

THE NUFFIELD REVIEW OF

14-19

EDUCATION & TRAINING

ANNUAL REPORT

2005-06

Published by the University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, Oxford.

ISBN: 0903535831

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This Report is also available electronically at the website address below.

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The logo for The Nuffield Foundation, featuring the text "The Nuffield Foundation" in blue, stacked vertically. To the right of the text is a blue vertical bar with a white arrowhead pointing upwards. Below the text is a blue horizontal bar with a white arrowhead pointing to the right.

**The
Nuffield
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The Report arises from a grant made by the Nuffield Foundation to the University of Oxford to undertake the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training. The views expressed in the Report are not necessarily those of the Nuffield Foundation.

Contents

	Acknowledgements	7
	Foreword	9
	Introduction	11
Part I	Policy	19
	Overview	21
Chapter 1	14-19 policy and organisational developments in England: Towards strongly collaborative local learning systems	23
	Introduction	25
	1. 14-19 policy developments 2005/06	26
	2. The policy process and governance	37
	3. Institutional collaboration in the 14-19 implementation phase	43
Chapter 2	14-19 institutional developments in Wales in the wider policy context: Observations from an English reform perspective	59
	Introduction	61
	1. Convergence and divergence	61
	2. 14-19 learning, curriculum and qualifications	64
	3. Institutional and organisational arrangements	70
	4. Welsh 14-19 Networks	73
	5. The role of policy levers and drivers	76
	6. Politics and the policy process in Wales	79
	Conclusion	83
Part II	Progression	87
	Overview	89
Chapter 3	Working for their future? Young people outside education and training	91
	Introduction	93
	1. Engagement with the labour market at 16-17	96
	2. Young people outside education and training: Who are they?	104
	3. Policy problems and policy misunderstandings	125
	Conclusions	138

Chapter 4	Articulation between 14-19 education and training and higher education: Clear pathway or obstacle course?	143
	Introduction	145
	1. The current context of higher education	146
	2. Articulation between 14-19 education and training and higher education	148
	i. The expansion of higher education	149
	ii. The attractiveness of higher education for 14-19 year-olds	154
	iii. The widening participation agenda	158
	iv. Different entry routes	166
	v. Retention and attrition	176
	vi. Information, advice and guidance	178
	Conclusions	180
Part III	Principles	185
	Overview	187
Chapter 5	The <i>education</i> of 14-19 year-olds	189
	Introduction	191
	1. Aims and values: Defining an 'educated 19 year-old'	192
	2. Curriculum for the 21 st Century: Principles	197
	3. Social and cultural dimension of 14-19	202
	4. Inclusive education: Young people whose needs are frequently not met	204
	5. Implications for 14-19 provision	209
	6. Looking to the future	229
	Conclusion	231
	References	243
	Appendices I-XI	261
	Index	309

Tables and figures

Table 1	Weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems: A national perspective	43
Table 2	Transferring and learning from good practice	51
Table 3	Weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems: A local perspective	55
Table 4	The main activities of 16 year-olds in the 1986 and 1998/9 Youth Cohort Studies	96
Table 5	Percentage of the sample falling into each attainment band	102
Table 6	Selected policy initiatives: Research issues	126
Table 7	Type of institution attended before higher education	151
Figure 1	Policy formation, actors and system behaviour	95
Figure 2	Participation in education, training and employment among 16-18 year-olds: 1992 and 2003	98
Figure 3	Main study aim of 16 year-olds by Year 11 attainment, England and Wales 2004	101
Figure 4	Applicants and acceptances in higher education 1996-2005	150

Appendices

Appendix I	List of abbreviations	261
Appendix II	New national entitlement	263
Appendix III	Case studies	265
Appendix IV	Focus groups with higher education institutions	267
Appendix V	Focus groups with students and staff at schools and colleges, and with first year undergraduates	277
Appendix VI	Higher education admissions tests	285
Appendix VII	Curriculum for the 21 st Century	287
Appendix VIII	Nuffield Review publications 2003-2006	291
Appendix IX	Advisory Committee membership	301
Appendix X	Contributors to chapters	303
Appendix XI	Core Group membership	307

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to this Report. In particular:

- The Nuffield Foundation, for its continuing support of the Nuffield Review and for hosting the working days and meetings.
- Catrin Roberts at the Nuffield Foundation, for her excellent advice and guidance, and Velda Hinds at the Nuffield Foundation, for facilitating the smooth running of the project.
- The Advisory Committee for their constructive and challenging input.
- The Oxford University Department of Educational Studies, for providing the Review with a base, and excellent administrative and library support.
- Joanne Hazell, for her skilful management of the Review throughout the year, and for coordinating the production of the Annual Report so efficiently.
- Ewart Keep, for his invaluable intellectual contributions throughout the Review.
- David Egan, for responding to Chapter 2 from a Welsh perspective.
- UCAS, for providing and analysing data on applications to higher education and carrying out the focus group research with schools and colleges.
- All participants in and facilitators of the focus groups with higher education institutions and schools and colleges respectively.
- All authors of and contributors to the papers available on the Nuffield Review website (see www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/index.shtml for a complete list of these documents).
- Members of the Core Group for actively participating in Nuffield Review events and providing insightful feedback.
- Sarah Margetts, for meticulously copy editing all three Annual Reports since the Review began.

Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

Foreword

This third Annual Report brings the first phase of the Nuffield Foundation's review of educational and training provision for 14-19 year-olds to a close. The trustees of the Foundation have been delighted with the achievements of the project team not only in leading the debate about this vitally important area of public life, but also in supplying ideas and evidence with which such a debate can be better constructed.

As you will see on reading further, the report operates on a number of levels. In terms of policy it makes a start in restoring an essential element of 'policy memory' to a field in which it has been conspicuously lacking. In terms of practicalities, it uses evidence – some of it compiled by sophisticated secondary analysis, some of it strikingly original – to overcome opinion, most notably in the analysis of non- or partial participation. Conceptually, it bucks the dominant trend of giving way to simplistic oppositions, for example of 'general' and 'applied' education (look, for example, at how the contribution of the arts is now seen to contribute to both domains). Perhaps most importantly, it restores a sense of value to a discussion which has been dominated by narrow instrumentalism for too long.

Much of the business is, of course, unfinished, and the Foundation has recently decided to invest in a further, final phase of the project, where the Trustees hope that many of these threads will be drawn together, in the interests not just of current and future generations of young people, but of us all.

Professor Sir David Watson
Institute of Education, University of London
Trustee, the Nuffield Foundation

31 August 2006

Introduction

The Nuffield Review

The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales has come to the end of its initial three years.

It has provided an independent and comprehensive review of every aspect of developments at a most important time. As the Nuffield Review shows, the last three years have been, within the 14-19 phase of education and training, an almost unprecedented period of policy initiatives and reshaping of the system. The Nuffield Review has welcomed many of the policies and practices which it has outlined in its previous two Annual Reports – in particular, the determination to have a more inclusive system, the recognition of the need for partnership between different providers, the determination to broaden learning and curriculum experiences to suit all young people, the improved resourcing of the system as a whole and the attempts to link schooling more closely to further training, higher education (HE) and employment.

At the same time, the Nuffield Review has identified tensions: between stated policy and its implementation (e.g. in the development of partnerships), between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability, between funding of schools and funding of colleges for doing similar work, between the need for employer involvement and the actual contributions which employers feel able to make, and between general education and vocational training.

In identifying these tensions and responding to them, the Nuffield Review has been organised around three main, but interconnected, areas of investigation: the development of the system itself through various policy initiatives; students' retention and progression into HE, further training and the labour market; and the quality of learning itself for all young people. In all these areas, the Nuffield Review has raised fundamental questions about the system – its assumptions, provision, achievements, deep-seated problems and political control. And it sets this long-term analysis within the current education and training context for England and Wales.

The political context

The shaping of a distinctive 14-19 phase of education, and the determination to make it inclusive, to raise standards within it and to ensure progression from it, are apparent from the many consultation and policy papers which have come out of Whitehall, and out of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in particular, over the last three years. These are listed in Briefing Paper 2 on the Nuffield Review's website¹, and have been referred to in previous Annual Reports. This year has seen further reports and policy documents, which are listed in Chapter 1.

¹ www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

The deliberations of Tomlinson's Working Group on 14-19 Reform coincided with the writing of the first Annual Report, its rejection with the writing of the second, and its aftermath with the writing of this year's report. It is clear that the issues which Tomlinson was dealing with will not go away.

This speedy development of policy has many virtues. There is a sense of urgency – to raise standards, to open up more possibilities for relevant learning, to be more inclusive, and to make connections between the different providers and beneficiaries. But too much speed creates its own problems – it can work against joined-up thinking, and leave too little time for deliberation and consultation. The Nuffield Review has identified the following issues which need more careful and prolonged consideration in the light of the evidence accumulated:

- **Underpinning values of 14-19 developments**
What are the educational aims of the phase? What should they be?
- **Content of the curriculum**
What knowledge, understandings, skills and dispositions should be part of the learning experience of all young people?
- **Links between government initiatives and cultural pressures on those who are disengaged**
What needs to be done to re-engage reluctant learners?
- **Relation of policies to progression into HE, apprenticeships and the labour market**
What changes are needed to ensure continuity and coherence?
- **Impact of policies on assessment for learning**
How can assessment for learning be reconciled with assessment for accountability?
- **Development of a qualifications framework**
What framework would reflect the range of learning, provide flexibility and facilitate progression?
- **Capacity of employers to provide work-based experience and learning**
How might employers be more effectively involved in the planning and provision of education and training?
- **Teachers' skills and creativity**
How can initial training and continuous professional development give teachers the relevant skills and knowledge to meet current and future demands?

- **14-19 institutional arrangements**
How can one ensure that schools, colleges and other providers will collaborate and form partnerships to provide a cost-effective and equitable system for all 14-19 learners?
- **Government planning**
How can central planning ensure effective and inclusive local delivery?
- **Divergent paths along which 14-19 changes are taking place in England and Wales**
How divergent are these paths and are lessons to be learnt to mutual advantage?

In identifying and tackling these issues, the Nuffield Review came to the following tentative conclusions in its first two Annual Reports.

Summary of conclusions from previous reports

Aims and values

The Nuffield Review has posed the question 'What is an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?' in order to examine critically the normative assumptions which permeate so much of the discourse on education and training but which are rarely examined.

Participation, retention and progression

There is, compared with other European countries, a relatively low participation and retention rate in post-compulsory education and training, with a correspondingly high number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Nuffield Review has endeavoured to probe beneath these figures in order to understand why this should be so, relating poor participation and retention to a wide range of factors, including the perceived relevance of further education (FE) and qualifications to future employment and well-being – and indeed to the hidden selection which often takes place at 16.

Learning and curriculum

The number of disaffected young people is a matter of concern. The Nuffield Review has recognised the value of extending the experiences of many young people through attendance at FE colleges and quality work-based learning. But it points to the need to see things more from the point of view of the young learner, to provide a more experiential and practical basis for learning, and to question, in the light of the evidence, the proffered solutions in terms of **vocational** routes from the age of 14.

Qualifications

The Nuffield Review started at the same time as Tomlinson's Working Group on 14-19 Reform developed its proposals. The Nuffield Review has thus explored the connections between quality of learning, curriculum, progression and recognition of achievement.

Teaching

A crucial part of the Nuffield Review has been to make connections where these are seldom made in a fragmented approach to policy initiatives. Thus, the developments in curriculum, the reform of qualifications, the focus on disengagement and the development of vocational tracks have implications rarely acknowledged for the training and continuing professional development (CPD) of the teaching force – a matter being explored by the Nuffield Review.

Vocational preparation

The work-based route is weakly performing and, compared with several other countries, under-regulated. The Nuffield Review has argued for 'strongly vocational' programmes, including a revision of apprenticeships at Level 3, with emphasis on occupational competence and greater incentives for employers to provide good work-based learning opportunities. At the same time, it has also suggested that there is a need for a core of general education in all 'strongly vocational' programmes and a need for applied and practical education in all general education programmes.

Policy development

The Nuffield Review has explored these specific but interconnected issues within the national policy context. Hence, it has attempted to make sense of the many government initiatives and to engage with ministers and policymakers. In doing so, the Nuffield Review has been critical of the large number of initiatives, which are often in tension with one another, which do not have time to bed down within the system or which fail to take note of what has happened to similar reforms in the past. The Nuffield Review has suggested that there is a strong body of professional knowledge that is not being adequately used in policy development and implementation.

Collaborative system

The Nuffield Review has brought together research evidence on the institutional framework (embracing public, private and voluntary education and training providers) within which the development of 14-19 education and training is expected to take place and has, in particular, highlighted the tensions between the increasing fragmentation and competitive nature of the system and the underlying reliance upon partnership and collaboration. Current 14-19 institutional arrangements have been described as 'weakly

collaborative' and the parameters of 'strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems' have been set out for discussion.

Wales

The Learning Pathways being developed in Wales are sufficiently distinctive to merit separate examination. Lessons might be learnt within England from the Welsh experience. On the other hand, such is the interdependence of the HE systems and of the labour markets that such divergence could create problems of continuity.

Third Annual Report: 2005-06

This Report takes the examination of these issues further.

In **Part I** (Chapters 1 and 2), the Report continues to monitor the development of policy and the use of various policy instruments, especially in the development of the specialised Diplomas. This requires an examination of the partnership of providers which is believed to be so crucial to 14-19 developments. In providing this, the Report pays particular attention to the distinctive developments in Wales.

In **Part II** (Chapters 3 and 4) the Report extends the analysis of the progression from the 14-19 phase into the labour market and HE, with particular reference to: the knowledge and skills preparation of new entrants to the labour market; the problems of analysis of those within the NEET group; the effectiveness of the system of apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3; the impact of HE requirements on schools and colleges; and the quality of preparation of new entrants to HE.

In **Part III** (Chapter 5), the Report continues to question the underlying educational aims and values of these developments and to raise questions about the kind of learning experience to which **all** young people should be entitled, the appropriate way of assessing that experience, the demands this makes on the professional development of teachers, and the kind of provision needed.

Part I

Policy

Part I: Policy

Overview

This section of the third Annual Report reviews recent 14-19 education and training reform in England and Wales.

Chapter 1 considers policy and organisational developments in England, examining three related areas of 14-19 reform during 2005/06: key 14-19 policy developments; changes in local governance; and patterns of 14-19 institutional collaboration. Over the last year, 14-19 policy has moved decisively into a phase of implementation, as the DfES rolls out its *14-19 Implementation Plan* with the emergence of a delivery infrastructure including the 14-19 Entitlement, new vocational qualifications and a framework for collaboration and support (e.g. 14-19 Pathfinders, best practice manuals and Learning Visits). The chapter pays particular attention to the specialised Diplomas because of the central role they play in the government's reform strategy.

The second and final parts of the chapter consider the effects of the policy process, developments in system governance at the local level and 14-19 Partnerships. We suggest that, despite organisational changes and the growth of partnership in the new implementation phase, 14-19 reform continues to be delivered through 'weak local governance' and 'weakly collaborative' institutional arrangements. Chapter 1 draws to a close by elaborating the local dimension of the 'weakly' and 'strongly' collaborative 14-19 local learning system model, outlined in the 2005 Annual Report, in order to create a tool to evaluate ongoing changes in local governance and 14-19 Partnership developments on the ground. The chapter concludes with a suggestion that weakly collaborative partnership arrangements may not be sufficient to address deeper problems of cultural and social divisions that continue to pervade 14-19 education and training in England.

14-19 reform in England is thrown into sharp relief by Chapter 2 – *14-19 institutional developments in Wales in the wider policy context: observations from an English reform perspective*. Resulting from interviews with Welsh policymakers and practitioners, the chapter describes the main characteristics of the Welsh 14-19 landscape – its patterns of governance, curriculum and qualifications and its policy process. We argue that the Welsh system comprises an interesting mix of difference and similarity in both policy and practice compared with England. Main areas of divergence appear to arise from the wider political environment, changes to national governance and the conduct of the national policy process. Similarities are greatest in the aims of 14-19 reform and those aspects most affected by the role of common English/Welsh qualifications. The chapter concludes by discussing the effects of wider political divergence and continued links between the English and Welsh education systems. It finishes with the suggestion that

14-19 reform efforts in both countries may benefit from greater interaction between the two to support policy and practitioner learning.

CHAPTER 1

14-19 policy and organisational developments in England: Towards strongly collaborative local learning systems

Introduction

The 2004-05 Annual Report highlighted the 'busyness' of policymaking in the area of 14-19 education and training in England, with a range of White Papers and policy reviews published during that year². This year has continued the trend with a further stream of policy documents and initiatives, but this time focused primarily on operationalising proposals outlined in the previous year. These new documents cover not only curriculum and qualifications reform, but also guidelines for institutional action, the reorganisation of the learning and skills sector with a strengthening of the regional tier, a review of the role of FE, new inspection and quality improvement arrangements and a focus on skills and the work-based route.

In this chapter, we build on work undertaken in 2005 by focusing on three areas – 14-19 policy developments during 2005/06; issues of local governance; and 14-19 institutional arrangements. We use evidence from policy documents; academic sources; meetings, conferences and seminars with 14-19 Pathfinders, Local Authorities (LAs), Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs), 14-19 Partnerships and the 14-19 Alliance³; and case study visits to a number of LAs and research visits to Wales and the Republic of Ireland undertaken during 2005/06⁴.

Section 1 of the chapter begins by briefly describing major national policy documents published in 2005/06 to aid understanding of this complex and continually changing terrain⁵. In particular, we examine the impact of the recently published *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁶ and recognise that we are now in a new context – the implementation phase of 14-19 policy. The government is putting in place an ambitious 14-19 infrastructure, comprising the 14-19 Entitlement, new vocational qualifications, an incentives framework for collaboration, and support mechanisms (e.g. 14-19 Pathfinders, best practice manuals and Learning Visits). However, we argue that

² Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wright, S. and Wilde, S. (2005)

³ References to the views of practitioners throughout this chapter are derived from: meetings of the 14-19 Alliance, a voluntary group comprising representatives of teacher, lecturer and manager unions and associations, which meets twice-termly at the Institute of Education; 14-19 conferences, lecturers and seminars held at the Institute of Education and organised by the London Region Post-14 Network of 5000 practitioners, researchers and policymakers; visits and discussions with members of Pathfinders and 14-19 consortia in South Gloucestershire, Surrey, Lancashire, York, Stevenage and Hertfordshire and Connexions West of England; two consultation events on the design of the specialised Diplomas held at the Institute of Education and the Nuffield Foundation; two Core Group meetings of the Nuffield 14-19 Review; and a dedicated seminar in July 2006.

⁴ A separate report on the Republic of Ireland is on the Nuffield website at www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk. Chapter 2 of this Annual Report provides more detail on the findings from the research visits to Wales.

⁵ For more detail on key policy documents, see Besley, S. (2006) and the chronology by Wright and Oancea on the Nuffield Review website.

⁶ DfES (2005a)

because the government is not prepared to reform general qualifications alongside vocational learning, because it is unclear in its messages about competition and collaboration, and because it will not contemplate a strong planning environment at the local level, a great deal of effort may go into the infrastructure without achieving the desired aims.

In Section 2, which focuses on the 14-19 policy process and issues of system governance, we suggest that, despite recent national policy developments, there is still 'weak local governance' at the level above the institution. We argue that this is due to a number of mutually reinforcing factors: the rushed way in which the policy process is being conducted; tensions within government policy between competition and collaboration; the continued use of powerful steering mechanisms which encourage institutional self-interest; weak area-wide frameworks and incentives for collaboration; and a 'governance vacuum' at the local level as a result of further reorganisation of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and continued limitations in the powers of LAs.

In Section 3, the final section of the chapter, we focus on institutional collaboration in the new phase of 14-19 policy implementation. We revisit the concepts of 'weakly collaborative arrangements' and 'strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems', ideas outlined in Chapter 5 of the 2004-05 Annual Report, to evaluate how 14-19 Partnerships are developing on the ground in various parts of England. In doing so, we recognise the need to develop a local perspective on the weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems put forward in that report. The chapter concludes with a plea for a more symbiotic relationship between national and local policy and between policymakers and practitioners to solve some of the deep-seated practical and cultural problems, particularly those related to social divisions, which still pervade 14-19 education and training in England.

Section 1: 14-19 policy developments 2005/06

Policy aims and assumptions

The major driver of 14-19 policy in England is the widely accepted desire to raise levels of participation and attainment in order to compare more favourably with international competitors on education and training performance. In particular, there are concerns about participation at 17-plus and raising Level 2 attainment (the level associated with employability). Three key targets related to participation, attainment and engagement are cited in the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁷, which has been seen as the key policy text in this area during 2005/06:

⁷ DfES (2005a), para 4.2

- increasing attainment at Level 2 by the age of 19 – from 67% in 2004 to at least 70% by 2006 and 72% by 2008
- at Level 3, increasing the number of young people completing apprenticeships by 75% between 2002/03 and 2007/08
- increasing the number of young people participating in education from 75% now to 90% by 2015 and reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by 2% by 2010.

The DfES view is that to meet these targets it will have to change the nature of 14-19 education and training. It believes that more young people will stay on in education or training if they can be offered a choice of ways of learning through an alternative vocational curriculum; the basic skills to progress within the 14-19 phase; and collaborative 14-19 institutional arrangements to support a vocational entitlement. Others have looked at the problems of low levels of participation and attainment in 14-19 education and training in a different way and identified the need for a broader set of reforms. They have stressed the importance of removing qualifications divisions, both academic/vocational and pre-/post-16; the central role of the youth labour market in framing young people's behaviour; and the need for institutional reorganisation to reduce social segregation between schools, colleges and the work-based route⁸. This latter analysis leads to proposals for a unified qualifications system; licence to practise in the youth labour market and tertiary solutions to 14-19 organisation – all of which currently appear to be unpalatable to this government.

Given the DfES analysis of the problems within 14-19 education and training, the key concepts it uses to drive policy in this area are excellence and standards, choice and personalisation, curriculum entitlement, a focus on the basics and provider collaboration. Behind these key concepts lie seven broad assumptions:

- 1) A better quality education and training system will attract more learners to stay in it – “for all the improvement in individual schools and colleges, not enough people feel engaged by the education on offer”⁹.
- 2) Young people learn in different ways and need to have ‘tailored’ support, so it is important – “for all young people to chose a qualifications pathway which suits them”¹⁰ and a choice of mode of study, whether this be at school, college or in an apprenticeship.

⁸ See, for example, Finegold, D., Keep, E., Miliband, D., Raffe, D., Spours, K. and Young, M. (1990); National Commission on Education (1993); Evans, K., Hodkinson, P., Keep, E., Maguire, M., Rainbird, H., Raffe, D., Senker, P. and Unwin, L. (1997); Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004); Fletcher, M. and Stanton, G. (2006); Stanton, G. and Fletcher, M. (2006)

⁹ DfES (2005a) p. 1

¹⁰ DfES (2005a) p. 2

- 3) All young people need functional skills to Level 2 in English, maths and information and communications technology (ICT) – “Whichever route young people take, they will have to succeed in the basics of English and maths, which are so crucial to success in life and at work”¹¹.
- 4) General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and Advanced Levels (A Levels) are ‘well understood’ and ‘internationally recognised’, but vocational qualifications constitute a weak link in our system and have to be strengthened, with a leading role for employers. “To make this possible we are working with employers to develop new qualifications with practical workplace experience”¹².
- 5) There will be a wide range of institutions offering provision (FE colleges, sixth form colleges, specialist schools, school sixth forms, national skills academies, academies and 16-19 academies, as well as private work-based learning providers). This will be reinforced by the use of LSC-led ‘competitions’ – “we are taking important steps to bring in new providers”¹³.
- 6) Institutional collaboration is vital because – “the nature of the 14-19 Entitlement makes it evident that no school acting alone will be able to meet the needs of all young people on its roll and very few colleges will be able to offer the full breadth of curriculum on their own”¹⁴.
- 7) There needs to be local flexibility in the way that the new provision will be offered – “the detail of how an entitlement is to be delivered in an area must be decided locally”¹⁵.

There are two main mechanisms for achieving these aims – the creation of a ‘curriculum and qualifications entitlement’¹⁶ to be in place by 2013, the centrepiece of which will be the new 14 lines of specialised Diplomas from Levels 1 to 3, and the development of flexible and collaborative local delivery systems.

Key policy documents 2005/06

At the same time, there are a number of other important policy documents which, while ranging beyond 14-19 education and training, also have an impact on the phase. These include:

- Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work – the skills White Paper¹⁷

¹¹ DfES (2005a) p. 2

¹² DfES (2005a) p. 2

¹³ DfES (2005a) para 3.46

¹⁴ DfES (2005a) para 3.1

¹⁵ DfES (2005a) para 3.2

¹⁶ See Appendix II

¹⁷ DfES (2005b)

- Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – the schools White Paper¹⁸
- Agenda for Change¹⁹ – blueprint for reorganisation and operation of the LSC
- revised Common Inspection Framework²⁰
- Realising the Potential – the Foster Report on Further Education Colleges²¹
- Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances – FE White Paper²²
- Youth Matters White Paper²³ – Youth Services and Connexions
- Skills in the UK: the long-term challenge – Leitch interim report²⁴
- The Quality Improvement Strategy²⁵
- The UK Government’s Approach to Public Sector Reform – a discussion paper²⁶

There is a coherent approach within *the 14-19 Implementation Plan*²⁷ itself and between it and some of these other documents. It could be argued that there is an internal logic around the themes of improving the quality of vocational education, providing clear qualification routes, building vocational capacity and encouraging institutional collaboration. This is reinforced by the increased focus on improving the quality of provision, supported by the revised Common Inspection Framework and the formation of the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA); the reorganisation of the LSC to make it more responsive at the local level; and new powers invested in LAs – a process originating in the *Every Child Matters*²⁸ agenda and the proposals for the development of wider opportunities for young people, better advice and guidance facilities and targeted support for those in need, emanating from the *Youth Matters* Green and White Papers²⁹. These proposals together transmit a powerful message about transforming 14-19 education and training. However, there are a number of problems within the 14-

¹⁸ DfES (2005c)

¹⁹ LSC (2005a)

²⁰ Ofsted (2005a)

²¹ Foster, Sir A. (2005)

²² DfES (2006a)

²³ DfES (2006b)

²⁴ Her Majesty’s Treasury (2005)

²⁵ QIA (2006)

²⁶ Strategy Unit (2006)

²⁷ DfES (2005a)

²⁸ DfES (2003a)

²⁹ DfES (2005d); DfES (2006b)

*19 Implementation Plan*³⁰ itself, most of which relate to the development of the specialised Diplomas and the 14-19 Entitlement within very tight timescales.

