

# **The Policy of Payment by Results in Irish Primary Schools, 1871–1900**

*rancour and discord*

**Tony Lyons**

Peter Lang

This book outlines the principal features of the Payment by Results policy, first introduced in England in 1862. It draws attention to some of the positive aspects of the system but it also considers the more salient features of a system that preyed heavily on both pupils and teachers. Inspectors were used as agents of its implementation, resulting in a divergence of views between them and the teachers. Very few regretted its demise in 1900 when it was replaced by the Revised Programme, a much more child-centred curriculum.

It was a system of schooling rather than of education, and it served very few admirably.

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# Prelude

Education: a debt due from present to future generations.

– George Peabody

A Payment by Results system was introduced in England by Robert Lowe in 1862, and roughly a decade later it was introduced in Ireland by Patrick Keenan. At first, it was introduced to the Model Schools alone, but in 1872 the results system expanded into all national schools in the country. The results regime, in both England and Ireland had two fundamental objectives – to ensure that teachers would be more accountable for the progress of their pupils, and as well as that, to expedite progress towards children's acquisition of the three Rs. The emphasis on gaining some prowess in the three Rs caused the curriculum to be very bookish, and this turned out to be one of the cesspits of the system which eventually led to its demise at century's end. The results programme fostered a constricted approach to the curriculum, and a methodology which was unyielding and implacable. Exact programmes were laid down for each class level in the schools. There was no deviation from the content of each syllabus. There was no space allowed for a teacher's individuality. The methodology was hard and fast, and bound to the criteria laid down. Inspectors were at hand to ensure there was no deviation; the worth of the teacher was determined by the results each pupil received at the annual examination. There were many flaws in the system, which will be discussed throughout the book.

The following chapters discuss the germination of the payment by results regime at an international level (chapter one); the adoption of the results programme within the national school system in Ireland is dealt with in chapter two; chapter three tackles the nuts and bolts of the system within primary education in Ireland; the ebbing and demise of the scheme is discussed in chapter four; the concluding chapter deals with a synthesis and an analysis of the programme.

Though the scheme was introduced at intermediate level in Ireland, this aspect is not the remit of this book.

Payment by Results was an English phenomenon in the nineteenth century. In due course it spread to Scotland, Wales, Ireland and to some other countries within the British Empire, such as Malta and Trinidad and Tobago. It stemmed from the fact that education was a costly business, and increasing as such, so much so that governments felt it necessary to curtail as much expenditure as possible in schools that were becoming increasingly associated with the state. The Treasury was one of the key supporters with a vested interest in such a regime.

Most historians interpret England's attitude towards education provision during the nineteenth century as one of *laissez-faire*. This policy fostered a market economy in which the law of supply and demand was to be the self-adjusting mechanism in human affairs. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) was one of the great bedrock texts of *laissez-faire* economics. Smith urged the state to concern itself with providing the poor with 'the most essential parts of education, to read, write, and account'. Smith exhorted that in order to ensure value for money the teacher should be kept dependent on private fees for the great part of his enrolment.<sup>1</sup> Smith hoped that such a system would provide a more useful industrial workforce and biddable citizens who are 'more disposed to respect superiors and lawful authority'.<sup>2</sup> This market-led economics played a fundamental role in establishing a Payment by Results system of education in England, and later in other countries of the United Kingdom. This current book explores the political, economic, social and educational circumstances of this particular education system in Ireland and to a lesser extent in Britain. It is the book's intention to elucidate and clarify the interlocking web of factors which came to surround the operation of the scheme. The book examines the actual operation of the scheme in the concrete educational circumstances of the schools of the period in which exposition, analysis and evaluation are interwoven. The programmes of examination are studied as are the prevailing teaching methods, the condition of the schools, the pupil

1 Ed. Cannan, ed., *Wealth of Nations*, vol. 2 (London: Methuen, 1904), 270.

2 Cannan, ed., *Wealth of Nations*, 273.

success rates and attendance patterns, teacher remuneration and conditions of employment, textbooks, equipment, and so forth, in an effort to get an inside look at the school systems in operation under the results policy. Reactions of key interests and personnel towards the policy are explored. Further insights emerge from close study of pertinent official commissions of inquiry which affected the payment by results policy.

The beginning of state support for education in England and Scotland was a feature of the nineteenth century. Payment by Results came to the rescue, with the costly Crimean War as a backdrop, in the latter half of the century when state subvention was burdened by rising costs. Payment by Results, with its annual examination of pupils, made it possible for the state's endeavours to ensure that value for money was a welcome outcome.

