**Educational failure has a crushing impact on a child’s future. Lower qualifications depress earning potential and make unemployment more likely, while low basic skills are linked with poor home learning environments.**

Disadvantaged pupils are particularly susceptible to educational failure. On average, they are 18 months behind when they take their GCSEs, and almost two thirds do not achieve passes in English and maths GCSEs. A child in one of England’s poorest areas is 10 times more likely to go to a substandard school than one in its richest areas. And for most, higher education remains a faint prospect, particularly in the top third of universities.

For children excluded from school, reality is bleaker still. Just 4.3 per cent of pupils in alternative providers pass English and maths GCSEs, and almost half do not progress to a sustained destination. Meanwhile, 58 per cent of young adults in prison were permanently excluded at school.

But it is not just school-age pupils we must support. Millions of adults, too, need help to upskill and reskill. Around 6 million are not qualified to level 2 (GCSE level), and our jobs market is rapidly being remoulded by technology and the world economy.

All of these challenges together constitute a social injustice, but also an economic threat as we deprive our country of considerable and diverse talent.

In response to some of these challenges, our education system is currently undergoing extensive and widespread reform, the full effects of which will not be felt for some time. In the meantime, there is work to do and so the CSJ has established a permanent Education Unit within its policy team. Its projects to date include:

* A review of school exclusions and alternative provision, and a three-year project to build on our initial work and to campaign for far-reaching reform.
* A partnership with Save the Children UK, examining the barriers to high-quality childcare for low income families.
* A review of lifelong learning and a study on access to higher education for disadvantaged pupils.
* An analysis of apprenticeships policy exploring how we can extend these opportunities to more people by addressing the challenges that exist in the system.
* An upcoming project on literacy and numeracy. Around a third of pupils fail to pass both English and maths GCSEs at 16, and 9 million adults have low functional literacy or numeracy.