Specialised Diplomas and the 14-19 Entitlement

Designing and implementing the Specialised Diplomas³¹

At the heart of the national 14-19 Entitlement lie the new 'employer-designed' specialised Diplomas, of which there will be 14 lines³² offered at Levels 1 to 3. The DfES intends that specialised Diplomas should provide "an exciting, stretching and relevant programme of learning for young people of all backgrounds and abilities"³³ and prepare them for life and work. It is claimed that the diplomas will achieve this by their blend of general and applied learning in "real world environments" and the fact that they are designed by both employers and educators.

Each of the diploma lines follows a common template comprising three elements:

- *principal learning*, which is designed to "develop knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to a broad economic sector, using realistic contexts and leading edge sector relevant materials"
- *additional/specialist learning*, which "will allow learners to tailor their programme according to their interests and aspirations and may include further specialisation, or complementary studies"
- *generic learning*, which "will ensure that all Diploma students cover common skills essential to successful learning and future employment. It includes personal learning and thinking skills, a project, work experience and maths, English and ICT"³⁴.

However, the content and assessment requirements of each line of diplomas are likely to be different because of their sector specific genesis. In addition, the proportions of each of these three elements of the diplomas are different at each of the three levels, with generic learning decreasing and principal learning increasing from Level 1 to Level

³⁰ DfES (2005a)

³¹ Our comments in this section are based on a snapshot at a particular point in a reform process that is moving rapidly.

³² ICT; health and social care; engineering; creative and media; construction and built environment (available from September 2008); land-based and environmental, manufacturing; hair and beauty; business administration and finance; hospitality and catering (available from September 2009); public services; sport and leisure; retail; and travel and tourism (available from 2010).

³³ DfES (2006c) p. 3

³⁴ DfES (2006c) p. 10

3. A Level 1 specialised Diploma is seen as broadly equivalent to four to five GCSEs, a Level 2 to five to six GCSEs and a Level 3 to three A Levels, although there will also be a smaller 'Certificate' at Level 3, equivalent to two A Levels.

The specialised Diplomas represent yet another attempt to strengthen vocational learning for young people, to raise its status and to rationalise the plethora of vocational qualifications for this age group. They take forward the programmatic approach to learning and qualifications outlined in the final report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform³⁵ and appear to constitute a progression ladder of broad vocational full-time provision between the GCSE/A Level track and apprenticeships and leading to either employment or HE. While they have similar characteristics to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), policy documents suggest that specialised Diplomas are intended to be more vocationally focused with higher degrees of employer engagement and recognition. The DfES is hoping that these features will prove attractive to both young people and end users.

However, the wider context of the 14-19 reform process (e.g. the fact that specialised Diplomas will co-exist with GCSEs and A Levels; that they do not embrace apprenticeships; continued employer voluntarism; lack of vocational capacity in schools and the pace of reform) casts doubts over the ability of these new awards to fulfil the ambitious aims that the DfES has for them. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate about the nature of the proposed diplomas, centring on the degree to which they will become more general, more applied or more sharply vocational. At the time of writing the designs are still very fluid. The wider contextual factors highlighted above may push the specialised Diplomas towards becoming more general rather than vocational awards, principally because of the continued distinction being made between their role and the role of apprenticeships and the need to create 'parity of esteem' with relatively unreformed general qualifications. If this happens, we will once again be witnessing the process of 'academic drift'³⁶ that occurred with both GNVQs and Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs).

In the light of these contextual factors and from discussions with researchers, policymakers and practitioners, a number of key questions arise about how the specialised Diplomas and associated qualifications reforms will fare in the implementation phase.

What are their purposes?

Like GNVQs³⁷, the specialised Diplomas are intended to serve multiple purposes, some of which are in tension with one another. They are intended to provide programmes of

³⁵ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004)

³⁶ Green A. *et al.* (1999)

³⁷ For example, see FEDA/IoE (1995)

study for disaffected learners; for learners who have failed to get the five A*-C benchmark at 16; for those wishing to pursue a high-quality employer-recognised qualification; and for those wanting to prepare for entry to HE. Moreover, at Levels 1 and 2, specialised Diplomas are supposed to meet the needs of both 14-16 and 16-19 year-olds. This gives rise to a number of problems. In particular, practitioners have highlighted the issue of learners pursuing vocational specialisation pre-16. Learners of this age are not old enough to gain licence to practise awards such as those in childcare, so even if they pass a Level 2 qualification, they are not ready to go out into the workplace, unlike their post-16 counterparts. In addition, if learners undertake vocational specialisation pre-16, there is a danger of repetition post-16, particularly if they do not progress to the next level. Some practitioners have argued that there is a role for a 'general Diploma' pre-16 at Levels 1 and 2 along the lines proposed by the Working Group on 14-19 Reform. This would allow for sharp vocational, practical and applied experiences, but would avoid the problems highlighted above.

Which learners are likely to take them?

The retention of GCSEs and A Levels, which have been accepted as the most prestigious route of study for many years, will mean that the most able learners are likely to opt for these qualifications rather than choose one of the new specialised Diplomas. Moreover, if specialised Diplomas co-exist with tried and tested vocational qualifications such as Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, and City and Guilds, they may prove even less popular. Currently, awarding bodies are reserving their position on whether to replace their current awards with the new specialised Diplomas. There is, therefore, a danger of a repetition of the GNVQ and AVCE experience of a low-status and low-profile award only partially accepted by HE and by employers.

Who will offer them?

It is unlikely that schools will be able to offer a large number of specialised Diplomas because they will not have the facilities, despite the capacity building measures described in the *14-19 Implementation Plan*³⁸. Colleges, on the other hand, while potentially appearing to be the obvious providers of the vocational entitlement are, from discussions we have had, concerned on three accounts. First, they are nervous of taking on new qualifications without a strong reputation, having been burnt by the AVCE experience³⁹. Many have gone back to offering BTEC awards and are unlikely to want to switch wholesale to the new specialised Diplomas. Second, they are concerned that some of the diploma lines, at each of the levels, may attract very small numbers of learners and will be costly to mount as courses. GNVQs have taught FE colleges that

³⁸ DfES (2005a)

³⁹ See Hodgson A. and Spours K. (2003)

some sector qualifications do not prove popular. Third, colleges are concerned about the very broad nature of each of the 14 diploma lines and the risk of not being able to meet specific learner or employer needs without offering large numbers of costly specialised units.

Who is designing them?

The template for the specialised Diplomas was primarily designed by private consultants, working for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), with very little time for proper consultation. The designers attempted to incorporate features of the proposals from the Working Group on 14-19 Reform into the diploma template but did not overtly build on any existing vocational qualifications. The Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs), who are in charge of 'populating' the specialised Diploma template, do not necessarily have the curriculum expertise required for this task and they are having to adapt to a predetermined template which does not necessarily match their needs. Meanwhile, awarding bodies, which have the expertise to design the diplomas, played a marginal role in the initial design, even though they are now expected to develop the specifications and possibly replace their own qualifications products. Furthermore, QCA is in charge of the assessment, while the DDPs are in charge of content and the resulting communication problems are self-evident, particularly given the very short timescale for design. This new and untried approach to qualifications design, in which sectoral employer interests have been accorded the leading role, risks creating very different diplomas in the 14 lines which may restrict horizontal and vertical progression. This kind of learner mobility is particularly important at the lower levels of the new diploma ladder.

Other curriculum and qualifications reforms

There are a number of changes proposed for general education that, while falling short of the type of radical reform we have discussed above in relation to vocational learning, will nevertheless have an effect upon inclusion. These include a review of coursework within GCSEs, introducing greater differentiation at the top end of A Levels, the development of functional skills awards in English, maths and ICT and the reform of Key Stage (KS) 3. In this section, however, we confine ourselves to those issues that most closely relate to the specialised Diplomas.

What role for the extended project?

An extended project, offered at all levels and in all types of diplomas, was a key feature of the Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform⁴⁰. It was seen as a way of motivating young people by giving them control over their learning, personalising their

⁴⁰ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004)

curriculum and providing a vehicle for developing and accrediting the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for further study and working and adult life. The *14-19 Implementation Plan*, on the other hand, makes it clear that the extended project will be part of all specialised Diplomas at Levels 1-3, but will only be available at Level 3 for learners on the general track. In the specialised Diplomas, there is still a debate about how much choice learners should be given over the substance of their extended project. Currently, there is a proposal to prescribe a list of topics for each diploma line⁴¹, which will undermine the personalised nature of this element of the diploma. The Level 3 extended project in the general track stands alone, probably as an AS Level, and there are practitioner concerns about its status, its acceptance by HE and its ability to play a synoptic role in advanced level general programmes. The troubled experience of offering Key Skills as a stand-alone qualification at Level 3 as part of the *Curriculum 2000* reforms should have rung warning bells for policymakers⁴².

What will be the effects of the proposed general Diploma?

The *14-19 Implementation Plan* contains a proposal for an intermediate level general Diploma comprising five A*-C GCSEs, including English and maths. This is very different from the general Diploma proposed in the final report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform⁴³, which was designed at four levels to provide a ladder of progression in general education for a large section of the 14-19 cohort. The general Diploma in the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁴⁴ appears to be a measure designed to establish a new Level 2 benchmark and to 'raise the bar' of institutional performance at 16 by including a new metric for schools from 2006. The likely effects will be to reinforce the break and divide at 16-plus, a far cry from the rhetoric of the 14-19 White Paper which stated: "So, our vision is that 16 should cease to be a fixed point in our system at which all young people take qualifications – more and more should do so as soon as they are ready"⁴⁵. The most immediate effect of the introduction of this version of the general Diploma is that the proportion of the 16-plus cohort meeting the new five A*-C benchmark will fall below 50% (currently 54% of 16 year-olds gain five A*-C grades at GCSE), reversing the steady upward trend over recent years and increasing the number of young people who feel they have failed at the end of secondary schooling. At the time of writing, however, it is not clear how, or even whether, the proposal for this version of the general Diploma will be taken forward by the DfES.

⁴¹ QCA (2006)

⁴² Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2003)

⁴³ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004)

⁴⁴ DfES (2005a)

⁴⁵ DfES (2005e) para 3.19

A partial offer at the lower levels?

One of the major proposals of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform was to recognise Entry and Foundation Level achievement through Entry and Foundation diploma awards. The 14-19 White Paper, on the other hand, takes the view that achievement below Level 2 at 16 is unacceptable and this is why ministers privileged the general Diploma as their preferred benchmark at 16-plus, highlighted accelerated learning, rejected the idea of a discrete Entry Level diploma and put in place what is called a Foundation Learning Tier of individual qualifications for learners working below Level 2. This has disappointed many practitioners who saw the diploma system proposed by the Working Group on 14-19 Reform as a way of including all 14-19 year-olds for the first time in a national system. They recognise that the real problem for 14-19 education is motivating those learners who know that they are not going to gain five A*-C GCSE grades and therefore feel rejected by the system and drop out of education and training altogether. Moreover, because of the political refusal to reform GCSE, there are no Foundation/Level 1 awards available in both vocational and general education and no means of learners pursuing a general education beyond the age of 16 below Level 3. The importance of offering these choices and progression opportunities lay at the heart of the proposals of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform.

Is the 14-19 Entitlement deliverable?

The *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁴⁶ proposes that "every young person in a school or college is entitled to pursue any one of the specialised Diploma courses at any appropriate level for them wherever they are in the country"⁴⁷. The government itself recognises that "delivering this entitlement will require profound change in the education system"⁴⁸. While most practitioners support the idea of a 14-19 Entitlement and have done for many years, many see the government's model as undeliverable, because it would mean a commitment to offer all 14-19 diploma lines and all their specialist units at all levels within a single area, regardless of learner or employer demand, with potentially very small class sizes in some cases. Fletcher and Stanton⁴⁹ have completed calculations of class sizes that support these concerns and they highlight the potential for conflict between institutions in an area about which of them is going to deliver uneconomical courses to meet the entitlement.

Wales is employing a different and potentially more cost-effective way of meeting a 14-19 Entitlement through the use of five broad domains of general and applied learning⁵⁰ rather than 14 lines of vocational learning alongside the full range of academic subjects.

⁴⁶ DfES (2005a)

⁴⁷ DfES (2005a) para 1.10

⁴⁸ DFES(2006b) (2005a) para 1.11

⁴⁹ Fletcher, M. and Stanton, G. (2006)

⁵⁰ WAG (2004)

Welsh 14-19 Networks, the equivalent of English 14-19 Partnerships, also have to provide a viable business plan for the delivery of the entitlement⁵¹ (see Chapter 2 for more detail of the Welsh reforms). In addition, there are a number of obvious and well-rehearsed practical challenges in delivering the entitlement in England, including vocational capacity in schools; the issue of student mobility to access their entitlement; transport costs and continuous professional development for staff. While the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁵² recognises some of these issues and suggests measures for tackling them, government proposals are very much at the level of generalities and there is widespread practitioner concern about these practical problems. Recent research by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) into the financial implications of the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) has shown that making vocational choices available to 14-16 year-olds is costly and that FE colleges are estimated to be subsidising schools to the tune of about £100 million⁵³. Funding for the new Entitlement is an important issue for both schools and colleges and it is not yet clear exactly how much they will receive to support this development. If resources are insufficient, it is difficult to see how this form of entitlement can be realised.

Summary

The *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁵⁴ is a detailed and practical elaboration of the government's 14-19 reform agenda and for the first time contains an entitlement for all 14-19 year-olds. This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction for inclusion, learner motivation and more effective learning. However, the problems that surround the government's approach to qualifications reform are likely to diminish the power of the 14-19 Entitlement and render it more difficult to deliver. These we see as largely resulting from what has been termed 'policy evasion' and 'policy busyness'⁵⁵. Policy evasion can be illustrated by the government's refusal to reform general education at the same time as applied/vocational learning, which means that the vocational is always seen as 'alternative'. Problems associated with failure and disaffection in the general track are offloaded, once again, on to vocational qualifications, not only lowering the status of the specialised Diplomas, but also contributing to tensions in purposes and design.

These design tensions are exacerbated by policy busyness. Politically determined reform timetables, symbolised by the ministerial decision to bring forward the implementation of the specialised Diplomas from 2013 to 2010, fuel a perception of a government in a hurry to show that it is doing something. One only has to look at the

⁵¹ WAG (2006)

⁵² DfES (2005a)

⁵³ Styles, B. and Fletcher, M. (2006)

⁵⁴ DfES (2005a)

⁵⁵ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, A., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wright, S. and Wilde, S. (2005); Raffe, D. and Spours, K. (2006)

diagram on page 27 of the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁵⁶ to see why several of the teacher unions and professional associations are concerned about all the curriculum and qualifications changes scheduled for the next few years. Piloting of the functional skills; changes to GCSE specifications in English, maths and ICT; starting the new KS 3 curriculum; modifications to A Level specifications; introduction of the extended project and the first five diplomas all collide in 2008. The speed of reform contributes to a perception among many practitioners and researchers that the government's mind is closed and that presently the professional voice is only relevant when it provides a solution to a problem raised by an implementation plan that is already fixed.

It is possible, however, to take a different view of the introduction of specialised Diplomas as part of the policy process. Rather than seeing them as the development of a distinctive broad vocational track, they could be seen as precursors of a diploma approach to the whole 14-19 curriculum, in which the diploma brand is extended to both general education and apprenticeships. Under this scenario, the specialised Diplomas might be viewed as a first step towards a more radical conception of 14-19 education and training. The review of A Levels in 2008, therefore, could provide the opportunity to establish the diploma brand within the general track. While some policymakers and practitioners would like to believe in this positive trajectory, historical precedent suggests that they are likely to be disappointed. The real danger is that the concept of a diploma becomes associated with those learners who cannot do A Levels or apprenticeships and this is not the way to establish a high-status diploma brand. Unless the brand achieves this status, no political party is likely to risk its introduction into the high-status and politically sensitive area of A Levels and GCSEs.

Section 2: The policy process and governance

In commenting on the 14-19 policy process and governance issues, we examine the factors that either facilitate or inhibit localities from developing the strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems required to meet both the demands of the new policy implementation context and the needs of all learners in their local area. As far as the DfES is concerned, 14-19 policy has been determined and no further consultation is necessary until 2008. The reality is that there was no definitive consultation process about 14-19 education during the period 2002-2006 and certainly no consensus generated. The 14-19 Green Paper⁵⁷ was only partially accepted by the education profession and this uncertainty led to a government response⁵⁸ and ultimately to the establishment of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform. This latter group's main recommendation, for a unified and inclusive diploma system covering the whole of 14-19 education and training and including GCSEs and A Levels, was not accepted by

⁵⁶ DfES (2005a)

⁵⁷ DfES (2002)

⁵⁸ DfES (2003b)

government. The subsequent 14-19 White Paper⁵⁹, written behind closed doors, adopted thinking very similar to the 2002 Green Paper but with a partial cherry-picked version of the proposals of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform. At this point, there was no more real consultation, only a detailed implementation plan, the appointment of eight 14-19 Pathfinders to pilot aspects of the reforms and a piecemeal and circumscribed set of consultation processes around some of the design features of the specialised Diplomas⁶⁰. Moreover, the DDPs designing these awards are led by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and have afforded a limited role for practitioners and other expert stakeholders. This stage of the policy process could thus be described as having a brisk, no nonsense approach with a focus on getting things done in the fastest possible time. It is clearly not a time for looking at the wider picture or raising difficult practical issues.

A politicised policy process

It is evident from our discussions with practitioners, researchers and policymakers that there is, therefore, not a settled view about the direction of 14-19 reform in England. The basic problems around the internal curricular, qualifications and delivery tensions we have already described above derive, in our view, from a 'politicised' approach to policymaking⁶¹. The rejection of the central proposal of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform was due to ministerial political concerns in the run up to the 2005 general election, or as John Dunford, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, put it: "Electoral tactics, it seems, have taken precedence over educational logic."⁶² The second dimension of politicisation is the application of a public sector reform paradigm across all public services including education, with an emphasis on competition, contestability, personalisation, top-down performance management and consumer choice and voice⁶³.

It is our contention that this broader public sector reform agenda reinforces policy tensions within the 14-19 area. Chief amongst these is the perceived contradiction between institutional competition that is being pursued as a result of the schools White

⁵⁹ DfES (2005e)

⁶⁰ Two brief consultation exercises were carried out by private consultants for QCA in February and March 2006. The range of participants and the scope of the consultation were very limited because the overall shape of the diploma template had been broadly fixed at that point. A similar but even shorter (48 hours) consultation was undertaken with the eight 14-19 Pathfinder areas on the design of the Level 1 Diploma. There have also been separate consultations with short timescales on the extended project at Level 3 (but not Levels 1 and 2), the Foundation Learning Tier and the standards for the functional skills of English, maths and ICT.

⁶¹ Raffe, D. and Spours, K. (2006)

⁶² Dunford, J. (2005)

⁶³ Strategy Unit (2006)

Paper⁶⁴ and the institutional collaboration agenda that is central to the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁶⁵. The emphasis in *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*⁶⁶ is on institutional diversity, specialisation and the establishment of new school sixth forms, reinforcing school autonomy, parental choice and competition for able learners at both 11 and 16⁶⁷. This competitive climate is exacerbated by the publication of performance tables, which highlight the importance of the five A*-C GCSE benchmark at 16; by funding mechanisms which reward recruitment and attainment; and by an inspection framework that praises good performance, regardless of the breadth of curriculum offer. In meetings with practitioners there has been a strongly held perception that these policies do not help collaboration because they incentivise individual institutional self-interest and do not sufficiently stress collective thinking and area planning. In a recent research report on the effects of performance indicators on institutional behaviour, Perry and Simpson argue forcefully that current levers and drivers, such as targets, performance indicators and funding, work relatively effectively at the individual institutional level,

... but have weaknesses in setting or assessing the needs of an area. This is because the attention is focused on the achievements of those actually enrolled at the institutions, not on the population of the locality.⁶⁸

The fact that provision is determined by the institution rather than by the locality means that schools and, to a lesser degree, colleges, can choose to specialise in either a narrow academic or a vocational curriculum. The outcome is that some will continue to make a purely academic offer, because this is still the most prestigious path to follow. The most selective and high-performing institutions will thus remain outside the main thrust of 14-19 reform, leaving it to others in an area to offer the vocational aspects of the entitlement curriculum. The second effect is that the pressures on secondary schools to improve performance at GCSE may compromise their willingness to participate in the organisational aspects of reform, such as common timetabling and shared provision. Conversely, the willingness by government to invest vocational resources in a variety of institutions (e.g. skills academies, school sixth forms, FE colleges) is already causing disagreements between schools and colleges that are supposed to be collaborating with one another. Moreover, differences between conditions of service for school and college staff continue to work against collaborative practice in England⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ DfES (2005c)

⁶⁵ DfES (2005a)

⁶⁶ DfES(2005c)

⁶⁷ Glatter, R. (2006)

⁶⁸ Perry, A. and Simpson, M. (2006) p. 4

⁶⁹ The situation is different in Wales with FE lecturers and school teachers having the same pay and conditions of service – see Chapter 2

The cumulative effects of measures of politicised policy proposals that come from outside the 14-19 reform arena thus make collaboration much more difficult, time-consuming, inefficient and potentially unstable. There are measures within the *14-19 Implementation Plan*⁷⁰ that are intended to address these issues: the statutory requirement for schools to provide learners with the full 14-19 Entitlement; the introduction of progression targets which make schools responsible for the destinations of all their Year 11 learners; the requirement for each area to have a 14-19 Partnership; and the provision of a joint area prospectus. However, these remain weak in comparison with the measures highlighted above that encourage competition.

Weak governance at the local level

Since the early 1990s, schools and colleges have been given greater freedoms as autonomous institutions and FE, sixth form and tertiary colleges are incorporated organisations. Although LAs are still used by central government to channel the majority of funding to schools, their powers in relation to these institutions have been significantly diminished by successive Conservative and Labour governments. In addition, since 2001, the LLSCs have largely taken over local planning functions for post-16 education, using Strategic Area Reviews and Provider Performance Reviews, as well as the outcomes from area-wide and 14-19 inspections⁷¹.

However, the 14-19 White Paper, the *14-19 Implementation Plan* and even to some extent the schools White Paper appear to recognise the importance of LAs as well as LLSCs in guaranteeing the 14-19 Entitlement across an area. Government recognition of the role of LAs has increased since the publication of the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper⁷², in which LAs were charged with coordinating local services for children and young people. While the *14-19 Implementation Plan* asserts in several places that it “will not be prescriptive about exactly how local areas should implement the policy”⁷³, it recognises that LAs have played a key role in 14-19 Pathfinders and it suggests that they should be the “integrators locally of services for young people up to the age of 19”⁷⁴. Nevertheless, it also suggests that LAs should work together with LLSCs, with the former responsible for entitlement for 14-16 year-olds and the latter for 16-19 year-olds. Throughout the document there is an emphasis on institutions collaborating together to deliver the full statutory 14-19 Entitlement.

⁷⁰ DfES (2005a)

⁷¹ Hodgson, A., Spours, K., Coffield, F., Steer, R., Finlay, I., Edward, S. and Gregson, M. (2005)

⁷² DfES (2003a)

⁷³ DfES (2005a) para 1.17

⁷⁴ DfES (2005a) para 1.20

In the 2004-05 Annual Report, we described institutional arrangements in England as 'weakly collaborative'⁷⁵. For the reasons we will identify below, the suggested new organisational arrangements for 14-19 education and training at the local level will, in our view, provide at best what we term 'weak governance' to support these weakly collaborative arrangements.

Local government has over the years been hollowed out, as national and institutional levels have become more dominant in England. As Clarke and Newman⁷⁶ argue, the Conservatives believed they could create a local market in education, whereas New Labour sought to centrally steer and manage a market through arms-length policy mechanisms. In both cases, these strategies obviated the need for local education authorities. In the case of New Labour, there was the added antipathy towards local government, because of its association with Old Labour. Nevertheless, over the last couple of years, the present administration has come to realise that it cannot do without local government. Its answer has been to subsume LAs ideologically within the 'modernisation' agenda in roles such as "commissioners" and "integrators" of services. Even the Local Government Association (LGA) adopts the language of modernisation by describing LAs as "community leaders" and stating that it does not want to "regain old or lost territory"⁷⁷. It is within this new and more contested context that LAs are being expected to provide a lead at the local level.

The desire in the *14-19 Implementation Plan* for LAs and LLSCs to lead local 14-19 Partnerships has been broadly welcomed by the majority of practitioners, who recognise the need for effective arbitration in the highly competitive area of 14-19 education and training. There are, however, a number of potential difficulties with this form of governance.

To date, there has been a variable record of collaboration between LAs and LLSCs. In some areas, they have worked well together, particularly where their borders are coterminous (e.g. Surrey⁷⁸, Lancashire and York) but this has not been the case everywhere, particularly where an LLSC has been very assertive (e.g. recommending post-16 rationalisation) or where it has largely excluded schools and LAs from its decision-making committees.

Oversight of the 14-19 phase is now split between LAs responsible for the 14-16 year-old entitlement and LLSCs responsible for the 16-19 aspects. This continues to cause confusion despite attempts to organise a more explicit partnership arrangement between these two bodies. The position in Wales, for example, is different with LAs

⁷⁵ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, A., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wilde, S. and Wright, S. (2005)

⁷⁶ Clarke, J. and Newman, J. (2004)

⁷⁷ LGA (2004) p. 15

⁷⁸ See Plato, P. (2006)

taking overall responsibility for the 14-19 Networks since ELWa (the Welsh LSC equivalent) has been absorbed into the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) (see Chapter 2).