It was Adam Smith's ideas on teaching and the proper mode for its remuneration which were to be the greatest consequence for the later policy of Payment by Results. Basing his view on the utilitarian maxim of self-interest he set down the following:

In every profession the exertion of the greater part of those who exercise it is always in proportion to the necessity they are under of making that exertion. This necessity is greatest with those to whom the emoluments of their profession are the only source from whence they expect their fortune, or even their ordinary revenue or subsistence. In order to acquire this subsistence, they must in the course of a year execute a certain quantity of work of a known value, and where the competition is free, the rivalry of competitors who are all endeavouring to jostle one another out of employment, obliges every man to execute his work with a certain degree of exactness .... It is in the interest of every man to live as much at his ease as he can, and if his emoluments are to be precisely the same whether he does or does not perform some very laborious duty, it is certainly his interest, at least as vulgarly understood either to neglect it altogether, or if he is subject to some authority which will not suffer him to do this, to perform it in as careless and slovenly a manner as that authority will permit.<sup>3</sup>

In line with utilitarian ideology on state support for education John Stuart Mill extolled such a philosophy when he expressed support for state support in this instance because it was not one of the cases in which 'the tender of help perpetuates the state of things which renders help

3 Cannan, ed., *Wealth of Nations*, 249–250.

necessary'. Mill did not favour allowing the state have a free hand over education – there should be limits. He wished for diversity within the population – if the state had unlimited control over education a scenario might ensue where universal moulding could take place. Supporting individuality, for Mill, would be conducive to progress. State support for education should be confined to the elementary level, and only in voluntary schools.<sup>4</sup>

In 1859 Darwin's historic *Origin of the Species* leapt upon the scene and was to have resounding echoes on nineteenth-century thought. On opposing sides of the fence were the theologians and the scientists, and on occasions participants were thrust into learned, and sometimes, agonizing controversy. At the same time, the general public, who for the most part did not have any first-hand acquaintance with Darwin's thesis, were nevertheless very affected by it:

The effect of 'Darwinism' upon the non-scientific world in England was immediate and profound.<sup>5</sup>

With *Origin of the Species* came the message which became popular, 'the survival of the fittest' and it strongly endorsed an atmosphere of thought in line with stark and rugged individualism and it validated the confidence in continuing progress which was widely shared.

To infer that no opposition to the above outlined values existed in the second half of the nineteenth century, would be an exercise in deception, as there were many writers and social commentators like Coleridge, Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Arnold, and we can include Dickens as well, who were very critical of such a regime.<sup>6</sup> They all challenged Utilitarianism, and they favoured a more humanistic ideal, while eschewing the mechanistic methods of the Doctrine of Utility. As a counter aim, they did not see people as objects of raw socialization, and in short, they wished that human

4 See R. L. Archer, *Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 147–149.

5 D. C. Somervell, *Nineteenth-Century Thought* (London: Methuen, 1964), 137.

6 See for defined treatment, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (London: Pelican, 1971).

motivation would be formed on a higher level than that of self-interest. They were opposed to the philistinism which was inherent in self-interest and self-reliance, and ‘in the hardness and vulgarity of middle-class liberalism.’<sup>7</sup>

One person to embrace the philosophy of Payments by Results was Robert Lowe. He had also taken a liking to *Origin of the Species*, stating that he was ‘completely fascinated by it.’<sup>8</sup> The year 1859 also witnessed the publication of Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help*, a book which proved a great popular success, selling over 250,000 copies by the end of the century. The title of this book, along with another three by Smiles speak for themselves – *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), and *Duty* (1887). His books encouraged the Victorian values of self-reliance; application and diligence; the value of patience, obedience and so on. The language of Smiles was simple and could be understood by the ordinary person, enabling that person to grasp the vicissitudes in the doctrines of the more philosophical or economic language of the theorists.

Educationists have condemned Robert Lowe, and some have gone so far as to apply the epithets ‘knave’ and ‘tyrant.’<sup>9</sup> One of the chief weaknesses of the English system was poor and irregular pupil and student attendances. The Newcastle Commission reported in 1861 that, of 2,213,694 children at school, 38.81 per cent attended for less than a year.<sup>10</sup> Lowe introduced Payment by Results with the catch-all cry, ‘if it is not cheap, it shall be efficient; if it is not efficient, it shall be cheap.’<sup>11</sup>

The abiding attraction of such a system was its value for money – teachers received extra payment if their pupils passed the annual

7 Mathew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* in G. Sutherland, ed., *Arnold on Education* (London: Pelican, 1973), 164–269.

8 A. Patchett Martin, *Life and Letters of Viscount Sherbrooke*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), 202.

9 See K. Richmond, *Education in England* (London: Penguin, 1945), 7, 154.

10 Cited in H. C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London: University of London Press, 1969, 1st ed., 1947), 112. Lowe was the chief national administrator of education in England. He had taken up the mantle on the retirement of Kay-Shuttleworth in 1849.

