only 2 of the 8 terms of teaching within the High school environment. The majority of the teaching having taken place within the Middle schools. In fact this is certainly not the case. In 2004 the 3-tier boys and girls of Northumberland made a clean sweep of the top of the North East tables for English, Maths and Science at KS3. Tables dominated by 2-tier authorities and one of these authorities is classed as a close statistical neighbour. . In fact our maths results gained us 3<sup>rd</sup> position within our 11 statistical neighbours in the same year, where Northumberland achieved an average score of 4% greater than the national average. We were 5<sup>th</sup> out of the 11 statistical neighbours in both English and Science (achieving 3% and 5% above national averages respectively). Since 2002, Northumberland schools have achieved results that have placed them in the top 16-35% of all LEAs for English, top 19-26% for Maths and top 20-35% for Science at Key Stage 3. This surely is an indicator that this 3-tier system can hold its own against 2-tier authorities on a national stage and that transfer to a new school within the final year of KS3 has not produced a major dip in performance.

On a wider scale, the 2004 KS3 results achieved a national ranking in the top 29% (English), 18% (maths) and 20% (Science) of LEAs within the entire 2-tier dominated Country. Since 2002, Northumberland schools have achieved results that have placed them in the top 16-35% of all LEAs for English, top 19-26% for Maths and top 20-35% for Science at Key Stage 3. This surely is an indicator that this 3-tier system can hold its own against 2-tier authorities on a national stage and that transfer to a new school within the final year of KS3 has not produced a major dip in performance.

Since 2002 Northumberland’s 3-tier system has been placed within the top 29% of the 150 LEAs nationally for Key Stage 2-3 Value added scores, all demonstrating greater than the national average. There is certainly no detrimental fall out from transition between schools only a year earlier here. Neither does it support any argument that there is a dip in performance due to Middle schools. The KS2-Age 15 VA performance of our pupils in 2004 gained a statistical neighbour ranking of 4<sup>th</sup>.

The KS2-3 VA score along with the Average Point Score allow the Northumberland Learning Skills Council to achieve a position in the top 36% of national LSCs for KS3 in 2004. Our Average point Score has consistently been above that of the National average in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

On an individual school basis at KS3, again we see the same partnerships as identified at KS1 that produce results below the national average. Again demonstrating that there is not a system based issue, but rather something more local to the partnership that has continued through since ks1.