There have been widespread criticisms of a lack of capacity in the LLSCs⁷⁹ and LAs have, over the years, shed many of their post-16 specialists as a result of their retreating role in this area with the LGA commenting on this process: "Over the past decade, staff, skills and resources have been stripped out"⁸⁰. Moreover, many unitary LAs are very small and simply do not have the staff to carry out the kind of functions envisaged for them in the *14-19 Implementation Plan*. In addition, there has been constant reorganisation. At the very time that the LLSCs are being asked to form partnerships with LAs, their numbers are being reduced significantly; they are going through their third reorganisation in five years and their role and size is not yet clear. In fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, LLSCs will have to rely on their role as 'commissioners of provision', a role which, according to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)⁸¹, they have not effectively exercised to date.

Under the forthcoming Education and Inspections Act, LAs will be given a statutory responsibility to deliver the 14-19 Entitlement, which will necessitate institutional collaboration. They are also responsible for leading on the development of local 14-19 prospectuses and the coordination of institutional planning for delivery of the new specialised Diplomas, as local consortia gear themselves up for the Specialised Diploma Gateway process. Despite the fact that the 14-19 Entitlement will have a statutory basis, it is not clear exactly what powers LAs will have to enforce it or to ensure the introduction of all specialised Diploma lines within a local area. Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers remain autonomous and, as we have indicated above, have considerable incentives to pursue their own agendas and specialisms. Strong national policy levers and drivers which encourage institutional competition (e.g. performance measures and funding) remain in place while, as we have explained, there are very few area-wide mechanisms that impact directly on schools and colleges, and the ones that do exist are weak.

The ability, therefore, of LAs and LLSCs to work together in a locality to provide a level of governance above that of the individual institution is, in our view, still limited. Moreover, whoever is leading 14-19 at the local level in the future is going to face two major tough decisions over and above the practical issues we have raised so far. The first is what balance is to be struck between young people's choice of institution and

⁷⁹ For example, Coffield, F., Steer, R., Hodgson, A., Spours, K., Edward, S. and Finlay, I. (2005); Foster, Sir A. (2005); Perry, A. and Simpson, M. (2006)

⁸⁰ LGA (2004) p. 16

⁸¹ Ofsted (2003)

choice of provision. The second is how possible it is to reconcile choice and cost effectiveness⁸².

Section 3: Institutional collaboration in the 14-19 implementation phase

In the 2004-05 Annual Report we developed a conceptual model to illustrate a distinction between what we termed weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems in England (see Table 1).

Table 1. Weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems: a national perspective

Dimensions: national	Weakly collaborative approach	Strongly collaborative approach
1. Vision, purposes and underpinning principles	Vision: two routes to meet different learner needs – academic and vocational. Main purpose: participation up to 19 and employability. Principle: choice of route and entitlement to the 'basics'.	Vision: comprehensive and inclusive unified system. Main purpose: participation up to 19 and preparation for adult life and lifelong learning. Principle: entitlement to common 'formation' and choice within this.
2. Curriculum, qualifications and assessment	Divided curriculum and qualifications arrangements with separate progression routes based on individual free-standing qualifications. High degrees of external assessment for national standards and public accountability.	Unified credit-based diploma system for all 14-19 learners based on holistic learner programmes, with clear ladder of progression and high degrees of local innovation and discretion. Assessment for learning, a mixture of external and internal.
3. Planning, organisation and governance in 'a local area'	Specialisation, competition and collaboration for learner choice with the possibility of clear distinctions between institutional types (e.g. grammar schools and FE colleges); area planning primarily focused on the vocational route. Top-down relationship between national/local, unclear division of labour between LLSC/LAs and lack of democratic accountability.	Formation of a democratically accountable sub-regional authority for planning comprehensive provision across a local area with the possibility of rationalisation. Clearer limits to institutional autonomy and changes to governance arrangements to reflect a more tertiary approach.

⁸² Stanton, G. and Fletcher, M. (2006)

<p>4. Professionalism, pedagogy and leadership</p>	<p>Tolerance of different conditions of service and professional development for those working in FE, schools and work-based training, focus on subject or area of curriculum with little mutual learning or boundary crossing.</p>	<p>Capacity building for innovative general and vocational learning and assessment to support the new unified system and the transformation of the secondary and upper secondary phase. No distinction between conditions of service and professional development for those working in FE, schools and work-based training. Focus on expansive learning, cross-disciplinarity and boundary crossing.</p>
<p>5. Physical learning environments and communications systems</p>	<p>Main focus on new vocational learning environments and communications systems aimed mainly at tracking achievement and supporting choices across a divided system.</p>	<p>Focus on learning environments for both general and vocational learning and communications systems aimed to create new relationships between learning, assessment, personal progress and professional capacity building.</p>
<p>6. Accountability framework</p>	<p>National levers (e.g. performance tables, targets, inspection, funding) to drive institutional behaviour; mainly based on individual institutional performance. Standards assured through national external examinations. Lack of local democratic accountability.</p>	<p>Emphasis on bottom-up 'aspirational' targets; main focus on monitoring performance across an area at 19 based on collaborative targets for participation, achievement and progression; creation of local, transparent quality assurance systems alongside national awarding and validating systems.</p>

Here we focus on those national developments that have had an impact on collaborative working at the local level in 2005/06 in the new 14-19 implementation phase. We discuss both the decisions and actions that individual institutions and 14-19 Partnerships are currently being expected to make and the mechanisms that the government has been or is putting into place to support them. At the end of this chapter, we revisit the model of weakly and strongly collaborative local learning systems to introduce a more explicit local dimension.

Drivers for collaboration

The 14-19 Entitlement

The first and most obvious driver for 14-19 institutional collaboration is the statutory requirement for all local areas to offer the new national 14-19 Entitlement by 2013⁸³. The breadth of this curriculum offer, as indicated earlier in this chapter, requires institutional collaboration. This will be reinforced from November 2006 by termly 'Progress Checks' by government offices "which will measure the performance of every LA in the progress they are making in delivering the reform programme in preparation for the introduction of the specialised Diplomas and the new national entitlement"⁸⁴. These Progress Checks, based around 13 performance indicators, two of which relate specifically to collaborative arrangements, will be used to judge the performance of each local area and to advise ministers of progress on the *14-19 Implementation Plan*. When the assessment of an area has been completed, depending on which 'traffic light grading' is given – red, amber/red, amber/green or green – the appropriate 'support package' will be developed to ensure progress towards successful implementation.

The Specialised Diploma Gateway

In May 2006, the DfES published details of the Gateway process through which providers need to pass to offer the five available specialised Diplomas from 2008⁸⁵. The process is designed to "assess the readiness of providers to offer the specialised Diplomas and identify where these providers need to develop, and how we can support them, to ensure that they are ready and capable of delivering the diplomas to a high standard"⁸⁶. In order to meet the five broad requirements of the Gateway, providers have to demonstrate that they:

- are working together with "firm collaboration arrangements in place"
- can offer "collaborative delivery" of effective impartial information, advice and guidance
- have the capacity to deliver high-quality general, applied and practical teaching and learning to all ability levels
- have the "capacity and commitment to provide the necessary workforce and workforce development to deliver the Diplomas"

⁸³ See Appendix II

⁸⁴ DfES (2006d) p. 4

⁸⁵ ICT; health and social care; construction and the built environment; engineering; and creative and media

⁸⁶ DfES (2006c) p. 4

- have in place or are able to develop “effective links” with employers and higher education institutions⁸⁷.

Consortia considering offering one or more of the specialised Diplomas are asked to use these criteria to assess how much support they might need and to undertake structured Learning Visits to 14-19 Pathfinder and Increased Flexibility Partnerships to build their capacity for 2008. LAs and LLSCs are tasked with supporting partnership development so that consortia in their area can undertake the necessary preparations for the delivery of the specialised Diplomas. As part of the Gateway process, LAs were expected to coordinate the initial expressions of interest from consortia by 30 June 2006 and submit them to the DfES for consideration. More detailed criteria for selection of eligible partnerships to deliver each of the specialised diploma lines were due to be published in September 2006 and interested consortia were asked for more detailed proposals to be submitted in December. These proposals will be assessed for approval by regional panels in early spring 2007 and those consortia that are successful will be given support to gain approval from awarding bodies from September 2007.

This somewhat lengthy and bureaucratic Gateway process can be seen as a rigorous approach to the new qualifications. However, it also has elements of the absurd resulting from what we have termed ‘policy busyness’. Consortia are being asked to put in expressions of interest for specialised Diplomas that are not yet designed and to indicate how many learners might be likely to take them. While there is a generic template for the diplomas available and some indication of the broad content of the first five, there is no detail about the assessment requirements that drive pedagogic approaches. As one 14-19 Partnership coordinator said: “It’s like buying a car without having seen it. Well you wouldn’t, would you?” Nevertheless, the Nuffield Review has evidence that many local areas have put in expressions of interest to offer some, if not all, of the first five specialised Diplomas because they feel that this will not cut off options at a later stage.

Developing the local 14-19 prospectus

A third and related area of current activity involving cross-institutional collaboration is the development by LAs and LLSCs of what is called “a searchable Internet-based prospectus of 14-19 learning opportunities”⁸⁸. As outlined in the *14-19 Implementation Plan*, local areas are encouraged to publish prospectuses from Autumn 2006 and need to have one in place and linked to a national website by Autumn 2007. The primary audience is young people themselves but it is assumed that parents and professional advisers will also make use of the prospectus. It is intended to support the proposals contained in the *Every Child Matters* and *Youth Matters* Green and White Papers and to underpin the ‘September Guarantee’ of “appropriate learning for every young person by

⁸⁷ DfES (2006d) p. 5

⁸⁸ DfES (2006e) p. 3

the end of September after they complete Year 11” which “will be in place in most areas in 2006 and across the country in 2007”⁸⁹. Clearly there is also a link between 14-19 prospectus development and the introduction of the new specialised Diplomas. The national guidance on local prospectuses⁹⁰, which was published in May 2006, provides a detailed outline of what information should be included, how it should be formatted, how the whole process should be managed and so on, with some pump-priming funding being allocated to LAs. There are also suggestions about linking course admissions procedures with the prospectus. The guidance is based on the findings of a research project undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)⁹¹. Judging by the tasks outlined in the guidance document, LAs and LLSCs will have their work cut out to get their local 14-19 prospectuses up and running for September 2006, although it is clear from the NFER research that some areas are further ahead than others.

Support for collaborative working

14-19 Pathfinders

Following the publication of the 14-19 Green Paper⁹², national funding was made available for three years to support 14-19 Pathfinders. Used as a tool of ‘experimentation’ across a range of services (Children’s Services, Home Office and so on), Pathfinders are a policy piloting strategy favoured by the Labour government⁹³. They are not, however, pilots in the strictest sense – that is means of implementing a policy within tightly controlled conditions. Pathfinders are a more nebulous form of policy experimentation accorded several ambitious purposes – to develop ‘best practice’, to provide a test-bed for policy initiatives; to reduce incidences of policy failure by providing swift feedback on the policy process before roll-out; and to explore new solutions and identify barriers to reform⁹⁴.

In the area of 14-19 education and training, Pathfinders were intended to:

- “test out a range of ideas and discover new ones
- develop best practice in 14-19 education and training to guide the steps to, and pace of, a national roll-out

⁸⁹ DfES (2006e) p. 4

⁹⁰ DfES (2006e)

⁹¹ Blenkinsop, S. (2005)

⁹² DfES (2002)

⁹³ Performance and Innovation Unit (2000)

⁹⁴ Strategy Unit (2003)

- see how 14-19 policy will fit with other policies, identify barriers to a coherent 14-19 phase and design ways to overcome them
- show that a coherent 14-19 phase can be achieved nationally in a variety of locations with different social circumstances and different mixes of schools and colleges⁹⁵.

By the end of the 14-19 Pathfinder programme in 2005, 39 areas across England had received resources to test and pilot various aspects of 14-19 reform, including its strong focus on cross-institutional collaborative working. The final evaluation report published earlier this year identified nine key legacies from this initiative in the Pathfinder areas⁹⁶:

1. a stronger emphasis on 14-19 as a phase of education and training
2. the emergence of the concept of 14-19 Entitlement in many areas
3. a broader and more relevant curriculum offer with greater learner choice
4. the development of substantial collaborative arrangements
5. supporting change at local level through a combination of national and local mechanisms
6. more innovative learning for some learners
7. the development of strategic collaborative leadership
8. the establishment of organisational structures to support collaboration
9. and the development of staff with networking skills to facilitate collaboration.

Despite these messages, however, the difficulty then has to be faced in scaling up the response elsewhere when the very conditions that produced the success can be lost in replication.

Pathfinders are also intended to develop and disseminate best practice. Originating in the private sector as a tool to benchmark performance against competitors, the concept of 'best practice' has entered popular parlance in the public sector as part of the government's agenda of driving up public sector performance⁹⁷. Seen as a subtler tool than targets and the accountability agenda, best practice describes a process in which innovation is stimulated, identified and then disseminated by central government, leading to widespread improvement⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ Higham, J., Haynes, G., Wragg, C. and Yeomans, D. (2004) p. 7

⁹⁶ Higham, J. and Yeomans, D. (2006) pp. 58-9

⁹⁷ Brannan, T., Durose, C., John, P. and Wolman, H. (2006)

⁹⁸ Newman, J., Raine, J. and Skelcher, C. (2000)

Fielding and colleagues⁹⁹ note that concepts of 'best practice' are most effectively communicated laterally through 'networks of trust' and that dissemination from central government through best practice manuals has proved somewhat less useful. The government, however, still relies heavily on good/best practice manuals as a means of dissemination. Commenting on this, the authors of the most recent Pathfinder evaluation¹⁰⁰ point to the DfES 14-19 Gateway website with its section on good practice which details the Learning Visits and good practice manuals, together with case studies and video clips, based on the practice in 14-19 Pathfinders. The evaluators go on to remark, however, that they have no evidence about how many people have actually used these resources and in what way.

A major problem for 14-19 Pathfinders and their role in enabling best practice transfer is that they are funded on such a precarious basis and the policy agenda is moving so quickly that these exemplars of innovation can come and go. They are often not in the position to form sustainable networks of trust¹⁰¹. Pathfinders, nevertheless, have been given some systemic functions, insofar as they are intended to identify barriers and show links between policies. This is part of their role in reducing the possibility of gross policy failure and offering some sort of 'insurance policy' by providing feedback for policymakers early in the implementation process¹⁰².

But what do Pathfinders actually tell policymakers and how are they used? The 14-19 White Paper made eight references to the first wave of 14-19 Pathfinders that started in 2003. It reported that a great deal of innovation was taking place and concluded from this that the proposed policy could work (i.e. 'autonomous' institutions could collaborate). There were no indications of what the government itself had learned from local innovation and no discussion about barriers. This, it might be argued, could be because, as we have seen, the main barriers frustrating change and improvement derive from the government's own policies (e.g. the refusal to reform general qualifications and the encouragement of institutional competition).

Policy learning from Pathfinders may also be affected by the way this form of innovation is funded. The original thirty-nine 14-19 Pathfinders were relatively generously resourced, although funding for the latest round of Pathfinders, following the publication of the *14-19 Implementation Plan*, was even more competitive and precarious than the previous round. There is little incentive, therefore, for Pathfinders to burden government with uncomfortable messages about barriers to innovation. In the competitive world of funding, it might be calculated that the best chance of securing future financing is to accentuate the positive and not to talk about inhibiting factors.

⁹⁹ Fielding, M., Bragg, S., Craig, J., Cunningham, I., Eraut, M., Gillinson, D., Horne, M., Robinson C. and Thorp, J. (2005)

¹⁰⁰ Higham, J. and Yeomans, D. (2006)

¹⁰¹ Higham, J. and Yeomans, D. (2006)

¹⁰² Strategy Unit (2003)

While the Pathfinder concept has its merits as a source of local innovation, we argue that it suffers from the effects of the wider politicised policy landscape. Moreover, the 14-19 Pathfinder experience accords with findings from policy and practice transfer in local regeneration programmes, where it was recognised that Pathfinders tend to function more as a source of policy legitimisation than as a means of policy learning or analysis¹⁰³. This experience begs the question of whether Pathfinders can, in practice, find the path for others or whether everyone has to find their own way by reflecting upon their unique as well as shared conditions.

Learning Visits

A related element of the Pathfinder concept is the DfES's programme of Learning Visits, which represents "a mechanism for enabling everyone to learn from the areas that have made the most progress"¹⁰⁴. 14-19 Pathfinders and other innovators from the IFP presently offer Learning Visits to 14-19 Partnerships across the country. Visits last a day, though in theory at least, there are opportunities for longer-term relationships to be formed between schools and colleges. It is also proposed to establish four types of networks to support 14-19 White Paper developments:

1. networks to support learning transfer from the learning visits
2. networks linking schools, colleges and the DDPs that are currently designing the 14 lines of the proposed specialised Diplomas
3. sector-wide networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs) and the newly established skills academies to promote quality vocational provision within the Diplomas
4. regional networks of 'subject coaches' to "ensure the adoption of good practice"¹⁰⁵

According to the 'timeline for capacity building', it is intended that the Learning Visits and the networks will facilitate preparation and disseminate good practice in time for the introduction of the first wave of specialised Diplomas in 2008.

The government is undoubtedly committed to enabling learning from local practice within the framework of established policy. Moreover, the programme of Learning Visits is underway and they appear to be proving popular with groups of practitioners. The question is not whether learning is taking place, but whether the learning model will prove effective in establishing improvements in 14-19 learning, provision and policy. In terms of evidence, it is simply too early to make a judgement. However, the assumptions of the government's model can be tested against recent research on the

¹⁰³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000)

¹⁰⁴ DfES (2005a) p. 9

¹⁰⁵ DfES (2005e) p. 67

transfer of good practice¹⁰⁶ and on the experience of 14-19 Pathfinders¹⁰⁷. Using research based on wide-ranging evidence (interviews with 120 practitioners who have tried good practice transfer; data from over 30 beacon institutions; information from recipients of best practice scholarships; and the outcomes of seminars to discuss interim findings), Fielding and colleagues from the University of Sussex and Demos arrived at the conclusions summarised in the first column of Table 2. These are compared with features and conditions within the government's own 14-19 good practice learning model listed in the second column.

Table 2. Transferring and learning from good practice

Factors influencing the transfer of good practice	Government's 14-19 good practice learning model
Joint practice development rather than practice transfer	Focused on practice transfer
Development and continuity of trust relationships built on previous experience	New and possibly temporary learning relationships based around the Learning Visits
Learners are engaged due to involvement in joint planning of the learning	Learners are the recipients of good practice
Understanding time and addressing the issue of lack of time	Politically inspired deadlines (e.g. 2008 for the introduction of the first five specialised Diplomas and all to be introduced by 2010) which leave little time for consultation or policy learning
Positive teacher and institutional identity through a 'non-badging' approach	Potential for labelling institutions as 'advanced' and 'less advanced'
Supportive structures for transfer – time, communication, funding and technology	Limitations in all of these
Challenges of evaluation and seeing whether good practice transfer actually takes place	Too early to tell but tradition of evaluation established through 14-19 Pathfinders and IFP

The main difference between the practice transfer advocated by the research findings and government-sponsored practice transfer model is one of mutual engagement and time. Learning Visits are based on hierarchical, temporary and time-constrained

¹⁰⁶ Fielding, M., Bragg, S., Craig, J., Cunningham, I., Eraut, M., Gillinson, D., Horne, M., Robinson C. and Thorp, J. (2005)

¹⁰⁷ Higham, J. and Yeomans, D. (2006)

learning relationships rather than on mutually supportive relationships fostered over time.

The effectiveness of Learning Visits will depend not only on the quality of the visit experience itself, but also on factors related to those who want to learn. Learning Visits, by their very nature, are fleeting and compressed learning experiences. In the case of one particular 14-19 Pathfinder, a well-reviewed Learning Visit comprised a PowerPoint slideshow of no less than 67 slides delivered over a five-hour period. The recipients may well have been struck by the innovating institution's presentation of its own accomplishments. However, how much they would have taken away to transfer to their own context is less clear. The question of 'practice transfer' was simply not on the agenda: it was assumed. The DfES has stated that it would like to see a follow-up process to the Learning Visits, but it is difficult to see how a limited number of busy 14-19 Pathfinders will have the time to consolidate multiple learning relationships within the time constraints under which they are currently compelled to operate.

Effective practice transfer, as the research illustrates, relies on a wider range of factors. In addition to those listed in the Fielding *et al.* research, the Nuffield Review's contact with 14-19 Partnerships suggests that factors affecting practitioner learning include the degree of cohesion of the partnership seeking advice and how far it has clarified its aims and questions. Many partnerships are at an early stage of development and may, from our observations, be simply casting around to learn 'randomly' rather than seeking concrete solutions to help them progress in a particular area or solve an identified problem. In addition and crucially, 14-19 Partnerships are likely to identify problems that cannot be solved by examining the practice of others. This is because the issues that exercise everyone most (e.g. the nature of qualifications and assessment, institutional competition, performance measures and funding instability) emanate from policy itself and, as we highlighted in the 2004-05 Annual Report¹⁰⁸, from the role of key policy levers and drivers beyond the immediate control of even the most innovative 14-19 Partnerships.

14-19 Partnerships: Progress in 2005/06

It is difficult to gain an accurate picture of what progress has been made on 14-19 collaborative arrangements at the local level in England during 2005/06. Three relevant research reports have been published: the third and final national evaluation report on the 14-19 Pathfinder Initiative¹⁰⁹; a report of research undertaken for NFER entitled *Schools in Collaboration: federations, collegiates and partnerships*¹¹⁰ and a national

¹⁰⁸ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wright, S. and Wilde, S. (2005)

¹⁰⁹ Higham, J. and Yeomans, D. (2006)

¹¹⁰ Arnold, R. (2006)

survey of readiness for 14-19 reform under the auspices of LEACAN 14+ Ltd¹¹¹, *Challenges Facing Partnerships: Current developments towards implementation in local authorities*¹¹². The Nuffield Review has also been undertaking a number of case studies in various parts of the country as a way of illuminating and deepening understanding of some of the issues being raised in the research literature and in seminars and conferences involving practitioners¹¹³. In addition, there is national guidance based on case study evidence published on the QCA, DfES and LSDA websites. The QCA website on 14-19 Learning¹¹⁴, for example, contains a checklist of 13 planning considerations for 14-19 Partnerships:

- collect background information
- produce a statement of purpose and supporting documents
- review the potential range of collaborative activities
- describe roles and responsibilities
- consider curriculum details
- allocate resources
- reconcile different operational procedures
- establish communication strategies
- establish staff recruitment and development policies
- produce formal agreements setting out working arrangements
- define methods for supporting students
- monitor, review and evaluate the partnership.

Despite this evidence and guidance, however, there is no definitive way of quantifying what is happening nationally and to what extent progress has been made towards a more collaborative 14-19 education and training system. What the evidence of various types suggests is that most, if not all, local areas, are mapping their current 14-19 provision; introducing more vocational or applied provision, particularly pre-16 at Levels 1 and 2; attempting to assess future learner needs; considering progression routes for

¹¹¹ LEACAN 14+ Ltd is a national network of over 140 professionals, supporting staff in English LEAs and local LSCs who have a responsibility for 14-19 education and training.

¹¹² Tirrell, J. Winter, A.M. and Hawthorne, S. (2006)

¹¹³ See Appendix III

¹¹⁴ www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/index-s6-1-checklist.htm

learners; introducing individual learning plans; preparing local prospectuses and entitlement statements; and beginning to form partnerships. A smaller proportion of partnerships are at a more advanced stage where they are looking at shared provision, common timetabling and joint funding, accommodation, appointments and quality assurance systems¹¹⁵. On the whole, partnerships between schools and colleges are at a more developed stage than those between education providers and employers, work-based learning providers and other community partners because the IFP has been mainly school/college-based and because of the historical problems of developing sustainable education/employer relations¹¹⁶.

The overall picture suggests that in many areas 14-19 Partnerships are still at a relatively early stage, therefore, with more development pre-16 than post-16; joint provision actively affecting a relatively small proportion of learners and staff; some institutions being more heavily involved than others; minimal impact on the general (as opposed to the vocational) curriculum; and little involvement of parents and governors. However, as highlighted in the preceding section of this chapter, the legislation to underpin the 14-19 Entitlement and the need for schools and colleges to collaborate in order to meet the specialised Diploma Gateway criteria will undoubtedly push things forward. Nevertheless, even in those areas where there are well-established partnership arrangements, coordinators are concerned about how they will be able to meet the demands of the 14-19 Entitlement and the LEACAN survey indicates that the key barrier to implementation is the attitude/willingness of schools¹¹⁷.

Despite these limitations it is clear that during 2005/06 there have been significant developments in policy and practice since we created the weakly and strongly collaborative framework illustrated in Table 1. 14-19 policy has moved decisively into an implementation phase with a range of national policy mechanisms (e.g. the specialised Diploma Gateway, 14-19 Pathfinders, Learning Visits and local prospectuses) to encourage collaboration at the local level and changes to local governance arrangements. In parallel, many 14-19 Partnerships have made practical progress in the same period, although they have responded in different ways to the policy framework. While there is broad agreement on the need to build vocational provision and capacity, some localities are taking a more comprehensive view of change than is implied in the 14-19 White Paper and are following a more unified and inclusive approach.

Strongly collaborative 14-19 learning systems: Developing a local model

In the final part of this chapter we return to the model outlined in Table 1 and develop a more explicit local model (see Table 3) to reflect the changes that have occurred in

¹¹⁵ See for example Plato, P. (2006)

¹¹⁶ See LEACAN report by Tirrell, J. *et al.* (2006)

¹¹⁷ Tirrell, J. *et al.* (2006)

2005/06 and to capture the dynamics of these local developments. We conclude the paper by examining the implications of 14-19 Partnerships pursuing weaker or stronger approaches to collaboration and the factors that either facilitate or impede progress towards more strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems.