11 Speech, 13 February 1862, H.C., vol. 165, 229. Cited in Barnard, 112. Payment by Results, when introduced to British schools in 1862 came in under the title of the Revised Code.

examination. Extra payment was the chief inducement for the teachers. Inevitably, teachers knew how to butter their bread, and teaching towards the examination day became part and parcel of their daily routine. This new system would be the answer to all their prayers. It is salutary to reflect upon the commissioners' views on the character and personality of the teachers employed to educate the children. They felt that a significant proportion of the children were not satisfactorily taught what they had come to school to learn; in some districts some pupils could not read or write:

They work sums, but they learn their arithmetic in such a way as to be of little practical use in common life. Their religious instruction is unintelligent, and to a great extent confined to exercises of merely verbal memory ...<sup>12</sup>

The introduction of the results scheme in England coincided with *laissez-faire* government policy. The scheme was deemed to, at least, ensure that schools would become more efficient, and this should satisfy the denizens of Westminster who held the purse strings. It lasted for forty years, with some modifications. And, so it did impress those very denizens: In 1861 the education grant was £813,441; this fell to £636,806 in 1865. The Revised Code, as it was termed, also brought with it increased average attendances. In 1862, the average was 888,923; in 1866, 1,048,493. The examination for Payment by Results was practically based on everyday circumstances; for reading, it meant reading a newspaper story; for writing, it meant taking down some dictation and for arithmetic, adding up bills of parcels.<sup>13</sup>

All political, social and economic evolutions have a starting-point, or, at least a spot in history which can highlight some particular event which gives rise to a particular movement, or, in this case a policy injection.

In Ireland, although the vital change in Primary Education following the Powis Report of 1870 was the adoption of the system of Payment by Results, the educational scene was also bound up with the Disestablishment Act of 1869, which removed the Church of Ireland from its status as the 'established church'. This meant that the Church of Ireland could no longer

12 Quoted in Ivor Morrish, *Education since 1800* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), 16.

13 Figures in H. C. Barnard, 112.

claim to control education in Ireland. The passing of the Disestablishment Act also meant there was an abundance of monies available to the government to spend as it saw fit. The national system of education was one area interested in such a surplus of funds, especially with the introduction of the Results programme in 1871.

When the Results Plan was introduced, the number of pupils attending schools was decreasing, owing to the prevalence of epidemics, resulting in a high mortality rate. Schools had to be closed frequently. This was the atmosphere into which the new regime was immersed in the early 1870s.

In Ireland, the policy of Payment by Results was introduced, tentatively at first, in 1871 and in the following year the policy became more widespread. It was customary that trends in education policy in England had a knock-on effect on policy in Ireland during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Ireland's national school system embraced Payment by Results fully from 1872 to 1900.<sup>14</sup>

The policy in Ireland became closely associated with denominational affairs and tensions. Many political conflicts also attended the inception and operation of the results programme in Ireland. This study makes an effort to explicate and clarify the many interlocking aspects which came to encircle the operation of the system. At first glance, the policy could be perceived to be an administrative device for the remuneration of teachers on set criteria. Upon further examination, the scheme had profound effects on the school curriculum and on the teaching methodologies used in schools. The system interpenetrated many features of education practice and policy at the time.

Between 1871 and 1900 Irish primary schools gained significant experience from the application of Payment by Results. Its introduction was accompanied by denominational squabbles, which had been a recurring problem for several decades prior to this. At first, some individuals felt that this new system would be good for education, but it had intense consequences on what was being taught in schools, and, also on the relationship between teacher and pupil.

<sup>14</sup> See *Sixty-Seventh Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, for the Year 1900*. Pub. In 1901; 37.

The pages of this book examine the operation of Payment by Results at the coalface in which critique, investigation and appraisal are blended. There were many reactions to the results policy, and these are explored. Emerging insights from official commissions' reports are taken on board on how the results policy was performing.

Payment by Results was a unique phenomenon, and aspects of its philosophy and worth are very liable to surface at different times, especially when a country's economy is under stress.

The *Belmore Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction* reported in 1898, and as a result of this report, Payment by Results came to a close and was replaced by the *Revised Programme* in 1900.

The two decades prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 was an eventful era in Irish education policy and administration. Two major efforts were made by the state to introduce a radical revamping of education. Attempts were made to achieve reform in primary, intermediate and technical levels of education. The climate of thought had shifted from one of the promotion of self-interest to one of an all-encompassing nature, in which the pupil took on a central role.

Sources used for this work are a mixture of primary and secondary ones, for example, the *Annual Report of the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland, 1813*; Mr Keenan's *Memorandum in Parliamentary Papers H.C. 1870, XXVIII, Pt III*; *Circular to Inspectors (including programme)*, 24 Oct. 1871; *Appendix to Rules and Regulations of the Commissioners*, Oct. 1874; *Annual Report of the Gaelic League, 1897*; the *Irish Teachers' Journal*. See the Bibliography at the end of the book for a comprehensive list.