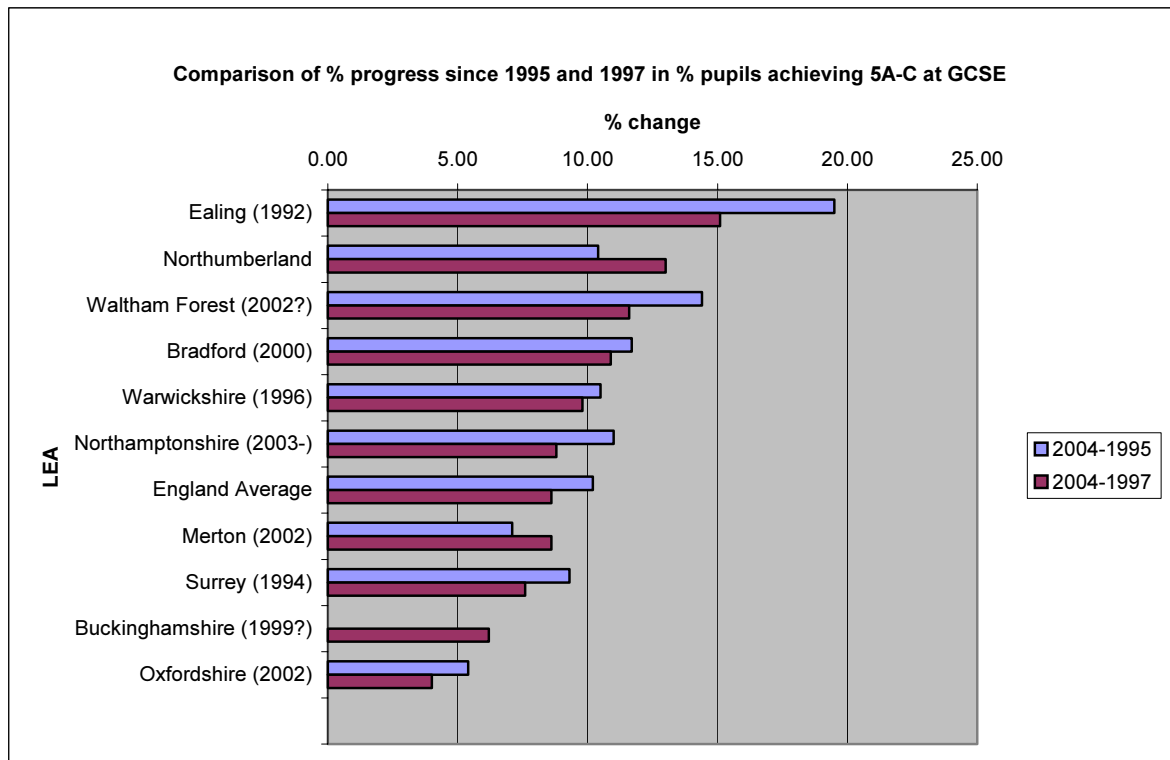
**Exams for Life**

Employers, parents and pupils are predominantly concerned with the results of GCSE and Post-16. Does the school and system equip the pupils with the exams they take with them for life?

**Key Stage 4**

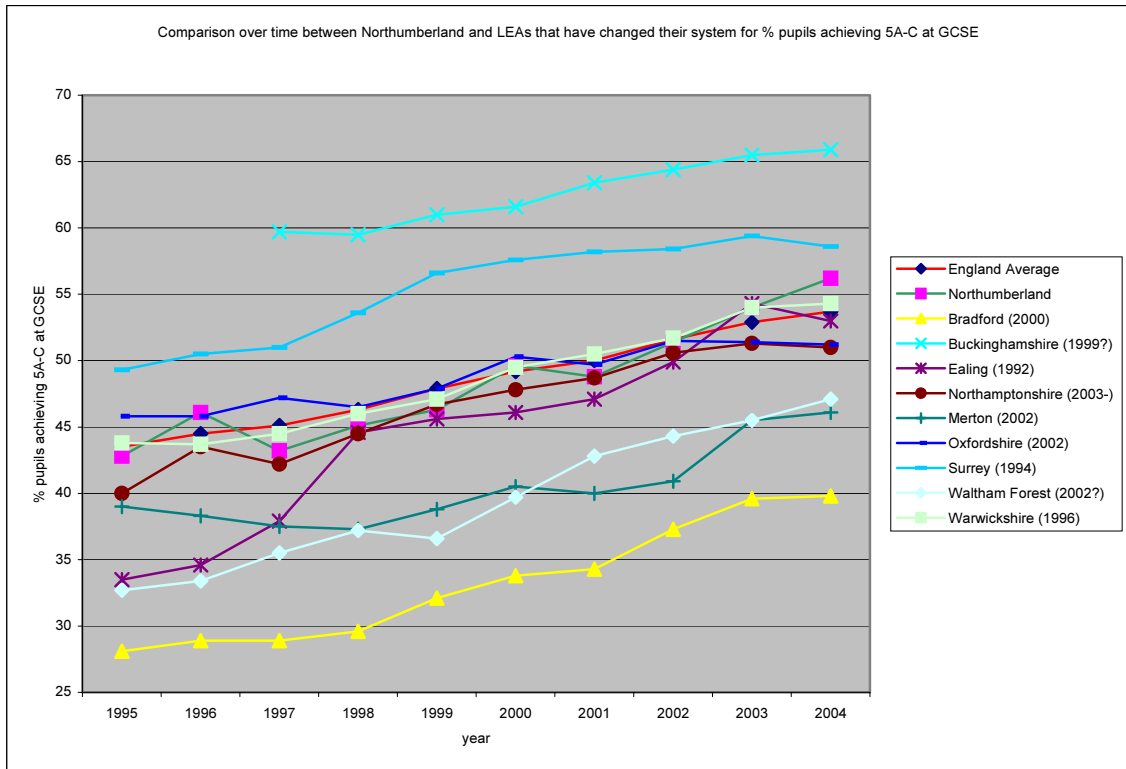
Since 1998, our 3-tier system has demonstrated greater progress at achieving 5A-C grades at GCSE than all but one of our statistical neighbours. In fact, since 1997 out of 9 other authorities that have changed to a 2-tier system, Northumberland has improved more than all but 1 of them (Fig 4), and in 2004 is currently only just behind both Buckinghamshire and Surrey in the percentage number of pupils with 5 A-C grades (Fig 5). There do not appear to be any dramatic upward shifts in performance from these authorities that have removed their 3-tier system. Since 1998 Northumberland has made greater progress than the England average. Currently Northumberland pupils (56.2%) achieve above the England average (53.7%) for the % number of pupils achieving 5+A-C passes.