Table 3. Weakly and strongly collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems: A local perspective

Dimensions and local actions	Weakly collaborative	Strongly collaborative
<p>1. Vision, purposes and underpinning principles e.g.</p> <p>Vision statements for the curriculum and for 14-19 Partnership</p> <p>Learner entitlement statements</p>	<p>Vision statements and learner entitlements largely confined to the government agenda of providing 'alternative' learning experiences.</p>	<p>Vision statements and learner entitlements cover all aspects of 14-19 learning, including general provision, and attempt to take a more unified and integrated approach to learning.</p>
<p>2. Curriculum, qualifications and assessment e.g.</p> <p>Mapping provision</p> <p>Building progression routes</p> <p>Deciding on a diploma offer</p> <p>Strengthening vocational provision</p>	<p>Development of vocational pathways and programmes with a focus on specialist vocational provision from 14-plus for learners unable to participate in GCSEs and A Levels. A primary goal is motivating disaffected 14-16 year-olds, using college and work-based provision as an alternative curriculum and an alternative site of learning.</p>	<p>Developing holistic programmes across all types of learning with a focus on more flexible, applied and practical approaches for all learners from 14-plus. The primary goal is to broaden the general curriculum to make it more motivational and to focus strongly vocational provision post-16 and at the higher levels.</p>
<p>3. Planning, organisation and governance in 'a local area' e.g.</p> <p>LAs, LLSCs and Connexions working together to deliver the entitlement</p> <p>Forming partnerships and clusters</p> <p>Developing local prospectuses</p>	<p>Confused or contested relationships between LAs, LLSCs and providers with diminished area governance capacity. Partnerships and clusters are under-developed, external funding dependent and easily destabilised by institutional competition, institutional hierarchies and the threat of new providers.</p>	<p>Clear and accepted local governance arrangements in which there is a high degree of collaboration between LAs, LLSCs, Connexions and local providers, thus increasing governance capacity and leadership. Less institutional hierarchy and a stronger shared concept of local need with an emphasis on area planning and possible rationalisation of both provision and institutions.</p>

<p>4. Professionalism, pedagogy and leadership e.g.</p> <p>Pathfinders</p> <p>Learning Visits</p> <p>Development networks and joint CPD</p>	<p>Conformity to the government reform agenda without a strong professionally informed sense of what is required at the local level. Limited leadership, CPD and a dependence on nationally generated support mechanisms with a short-term, 'what works' approach to development</p>	<p>Strong sense of local professionalism, leadership and a shared knowledge of the area; a more reflective, longer-term, planned and locally generated approach to capacity building with a use of pooled local and national funding and a discriminating use of national resources.</p>
<p>5. Physical learning environments and communications systems e.g.</p> <p>Building new skills centres</p> <p>Building Schools for the Future</p> <p>ICT infrastructure</p> <p>Pooling funding</p>	<p>New infrastructure arrangements are driven by institutional self-interest and incentivised by national funding (e.g. vocational and ICT facilities developed on a competitive basis and dispersed across schools, colleges and work-based learning providers).</p>	<p>Development of institutional infrastructure, physical learning environments and communications to meet the needs of all learners in the local area to attain optimum efficiency. Individual institutional self-interest is subordinate to area-wide agreements.</p>
<p>6. Accountability framework e.g.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Progression targets</p> <p>Local quality assurance systems</p>	<p>National government steering mechanisms and policy (e.g. performance tables, targets and funding) drive institutional self-interest and inhibit collaboration. Little development of local accountability mechanisms to support partnership working</p>	<p>Use of new government mechanisms (e.g. 14-19 Entitlement, prospectuses and progression targets) to strengthen local accountability frameworks. Development of agreed local quality assurance systems and area-wide performance measures to increase confidence in collaborative provision and to strengthen an area-wide performance logic.</p>

Table 3 can be used to assess the progress of 14-19 Partnerships towards strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems. It is important to note that weakly and strongly collaborative approaches are not in opposition to one another, but that the latter are an extension of the former. In this sense, it might be more appropriate to see the two concepts as on a continuum, with 14-19 Partnerships currently lying at different points on this continuum in each of the six dimensions. Moreover, certain dimensions are more nationally constrained than others. In particular, the curriculum,

qualifications and assessment and accountability frameworks dimensions are strongly determined by national policy agendas and also shape the other four dimensions to a greater or lesser degree. Nevertheless, within these national constraints, 14-19 Partnerships can take a more reactive or a more proactive stance to the 14-19 agenda depending on their confidence as a partnership and their education philosophical position¹¹⁸.

The argument for partnerships to move towards a more strongly collaborative system, however, is not simply based on a particular philosophical stance on national policy. Strongly collaborative systems are also important for addressing deep-seated practical and cultural problems at the local level within the English system. Three of these stand out.

First, it is our contention that motivating disaffected learners requires more than the introduction of specialist vocational provision pre-16. Addressing disaffection has to be seen within the much broader parameters of reforming secondary education as a whole to tackle the roots of alienation rather than simply treating its symptoms. This type of reform demands a culture shift and collaboration between all practitioners, not just those running vocational programmes.

Second, in a period of financial constraint, institutions need to move towards the concept of a local learning system that shows genuine regard for the efficient use of area resources for the benefit of all learners. This may mean pooling vocational accommodation and equipment, rationalising school sixth form places and introducing a more planned approach to using employer placements.

Third, there is strong evidence that an institutional division of labour in a local area, resulting from institutional diversity and competition, exacerbates social divisions¹¹⁹. Stanton and Fletcher argue that 11-18 schools and sixth form colleges continue to offer more Level 3 provision and are able to select the most capable learners, while FE colleges are the main providers of Level 1 and 2 provision post-16. They point out that because Level 3 provision attracts higher levels of funding, the most socially advantaged continue to receive better resourcing than the disadvantaged, despite the greater needs of the latter. Citing research by NFER¹²⁰, they also point to the minimal effects of different patterns of institutional configurations on levels of participation and attainment¹²¹. They conclude, therefore, that it is important to focus on approaches to organisation that are able to deliver cost benefits and to reduce social segregation. For these reasons, Stanton and Fletcher go on to argue for a more strongly planned tertiary

¹¹⁸ See Plato, P. (2006) and case studies in Appendix III

¹¹⁹ Stanton, G. and Fletcher, M. (2006)

¹²⁰ Schagen, I., Lopes, J., Rutt, S., Savory, C. and Styles, B. (2006)

¹²¹ Stanton, G. and Fletcher, M. (2006)

system that overtly attempts to redress social differences, produces economies of scale and privileges choice of provision over choice of provider.

As we have seen, current government policy stresses the involvement of localities in the delivery of the 14-19 Entitlement. However, this chapter suggests that effective practice cannot be achieved simply by practitioner acceptance of national policy, because national constraints inhibit effective local development. The government has to appreciate that the role of practitioners should not be confined simply to implementation: professionals need to be fully involved in the whole policy process. Practitioners and employers also need to recognise their responsibility for shaping national policy. Strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems can only be achieved through proactive stakeholders working together with government in a more open, reciprocal and deliberative way to make the kind of tough decisions that are needed to ensure equitable, effective and efficient 14-19 provision in a locality.

CHAPTER 2

14-19 institutional developments in Wales in the wider policy context: Observations from an English reform perspective

Introduction

This chapter confirms the observations of other commentators that at the level of policy and governance, education arrangements in England and Wales are on a path of divergence. However, a closer examination of 14-19 developments in Wales suggests that the reform of this phase and, therefore, the degree of divergence is being constrained by a number of factors related to the small size of the Welsh education system and the continued inter-dependence between Wales and England in terms of qualifications, HE and labour markets. The result is that 14-19 organisational and institutional developments in Wales are at a very similar stage to those in England and face many of the same challenges.

From an English reform perspective we observe that the Welsh system appears to be suffering particularly from the constraining effects of curricular and qualifications features (e.g. GCSEs and A Levels), although, as we will see, this perspective is challenged by Welsh policymakers¹²². In addition, Wales faces specific challenges of pockets of high levels of socio-economic deprivation, what it sees as serious skills deficits, particularly in literacy and numeracy, rurality, the need for Welsh-medium provision and a noticeably under-developed work-based route.

We conclude that while Wales has to tackle some of its own particular needs, and it is clearly committed to doing so, the overall progress of 14-19 reform in Wales is nevertheless closely tied to developments in England. It is for this reason we advocate collaboration and mutual learning between policy, practitioner and research communities in Wales and England. In this way it may be possible to turn the reality of inter-dependence from a constraining influence to a more positive mutual learning relationship in the interests of 14-19 reform in both countries.

Section 1: Convergence and divergence

It is widely recognised that the education systems of Wales and England are diverging¹²³ with noticeable differences in policies on standard attainment tests, performance tables, the organisation of secondary schooling and the abolition of quangos (e.g. the absorption of ELWa into the WAG). The issue of distinctiveness and difference is significant because of the extent to which Welsh education has been traditionally embedded within a wider UK and English-dominated context, and the degree to which the Welsh, following democratic devolution, might define themselves according to divergence from England. Differences are also of interest to policymaking

¹²² See Egan 2006

¹²³ For example, Rees, G. (2003); Daugherty, R. (2004); Finlay, I. and Egan, D. (2004); Raffe, D. (2005); Reid, K. (2006)

in England and Wales because of opportunities for policy learning between the 'home international' systems of the UK that may be on different trajectories¹²⁴.

The exact nature of the process of divergence is, however, a matter of debate. Some argue that Wales is creating distinctive education to meet Welsh needs¹²⁵, while others see the change being on the English side, with a renewed emphasis by New Labour on neo-liberal policies¹²⁶. Policies, following the establishment of democratic devolution in 1999, could be viewed as promoting the continuity of comprehensive structures and civic social democratic values. This debate was also reflected in responses of interviewees recorded during a recent research visit to Wales.

So far, the headlines about distinctiveness and divergence have largely been captured by policies in primary and secondary schooling and HE. Less attention has been paid to 14-19 education and training because policy developments in both England and Wales are at a relatively early stage and are still evolving. Issues of comparison were also blurred, albeit temporarily, by the deliberations of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform and its proposals for a unified and inclusive 14-19 system of diplomas in England¹²⁷. These would have put Wales and England on a strong path of convergence, with the Welsh having started the piloting of the Welsh Baccalaureate (the Welsh Bac) in 2003¹²⁸. Following the publication of the 14-19 White Paper¹²⁹ in England, with its rejection of the main recommendations of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform, the retention of GCSEs and A Levels and the promotion of vocational specialised Diplomas, discussion about the different approaches of Welsh and English policymakers since Welsh democratic devolution in 1999 continues¹³⁰.

Much of the recent writing and discussion about 14-19 education and training in Wales has concerned curriculum and qualifications reform because of its influence on learning and outcomes for young people and because this is where the Welsh government has been concentrating its efforts to date – *The Learning Country*¹³¹ and, more specifically, *Learning Pathways 14-19*¹³². This chapter examines the distinct but related issue of 14-19 institutional arrangements in Wales, considered within the wider contexts of governance, qualifications reform and the policy process, because of the effects that these factors are having and will have on the next phase of development of 14-19 strategy and delivery in that country. It builds on the work on 14-19 institutional and organisational arrangements in England undertaken during the second year of the

¹²⁴ Raffe, D. and Spours, K. (2006)

¹²⁵ For example, Phillips (2003); Egan, D. (2004); Egan, D. (2005); Daugherty, R. (2004)

¹²⁶ For example, Rees, G. (2003); Raffe, D. (2006)

¹²⁷ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004)

¹²⁸ Adams, R. (2003)

¹²⁹ DfES (2005e)

¹³⁰ For example, Egan, D. (2004); Egan, D. (2005); Egan, D. (2006)

¹³¹ WAG (2001)

¹³² WAG (2002); WAG (2004a); WAG (2006a)

Nuffield Review¹³³. Drawing on an analysis of policy documents, academic literature and discussions with 15 key policymakers and 14-19 coordinators in Wales undertaken in the spring of 2006¹³⁴, we suggest that while the two countries are pursuing a somewhat different approach to curriculum and qualifications reform in the 14-19 phase, they are currently grappling with very similar implementation issues at institutional level.

Both countries organise upper secondary education in terms of a 14-19 phase with a policy focus on increasing rates of participation, achievement and progression through greater curricular choice, an emphasis on skills development and work-based learning, qualifications reform and a more personalised approach to learning, advice and guidance¹³⁵. Wales has 14-19 Networks that broadly correspond to England's 14-19 Partnerships and consortia. In both countries, schools and colleges are currently mapping provision in localities and developing progression pathways, although institutional arrangements could still be described as 'weakly collaborative' in both¹³⁶. These similarities, within a more general process of divergence, might be explained by the relatively short period of democratic devolution in Wales and the continued use in both countries of common qualifications, together with the wider effects of a UK HE and voluntarist labour market. These factors reinforce Welsh political pragmatism which, we would argue, serves to slow the more distinctive aspects of the reform process in Wales.

At the same time, there are subtle institutional differences in the two countries arising from the period before democratic devolution and still in evidence today – FE colleges in Wales, although incorporated as in England, are more broad-based and community focused; secondary schools are comprehensive with no hint of a move towards more specialisation; rurality and the focus on Welsh-language-medium education are important specificities. There are, moreover, four areas where it could be argued that democratic devolution has already had effects on 14-19 education in Wales:

- The perceived success by policymakers of the Welsh Bac pilots¹³⁷ suggests that there will be a more unified grouped award qualifications structure covering both general and vocational education in Wales, compared with the more divided individual qualifications approach to curriculum and qualifications developments in England.

¹³³ For more information on the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales see www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

¹³⁴ Quotations from the interviewees are coded W1-15

¹³⁵ WAG (2002); WAG (2004a); DfES (2005e); DfES (2006a); DfES (2006a); WAG (2006a)

¹³⁶ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2006 forthcoming)

¹³⁷ The full external evaluation is still underway but political interviewees we spoke to gave a strong indication that they wish to use the Welsh Bac more extensively.

- A broader strategy for skills development and assessment, which was described by one of our interviewees as “an inclusive approach using a combination of all six Key Skills to promote active student learning across academic and enrichment activities ...with teacher and portfolio based assessment” (W9).
- A different stance towards accountability levers and drivers, together with an emphasis on comprehensive education and greater involvement of local communities in reform, indicates that Wales could form stronger collaborative 14-19 Networks than England, where there is more emphasis on institutional diversity and competition.
- The absorption of the quangos into the WAG has arguably increased the role of democratic accountability for public services, including education.

At the level of policy intention, these developments in the curriculum and qualifications framework, organisational and institutional arrangements, the use of accountability levers and drivers (e.g. inspection, planning, funding and targets) to influence institutional behaviour and the conduct of the policy process itself, suggest that differences between 14-19 education and training in Wales and England could be more marked in a decade or so, despite their shared history and the influence of UK-wide contextual factors. However, the evidence from our policymaker and practitioner interviews indicates that this may not, in fact, become the case. At this early point in the reform process, where practical curriculum and organisational changes have to take place to make a reality of the 14-19 Pathways policy, deeper cultural, qualifications and economic constraining influences, many of which emanate from England, will affect the balance of convergence and divergence between the two countries.

Section 2: 14-19 learning, curriculum and qualifications

Learning Pathways 14-19

14-19 curriculum and qualifications reform in Wales needs to be seen within the context of broader reforms in this area, notably the Credit and Qualifications for Wales developments; the 5-16 National Curriculum Review; Key Skills development and the piloting of the Welsh Bac.

14-19 curriculum and qualifications reform is articulated through *Learning Pathways 14-19*, which comprises six key elements:

1. “Individual Learning Pathways to meet the needs of each learner
2. wider choice and flexibility of programmes and ways of learning

3. a Learning Core (skills, knowledge and, understanding, values and experiences required for all 14-19 year-olds) which runs from 14 through to 19 wherever young people are learning
4. 'learning coach' support
5. access to personal support and
6. impartial careers, advice and guidance"¹³⁸.

Together, these offer young people programmes that combine formal qualifications, non-formal awards such as Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Open College Network and Duke of Edinburgh awards and informal experiences such as residential programmes and club membership. All elements of the programme were intended to be available in 'option menus' from September 2004, supported by a WAG grant of £50,000 to each of the twenty-two 14-19 Networks. The option menus are intended to be framed within an entitlement to five broad 'domains' (creative arts and culture; maths, science and technology; business management; services to people; and humanities and languages), each of which has to be offered from Entry Level to Level 4 and in an applied and general mode. This was described by one of our interviewees as a "framework for equity across the country" (W5). The domains concept can be seen as an attempt to provide a strategy for mixing general and applied study to create broad learner programmes. Part of the funding is to ensure that the non-formal and informal aspects of the programme are published in a 'prospectus of activities' in each LA area.

It is intended that post-16 learners will be able to make a choice from four learning routes:

- *national traineeship*, which consists of a substantial work-focused and accredited element plus core and main and wider essential skills and Level 2 qualifications equivalent to five A*-Cs
- *general Level 3* leading to school or college-based Level 3 qualifications
- *combined Level 3* – a new route of study at Level 3 in school or college with extended work experience
- *modern apprenticeship* leading to work-based Level 3 qualifications.

The Welsh Bac at Advanced and Intermediate Levels is seen as an appropriate overarching award for recognising these routes. For those learners working below Level 2, there is currently a 'Springboard' programme of Foundation and Intermediate Level GCSEs, which will be subsumed in due course by a Foundation Level Welsh Bac. Each

¹³⁸ WAG (2004a), p.v

learner is intended to build his or her individual learner pathway through this system from 14-plus with the support of a learning coach and 'progress file'.

While *Learning Pathways 14-19* has been a strong participative process and has brought together a range of different initiatives, policymakers interviewed in early 2006 (e.g. W7), felt that there was now a need for a strong national strategic and operational plan to take the reforms forward. This was echoed by the 14-19 coordinators interviewed. Moreover, several interviewees were critical of the calibre of leadership below that of ministers. One policymaker summed this up with the comment, "You find some very good people in central government; you find some not so good people in central government" (W4).

The *14-19 Action Plan* published in March 2006¹³⁹ is an attempt to address these concerns with a budget of over £43 million over the period 2005-2008. The document begins with a foreword by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Davidson, which spells out in very plain language her commitment to the Learning Pathways 14-19 Programme:

This Action Plan, taken in the context of the detailed Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance II which accompanies it, should, therefore, leave no doubt about our intentions. We will now proceed further to transform the education and training opportunities available to our young people in the 14-19 age group.¹⁴⁰

Key deadlines have been set for:

- an Employers' Concordat to support increased vocational learning opportunities for 14-19 year-olds (September 2006)
- availability of the Welsh Bac at Advanced and Intermediate Levels to all 16-19 year-olds (September 2007), at Foundation and Intermediate levels to 14-16 year-olds (2009) and an entitlement to it for all 14-19 year-olds (September 2010)
- a revised KS 4 curriculum (September 2009)
- an entitlement to high quality learning support, a choice of high quality work related and general learning options and a new learning infrastructure for all 14-19 year-olds (2010).

Despite the broad conception of 14-19 Pathways, according to our interviewees many teachers and even head teachers still think of it as an initiative for those who cannot succeed in GCSEs and A Levels. As one interviewee commented, "They think of it

¹³⁹ WAG (2006a)

¹⁴⁰ WAG (2006a), p. 1

sometimes as being a project that may be for the disaffected, an alternative curriculum” (W8). Furthermore, existing qualifications continue to be seen by some as an inhibiting factor. At KS 4, as another interviewee stated:

The only way it can work in a significant way is ... if they reduce the number of GCSEs that a child takes. If a child is expected to take 10 or 12 GCSEs there is literally no place in their curriculum that they can have space to do the learning core. (W9)

The Welsh Baccalaureate

This tendency to see Learning Pathways 14-19 as an alternative curriculum switches the spotlight firmly on to the role of the Welsh Bac in producing a unified qualifications approach. Several of our WAG interviewees stated that the Welsh Bac qualification would increasingly be seen as an organising framework:

... and this is where bringing together the National Curriculum and Key Stage 4 in the Welsh Bac is the critical thing for us now ... qualifications and maybe other informal and non-formal kinds of learning experiences should all be containable within the Welsh Bac at three levels. (W7)

Currently, still in its pilot stage in 31 schools and colleges, the Welsh Bac has been offered to 16-19 year-olds at Advanced and Intermediate Levels. An independent evaluation undertaken by University of Nottingham will be published shortly. Even without this evidence, the 2006 Action Plan makes it clear that there is already an intention to pilot the Foundation Level in 2006 and to make the Welsh Bac an entitlement for all 14-19 year-olds by 2010.

While the future organising role for the Welsh Bac may be clear in the minds of high-level policymakers, at this early stage, it is not so clear or accepted on the ground. Many see it simply as a stand-alone qualification because this is the way in which it has been practised within the Welsh Bac pilots. If anything is viewed as a potential organising mechanism, it is the credit framework, which would introduce a common language for describing all types and levels of learning and then translate these into credit points. This approach was summed up by one coordinator:

I think that we need in Wales to get the credit and qualifications framework sorted out so that it is to do with points so that people can just understand that, right? ...The Welsh Bac would sit within the credit and qualifications framework. The Welsh Bac is just a... it's just a mechanism for bringing all sorts of choices together I think, and with the core and the skills agenda, to deliver a programme. The Welsh Bac is just a programme if you like. (W12)

Moreover, there were sharp differences of opinion amongst our interviewees regarding the status and role of the Welsh Bac. One enthused: “There is really impressive evidence from the schools and colleges themselves about the way it’s changing the

culture of thinking in students who are taking that route, as opposed to the traditional route” (W4). Another described it as “a bit of a damp squib ... because it has piled on top of A Levels” (W2).

These differences of opinion can perhaps be explained by the design of the Welsh Bac and its incorporation of existing qualifications. On the one hand, those schools piloting the Welsh Bac core may be producing positive changes to learner programmes and this is likely to be confirmed by the independent evaluation undertaken by the University of Nottingham. On the other, the Welsh Bac core is currently offered in addition to A Levels, which makes learners’ programmes onerous. A 14-19 coordinator remarked:

Now if you talk to the good and the great, they’ll tell you the Welsh Bac is working well and it’s all great. And you talk to these students and they’re all saying, ‘This is overload, we can’t cope.’ And that’s not just about whinging and complaining. They really do feel that... you know, they see their colleagues who might be doing four A Levels and they’re coping, and here I am trying to do two A Levels and the Welsh Bac, or three A Levels and the Welsh Bac and...’ (W14)

Some teachers are “very frightened” (W14) about the Welsh Bac learning core with its focus on all six Key Skills, imported from England’s discredited *Curriculum 2000* reform with its history of difficulties in this area, although they are more positive about the role that Key Skills can play in the 14-19 curriculum.

Finally, there are also reports that HE institutions are influencing learners’ patterns of study:

What we’ve found with the Welsh Bac, particularly at Level 3, was that young people when they started to receive offers from universities, where those universities weren’t taking any account of the core and the Key Skills, they were dropping out of the Welsh Bac and just doing their A Levels. Because that’s what was required and why not just focus on what you’re being asked for? (W9)

At this stage of the policy process, the high level of consensus about the direction of change and the potential role of the Welsh Bac within this appears to have been tempered by the continued use of existing English/Welsh qualifications and dependency on universities’ admissions policies, although some in the policy community in Wales think the picture is changing towards greater acceptance.

Vocational learning

As many of our interviewees pointed out, 14-19 Pathways requires considerable capacity building in terms of vocational education and training. One talked about “consistently under-performing” (W10) work-based learning provision which has been

highlighted by both Estyn¹⁴¹ (the Welsh equivalent of Ofsted) and ELWa's (the Welsh funding and planning organisation, equivalent to the LSC in England) Provider Performance Review process. Another interviewee illustrated the problem:

We haven't got that many training providers and the quality in some cases is absolutely excellent, but in others it's very iffy... We have to have a quality framework ... if you are promoting learning opportunities, whether through the options menu and the formal route or through the prospectus of activities and the more informal and non-formal learning settings, you cannot promote those things unless you know that young people have a quality experience and obviously that they are safe. I mean we just can't do it. We'd be strung up. (W12)

There is a recognition by both national policymakers and 14-19 coordinators that building vocational learning opportunities and supporting vocational qualifications is a key priority. In addition to challenges on the work-based route there are capacity problems with full-time vocational learning. Few schools offer a wide range of vocational qualifications because of the traditional division of labour between schools, offering GCSEs and A Levels, and colleges, offering vocational provision. The latter is seen as expensive by schools, who do not currently have the resources to offer these types of qualifications.

Developments in this area, therefore, will require extensive institutional collaboration and, as the newly appointed Director of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in Wales, highlighted in an interview for Dysg (the Welsh equivalent of the Learning and Skills Development Agency)¹⁴²:

In the 14-19-year-old area – further education in particular – it is critical to embed a more robust set of vocational opportunities and learning pathways, so that students can take on other learning or employment, to meet their needs and those of employers.¹⁴³

Both Wales and England are focusing on developing vocational capacity as a major part of 14-19 reform. In England, policy is focused primarily on the development of the new specialised Diplomas at Levels 1 to 3 as an alternative to GCSEs and A Levels.

Wales is attempting something more ambitious through a broader concept of 14-19 domain-based pathways, embracing both vocational and general learning and through a growing role for a unified baccalaureate and credit framework covering the whole of 14-19 education and training.

¹⁴¹ Estyn (2005)

¹⁴² The LSDA ceased to exist from April 2006. Part of its functions have been subsumed into the new Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning (QIA) and some have been taken over by a new private company, the Learning and Skills Network. Dysg continues to have the same function as LSDA despite being subsumed within the Welsh Assembly Government and it even continues to operate under the same name.

