

[In memoriam: John Marks](#) [1]

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Everyone at the Adam Smith Institute is saddened to learn of the death of John Marks, the veteran campaigner for transparency and higher standards in the state school system.

Today it is hard to remember ? well, perhaps not so hard ? that in the 1960s and 1970s state school teachers consistently refused to make their examination results public. They argued that examination results were only a part of what makes a well-rounded citizen, that parents would not understand what the results meant, and that 'league tables' of school examination performance would stigmatise those performing most poorly.

Whatever small grain of truth there might have been in these claims, the net result was that taxpayers were pouring millions into a school system, with no way of finding out what if anything their money was buying. And parents had absolutely no information on which to judge the quality of their school. When John Marks and colleagues initiated a private survey to gather school examination results, many schools ? and indeed entire education authorities ? refused to send him any results.

Eventually Margaret Thatcher's administration accepted the need for transparency in school performance measures, and published the 'league tables' ? exposing the so-called 'hidden garden' of education and leading to a huge focus on standards, in particular the exposure of bad schools and bad teachers who were ruining the prospects of generations of young people.

A physics teacher at North London Polytechnic, he also exposed the political corruption of the higher education sector, where independent-minded teachers were being sidelined and worn down for standing up to the perversion of the curriculum, and the widespread denial of free speech and debate, that was occurring as a result of the domination of Marxist students, teachers and administrators.

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[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/education/in-memorial-john-marks>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/authors/dr-eamonn-butler>

[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>