Fig 4.



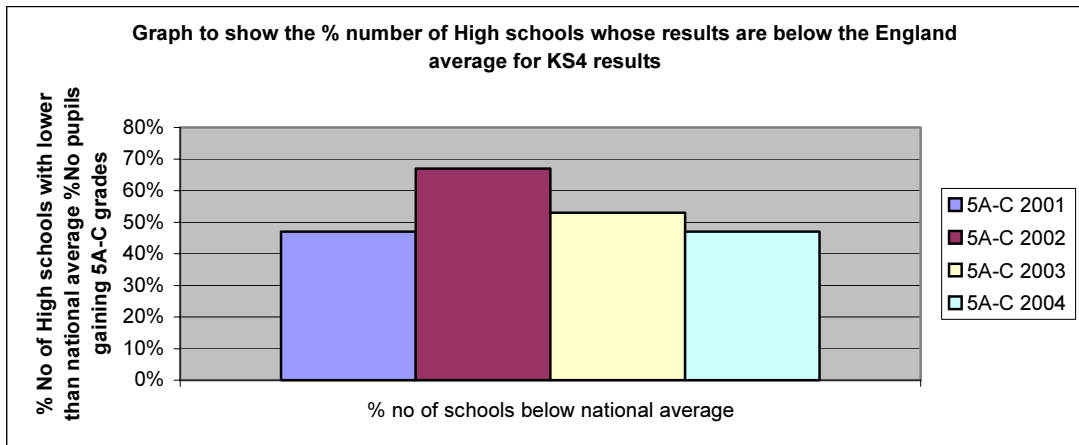
Since 2002, Northumberland pupils have achieved results at KS4 to enable the LEA to move from 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> place amongst our statistical neighbours. In a national context, in 2004 our GCSE results carried the county to a placing in the top 23% of LEAs, achieving a 5+ A-C pass rate of 4.4% above the national average. In 2003 and 2004 Northumberland pupils were the second highest performers in the North East for their achievement in gaining 5+ A-C grade GCSE passes. The results also took the LEA into 3<sup>rd</sup> position out of the statistical neighbours for KS3-Age 15 VA in 2004. The pupils of our 3-tier system delivered above average performance.

Fig 5



However, closer examination of individual school performance does indicate that since 2001 between only 5 and 8 of our 15 High schools have achieved 5 A-C passes greater than national averages (Fig 6). In fact five High schools have been below national average in each of the 4 years. Again it appears to be dominated by the same partnerships that were identified above as below national performance at KS1.

Fig 6.



On what evidence base will the transformation to a 2-tier system necessarily see a dramatic turn around in the fortunes of these schools in these partnerships?

Post-16

Two thirds of our High schools under performed compared to national averages over the past few years for Post-16 results (Table 1). Again it is led by the same partnerships identified above at KS1.

Table 1.

Year	Number of schools below England Average for Average Point Score/Student	Number of schools below England Average for Average Point score/Exam Entry
2002	11/15 (73%)	10/15 (67%)
2003	10/15 (67%)	11/15 (73%)
2004	13/15 (87%)	11/15 (73%)

Despite this, the County’s results polled a position in the top 45% of LEAs nationally in 2004. If key stage accountability, remaining within a school for years to embed an education, and not moving within a Key Stage were valid arguments to support change, then surely our Post-16 results should be far better than they are?

Despite being either 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> out of statistical neighbours in APS/student over the past 3 years (since 2002), Northumberland High schools have shown a far greater increase in improvement in this score than both the England average and 6 of its statistical neighbours. On a national stage our post-16 results still bring the Northumberland into the top 45% (APS/S) and 39% (APS/Exam Entry) of all LEAs in 2003.

In 2003 Northumberland was at the bottom of the national tables for the % pupils achieving post-16 vocational qualifications? Perhaps greater consideration of this aspect of education in terms of breadth of provision, greater access to facilities throughout the County’s High schools and earlier age of access to this type of provision could yield an overall improvement in results and attendance for the County, not just for Post-16 year olds?

**Summary**

Despite our mid position within the statistical neighbours Northumberland achieves well against the national picture, which is predominantly 2-tier (Fig 7). The data at school and partnership level reveal that future improvements in the County’s performance need to address specific issues within certain partnerships, rather than a wholesale radical overhaul of a system that is currently placing the LEA in the top third of all 150 national authorities.

Fig 7