¹⁴³ Dysg (2006), p. 1

What our research highlights at this stage of the reform process is that this strategy is not well understood on the ground in the 14-19 Networks. Moreover, two important restraining factors – academic qualifications and the role of HE – appear to be inhibiting greater understanding of how the Learning Pathways and Welsh Bac strategies can become a powerful organising force. The development of the new English specialised Diplomas muddies the water further because of the size and composite nature of these qualifications. Welsh policymakers recognise they will have to decide whether to adopt them wholesale, as yet another set of qualification choices within the 14-19 Pathways; incorporate components of them in the Welsh Bac; work with SSCs to develop “a couple of home-grown qualifications designed with the Welsh economy in mind” or just wait and see how they go in England – “it’s early days, those specialised Diplomas have a long way to go”. (W11)

Section 3: Institutional and organisational arrangements

14-19 education and training in Wales is principally organised around LA areas with four types of partnerships playing a role in its delivery:

- Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs) with a responsibility for choices post-16
- Young People’s Partnerships responsible for youth support services for all 11-25 year-olds
- 14-19 Networks, which provide liaison between LAs, Young People’s Partnerships and CCETs to implement local 14-19 development plans and
- Community Learning Networks that use school and college premises out of normal hours for the promotion of lifelong learning.

As in England, 14-19 education and training is currently delivered by a range of providers – 11-16 and 11-18 comprehensive schools, general FE colleges, sixth form colleges (of which there are only two in Wales) and work-based learning providers. However, there is a recognition that Learning Pathways 14-19 has to be delivered through institutional collaboration in order to offer the full range of provision and progression opportunities required in each LA area¹⁴⁴. The emphasis on collaboration is seen as a wider partnership agenda, with one interviewee commenting:

Basically there’s a feeling in Wales at the moment that local authorities need to work collaboratively on certain projects and certain ideas and 14 to 19 is certainly one of them. (W6)

¹⁴⁴ WAG (2006a)

Institutions are, therefore, organised into twenty-two 14-19 Networks based around LA areas and representing all provider interests. Each Network, led in most cases by an LA official, produces an annual plan that sets the collaborative agenda for the area.

LAs therefore play a central role in 14-19 education and training, which is likely to increase with the absorption of ELWa into the WAG. According to some of our interviewees, the leading role for LAs in 14-19 education and training enjoys widespread political support. The small scale of the Welsh system means that the 22 LAs are able to meet regularly with ministers and civil servants. They have a strong voice in the policy process, which is strengthened through their membership of the powerful and active Welsh Local Government Association. As one interviewee asserted:

I mean the Assembly and local government by and large work quite closely together, they've broadly got the same interests and although there's not always consensus they do work closely together. (W6)

While LAs continue to provide the majority of funding for schools, and there is less school autonomy than in England, they do not currently have jurisdiction over colleges and work-based learning providers and have had to work in a consultative and collaborative manner with them. There are plans for LAs to be given more responsibility for post-16 reorganisation, although some interviewees questioned how far powers to rationalise provision would be exercised, given that the role of sixth forms is politically emotive and there is the added factor of Welsh-medium provision. One stated:

I mean what we really want is a radical configuration at post-16 ... I mean our preferred solution, if you push us, would be to go for a tertiary type model. We recognise that... there isn't the political will. There will be from some individual members, but it's a bit like closing a small primary school, it's very, very emotive. It's also linked up in some parts of Wales with the Welsh language, Welsh medium schools, because colleges are not good at, generally speaking, at maintaining bi-lingual education post-16, whereas Welsh medium schools are. (W12)

FE colleges and work-based learning providers are independent organisations, are currently funded differently from schools and work across a number of LA areas, catering for adult learners as well as 14-19 year-olds. Therefore, while colleges participate in 14-19 Networks, one of our interviewees claimed that they feel "marginalised", having only one representative at Network meetings and perceiving that an LA-driven agenda is predominantly school-focused. Some LAs and college principals are working together well, but the attitude of a single head teacher can make an important difference to the climate of collaboration.

In other places you've got school headmasters with the drawbridges pulled up so tight and, you know, planning new courses that cut straight across the local college's provision. (W1)

One interviewee suggested that colleges in Wales wanted their own Foster Review to look at their mission and raise their profile¹⁴⁵. Furthermore, colleges are currently losing money by offering provision for 14-16 year-olds. An outcome of this situation is college support for post-16 rationalisation and the formation of a post-16 tertiary model to drive out inefficient competition. It was argued that government would have to look beyond institutional collaboration if the broad range of policy aims were to be fulfilled:

Wales, all is collaboration, competition is a no-no. And, if the 14-19 agenda Pathways in Wales is to be delivered and if the Bac and CQFW are to be delivered and value for money and cost efficiencies, the providers have not just got to collaborate, but have to got to find new configurations for working in. So it's a much harder agenda than England ... there are four¹⁴⁶ Pathfinder projects currently reporting, consulting about structural amalgamations and statutory changes. (W1)

This position is recognised within government, partly because of the effects of demographic changes:

There are some hard decisions around here, this agenda, because we are going to have a hundred thousand kids less in our schools around by 2013 ... Which means there will have to be some rationalisation of provision. (W4)

In terms of work-based learning provision, there was an assertion by several of our interviewees, including those within the WAG, that this aspect of 14-19 education and training requires significant strengthening and reform. Some commented on the lack of employer and work-based learning provider involvement in the 14-19 agenda, which has been partly associated with the leading role of LAs in 14-19 Networks. One interviewee observed, "I do know that work-based learning providers are severely disgruntled about what's happened in 14-19 and really feel left out to a great degree." (W9)

Several of our interviewees recognised that expecting employers to participate in each of the twenty-two 14-19 Networks might not be the most productive means of engaging them. One initiative has been the appointment by the WAG of a 'skills champion', Peter McGowan, to look specifically at vocational education opportunities and the development of the Employers' Concordat. In addition, there is currently a consultation about moving the CCETs from local to regional level, in order to rationalise the number of networks at the local level and make more effective use of employer involvement.

Organisational issues also exist at the regional level, the main question being the concept of region for a country the size of Wales. The WAG is engaged in 'spatial planning', developing five regions where employers and colleges, together with HE

¹⁴⁵ Since this interview, there has been a commitment to a review of FE in Wales (WAG 2006c)

¹⁴⁶ In fact there are five.

providers, are focusing on economic regeneration. The *Making the Connections* agenda¹⁴⁷ also encourages LAs to work together to deliver certain public services. However, the regional level itself was seen by some interviewees as beginning to look “crowded” (W6) and complex (e.g. the CCETs could soon be lodged at this level); the 22 LAs are clustering in different configurations around different services; the WLGA has come up with four regions (North, South West, South East and Mid-Wales); and there are other regional groupings and configurations). Others (e.g. W3) saw the historical under-development of the regional level as the destiny of a small nation, which may have to form its main levels of governance at the national, local and community tiers (e.g. W2). In the final analysis, however, it was clear from our interviews that some form of regional coordination is necessary for 14-19 education and training in order to promote vocational education and the work-based route and to link this phase of education to the wider lifelong learning agenda.

There’s five spatial planning regions and there’s very, very strong support for this approach because you know a local authority boundary in some senses is totally artificial. (W4)

Section 4: Welsh 14-19 Networks

While the 14-19 Networks are organised around LA areas they have different coordination arrangements. The majority of coordinators are LA employees but there are other models (e.g. the appointment of consultants). Moreover, the time given to the role can differ from full time to 40 days per year.

Networks have had to produce an annual 14-19 Action Plan since 2004/05. These plans are now scrutinised by a small team from the WAG and some have been returned for improvement before being approved for funding. To date, with the six elements of Learning Pathways the major emphasis has been around two groups of themes – choice of provision (i.e. building the Options Menus and promoting wider learning), and learner support (i.e. training 10 learning coaches per LA in 2005/06). Both of these require collaboration between institutions with Careers Wales and with the CCETs.

Network coordinators meet quarterly with WAG officials to ensure a nationwide approach. However, the fact that the agenda is set nationally but interpreted locally has resulted in quite different Action Plans, ranging from strategic mapping of provision to initiative-based developments or collaboration capacity building for partners who have not worked together in the past. These varied emphases in the plans result not only from differences of capacity and history, but also from sharp differences in geography from very urban to very rural.

¹⁴⁷ WAG (2004b)

14-19 Networks have an entitlement to funding from three main sources: the LA for 14-16 activities; ELWa for 16-19 provision; and European Social Funding for particular projects for the excluded. To date, Networks have been bidding for relatively small sums of additional funding (e.g. £50K across an LA) but this is now increasing, with £8.5 million available across the country, within which funding for each authority will vary according to its size and social deprivation indices.

Support for the development of 14-19 Networks has been provided by both ELWa and Dysg and this is set to continue, even though both these organisations are being subsumed within the WAG's newly formed Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. During our interviews with policymakers and network coordinators, a number of issues arose about the arrangements for taking forward the 14-19 Pathways reform.

Some of those we interviewed in early 2006 questioned capacity to deliver in certain LA areas because of the variable calibre of local leadership, the history of competition or collaboration and the labour intensive nature of partnership working. One interviewee highlighted the resultant variability of collaborative developments:

It's incredibly patchy. Each LEA was given £50,000 and told to get on with it. It depends on the quality of the person that was appointed as a co-ordinator on the whole. It depends on whether the LEA was into really meeting the needs of learners in its area through collaboration and cooperation with other parties or whether it wanted to go with schools. (W1)

Another interviewee commented on the practicalities of partnership working:

Well it involves things like setting up partnerships, which in Wales we have a lot of them. So the formal process that you go through to set up partnership working between all these people takes time and it takes a lot of effort. And sometimes it can then be reliant on personalities working together, rather than formal structures. And that does take a long time, and there's been quite a tight time schedule on implementing the 14-19 minimum pathways that's come out of the Assembly and I think a lot of authorities do struggle with that. (W6)

A recent Estyn report¹⁴⁸ on the Learning Pathways 14-19 initiative broadly supports both these views.

Other interviewees questioned the extent to which 14-19 Networks are able to determine what is required locally. One network coordinator, for example, commented on struggles to get support for networking activities which were felt to be an immediate and necessary priority for future collaborative work.

¹⁴⁸ Estyn (2006)

What we have tried to do, and what I've been attempting to do, is to bring people together to talk. And I know the Welsh Assembly Government and ELWa, as was, have battled with me and said, 'We're not funding working groups and people just to talk,' but I'm going back to last October when I brought the curriculum deputy heads and representatives from the college together and the training provider and the Youth Service, and they said to me, 'This is the first time we have met as a group in eight years.' Now how are they going to collaborate? They hadn't even... they didn't even know what each other was doing. So how can they start to work together if they don't meet and they don't talk and they don't start to build some relationships between one another? (W14)

Despite the strong cultural theme of collaboration that came through the policy interviews, there was a feeling among the coordinators interviewed that not enough attention was being given to practitioner learning across Networks. For example, coordinators reported that they were not encouraged to share their Action Plans or to use coordinator meetings to disseminate good practice. There was a suggestion that these meetings were centrally driven and that practical implementation problems were not openly discussed.

This may be the result of a desire from the centre to push the reforms forward, to exercise the leadership that has been called for and to quantify returns (e.g. numbers of learning coaches trained and new courses provided) for what are seen to be substantial sums of WAG money. *Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance 2*¹⁴⁹, which was launched at the Wales Millennium Centre on 3 May 2006, is all about delivery and action. However, even quantifiable innovations, such as the learning coaches initiative, continue to stimulate debate. Learning coaches are seen as potentially useful for supporting young people with their learning and at transition points, but there are concerns about what the role of the learning coach is, who should take on this role, how it relates to existing personnel (e.g. form tutors, careers officers and youth workers), how it will be funded and how the demanding National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) required to become a learning coach are to be achieved in the short timescale indicated in the National Action Plan.

The network coordinators we interviewed were fully behind the 14-19 Learning Pathways strategy, but were very mindful of current and looming practical challenges. What they were calling for was a candid discussion about aspirations and limitations. There is a hope that the broad consensus generated around laudable aims, together with initiatives and increased investment, will drive change. However, what the coordinators were communicating was that practical change was still at a very early stage and that barriers to innovation would have to be faced. These are not just concerned with implementation and capacity, but also emanate from deeper cultural issues related to attainment and parental aspirations (e.g. a desire for their children to

¹⁴⁹ WAG (2006b)

take the traditional gold standard of A Levels and GCSEs) and how these are affected by powerful policy levers and drivers.

Section 5: The role of policy levers and drivers

In an era of 'governance' and the reconfiguration of relationships between the national, regional and local tiers of government, policy levers and drivers have been used to steer the behaviour of education providers¹⁵⁰. In England, key policy levers (e.g. performance measures, targets, funding and inspection) have been used by national government and its arms-length agencies to shape individual institutional decision-making and actions, while, at the same time, increasingly marginalising the role of local government. Although in the recent *14-19 Implementation Plan*¹⁵¹ and the FE White Paper¹⁵², LAs do seem to be making some kind of a comeback as 'commissioners' of services, their role is still unclear and individual schools and colleges continue to have considerable autonomy.

In Wales, however, our interviewees emphasised the continued importance of LAs and the different role played by nationally directed policy levers and drivers in that country. Our research highlights four major differences between England and Wales in this area.

First, the WAG reduced the power of some of the most divisive and competitive steering mechanisms – performance tables and differences between lecturers' and teachers' pay. Second, it deliberately did not introduce institutional structures, such as specialist schools, which would be seen as threatening the principle of comprehensive education. Third, the WAG 'softened' or made more equitable the approach of other steering mechanisms – inspection, targets and funding – while using alternative 'professionalised' measures (e.g. the introduction of a new qualifications framework and an increase in support for professional development) as a way of stimulating change in 14-19 education and training. These three measures were summed up by one of our interviewees as a "quiet revolution" (W4). Finally, some six years after democratic devolution, the WAG conducted "our bonfire of the quangos" (W10), marked in the case of education by the absorption of ACCAC (the Welsh equivalent of the QCA in England), ELWa and Dysg into the newly formed WAG Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

On the surface, the same official policy levers and drivers are present in both Wales and England – inspection, targets, planning and funding. However, one interviewee stated, "The way in which those mechanisms of regulation are operated is different in Wales." (W3)

¹⁵⁰ Steer, R., Spours, K., Hodgson, A., Coffield, F., Edward, S., Finlay, I. and Gregson, M. (2006 forthcoming)

¹⁵¹ DfES (2005a)

¹⁵² DfES (2006a)

Inspection

Inspection in Wales is undertaken by Estyn – the Office of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales – which is independent of but funded by the WAG. Estyn inspects all provision using the Common Inspection Framework and grading from 1 to 5. Interviewees suggested that compared with England, a more sympathetic and negotiated approach to inspection was taken in Wales¹⁵³. One compared the roles of Estyn and Ofsted:

So we do use the inspection process to drive the quality end of the agenda but we do it in a very supportive way as well ... I mean Ofsted I think has changed now to become much more like what we’ve been using in Wales for years and it has been delivering results. I mean Estyn’s been seen as supportive. (W4)

In addition, area inspections of 14-19 provision continue in Wales, whereas in England these have become part of broader area reviews of LA provision to reflect the expanded role for Ofsted.

Targets

Interviewees stressed the broad and high-level nature of targets, which are not designed to steer institutional behaviour directly through micro-management, but to provide general direction or aspiration and to emphasise where investment should take place. One stated forcibly:

We’re actually getting rid of most of our targets. We just think the sort of target-driven agenda is a total nonsense, to be quite honest. Targets should be in relation to where you can make the intervention. Every target should have a strategy. (W4)

The main target for 14-19 education and training is that 95% of young people by the age of 25 will be ready for high-skilled employment or HE by 2015. This is underpinned by five more detailed aspirational targets concerned with participation, qualifications attainment, skills development and indicators of learner satisfaction with the schools system¹⁵⁴. There are currently no performance measures for collaboration, but work is underway on their development, on equivalence values for different types of qualifications and on value-added indicators.

¹⁵³ See also Reid, K. (2006)

¹⁵⁴ WAG (2002)

Planning and funding

From 2007/8, there will be a single planning and funding system for post-16 learning¹⁵⁵, which is intended to be both learner centred and demand led. This document takes an 'indicative planning approach', using forecasting, better information and consultation with providers in the expectation that they will use it to make better decisions. It is intended to be light touch and to avoid national government micro-management by reducing the role of 'directive' or 'incentive' planning. Only 5% of allocated funding will be subjected to directive planning. There is a strong focus on collaboration with a Common Investment Fund and money for professional development, organised by Dysg, to support cross-institutional working. This may go some way to address criticisms that funding does not currently incentivise collaboration and there are few resources for CPD. Funding has also been used by the WAG to produce parity of pay between FE lecturers and teachers. One interviewee saw two important outcomes from this move. First, it supported institutional collaboration: "It does mean that our teachers can go to college and our lecturers can come into school and teach subjects that otherwise wouldn't be made available, without any notion of ... contravening the union" (W4). Second, parity may also reduce resistance to institutional rationalisation, because schools and colleges do not perceive national policy as having an agenda:

...that is going to attack either schools or colleges and that's why we've made the funding for schools and colleges similar through the national planning and funding system, which England has not done, and we've made the funding for the staffing similar, which England has not done. Because we feel if we can do those things we can absolutely lay to rest any notion that changes are funding driven, because they're not. The changes are ... about improving educational provision on an area basis and benefiting the learner. (W4)

However, while the way that Welsh 14-19 policy is driven may be more conducive to collaboration, interviewees pointed to three problems: the overall shortage of funding for education, particularly given the additional demands of the 14-19 reforms; the lack of efficiency associated with these reforms because of the stress on learner choice; and the fact that there is still no single funding stream for 14-19 education and training because sixth form funding continues to be channelled via LAs. In addition, while there are no official performance tables, the GCSE five A*-C benchmark is still used to judge institutional performance and continues to play a strong role in the minds of head teachers, parents, learners, LAs and the WAG itself. This has a knock-on effect on how 14-19 Learning Pathways and the Welsh Bac will work, with one policymaker pointing out the logic of accountability:

If we're going to make this Welsh Bac work at Key Stage 4, there has to be a means whereby it's in schools' interests to reduce the total number of GCSEs they expect children to take, in order to make proper room for

¹⁵⁵ ELWa (2006)

skills development in the Core. And the Minister's immediate response to that was to think about how the performance points would work. (W11)

This, however, is not an unchanging picture. There is a proposal (and a pilot) to explore a points systems to replace the five A*-C GCSE target. According to one of our interviewees, "Many comprehensive schools would want to see this as a more inclusive measure of attainment at Key Stage 4." (W9)

Section 6: Politics and the policy process in Wales

From 1999, the WAG was established and took control of education. According to Rees¹⁵⁶, following the formation of the coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in 2001, there were claims by the WAG First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, of "clear red water" between policies in Wales and England. This was underpinned by an ideological vision about how policy should be organised according to deep-seated democratic values, equality of opportunity and the state's role in guaranteeing these. Examples of a distinctively Welsh approach to policymaking in education included reducing competition between schools and a commitment to comprehensive schooling; the association of higher standards with an emphasis on the central role of the education profession; a move towards greater collaboration between the Assembly and LAs, professional groups and other employee groups; a more unified approach to 14-19 education and training; and a rejection of fees for HE. Furthermore, Rees¹⁵⁷ and Daugherty¹⁵⁸, as well as many of our interviewees, suggest that the establishment of the WAG brought about a greater openness in the policymaking process, with Assembly pressure on the Executive and its own committees to provide more open access to interest groups and to restrict the role of business interests, while at the same time promoting a powerful role for the public sector and LAs.

This is seen as consistent with a historical version of social democracy in which a drive for social justice is taken "as a given ... our culture takes that for granted" (W7) and considered to be closer to what is happening elsewhere in Europe (W3). One interviewee summed up the difference of discourse between the two countries: "In England you've got choice, contestability and the consumer. In Wales we have collaboration, the community and the citizen." (W7) Another also highlighted the desire to be different:

I think that there is a general consensus in Wales that we do want to do things differently to England. We certainly don't want to go down the road that they appear to be going down in England with the White Paper,

¹⁵⁶ Rees, G. (2003)

¹⁵⁷ Rees, G. (2003)

¹⁵⁸ Daugherty, R. (2004)

although that's open to discussion at the moment. There is definitely a feeling at the Assembly and within local government that we are a different country, we have different needs and we want to be able to reflect that in what we do with policy work, especially I think in education. I think in terms of Wales as a nation we do want to have a different policy and it's evident in everything we do. (W6)

An alternative view from within Wales is that it is England that has changed through its promotion of what has been termed the new public management and modernisation¹⁵⁹, while Wales has continued to pursue change through the traditional mechanisms of local democracy and LAs allied to strong concepts of community involvement¹⁶⁰ and not adopting English reforms:

Although many people would argue that what is happening in Wales is that this kind of new political structure is being forged in Wales, or more specifically this new education system is being forged in Wales. What I think ... what is actually being done is sustaining what has been there for ages. In other words, it is what's not happening in Wales that is significant. (W3)

With regards to England, this person went on to state: "But of course England's gone off on this kind of mad trajectory which has kind of taken it off into the wilds." (W3) Seen this way, ideological and political continuities in Wales could be regarded as 'traditions' and not as innovation. This interviewee described the effects of the new 'afforded' political spaces opened up by democratic devolution:

I think that one of the things that particularly democratic devolution has done is to, in a sense, create sort of spaces through which organisations in civil society can have a greater influence over the formulation of policy than was the case under administrative devolution. Having said all of that, however, one of the key arguments for democratic devolution was not only that those spaces would be opened up, but that the actual types of organisations that had an influence would become different ... there would be a kind of, an opening up to different kinds of grouping within civil society to have a role. Now I don't see much evidence of that latter thing happening. (W3)

This interviewee went on to argue that certain groups, particularly LAs, continue to be influential:

If you look at the kinds of organisations which have been influential ... it's the kinds of organisations that to some extent were always influential, local authorities, the inspectorate ... those on the borderline between civil society and the state if you like, but also organisations like the teachers' unions. (W3)

¹⁵⁹ Newman, J. (2001)

¹⁶⁰ Daugherty, R. (2004)

Nevertheless, the WAG itself was viewed positively, even by its critics, as having generated greater public stakeholder involvement through its strong committee process (W8) and the use of cross-party inquiries and policy development. One summed up their cumulative effects:

So through those sorts of processes a lot of interest groups, individuals, organisations have tramped through committee sessions and felt they'd been involved and engaged in a process of some kind. (W2)

The relatively open political process in Wales, described as "genuine openness", is partly the result of the small scale of Wales, but also the accessibility of ministers. One interviewee stated: "I wouldn't have any qualms about emailing Jane Davidson and I get replies." (W3) Another remarked on their visibility and the longer-term potential civic effect:

I mean you've got a dozen or so ministers that are out and about day in, day out, opening this, cutting that ribbon, making speeches and things. So I think, whereas in terms of influence and engagement in policy and policy development and argument, it is inevitably confined to what you might call a political class of, you know, politicians and lobbyists, interest groups and so on, there is wash-out to a wider sort of audience. I mean ... we are in the process of building a civic culture ... which in relation to Wales is quite new. (W2)

There also appeared to be extensive support for the Education Minister herself, who throughout the interviews was described in such positive terms as "outstanding", "a good minister" and "superb". She was seen as representing stability, having been several years in post; as sympathetic to practitioners because of her own teacher, youth worker and local councillor background; and as highly visible and proactive, having toured Wales for a year listening to views before producing *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19*¹⁶¹. Subsequently, over 170 people were involved in seven 'Task and Finish' groups and several of our interviewees stressed, time and again, the benefits of a consensual and consultative approach to the 14-19 strategy with one stating, "The policies again are widely shared, widely owned and it is the great success of the devolution project so far." (W8)

The level of consensus about the WAG's approach to education even appeared to pervade the media in Wales, which was described by one interviewee as prepared to question the deliverability of certain policies, but not to question the education 'project' itself. With regards to 14-19 policy he stated:

I mean the press, well the Western Mail particularly, were concerned about too much jargon which, you know, is fair enough. I think that was a fair point but really there was no attack on the substance of it. (W8)

¹⁶¹ WAG (2002)

This distinctiveness from England manifests itself in policy documents too. *Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services in Wales*¹⁶² sees collaboration between institutions and co-operation with citizens rather than competition between providers as a means of delivering effective services:

Our experience shows that improving service delivery will be achieved by more co-ordination between providers to deliver sustainable, top quality, responsive services, rather than by increased competition between providers.¹⁶³

14-19 policies take a broader view of the role of education and training than those in England. According to *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19*¹⁶⁴, education aims "...to sustain the country with a strong and vibrant economy, and a lively cultural and sporting life." And the 14-19 Action Plan associates improving the performance of all 14-19 year-olds with a desire "to advance the cause of social justice"¹⁶⁵.

Abolishing quangos in Wales also marks a significant and controversial move away from the English style of arms-length governance. As ELWa, Dysg and ACCAC all move into the WAG, there will be attempts to bring about a greater integration of the organisation of 14-19 learning within the newly formed Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, as part of the *Making the Connections* agenda¹⁶⁶. This move can be viewed as part of the process of reinforcing democratic accountability and reforming the 'quango state'. Some of our interviewees, who were officials of national agencies which have since been subsumed into the WAG, viewed this policy as positive because they saw themselves being able to take a seat 'at the policymaking table', with a prospect of greater policy coordination and a single point of contact for the wider public.

A key question is the degree to which more democratically accountable and integrated forms of governance will affect 14-19 developments both nationally and locally. As we have argued, effects of such changes may be limited by external factors, which continue to tie Wales to England, such as qualifications, HE and labour markets, as well as new 'internal' factors raised by interviewees. These internal factors revolve around whether absorption of agencies into WAG will produce the desired level of accountability and responsiveness, as well as economies of scale. Interviewees articulated a number of concerns about the new department: the possible politicisation of decision-making; the development of a "civil service" low-risk mentality rather than a more entrepreneurial and experimental approach; its size, which might make it too big to be responsive; and the fact that it might be less accountable than the current arms-length agencies. The following two comments illustrate these arguments:

¹⁶² WAG (2004b)

¹⁶³ WAG (2004b), p. 4

¹⁶⁴ WAG (2002), p. 5

¹⁶⁵ WAG (2006a)

¹⁶⁶ WAG (2004b)

A number of the fiercest advocates of democratic devolution in the referendum campaign argued against that, saying that having made these bodies accountable to the Assembly that was enough, you didn't have to absorb them actually into the Assembly Government, that actually there were lots of good reasons why these should remain as arms-length institutions. (W3)

But more importantly the Boards of these organisations were regularly parading in front of Assembly committees, justifying what they were doing and so there was strong accountability. What happens when the same functions get absorbed into the civil service? Are the civil service parading before the Assembly committees on a regular basis? Of course not. So in actual fact the accountability's going to be, paradoxically, reduced by this process." (W2)

On a more positive note, there was a suggestion by more than one of our interviewees that while there is strong leadership at ministerial level, this may be less present within the civil service, and one of the ways of strengthening this second tier of government was to bring officials from the quangos into the WAG.