## The Germination of Payment by Results

‘Education is too important to be left solely to the educators.’

– Francis Keppel

### Introduction and Backdrop

In England, education was among many themes that exercised the political state between the introduction of the Reform Bill of 1832 and the death of Sir Robert Peel in 1850. That period of time witnessed extraordinary alteration in British life; and as D. G. Paz, so eloquently comments, ‘it was as if the dyke erected at Waterloo could no longer hold against the liberal ideas of 1789.’<sup>1</sup> The twin social aspects of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent increase in population created unforeseen problems and exaggerated the old ones; there was a new order after 1830 which provided the means and language of reform. This new order urged the likes of Thomas Wyse to consider an education scheme which would respond to the requirements of the newly created circumstances. While he was absent from the House of Commons, he studied both British and Irish society, and their necessary requirements, and in 1836 he published a monumental treatise, *Education Reform*. In the book he came to the conclusion that technological changes had transformed the nature

1 D. G. Paz, *The Politics of Working-Class Education in Britain, 1830–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 7.

of society, producing severe disruptions in the relationships of the classes. The answer to these problems was education reform. In the short run, it would prevent revolution, and in the long run, it would enable the lower orders to take their place in the governing of society.<sup>2</sup>

And, when the *Central Society of Education* was formed in 1837, it was in fact the brainchild of Wyse supported by Duppa. Its ideas paralleled those elucidated in *Education Reform*. This Society was a lobbying body, its main function being to publish papers on current ideas in teaching methods, and child psychology, and on foreign educational systems. It attacked the monitorial system, and asked for its abandonment. The Society, unlike the Utilitarians,<sup>3</sup> favoured state intervention in education provision, and the religious problem could be resolved by separating religious from secular education based on the Irish model.<sup>4</sup> The form of government intervention should also follow the Irish model.<sup>5</sup>

Wyse toured industrial and commercial centres, including Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds, in 1837, promoting the Irish solution. In Parliament, Wyse asked for a select committee to be appointed to oversee the administration of the school grant. The ensuing debates found favour with this proposal, but there was very strong opposition as well. The Treasury rejected Wyse's proposal, and Lord John Russell defended the Treasury on the basis that the existing body in charge, the Treasury, should get more funds rather than crating a split between two organizations. He agreed with Wyse, however, that not enough children were being educated.

Wyse's motion failed: Radicals and Irish supported the motion; Whigs and Tories opposed. This failure also spelled the end of the *Central Society of Education*, its last edition being in 1839. The Radicals, too, never again mounted a formidable challenge.<sup>6</sup>

2 Paz, *The Politics of Working-Class Education in Britain*, 7–10.

3 Paz, *The Politics of Working-Class Education in Britain*, Chapter 1.

4 B. F. Duppa, 'Objects of the Society', *First Publication* (1837), 14; Central Society of Education, *Schools for the Industrious Classes; or, The Present State of education Among the Working People of England* (London, 1837), 6–30, 53–54.

5 Paz, *The Politics of Working-Class Education in Britain*, 70.

6 Paz, *The Politics of Working-Class Education in Britain*, 72.

Whatever happens in educational developments is forever in the context of social, political, economic, and often demographic circumstances prevailing at the time.<sup>7</sup> One needs to countenance and appreciate all these contingencies when one is dealing with changes to education provision, or when dealing with changes in policy formation. And, as Brian Simon puts it: '[T]he history of education is full of incident and interest, touching on all sides of life, on the outlook and interests of all classes of society.'<sup>8</sup>

Governments, by and large, are more influenced by social, political, economic and demographic considerations when dealing with modifications to education provision than they are by educational hypotheses. Society's values and requirements alter from epoch to epoch, and the changed circumstances are reflected in the educational provision associated with any particular era. To that extent, the study of the type of education provision in its schools and curricula and the manner in which its youth usually reflects greatly on society as a whole.

Payment by Results is associated with the nineteenth century, at a time when certain levels of education were sub-vented by the state. This is particularly true of the second half of the century when we witness state support for elementary schooling in England and Scotland. To counteract the costs involved it was thought necessary to adjust education provision in such a way as to make it more accountable and more effectual. The answer resulted in a Payment by Results policy. With its introduction came the realization that the state needed to ensure that value was given, and seen to be given, for the public expenditure involved. 'The state's attitude and involvement in education at the time was part of a complex interwoven web of societal factors,'<sup>9</sup> and as S. E. Maltby maintains:

7 T. G. Cook, ed., *The History of Education in Europe* (London: Methuen, 1974), viii.

8 Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 13.

9 John Coolahan, *The Origins of the Payment by Results Policy in Education and the Experience of It in the National and Intermediate Schools of Ireland* (M.Ed. thesis submitted to Trinity College, Dublin, 1975), 1-2.