The WAG and, particularly Jane Davidson, who describes herself as an "evidence-based minister", have prided themselves on the practice of evidence-based policymaking. The Welsh Bac, for example, has been evaluated by the University of Bath and now the University of Nottingham and the Foundation Phase is currently being evaluated by the Institute of Education, University of London's Effective Pre-School and Primary Education Team. While, as we have stated earlier, interviewees stressed the more open form of government, there is some scepticism among academics¹⁶⁷ and think-tanks about the WAG's willingness and ability to conduct this type of policymaking. One interviewee suggested that what the WAG was actually doing was "getting people's views, talking to stakeholders. Well, and of course there is a sense in which that is research, but it's not really what we would call evidence based... what I would expect us to understand as evidence-based policy." (W3) This person went on to argue that: "Civil servants were saying, 'We don't...really look at the evidence you know, we've no capacity to do so.'" (W3) Several remarked on the powerful political impetus behind policymaking and one went as far as to say: "I think we lack a culture of strong, independent evaluation in terms of policy and outcomes." (W2) There were also calls for a stronger political opposition and more openness to failure.

Conclusion

In the 2002 annual lecture to the National Centre for Public Policy at the University of Wales, Rhodri Morgan, WAG First Minister, claimed that the Labour administration in

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Daugherty, R. (2004)

Wales had put “clear red water” between it and the policies of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in relation to the objectives of social policy:

The Welsh way is, and will continue to be, rooted in collectivist values and aimed at equality of opportunity and outcome for all citizens rather than on individually oriented, consumerist approaches.

At this point, the phrase “clear red water” was seen as a political device to reposition the Labour Party in Welsh politics and to see off the electoral challenge from Plaid Cymru¹⁶⁸. Since then, within policy circles in Wales, there has been a greater emphasis on ‘Welsh solutions for Welsh problems’. This approach does not suggest gratuitously diverging from English policy, but rather taking a pragmatic approach, which may include adopting English policies when these are felt to be useful in the Welsh context and to play down rifts between Cardiff and Westminster. As one Welsh policymaker commented:

It is, therefore, a moot point as to whether education policy in Wales can be defined by its divergence from England. It is diverging, but its defining nature is not necessarily the contrasts that may be made with England. The policy trajectories along which Wales is developing are seen to be rooted in its indigenous historical and cultural values and an increasing interest in international experience.¹⁶⁹

In terms of the reform of 14-19 education and training, the concept of ‘Welsh solutions for Welsh problems’ has been very much in evidence, with a balancing act between the learner choice agenda, which to some extent mirrors policy in England; developing the Welsh Bac, which definitely does not; and supporting institutional collaboration, which is common to both countries but is being pursued in a somewhat different way in each.

We see the factors facilitating and inhibiting reform as finely balanced. The area in which the WAG has been able to make its mark has been in what might be termed the ‘governance/policy process nexus’, with an emphasis on comprehensive organisation; a continued strong role for local governance; a focus on collaboration rather than competition; the weakening of divisive policy levers and a consultative and participative approach to decision-making involving the education profession. This potentially constitutes a distinctively Welsh strategy which may be capable of achieving greater professional buy-in to 14-19 reform than the approach in England. The cumulative effects of this strategy are likely to place it on a path of divergence with England.

However, our interviews with those involved in the 14-19 Pathways reform suggest that this distinctive approach to policymaking at the national level may not be fully replicated or experienced at local level. It may be that the deliberative and consultative strategy, which has worked so well in the early phases of the reform process, may not

¹⁶⁸ Davies, S. (2003)

¹⁶⁹ Egan, D. (2006), p. 2

be so effective in the current phase of development when action that goes against traditional institutional behaviour is required at local level. It is certainly an open question how much collaborative work can be done through consensus and whether there will now have to be a more directive approach to 14-19 Pathways reform. We would suggest that there needs to be greater discussion of the very real practical challenges that 14-19 network coordinators report on the ground, many, if not all of which, are also proving difficult for those implementing 14-19 reform in England. Practitioners, policymakers and researchers from England and Wales would, we suggest, all benefit from this type of debate and problem-solving activity, which the independent Nuffield Review is in a strong position to facilitate.

Moreover, there are significant deeper inhibiting factors for 14-19 reform in Wales which link it to England. The most important include continued use of common qualifications, the UK-wide nature of the HE sector and labour market and small country size. These suggest that important decisions will have to be made in Wales in the coming years with regards to three fundamental structural issues, which are equally if not more pressing in England¹⁷⁰: how far to rationalise institutional structures rather than just creating collaborative networks of existing providers; how far to go in creating a distinctive and inclusive qualifications system; and, in the longer term, how to address the UK-wide weaknesses of work-based learning, skills development, lack of employer engagement and a voluntarist labour market.

Policy divergence between Wales and England has been a dominant theme both in recent research literature and in these interviews. What emerges from our observations on 14-19 developments in Wales from an English reform perspective, however, is not just the concept of divergence, but the issue of inter-dependence. Welsh innovation in the policy process and in governance offers an example to England of creating consensus through a more social democratic trajectory. However, Wales may not be able to sustain such a path on its own when it comes to the challenges of implementation – the price may simply be too high and the constraining factors too powerful. Resolving this Welsh issue, in our view, may require a future focus on reform in England and a re-opening of the debates about a more inclusive and unified 14-19 phase for both countries. If, in 2008, the review of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications policy in England were to address the barriers to reform posed by GCSEs and A Levels, the benefits would not only be felt in England but in Wales too. As a result, we argue Learning Pathways 14-19 would have a better chance of realising the balance and flexibility it currently seeks.

¹⁷⁰ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2004)

Part II

Progression

Part II: Progression

Overview

Part II of this report examines two areas of intensive policy intervention over the past decade: progression from 14-19 education and training, to HE and the labour market.

Chapter 3 focuses on the young people classified as NEET or in jobs without training (JWT), and discusses this situation in the context of participation rates that remain moderate and relatively static, despite the raft of policy initiatives aimed at raising post-compulsory participation.

The first section of the chapter outlines the statistical background, showing the changes in young people's employment and educational status at 16/17, between 1992 and 2003. The next one looks behind these headline statistics to describe in more detail the characteristics and circumstances of those young people classified as NEET or in JWT. The final section examines wider policy implications, and mismatches between the following three levels: policy formation, individual and institutional actors, and system behaviour. These mismatches are part of the reason why policy is unlikely to achieve its targets, such as the 90% participation rate by 2015. The chapter questions current policy assumptions, as well as assumptions about young people classified as NEET, and identifies partial and/or fragmented understandings that influence 14-19 education and training policy.

This chapter finds that, despite recent policy busyness the problems identified in last year's report persist. The raft of initiatives over the past decade has involved high transaction costs, but has only achieved modest increases in participation rates. We propose that this may have to do with the over-emphasis at policy level on participation rates, and the lack of appropriate attention to retention and attainment. Further, the heterogeneous group classified as NEET may be a policy priority, but arguably the diverse needs of young people in this group have been partially misconstrued. The evidence reviewed suggests that there are further groups that may be as much in need of policy attention as the NEET – for example, young people who enter JWT at 16/17. Finally, the intended changes in the system cannot be effected purely by continuing supply-side reform, in the absence of appropriate recognition of demand and of the wider context.

Chapter 4 focuses on the articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE. It examines current policy interventions that aim to increase participation and widen access. Quantitative data on the changing nature of HE and entry to it are presented. In addition, labour market and wider benefits from participation in HE are outlined, as well as the different entry routes into HE, and rates of retention and attrition.

This chapter examines the articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE, the direction of travel of policy (towards increased participation and widening access) and policy interventions designed to achieve these aims. It identifies positive developments and achievements. For many young people, the process of articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE is relatively smooth. Participation has increased and HE is currently attractive to large numbers of young people.

However, other young people encounter a range of obstacles, and attempts to widen access have met with only partial success. The chapter argues that improving articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE requires multiple, and interconnected, interventions in many areas, both within and outside the realm of education and training.

CHAPTER 3

Working for their future? Young people outside education and training

Introduction

Despite a raft of educational policy measures, initiatives and schemes, the proportion of young people outside the education and training system at ages 16 and 17 has remained almost constant, as demonstrated in the previous two Annual Reports. It is these young people, who are often presented as a significant social policy 'problem', who are the focus of this chapter. In what follows we shall attempt to account for the complexities behind the headline statistics. The problem is complex and the evidence fragmented, and therefore we resisted the temptation to impose any artificial coherence.

The narrative thread of this chapter is that, for a variety of reasons, the 14-19 education and training system is not performing as the policymaking process seems to have intended. This is made clear in Section 1 because of the stubborn refusal of the 16-18 participation rates to inch much above 76% (much less soar towards the ambition of 90% participation by 2015), even though increasing participation is an explicit policy aim, which has been pursued with a number of policy initiatives. The evidence suggests that this is a tough policy nut to crack. The small improvements in participation rates in recent years have been bought at the cost of heavy investment in programmes such as the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and apprenticeship. Whether such investment represents value for money remains an open question.

Section 2 shows the complexity and stubborn continuity of the issues concerning the group of young people classified as NEET. It is perhaps in this section that the fragmented nature of the evidence is most apparent, in acknowledgement of the complexity and heterogeneity of the issues under investigation. This group is that identified as being most at risk of long-term social exclusion in the context of the 'scarring' effects of early classification in this group with regard to later employment opportunities and life chances. This heterogeneous 'group' includes young people with a broad range of personal, medical, socio-economic, psychological, familial and criminal characteristics. The needs of this 'group' in terms of education and training provision and support are highly complex, and there can be no single solution to engaging or re-engaging these young people with education and training. Indeed, education and training solutions may not suffice or be the most appropriate response to their respective needs¹⁷¹.

Section 2 also calls into question the policy emphasis on the 'NEET group', because this discourse implies a homogeneity that simply is not there – this statistical classification covers a wide range of results, symptoms and causes of disengagement, disaffection and withdrawal from education and training and/or employment. The policy emphasis

¹⁷¹ The group of young people classified as NEET increased from 10% of the 16-18 year-old cohort in 2004 to 11% in 2005, or 220,000 young people, according to provisional figures from the DfES. See DfES (2006f).

on this 'group' of individual routes into NEET classification runs the very real risk of neglecting those young people who are at risk of social exclusion, but not yet excluded. The most recent statistics on 17 year-olds in England seem to indicate this could be occurring, as the percentage of 17 year-olds classified as NEET rose from 9% in 2004 to a provisional figure of 11% in 2005¹⁷². This is linked to the issues raised in Section 1 – policy may not be sufficiently recognising the complexity of the youth labour market, and the current changes occurring within it. As the proportion of 17 year-olds classified as NEET has increased, the proportion of 17 year-olds in the NET group (in work, but not in education or training) has decreased, indicating perhaps a move by some 17 year-olds from JWT to classification as NEET, rather than back into education and training. For these young people, effective support for a 'second chance' engagement with education and training, and lifelong learning which is a concrete reality, rather than a rhetoric which passes them by, is essential.

Section 3 argues that policy targets and/or ambitions, such as the 90% participation rate of 17 year-olds, or the reduction in the proportion of the NEET group by 2% by 2010, are unrealistic, and the policy instruments chosen ineffective, to a certain extent at least. The individual initiatives, while showing some successes, such as the EMAs, have not produced the desired effects. Indeed, such financial inducements alone cannot be expected to do so. Instead, a broader approach is needed, including continuing professional development of teachers, effective guidance at schools and colleges¹⁷³, appropriate curriculum development, sustained support for young people at risk of social exclusion, as well as for those who are already, for a variety of different reasons, socially excluded, and more joined-up policy thinking, in terms of the ages of young people, the institutions they attend, the informal support they need and their differing backgrounds. Further, the serial reform of qualifications¹⁷⁴, to be continued with the introduction of specialised Diplomas in 2008, has also not had the desired effect in terms of raised participation. Again, this is hardly surprising, as over-emphasis on the reform of a single element of a system of education and training, without full regard to the other constituent elements, cannot be expected to achieve the desired increase in participation rates.

The three sections in this chapter – system behaviour, actors and policy formation – are linked together by the device represented in Figure 1, to which reference will be made throughout the chapter. Section 1 argues that the measures and proxies of system behaviour, identified in the lower rectangle in Figure 1 below, show that participation rates in the system, the increase of which is a declared and explicit policy aim, have not

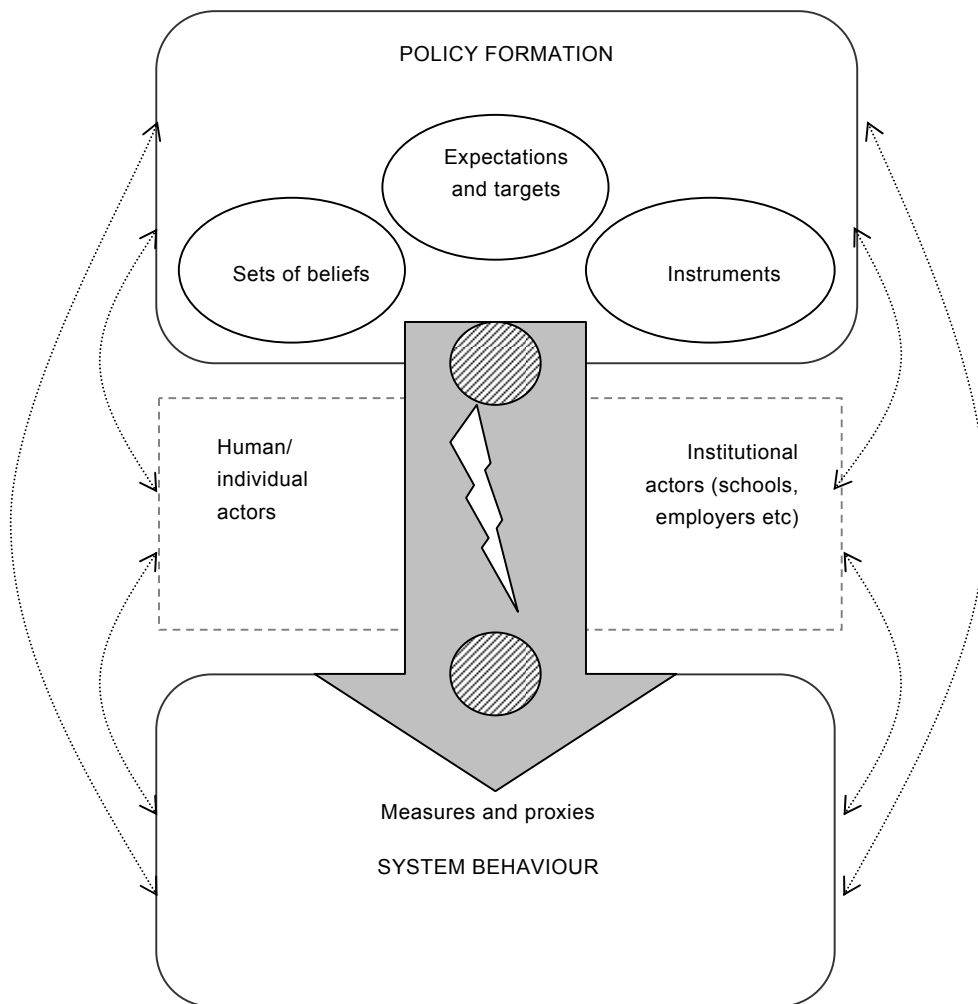
¹⁷² DfES (2006f)

¹⁷³ See Foskett, N. (2004); Morris (2004)

¹⁷⁴ See Ecclestone, K. (2006), p. 1: "Despite a great deal of activity in post-14 assessment over the past 30 years, preoccupation with the technicalities of repeated overhauls to qualifications and assessment systems have detracted from serious public debate about what subject content and learning outcomes a coherent 14-19 system should assess and about the impact of assessment on attitudes to learning and achievement."

improved significantly. Section 2 is based on the level of individual and institutional actors identified in the middle rectangle of Figure 1 below, focusing on the young people themselves and on employers. Section 3 analyses these issues based on the level of policy formation, the upper rectangle of Figure 1.

Figure 1. Policy formation, actors and system behaviour¹⁷⁵



¹⁷⁵ The dark arrow represents the expectation that policy implementation will carry policy intentions into system behaviour, provided instruments are used as prescribed. The striped circles and the jagged arrow indicate that this might not be the case, and that implementation is never straightforward, but is crosscut through actor interpretations, expectations etc. There are therefore many areas of potential mismatch between the expectations and behaviour of the three levels. The dotted arrows point to complex inter-related influences that cannot be controlled by policy, but need to be taken into account. Section 3 will explore further this line of argument.

Section 1: Engagement with the labour market at 16-17

Changes in social and economic policy and the expansion of post-compulsory provision in England and Wales in the 1980s appear to have had a marked effect on the opportunities available to young people on reaching the end of compulsory schooling. The combined effect of the collapse of the youth labour market, the introduction of youth training schemes, changes in state benefits, the declining size of the age cohort, changing social and parental aspirations and expectations, together with the expansion of FE opportunities resulted in a dramatic increase in the proportion of 16 to 19 year-olds deciding to stay in education longer¹⁷⁶. These trends have been fully documented in the two previous Annual Reports of the Nuffield Review. To emphasise the fundamental shift in the pattern of participation that occurred in the 1980s consider the following: in 1973/74 33% of male and 37% of female 16 year-olds remained in full-time education, compared with 70% of male and 76% of female 16 year-olds in 1993/94¹⁷⁷. In a comparison of the 1986 and 1998/9 Cohorts, Croxford *et al.*¹⁷⁸ show the following main activities at 16 and 18:

Table 4. The main activities of 16 year-olds in the 1986 and 1998/9 Youth Cohort Studies

	1986 Cohort	1998/9 Cohort
Main activity at age 16		
Full-time education	42%	72%
Full-time job	22%	9%
Government-supported training	26%	9%
Unemployed	8%	5%
Other	2%	4%
Main activity at age 18		
Full-time education	20%	41%
Full-time job	63%	31%
Government-supported training	3%	8%
Unemployed	8%	7%
Other	6%	13%

Source: Croxford *et al.* (2006, Table 1, p. 8)

¹⁷⁶ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Keep, E., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wright, S. (2004); Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wilde, S., Wright, S. (2005)

¹⁷⁷ Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (1997)

¹⁷⁸ Croxford, L., Howieson, C., Iannelli, C., Raffae, D. and Shapira M. (2006), p. 8

Where do all the learners go?

The best, though imperfect, source of information about the trajectories of young people after the age of 16 is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS)¹⁷⁹. In addition, data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) can be used to gain some insight into the sorts of jobs that 16 and 17 year-olds are undertaking. Finally, administrative data can be used to give an aggregate picture of what young people are doing, in terms of education and employment activity at the ages of 16, 17 and 18.

Figure 2 provides a snapshot of participation in education, training and employment among 16, 17 and 18 year-olds for two years – 1992 and 2003¹⁸⁰ – based on administrative data for England¹⁸¹. All figures in normal font relate to 1992, all those in italics are for 2003. Black figures indicate values for 16 year-olds, blue for 17 year-olds and red for 18 year-olds.

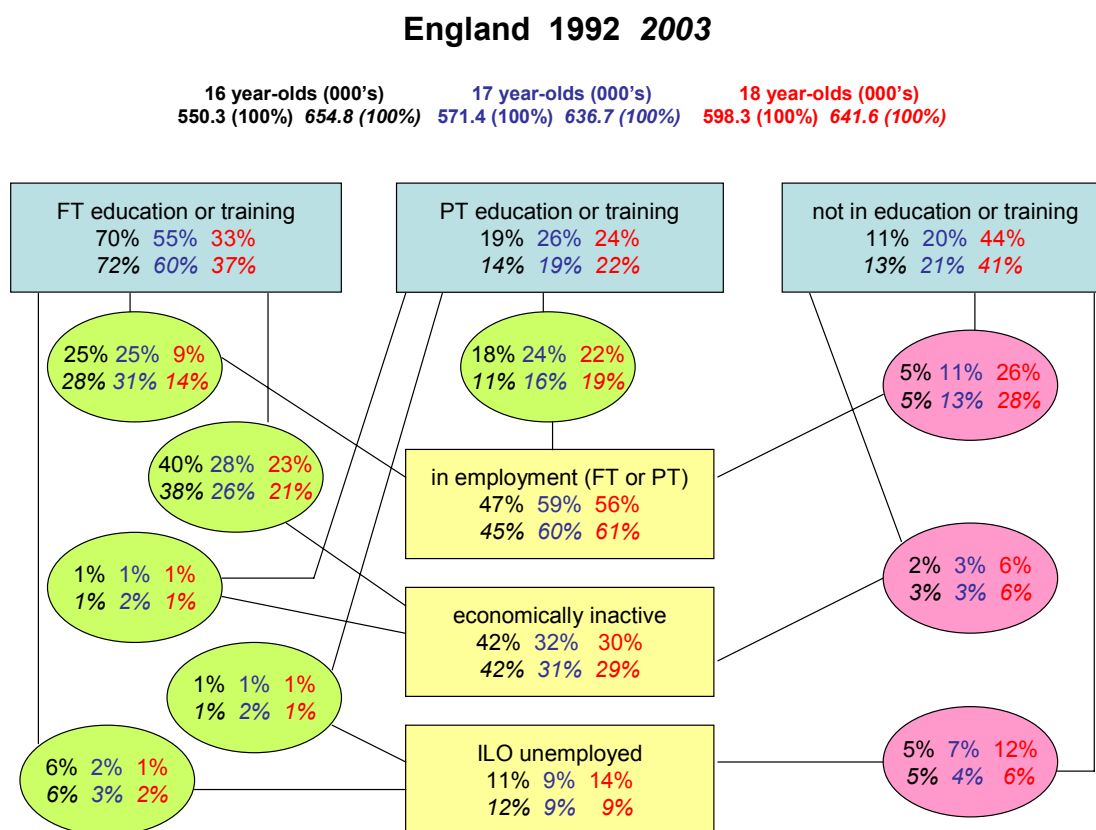
The top line in the Figure indicates the size of each age cohort (in thousands) for the two years in question. Notice that the size of each age cohort increased between 1992 and 2003. For example, the number of 16 year-olds in England increased from 550,300 to 654,800. The next line of boxes indicates the proportions of each age cohort participating in either full- or part-time education or training, and the proportion not in education or training. Note that the proportion of each age cohort in full-time education increased between 1992 and 2003 but the proportion in part-time education and training decreased, the result of a sharp decrease in participation in the work-based route. The proportion of 18 year-olds not in education and training declined, the result of increasing participation in HE. However, it is the 16 and 17 year-olds that concern us in this section. The evidence indicates that the proportion of these age groups not in education and training increased since 1992 as the economy recovered from recession. Taking account of the increase in the size of the age cohort over the time period this means that considerably more 16 and 17 year-olds were not in education and training in 2003 than in 1992 – the complete opposite of what government policy over the last decade intended for these age groups.

¹⁷⁹ See Croxford, L. (2006). A particular problem for this review is the very small sample size for Wales. Other problems include the fact that: "...lack of continuity and comparability in commissioning and design have reduced the value of the youth cohort surveys as an evidence base." (p. 1). Croxford also comments on the need for a long view in the survey design, rather than a focus on short-term impacts.

¹⁸⁰ These two years were chosen for the following reasons: 2003 because it is the most recent year with reliable and validated data, and 1992 because participation peaked at its highest level in that year.

¹⁸¹ Similar data cannot be found for Wales but there is no reason to believe that the general patterns reported here for England do not apply to Wales.

Figure 2. Participation in education, training and employment among 16-18 year-olds: 1992 and 2003



The figures in the pink ovals on the right hand side of the diagram show that, of those young people who are NET, the majority of 16, 17 and 18 year-olds were labour market active, either in employment or actively looking for work (ILO unemployed) in both 1992 and 2003. The proportion of 17 and 18 year-olds who are unemployed¹⁸² declined over the time period, while the proportion of 16 year-olds in this category remained constant. The proportion in each age group who are both NET and economically inactive has remained the same and this is the group about which we know the least. The yellow rectangles provide information on labour market status. Note that almost half of 16 year-olds and about 60% of 17 year-olds are in employment, either full time or part time¹⁸³. This means that undertaking paid work was a feature of the lives of more than half of 16 and 17 year-olds in England and Wales in 2003.

¹⁸² ILO unemployed indicates that a young person has been actively seeking work in the four weeks before the survey.

¹⁸³ See Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2001)

The data for 2003 are the most accurate data currently available. They indicate, therefore, that those who are NET at 16 and 17 are labour market active and the likelihood of being in employment as a 16 and 17 year-old who is not in education or training increased between 1992 and 2003 as the economy grew. The majority of these young people will be relatively poorly qualified, and so this trend is indicative of an increase in the supply of low-skilled jobs that these young people can fill over the time period. The number of such jobs has increased and so it is reasonable to assume that it is economically efficient for employers to fill them with 16 and 17 year-olds who can be paid a lower minimum wage. In a sense, then, there appears to be a mutually reinforcing contract between young people and employers which continues to encourage a significant minority of 16 and 17 year-olds to leave the education and training system.

The LFS tells us something about those who are in employment at 16 and 17 years of age though sample sizes are small. Secondary analysis¹⁸⁴ of the survey shows that of the 339 16 and 17 year-olds in the LFS dataset from June 2004 to August 2005, 18% were economically inactive, 22% were in constant employment, 1% was consistently unemployed and 59% moved into and out of employment and active and inactive unemployment. There were no gender differences. Of those with valid occupations, the largest percentage were working as sales and retail assistants followed, in order, by retail cashiers, kitchen/catering assistants and waiters/waitresses. The survey showed that the hourly rate of pay was higher for those in full-time education and part-time employment than for those working full time and apprentices¹⁸⁵.

More recent administrative data for 2004/05 are available, but in the case of 2005, the data remain provisional: experience suggests the values are likely to change. Nonetheless, these data indicate little if any change in overall participation rates and the segmentation of each age cohort into different descriptive categories. We illustrate these small changes using 17 year-olds whose participation rate is now seen as being the litmus test for the overall performance of the post-compulsory system.

- Between 2004 and 2005, participation in full-time education increased from 60% to 63%. However, this was offset by a decline of 2% in participation in part-time education and training delivered via the work-based route. Thus, the overall increase in participation rates is of the order of 1% for this age group.

¹⁸⁴ Hall, J. (2006)

¹⁸⁵ The type of employment undertaken by 16 and 17 year-olds may also be affected by the possibility that: “...over time given levels of schooling and given sorts of occupations simply become culturally associated with each other.” Bills, D. B. (2005), p. 77.

- The proportion not in education and training but in employment decreased from 12% to 9%, with a concomitant increase from 9% to 11% of 17 year-olds being classified as NEET.
- The largest change is in the proportion in full-time education who are labour market inactive, up from 26% to 31%.

Interpreting such small changes based upon provisional figures is fraught with difficulty. Nonetheless, two general points can be made. First, despite a major curriculum change (Curriculum 2000) intended to provide greater choice and flexibility in full-time education, a relaunch of apprenticeship, the development of new active labour market policies such as E2E and a financial incentive (EMA) , participation rates have shown, at best, only a small increase¹⁸⁶. Regaining the dramatic growth in participation rates seen in the 1980s, needed to hit the government target of 90% participation among 17 year-olds by 2015, seems a forlorn hope.

Second, these figures raise questions about what is happening within education, training and employment for 17 year-olds, with indications that 17 year-olds in employment without education or training may be moving into unemployment, rather than education and training. This could be because of displacement in the labour market from students working part time and migrant workers. In any case, it is clear that the 90% participation ambition of the *14-19 Implementation Plan* already seems almost impossible to achieve.

This is rooted in the unrealistic nature of the ambition – changing a system with stable but moderate rates of participation at around 76% to one with participation rates of 90% is a tall order when the proportions of both young people classified as NEET and those in employment without any education or training are taken into account. In the 2005 figures, these groups account for 11% and 13% of 16-18 year-olds, respectively. These groups need different, and varied, types of provision and support to facilitate their participation, retention and attainment in post-compulsory education. It is difficult to visualise policy interventions that would either address both groups in some way (accounting for around half of each group), or fully engage either one of these groups in education and training – which would need to happen in order to come close to achieving the 90% participation ambition.

So, this ambition may be based on a misinterpreted target, as it ignores the dynamics of the labour market, and the effects the labour market may have on the participation of young people in education and training. After all, the percentage of the 16-18 cohort

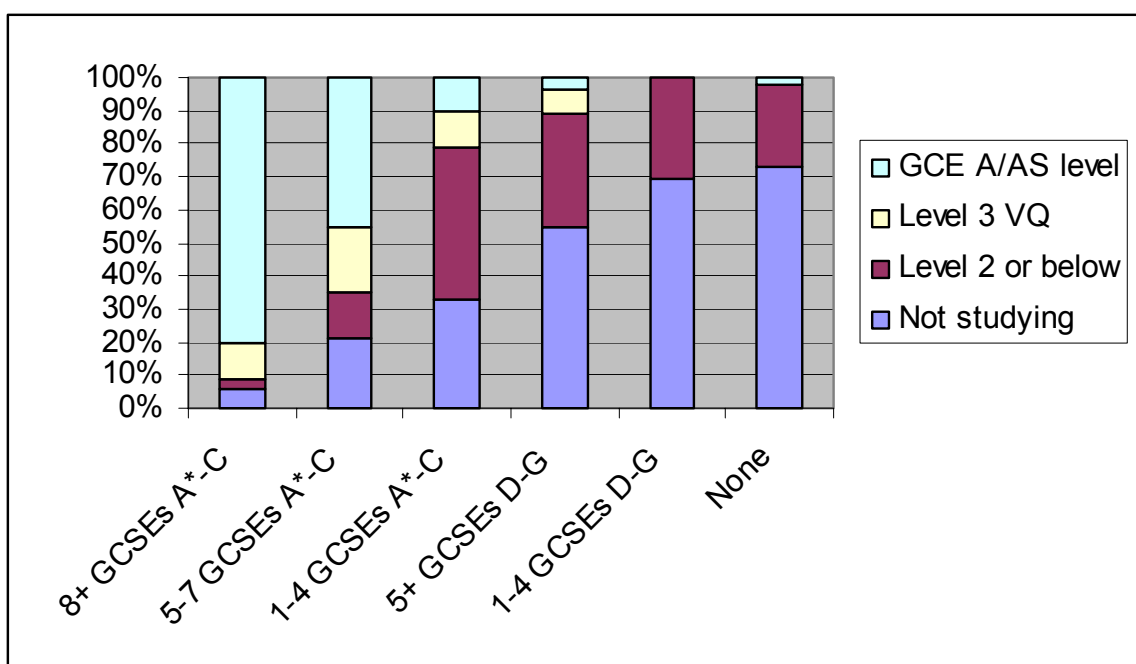
¹⁸⁶ See Maguire, S. and Thompson, J. (2006)

in employment without any education or training (13%) **exceeds** the proportion of the 16-18 cohort classified as NEET (11%) in the 2005 provisional figures¹⁸⁷.

Characteristics of those outside the education and training system at 16

Analysis of the YCS indicates that the key determinant of participation after the age of 16 is attainment at the end of compulsory schooling (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Main study aim of 16 year-olds by Year 11 attainment, England and Wales 2004



Source: DfES (2005f)

Clearly, there is some level of non-participation across all levels of attainment but the rate increases sharply with declining attainment. In interpreting Figure 3 it is important to keep in mind that the proportion of 16 year-olds in each attainment band varies widely (see Table 5). This means that while the proportion not in education or training is greatest for those with one to four GCSEs at D-G or none, the greatest number of young people not in education or training at 16 have five or more GCSEs at D-G, a level of attainment that would enable them to access Level 1 and 2 FE provision and Level 2

¹⁸⁷ In Scotland, there is also a continuing policy concern about this group of young people. Raffe, D. (2003b) states that 31% of young people in Scotland were classified as NEET *at one or more time points* during the three years after the end of compulsory schooling, and more than half of these were unemployed. The proportion of young people classified as NEET at any one time varied from 5% to 16%.

apprenticeships. Thus the challenge is to explain not just non-participation by the least qualified but also by those with a reasonable level of attainment by the end of compulsory schooling. This must consider how factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender and parental education affect the probability of a young person remaining in education and training after the age of 16 and transitions into the labour market.

Table 5. Percentage of the sample falling into each attainment band

Grades	% of the sample
8-plus GCSEs A*-C	38.6
5-7 GCSEs A*-C	15.4
1-4 GCSEs A*-C	23.2
5-plus GCSEs D-G	15.7
1-4 GCSEs D-G	3.3
None	3.7

Source: Source DfES (2005) SFR 04/2005 Youth Cohort Study: The Activities and Experiences of 16 year-olds: England and Wales 2004

Analysis of the YCS over time has consistently shown that in addition to educational attainment at 16, structural factors influence a young person's journey beyond compulsory education¹⁸⁸. Other things being equal¹⁸⁹, young people have a lower probability of remaining in education and training at 16 if they are male, white and from lower socio-economic groups, have parents with low educational attainment, come from poorer backgrounds¹⁹⁰ and have a history of truanting during compulsory schooling. Most of these findings are unsurprising and are indicative of continuing inequalities of access to learning despite a decade of social policy to address this problem. There is contradictory evidence about whether educational inequality has declined, stabilised or increased over time.

In terms of their journey after the age of 16, the majority of those not in education or training at 16, 17 and 18 are labour market active¹⁹¹ and in employment (see Figure 2). Encouragingly, the proportion who are unemployed has declined over time, presumably as the labour market has tightened following recovery from recession in the early 1990s. However, there is wide geographical variation in unemployment rates among this age group. The proportion who are labour market inactive has remained more or

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Payne, J. (2004); Coles, B., Hutton, S., Bradshaw, J., Craig, G., Godfrey, C. and Johnson, J. (2002)

¹⁸⁹ This *ceteris paribus* condition arises from the use of multivariate statistical methods to analyse the YCS data in order to isolate the effects of particular variables while simultaneously controlling for all other variables. It means that being white, for example, is associated with a greater risk of not being in education and training at 16 regardless of, for example, educational attainment or social class.

¹⁹⁰ As measured by receipt of free school meals.

¹⁹¹ Labour market active includes those in employment and those seeking employment, i.e. the unemployed. Being labour market inactive means not actively seeking work.

less constant over the time period but we know very little about this group. Undoubtedly some are carers and single parents, but we suspect this is likely to be a very heterogeneous group containing, for example, a proportion of people who are disabled and who have learning difficulties.

In addition to structural factors it is clear that geography and historical patterns of employment in particular localities play an important role in the decision-making of young people and their families at the end of compulsory schooling¹⁹². For example there are clear and persistent geographical differences in employment rates among this age group.

Participation in apprenticeship

In response to the previous two Annual Reports, we have received a number of communications suggesting that we are underplaying the importance of apprenticeship as a progression route for 16-18 year-olds. There seem to be two issues here: first, the desirability of having more young people participating in well-constructed apprenticeships; second, the actual participation of young people in apprenticeship. We heartily endorse the sentiments underpinning the first point, but it is our responsibility to report on the second point.

The most recent data available that provide validated figures for participation in apprenticeship continue to suggest that this is not a mass participation pathway¹⁹³. For example, the average number in learning on apprenticeship, a measure of the stock of apprentices, in 2004/05, did increase by 3% over 2003/04 for all age groups (i.e. 16-24). This growth in the stock of apprentices is due to an increase of 7.6% in the number participating at Level 2; participation in advanced apprenticeship continues to decline. Furthermore, the increase in participation in Level 2 apprenticeship seems to be a result of substitution of these programmes for stand-alone NVQs. That is the growth in apprenticeship numbers seems due, at least in part, to an administrative change in the funding regulations, rather than growth in the availability of apprenticeship places. In fact, if we take into account the decline in participation in Entry to Employment (E2E), overall participation in work-based learning declined by 2.3% in 2004/05, compared with 2003/04.

Turning to the data on apprenticeship starts, rather than the stock of apprentices, reveals that the number starting any apprenticeship declined from 193,600 in 2003/04 to 188,400 in 2004/05, across all age groups. The decline is sharper for advanced apprenticeship. Unfortunately, the administrative data do not disaggregate the numbers participating and starting by age. On the basis of the available data, we can

¹⁹² See Wright (2005a) for a review of the literature on young people's decision-making.

¹⁹³ LSC (2006a)

only conclude that apprenticeship for 16-18 year-olds remains a minority activity and one that does not appear destined to grow in the near future.

With regard to success rates, there has been some welcome improvement, with the percentage of 16-18 year-olds successfully completing apprenticeships (at Level 2 or advanced apprenticeship) rising from 33% of 89,121 total leavers in 2003/04 to 39% of 98,074 total leavers in 2004/05¹⁹⁴. However, it is important to note that the absolute numbers completing an apprenticeship are relatively small compared with those graduating from full-time education programmes for 16-18 year-olds.

Concluding remarks

This section has shown that post-compulsory participation rates have only registered a modest increase, despite a raft of policy initiatives with this explicit aim. This raises questions about why this might be the case, about the nature of the relationship between young people and the labour market and about the characteristics of young people classified as NEET.

To make progress with answering these questions and supporting future education policy's potentially positive contribution, a better understanding of the young people involved is required. This is the work undertaken in the next section.

Section 2: Young people outside education and training: Who are they?

Introduction

This section reviews the evidence on some of the potential reasons for and explanations of mismatches between policy formation, and the decisions and choices of young people regarding education, training and entry into the labour market. It develops an inevitably fragmented account of young people outside education and training, looking particularly at young people themselves, and at employers. These are the actors located in the middle rectangle of Figure 1. The issues involved in the decision of young people to leave education and training at 16/17 are located at the intersection of:

- the agency, identity and experiences of young people

¹⁹⁴ LSC (2006a), Table 7

with:

- education and training opportunities (including inducements, degrees of flexibility and potential further progression routes)
- the mechanisms of the (youth) labour market in England and Wales (within the context of globalisation and changes in the EU and international labour market) and
- the wider socio-economic context (including regional variations).

Young people's decisions at 16 are mediated by their aspirations, experience and motivation, as well as by their participant networks and the opportunities (subjective and objective) they perceive to be available to them. Various factors are involved in the 'journey'¹⁹⁵ young people make into and within (and perhaps out of, and then back into, and then out of again) the labour market and education and training¹⁹⁶. This process is often far from linear and rational¹⁹⁷, and may rely on unpredictable factors such as informal networks, peer group influence and serendipity. Perceptions of time are also of relevance here¹⁹⁸. Returning to education and training at a later stage is not straightforward for many of these young people, which may be at least partly because of the 'channelling' of young people at a relatively early stage in their education, and the 'filtering' function of GCSE results¹⁹⁹. The notion of lifelong learning, and the flexibility of FE is questionable within a context of multiple deprivation for some young people, which makes it very difficult for them to return to education and training²⁰⁰. In addition, pedagogy and institutional ethos play a crucial role, as young people are discouraged from returning to an institutional context at a later stage if they found their earlier contact with it gruelling and dispiriting. The CEO of the Rathbone²⁰¹ charity, Richard Williams, describing the difficulty for young people who do not respond well to institutional frameworks and authority, said there are "more opportunities to fail with more frequency and greater intensity if you do not relate to formal institutions"²⁰².

¹⁹⁵ See Raffae, D. (2003a) for an analysis of the various metaphors used to describe how young people move through to employment, including 'niches', 'trajectories', 'pathways' and 'navigations'. In this section, the term 'journey' is preferred.

¹⁹⁶ See: Thomson, R., Bell, R., Holland, J., Henderson, S., McGrellis, S. and Sharpe, S. (2002)

¹⁹⁷ See Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A. and Hodkinson, H. (1996) for their distinction between 'technical rationality' and 'pragmatic rationality'.

¹⁹⁸ See Brannen, J. and Nilsen, A. (2002).

¹⁹⁹ Ecclestone, K. (2006), p. 5: "Rates of poor achievement have moved from the 'bottom 40%' who left school with no qualifications in the late 1970s to the 55% who currently leave school with either low GCSE grades or with no qualification at all."

²⁰⁰ A point raised by Tim Oates at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

²⁰¹ See: <http://www.rathboneuk.org/>. Rathbone is a charity dedicated to working with young people who very often have not been successful in their secondary education.

²⁰² Verbatim citation from a comment made by Richard Williams at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

Further, institutions resonate in various ways with different young people²⁰³. This raises the central question of what the 14-19 system, institutions and assessment structures have to look like to be attractive to young people²⁰⁴. One particular issue is the persistence of the belief that reforming and developing qualifications increases participation, even though this has repeatedly been proved mistaken over the last decade. This is linked to the lack of policy memory identified in the Annual Report 2004-05, and the problem of 'whirlwind' change. Instability makes the system incomprehensible²⁰⁵. Indeed, it is possible that the constant stream of initiatives bewilders young people and their parents, an unintended consequence which is contrary to the desired effect. In addition to this, there is the problem of the lack of effective and sustained long-term evaluation and assessment of previous initiatives²⁰⁶.

The reasons for early²⁰⁷ engagement with the labour market may be complex and individualised²⁰⁸, and involve a positive perception of the jobs available, but the quantitative evidence shows that those who leave education and training at 16/17 to enter the labour market are disadvantaged in terms of their labour market outcomes in the long run (and often in the short- and medium-term as well)²⁰⁹. Joining the labour market at this age, perhaps with very few qualifications or qualifications at a low level, limits progression at work, as the jobs available do not necessarily offer a vertical progression route. Rather, there is a danger that young people move horizontally in the labour market, between various precarious, low-level, routine and poorly paid jobs. Further, many jobs available to 16/17 year-olds are JWT: any training available is normally not more than induction and specific for-the-job training. If employment is seen as synonymous with social inclusion²¹⁰, there is the danger that young people in JWT might not be perceived as a policy priority. However, there are indications that young people in JWT are becoming a policy priority.

²⁰³ A point raised by Graeme Tiffany at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

²⁰⁴ A question raised by Geoff Stanton at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006. See Chapter 4 on the attractiveness of HE – based partly on improved labour market prospects, rates of return and the likelihood of gaining a 'graduate job', but also on wider benefits such as the social experience, intrinsic interest in the subject and enjoyment of the HE experience.

²⁰⁵ A point made by Ewart Keep at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

²⁰⁶ A point raised by Tim Oates at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

²⁰⁷ In this context, 'early' is used as a descriptive term, and not as a value judgement.

²⁰⁸ See Brown, P. (1987); Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A. and Hodkinson, H. (1996); Ball, S.J., Maguire, M. and Macrae, S. (2000)

²⁰⁹ See Sturdy, S. (2006)

²¹⁰ See, for example, Alexiadou, N. (2002)

Young people classified in the NEET group: Who are they?

The term ‘NEET’

The term ‘NEET’ is variously used as an adjective and as a noun in official documents and research reports, as in ‘the NEET group’ and ‘the number of NEETs has changed in this region’. It is important to recall that NEET is a statistical classification (which often reflects absence of statistical data more than anything else). It is useful in quantitative analysis, as a data label to refer to those ‘outside’ the other statistical categories. The term itself has no real substance however, referring as it does to a statistical residual category (although it is sometimes used as if it had substance). Problems occur when this category is used as a ‘black box’, and there is an urgent need to produce more detailed descriptions of those young people who are classified as NEET. An in-depth breakdown of the characteristics of the young people classified in this way would be a major contribution to the drive to addressing their issues and needs. However, this would involve problems relating to definitions, and the transience of classification in particular groups. Further, classification itself is problematic. There are indications of the groups that are (over-)represented among the young people classified as NEET, but there are significant difficulties in disaggregating the data according to age (e.g. in the data on ‘young carers’ or those with particular illnesses)²¹¹.

So it seems inappropriate to refer to young people as NEET, undermining as it does their individuality, identity and defining characteristics. Further, the common collocation of NEET with ‘group’ compounds this, implying as it does common characteristics between those classified in this group, which, after all, includes individuals engaged in activities as diverse as: caring for an elderly relative, parenthood, engaging in criminal activity, coping with a serious physical or psychological illness, searching for suitable education and training provision, travelling or being on a ‘gap’ year. A key difference here is between those who have **chosen** their particular situation and those who had little choice. Therefore, there is no such thing as a ‘NEET group’. Is the mere fact that some young people are outside the formal education/work system enough to justify their description as a group? A token acknowledgement that it is a highly ‘heterogeneous group’ is not enough. This section will refer to ‘young people classified as NEET’ in an attempt to contain the pejorative and homogenising force of this term.

In terms of the actual numbers of young people classified as NEET, the latest Statistical First Release²¹², featuring revised data for 2004 and provisional data for 2005, indicates that the proportion of 16-18 year-olds not in education, employment or training increased from 10% at the end of 2004 to 11% at the end of 2005, and estimates the

²¹¹ See Coles, B., Hutton, S., Bradshaw, J., Craig, G., Godfrey, C. and Johnson, J. (2002)

²¹² DfES (2006f)

total number of 16-18 year-old “NEETs” (sic) at 220,000 at the end of 2005. This increase in the proportion of young people classified as NEET shows a deterioration, rather than progress, regarding the Public Service Agreement target to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by 2% by 2010. Further, the ambition set by the *14-19 Implementation Plan* that, by 2015, 90% of 17 year-olds are participating still seems elusive when official statistics show that 76% of 17 year-olds were participating in education and work-based learning at the end of 2005. Further, the figures for 17 year-olds classified as NEET, an important group for both of these aims, show a steeper increase, from 9% to 11%²¹³. Between 2004 and 2005, the proportion of 17 year-olds in employment but not in education or training fell from 12% to 9%, while the proportion of ILO unemployed (i.e. not working but looking for work) rose from 5% to 7%, and the proportion of 17 year-olds who were inactive in the labour market remained stable at 4%.

The literature on young people classified as NEET highlights a number of features on which there is general consensus:

- These young people are not a homogeneous ‘group’; rather there is a high degree of heterogeneity regarding how young people became classified as NEET, their future plans, their attitudes to employment and training, their backgrounds, participant networks and levels of personal and social capital (or lack of them)²¹⁴.
- The path to becoming classified as NEET may be associated with many different issues, including socio-economic, educational, cultural, regional and sub-regional²¹⁵ factors.
- Teenage pregnancy and parenthood are a significant factor within the group of young people classified as NEET²¹⁶. There are many structural barriers in place to discourage young pregnant women and young mothers from engaging in education and training. This is a complex issue, embedded within societal and generational expectations²¹⁷. Some young mothers explicitly plan for motherhood first, education later.

A further question is whether young people who are classified in the NEET group will face long-term consequences. Bynner and Parsons phrase this question in the following way:

²¹³ DfES (2006f), Table 3.

²¹⁴ LSC (2006b); Popham, I. (2003)

²¹⁵ Sachdev, D., Harries, B. and Roberts, T. (2006)

²¹⁶ Social Exclusion Unit (1999), p. 21, indicates gender differences in the group classified as NEET. Two-thirds of those classified as ‘unemployed’ were men, while three quarters of those ‘economically inactive’ were women, with half of them indicating that they were parents or carers.

²¹⁷ David, M. and Alldred, P. (forthcoming).

...is the experience of NEET no more than a temporary staging post on a life course marred by disadvantage and failure or does the experience in itself constitute a disabling condition or identity capital deficit in its own right, making subsequent adjustment to the demands of adult life significantly more difficult? This second, stronger view of NEET is that failure to gain the critical work experience and job training after leaving school is permanently damaging not only with respect to employment, but also in making a satisfactory adjustment to adult life.²¹⁸

The analysis undertaken of the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study supported the hypothesis that NEET status has a negative effect on the adult outcomes associated with identity capital formation, particularly for young women. For young men the effects of NEET status in the late teens could be seen mainly through poor labour market performance, especially through the continuation of NEET status itself at age 21²¹⁹.

In terms of analysis of who is classified in the NEET group, Bynner and Parsons found that:

For young people who leave education at the minimum age of 16, capital in the home, as reflected in parents not reading to child (boys at age 5) and lack of parental interest in child's education (girls at age 10) predict NEET. For boys, living in the inner-city is also significant; whereas for girls, family poverty (e.g. free school meals) matters. Notably these effects persist even when the highest qualification achieved at 16 is taken into account, suggesting that the components of identity capital derived from family circumstances and experience add to, rather than operate through, educational achievement in driving some young people toward NEET.²²⁰

Salient characteristics of non-participants identified in an Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) publication include:

- GCSE attainment (at risk if low or no qualifications)
- socio-economic group (at risk if from lower group)
- housing (at risk if in council housing)
- family circumstances (at risk if they live with neither parent or in care, especially because of aftercare accommodation transitions and problematic entry into the housing market; high level of mobility, homelessness and domestic instability play a role too)

²¹⁸ Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (2002), p. 291

²¹⁹ Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (2002), p. 300

²²⁰ Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (2002), p. 301

- ethnic background (Black and Asian young people more likely than their white counterparts to stay on in full-time education, and to do so at FE colleges rather than schools; young white people more likely than all ethnic groups apart from Bangladeshis to enter the labour market directly; there are high levels of unemployment amongst African-Caribbean youth)
- gender (particularly the carer role, often taken on by women, although the bulk of policy attention is aimed at men).
- learning difficulties and/or disabilities (over-represented in the group of non-participation, but far from homogeneous as a 'group').²²¹

In an analysis of the groups that are over-represented in the NEET classification, the following groups were identified:

- young people 'looked after'
- teenage parents
- young carers
- young people with chronic illnesses or disabilities and victims of accidents
- suicidal young people
- young people suffering from mental illness
- young people engaging in risk behaviours involving smoking, drinking alcohol and serious drug misuse
- young people involved in crime²²².

The focus is on 16 and 17 year-olds, but provision and initiatives fall into potentially unhelpful age segments in separation from each other. An integrated approach across the different age segments might be more effective²²³.

²²¹ Pearce, N. and Hillman, J. (1998) pp. 35-39.

²²² Coles, B., Hutton, S., Bradshaw, J., Craig, G., Godfrey, C. and Johnson, J. (2002), p. 35. The different groups are discussed in detail on pages 35-58. See also earlier work on young people's experience of the learning gateway which identified issues such as young people's housing situations, financial circumstances, family environments, levels of confidence and self-esteem, basic skills needs, poor motivation and time-keeping, problems dealing with authority, history of offending, pregnancy or parenthood and substance misuse. Sims, D., Nelson, J., Golden, S. and Spielhofer, T. (2001), Chapter 2, pp. 5-20.

²²³ See Pearce, N. and Hillman, J. (1998) p. 2: "...policy-making has been blighted by the tradition of considering 14-16 and 16-19 year-olds in separation from each other, by neglect of issues around the key

With raising post-16 participation being the main policy aim, it would seem that creating better education and training provision for those **in work** without training at 16 and 17 should be one of the main priorities, **as well as** providing for those (negatively) classified as 'not in education, employment or training'. In addition, those classified as 'ILO unemployed' and those classified as 'economically inactive' require particular attention appropriate to their situation. Further, issues of teenage pregnancy and gender issues are significant in this context²²⁴.

Aspirations play a major role here, as analysis of statistical data has indicated that teenage aspirations, in combination with educational attainments, as well as parental social class, are a driving force in the occupational development of young people. Further, improvements in material conditions have meant that relative disadvantage has increased in recent decades²²⁵.

Young people in jobs without training

JWT refers to those young people who are in employment, but either do not have access to, or choose not to access, forms of education and training at Level 2 or above. Not having Level 2 qualifications may limit young people's chances of progressing beyond low-level, routine jobs. There is also a relatively low (and relatively static) level of pay.

Less attention is currently given to those in JWT than those classified in the NEET and unknown groups. However, there are indications that those in JWT are becoming a policy priority. They have not been a policy priority in recent years, arguably because they do not feature as a negative statistic (since they are participating in employment). However, their employment may be routine, low-level tasks, which arguably demand less explicit training input than Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeship programmes. This type of work is characterised by a high turnover of staff or 'churn'. Therefore, incentives for employers and young people to devote time and resources to training may be limited. This may explain the persistence of the proportion of young people in JWT, despite the policy intention that precisely this group would be attracted into apprenticeship.

Further, there are significant problems in maintaining accurate data on the JWT group, as they can be difficult to contact and track, because many young people move frequently between jobs. Again, this is a heterogeneous group. Those in JWT have,

transition point at 16, and by a tendency to be constrained by professional, institutional and organisational boundaries that prevent an integrated approach to individual needs. It is a chief contention of this report that selective or age-constrained policy frameworks have failed to raise achievement, at all levels."

²²⁴See David, M. and Alldred, P. (forthcoming).

²²⁵ Schoon, I. and Parsons, S. (2002)

however, not necessarily ruled out education or training in the future^{226,227}. In a recent study of 68 young people in JWT, the most common reason given by the young people for not continuing was that they were 'disillusioned' with school and/or education generally:

I didn't like school when I was there and was fed up with the whole education thing. I didn't want to learn. I just wanted to get a job and get on with life.²²⁸

Other issues within that dataset of 68²²⁹ included: not having the right GCSE grades, and not being willing to resit them; the desire to earn money²³⁰ and bureaucratic reasons, such as applying for college too late, and therefore deciding to move into work instead. Reasons given for not applying for an apprenticeship were: the belief that there were no apprenticeships in their chosen field of work in the region; that apprenticeship did not pay enough; not having the right qualifications; not being able to find an employer or a place on a college course; strong competition; they were put off by the college-based element and they did not have enough information to follow it through.

In the group of 68, at least a quarter (17) were classified in (and out of) the NEET group, most commonly in the summer after leaving school²³¹. This study of young people highlights the need for effective information and guidance, particularly in the summer after GCSE results, and particularly with regard to the long-term benefits of completing apprenticeship training.

²²⁶ See Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006)

²²⁷ The Learning Agreement pilot, which began in April 2006, will test a number of variants (wage compensation and bonus payments) in an attempt to encourage 16 and 17 year-olds in JWT to work towards Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications. Research into young people in JWT showed that some saw the jobs as 'stopgaps', while most employers viewed the young people as short-term employees because of the limited opportunities for progression. The success, or otherwise, of the Learning Agreement in persuading young people in JWT to gain further qualifications will be an indication of the potential of the 'second chance' approach. The success of the pilot will rely on the ability of the LLSCs and Connexions to deliver it in the context of uncertainty and turbulence regarding their own roles.

²²⁸ Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006), p. 18

²²⁹ Of the 68, 48 had moved into a job without training (21 had had more than one job since leaving school); 14 had stayed on at sixth form or started a full-time college course; three had started an E2E programme; and three had started an apprenticeship. Anderson, A. *et al.* (2006), p. 18

²³⁰ "My English and science weren't very good grades ... I did think of resitting them but then I thought no, it was a waste of time when I could be going out and getting a job and earning money and liking something instead of sitting in a classroom and retaking them again."

²³¹ This period seems to be a high-risk period, and a programme such as the September Guarantee in London, may go some way to addressing this (see LSC, 2006a, p. 20). The September Guarantee liaises with young people in Year 11 and with pre- and post-16 providers to support the Year 11 learners into an offer of an appropriate learning programme or employment by September after completing Year 11.

Young people and apprenticeship: Gender differences

As discussed in Section 1, apprenticeships are not delivering the hoped for rates of participation, completion and attainment, especially within the context of the high levels of investment, and, in some sectors at least, the social inclusion agenda dominates over skill formation²³². The variation across the different sectors is extremely wide-ranging, and a nuanced discussion of apprenticeship necessitates a sector-by-sector approach.

With regard to young people's occupational aspirations, research has shown that there are significant gender differences, with particular regard to apprenticeships which are traditionally 'gender segregated'²³³. Various barriers inhibit young people of each gender from entering non-traditional occupations (such as young men going into childcare or young women going into plumbing). One major inhibiting factor for young men is the wish "...not to stand out from the crowd by doing a job normally done by the opposite sex" (in the study, 63% of the young men agreed, compared with 37% of the young women²³⁴). This raises questions about the expectations that young men have of their future occupations, especially in the context of the increasing importance of the service and care industries in the UK economy, and the continuing decline of manufacturing and traditional semi-skilled jobs for young men²³⁵. Further, 76% of the young women questioned indicated a preference for trying out the work before making their final decision. This finding was with specific regard to non-traditional occupations for each gender, but could be important in other contexts as well (e.g. with regard to starting particular Level 3 courses or other kinds of work-based training), in conjunction with information and guidance provision. In the focus groups involving employers and young people, it emerged that language was an important factor, as the two groups did not use the same language and that young people did not have sufficient access to what was actually on offer. Contacts with employers were rated very highly by young people in the study, and employer visits should perhaps have a higher priority. Certainly the young people in the study referred to were more interested in contact with employers than in contact with training providers. Information and guidance are of vital importance in this context, as:

The report has also shown that many young people are interested in apprenticeship but know little about the MA [modern apprenticeship]. They are unaware of the sectors in which it is available, whether it is (always) suitable for males and females, of what the programme consists, how long it lasts, what they will be paid, and where successful completion could lead.²³⁶

²³² See Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2003), and Fuller, A. (2004)

²³³ Fuller, A., Beck, V. and Unwin, L. (2005). See also Andrews, M. *et al.* (2006).

²³⁴ Fuller, A., Beck, V. and Unwin, L. (2005), p. 49

²³⁵ See also Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2004)

²³⁶ Fuller, A., Beck, V. and Unwin, L. (2005), p. 60

The findings of the research referred to "...showed that perhaps the strongest influence on young people's occupation aspirations can be located in the informal sphere of family and friends"²³⁷. As such, young people's occupational aspirations develop, to some extent at least, in a context of insufficient information, and reliance on informal, personal and *ad hoc* networks.

The Annual Report 2004-05 indicated the relatively low proportions of 16 and 17 year-olds on apprenticeship programmes²³⁸, and discussed the fact that this cannot be explained by a low level of demand, as the demand for apprenticeship places exceeds supply. Again, it must be emphasised that the situation diverges widely between sectors. Further research on the perspectives of employers and their (non-) engagement with apprenticeship is required to reveal more in this context. In addition, the role of financial inducements for both young people and employers is central here – especially as research shows that the perceived low level of financial incentives is a key factor in young people not participating in, and particularly in not completing, apprenticeship, with high levels of dissatisfaction with the amount of money received. However, this picture is complicated by the very diverse payment experiences of young people, with some receiving top-up payments from employers²³⁹.

The decision to leave at 16/17: The learner level

Factors affecting the decision to leave

The decision to leave at 16/17 may be affected by a range of factors, including the following: GCSE results, positive opportunities outside school, pregnancy/parenthood, poor learning experiences at school, difficulties with the experience of school as an institution²⁴⁰, a perception of a lack of relevance of the work at school, health problems, unsatisfactory support, exclusion from school or time in custody.

GCSE results are well-documented as having a significant impact on the future destinations of young people²⁴¹. Further, the decisions regarding which level of GCSE paper young people are entered for during the 14-16 preparation for GCSEs are taken

²³⁷ Fuller, A., Beck, V. and Unwin, L. (2005), p. 61

²³⁸ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Keep, E. Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wright, S. (2004), p. 100

²³⁹ Spielhofer, T., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L. and Sims, D. (2006)

²⁴⁰ Regarding the pace and speed of the secondary school day, MacBeath, J., Galton, M., Steward, S., MacBeath, A. and Page, C. (2006) state that: "Pupils and teachers spoke about the speed and 'urgency' of a secondary school day, bells directing pupils and teachers to the next in the series of lessons, moving rapidly down crowded corridors to reach the next learning episode, getting books out quickly, settling down, maintaining a pace and variety in the three/four part lesson, an impatience to cover the ground, keeping to task and achievement of objectives with the spectre of testing ever present in the background." (p. 44)

²⁴¹ Payne, J. (2004)

during 14-16 provision, and indicate to young people how well they are doing and what they can expect to aspire to²⁴². The oft-cited 'stumbling block' of GCSE results has been apparent to the young people well before they actually get their results. The impact on their aspirations of not getting higher grades is rather different from the impact on their aspirations of being told that they are not **expected** to get higher grades, and should settle for less, in order to maximise their chances of gaining that lower level.

The respective push and pull factors of education and training and the labour market are central to the decisions regarding post-compulsory participation or early entry into the labour market. The policy perspective seems to be linked to the assumption that staying on is the preferred course of action, and researchers have argued that: "...non-participation' is often framed within a deficit model, as linked to a lack of information, aspiration and motivation." Further, staying on may not be an active rational choice, but may rather be "...automatic for the middle classes, whereas leaving or 'choosing something else' may be 'natural' and common-sense for working class groups"²⁴³. It may be the case that certain young people feel intimidated by the prospect of continuing into post-compulsory education, based upon their experience of compulsory education²⁴⁴. Teaching and learning styles, as well as the incidence of bullying²⁴⁵ and harassment, are also of relevance here. These issues affect young people throughout their educational careers, including primary schooling²⁴⁶.

Their experience of teaching and learning at school may influence young people's willingness to engage in further teaching and learning in a full-time educational environment. Teaching and learning (and assessment²⁴⁷) experiences at primary, secondary and post-compulsory levels may have an impact on later levels of participation and attainment.

²⁴² See QCA (nd). QCA has announced a move from the three-tier mathematics GCSE to a two-tier examination: "The standard two-tier model is the same as is used in all other tiered subjects, e.g. English and science. It has a higher tier covering grades A*-D and a foundation tier covering grades C-G, and will allow all candidates the opportunity to achieve a grade C, should their work deserve it."

²⁴³ Archer, L. and Yamashita, H. (2003), p. 54

²⁴⁴ "...the ways in which the young people viewed themselves as 'not good enough' and 'knew their limits' were highlighted in relation to educational routes. It is suggested that these views were constructed and compounded by complex social and institutional factors, and were exacerbated by educational policies that impact upon inner city 'failing' schools and disadvantaged communities." Archer, L. and Yamashita, H. (2003), p. 56

²⁴⁵ For analysis of the complex relationship between the incidence of bullying at school and criminality in adult life see: Cullingford, C. and Morrison, J. (1995).

²⁴⁶ "It may not be too much to claim that the educational institution most relevant to the world of work is the elementary school. Virtually all complex and sophisticated job skills ultimately build on the ability to acquire and display the 'simple' skills of reading, writing, and calculating." Bills, D.B. (2005), p. 142

²⁴⁷ See Ecclestone, K. (2006). See also Reay, D. and Wiliam, D. (1999) for research into the reactions Year 6 pupils have to SATs and how they affect the perception they have of themselves as learners.

Looking at earlier learning experiences may shed light on young people's decision to leave education and training for (or drift into) the labour market. Many young people's experiences of teaching and learning, and of the institutions where teaching and learning take place, are not positive²⁴⁸. Difficulties in engaging with teaching and learning and the institutions can affect pupils across the ability range, and from various different backgrounds. Some young people may, for example, adopt an instrumental approach to studying in some subjects²⁴⁹, with potential impact in the longer term on GCSE entry decisions, achievement, and forms of future (dis)engagement in education and/or training. This is linked with the assessment structures in place.

Levels of support available

Effective levels of support are vital for young people to develop their occupational aspirations, and their journey towards fulfilling them. This support includes information and guidance, financial support and personal and emotional support from family, informal networks and peer groups.

Kendall and Kinder²⁵⁰ outline both preventive and curative strategies in nine European countries to 'reclaim' disengaged students. Their study shows the impact of various different contextual factors upon disengagement among young people, such as the level of selectiveness of the system, the existence of varied transition points and the opportunities for engagement in vocational education²⁵¹. They highlight the vulnerability of young people at the transition point between lower and upper secondary school, and argue that "...support at significant transition points may aid retention"²⁵². This comparative research also indicates the need for effective information and guidance.

Evidence shows that the EMA might make a difference for some individuals, but there is a danger of 'deadweight' because it is not persuading disengaged, financially vulnerable young people to continue in post-compulsory education²⁵³. One development is the fact that from April 2006 the EMA was extended to those who begin an LSC-funded E2E programme or a course that leads to an apprenticeship²⁵⁴. However, while the EMA may have some positive impact in persuading young people to **begin** post-compulsory

²⁴⁸ See Part III in this report

²⁴⁹ With regard to instrumentality on the part of entrants to HE, see focus groups X.

²⁵⁰ Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005)

²⁵¹ They argue, however, that "...opportunities to access vocational education should not be seen as the 'cure all' for student disaffection and disengagement and the extent that vocational routes can create problems for young people should be acknowledged, e.g. a lack of parity of esteem or the division between vocational and academic routes."

²⁵² Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005), p. 10.

²⁵³ See Maguire, S. and Thompson, J. (2006)

²⁵⁴ LSC (2005)

training, it may not address the problem of attrition. Further, the EMA payment to some individuals may be lower than the previous training allowance, or even non-existent, depending on their family's income.

Particular groups of young people, such as those with a history of offending, may require specific support²⁵⁵. Factors closely associated with offending (although this does not imply any causality) include:

- detachment from education (including non-attendance, formal and informal exclusion, and limited or part-time alternative provision)
- low attainment (especially in literacy and numeracy skills)
- influence of the school (including lack of a clear school ethos, discipline and bullying)
- experience of custody and LA care, which are associated with detachment from education and low attainment²⁵⁶.

Potentially successful interventions identified in research by the Youth Justice Board include: maintaining attendance at school, learner-centred individualised programmes to motivate young people to gain basic skills, and whole school approaches, which adopt a positive and inclusive ethos and develop strong staff-pupil relationships²⁵⁷. Young offenders interviewed raised issues surrounding detachment from school, low attainment, influence of the school and custody as barriers to their engagement. Strategic barriers to engagement to education, training and employment, identified in the Youth Justice Board research, have relevance to other young people classified as NEET. These strategic barriers are:

- failure to recognise the scale and nature of the problem
- professional lack of knowledge (here, regarding the youth justice system, but this could also apply to issues of pregnancy and parenthood, health, mental health, personal difficulties, learning difficulties and so on)
- conflicting objectives and targets (each agency working to different targets, which often conflict – for example, the Youth Justice Board's targets are not recognised by schools and FE colleges)
- confused responsibilities (responsibility for young people in particular circumstances can fall between schools, LAs and custodial institutions)

²⁵⁵ Youth Justice Board (2006)

²⁵⁶ Youth Justice Board (2006), p. 5

²⁵⁷ Youth Justice Board (2006), p. 6

- ineffective and non-existent protocols
- limited and tardy transmission of essential information (especially regarding the educational situation of young people – this applies to offenders, but also in other contexts)²⁵⁸.

Mentoring may offer some support to young people, but problems have been identified regarding the evidence base for engagement mentoring, and the imposition of beliefs and attitudes on to young people, involving addressing government's perceived problems rather than the problems identified by young people themselves²⁵⁹.

Leaving at 16/17: Positive choice, default mechanism or 'drift'

The move into the labour market at 16 or 17 could be described, in different individual scenarios, as a positive choice, a default mechanism or as a process of 'drift'. The first scenario would apply to young people who have found employment that matches their occupational aspirations, see no reason to continue at school, and/or welcome the concept of leaving; the second scenario would apply to those young people who had made particular plans for post-16 education and training, but then found that route blocked (e.g. if their GCSE results were not as good as hoped, leading to the withdrawal of the offer of further education and training, or perhaps the cancellation of a course). The third scenario refers to those who have become disengaged from school and wish to experience the working environment sooner rather than later, looking for immediate rewards in the form of earnings, even if those earnings may prove unsatisfactory in the long run. Further, there is a multiplicity of other scenarios, such as young people taking on a carer or parental role, instead of post-compulsory education or labour market activity. Teenage pregnancy and parenthood are major factors²⁶⁰. Further, as the cross-tabulation in Figure 2 indicates, there is significant overlap between categories, and movement between categories.

One hypothesis is that the system deprives young people of options and that it works in such a way that it is more likely to **restrict** than **enable** young people, particularly young people who are not following the so-called 'standard' route of A Level and HE in their post-compulsory journey. This narrative is built up around the perceived 'deficit model' of choices available to those with fewer than five A*-C GCSEs at post-16, the negative selection of young people for lower level GCSE examinations at pre-16, and the difficulties inherent in navigating the 'alternative' routes of post-compulsory

²⁵⁸ Youth Justice Board (2006), p. 10

²⁵⁹ See Colley, H. (2006)

²⁶⁰ Teenage pregnancy may involve (for young women and young men) some or all of the following: the positive choice for a baby, 'planning' for pregnancy and parenthood, ambivalence towards pregnancy and parenthood, an unsettled background and a desire for more stability, negative experiences of school education, and/or social and family norms in the local area. See: Cater, S. and Coleman, L. (2006)

education (work-based learning, apprenticeship, full-time employment, part-time employment with part-time education at FE college and so on).

A further hypothesis points to the partial and fragmented understandings of young people and the mechanisms of the youth labour market, as expressed in policy literature. This is developed in the following section. The language used to express policy formation processes and policy 'targets' also indicates potential partial and fragmented misunderstandings²⁶¹. There is an inherent contradiction between the policy presumption regarding the importance of personal choice and individualisation and the stamping as failures of those who choose not to participate or who do not participate²⁶². Further, the notion of infinite choice is a masquerade, as young people face barriers because of their location, socio-economic circumstances and a range of other interconnected factors²⁶³.

Gaps in the research evidence are of importance here. For example, there is a clear need for a robust longitudinal qualitative dataset to investigate reasons for leaving at 16, and the background to that decision, to complement and shed light on reliable and robust quantitative data on qualifications, destinations and employment status. An effective blend of qualitative and quantitative data will be needed to provide complex answers to the complex issues raised in this area.

The narratives of young people's post-16 decisions are characterised by complexity, various different types of interaction and an interplay of agency and structure²⁶⁴. The life course has changed, leading to less linear and predictable paths between education and work²⁶⁵. These issues were addressed in last year's Annual Report²⁶⁶. Further, there is a significant difference between those young people for whom schooling is **preparation** (for HE, for example), and those for whom schooling is **warehousing** (before they enter the labour market). For some young people, compulsory secondary

²⁶¹ See Oancea, A. (2005)

²⁶² A point raised by Richard Williams at the Nuffield Review Workshop, 22-23 June 2006.

²⁶³ Raffe, D. (2003b), p. 1 argues with relation to data on Scotland that: "Different NEET statuses require different policy solutions. Some young people freely choose their NEET activity and require no policy intervention. However, for many young people being NEET is part of a wider pattern of disadvantage and powerlessness, which may need to be tackled on a broader front."

²⁶⁴ See, for example, Brown, P. (1987); Hodgkinson, P., Sparkes, A. and Hodgkinson, H. (1996) and Ball, S.J., Maguire, M. and Macrae, S. (2000).

²⁶⁵ See Bills, D.B. (2005), p. 134: "At one time, the 'location' of the 'student to worker' transition in the life course was reasonably clear." However: "More recently, the sequence of educational and work spells (as well as those pertaining to family life) has changed in ways that make this formulation less useful for understanding the linkages between education and work."

²⁶⁶ Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Oancea, A., Pring, R., Spours, K., Wilde, S., Wright, S. (2005), pp. 112-116.

education is 'terminal' education, while for others it is 'preparatory' education²⁶⁷, and it is a difficult task for the education system to cater for both effectively.

Young people in the labour market

The quantitative evidence from the LFS outlined earlier in the paper shows that 16 and 17 year-olds typically access routine, low-paid jobs that do not offer much chance of progression or further training, often in the retail and catering sectors²⁶⁸. The retail sector, in particular, does not seem to be fertile ground for apprenticeships, for a variety of different reasons, including the fact that the nature of the work is based on **short-term** earnings for the young people and **short-term** sales for the employers, rather than long-term development²⁶⁹. As the retail sector provides many entry-level jobs, this situation has a negative impact on the potential for further training, and further professional development, of these young people. Completion rates of apprenticeships in retail are relatively low, compared with other sectors. However, there are some effective apprenticeship programmes with 16 year-olds with some retail chains, such as the Co-op and Bells where apprenticeship is used to train young entrants for managerial work.

The employer perspective is important here, and research with employers explores some of the reasons for the problems:

- 'Job hopping': "if a young person can get a job for 50p an hour more down the road, she will go and leave the MA [modern apprenticeship] behind."
- Young people that apply for jobs in retail "are not looking for a career – they're just wanting to earn some money."²⁷⁰

A further factor is that young people applying for jobs in retail were said to have very low skills, levels of ambition, few or perhaps no qualifications and low expectations. One employer in the study commented:

I don't know why we should be expected to be putting right a 10-year failure in education, and be expected to pick them up for the next 10 years.²⁷¹

A recent report by the Confederation of British Industry further echoes such concerns about the basic literacy and numeracy skills of employees²⁷².

²⁶⁷ See Bills, D.B. (2005), p. 143: "High schools are *terminal* for some students and *preparatory* for others."

²⁶⁸ Hall, J. (2006)

²⁶⁹ See Spielhofer, T. and Sims, D. (2004)

²⁷⁰ See Spielhofer, T. and Sims, D. (2004), p. 7.

²⁷¹ See Spielhofer, T. and Sims, D. (2004), pp. 9-10.

However, some of the jobs on offer can be criticised as well, for being short term, routine and low paid. The continuing mutual attraction between young people and employers offering this kind of work might be less an attraction and more a mutual convenience – short-term earnings for young people, and a good supply of relatively cheap labour for employers. It is the medium- and long-term prospects for young people that are of concern.

'Age bias' in the labour market is potentially an issue, with young people expected to do certain routine tasks. The recruitment stage is problematic for some young people, as application forms and job specifications tend to focus on chronology and career timelines (and qualifications). This discriminates against those with broken career (or education) paths because of parenthood or ill health, for example²⁷³.

What is the nature of employer involvement?

The role of employers in young people's transition to employment at 16/17 is key to an understanding of that transition. The central point about young people classified in the NEET grouping – that they are not a homogeneous group, but have a wide variety of different characteristics – applies equally to employers. It has been argued that they are too often viewed as a unified group, whereas the reality is that employers represent a range of interests, sectors, products, processes, size of company, regional representation and level of commitment to training. The presentation and understanding of the generic term 'employers' has perhaps not been multi-faceted enough, particularly in view of the potential tensions between the best possible outcomes for individuals, the state and employers, respectively.

There is consensus about the need for employers to be committed to education and training, and particularly work experience for young people. However, it has been argued that employers have disproportionate influence on 14-19 education and training, and that they have been given 'voice without accountability' and are a 'curious absence'²⁷⁴.

The prevalent argument about the need for skills for both individual and company success breaks down somewhat, according to experts who comment that employers in the UK seem to be able to achieve profitability with a workforce with a relatively low level of skills, and who are a 'more or less disposable commodity'²⁷⁵. A further problem identified is that government policy has tended to focus on **qualifications** in its reforms of compulsory and post-compulsory education. With respect to employers'

²⁷² Confederation of British Industry (2006). See also Her Majesty's Treasury (2005).

²⁷³ Freda, B. (2005)

²⁷⁴ Keep, E. (2004a); Gleeson, D. and Keep, E. (2004)

²⁷⁵ Gleeson, D. and Keep, E. (2004), p. 46. "The problem, for the purposes of this article, is that the government's obsession with qualifications is not one that is shared by employers."

engagement with young participants in the labour market, there are current changes to the labour market, such as the availability of students in education and HE to work part time, and the availability of migrant workers. This affects the labour market opportunities available to 16 and 17 year-old school leavers.

This is linked to the demand for 'aesthetic labour'²⁷⁶ in what has been termed the 'style labour market', including hotels, retailers, cafes, bars and restaurants²⁷⁷. Some employers in certain sectors, including, but not limited to, the retail and hospitality sectors, require not only technical and social skills, but also 'aesthetic' skills, including "...body language, dress sense and style, personal grooming and the voice and accents of potential and existing customers"²⁷⁸. These skills are not provided for by formal qualifications, but are located within personal and cultural capital. Employers looking for such characteristics and dispositions may only employ young people who already display them, which "...potentially reduces costs but it also signals a belief that the desired characteristics and dispositions of employees cannot easily be trained"²⁷⁹. The need for these skills may work against younger and less qualified labour market participants, and in favour of students looking for part-time work and migrant workers with high levels of aesthetic skills.

With regard to employer attitudes to training, recent research with 15 employers²⁸⁰ revealed a range of attitudes to training, including some who expressed a notion of corporate social responsibility. However, the majority of the 15 provided induction and job-specific training only. Only one of the 15 knew about the statutory entitlement to Level 2, and the majority of the 15 employers were sceptical about the potential costs of this, and the disruption to their business.

²⁷⁶ Nickson, D., Warhurst, C., Cullen, A.-M. and Watt, A. (2003), p. 185-6 state that: "Although analytically more complex, 'looking good' or 'sounding right' are the most overt manifestations of aesthetic labour. In essence, with aesthetic labour, employers are seeking employees who can portray the firm's image through their work, and at the same time appeal to the senses of the customer for those firms' commercial benefit". They argue that there is a need to support those at risk of unemployment or the long-term unemployed with developing "aesthetic skills" to facilitate (re-)entry into the labour market, despite concerns about the ethical implications of this, and the potential for what Nickson *et al.* (2004, p. 30) term the "Eliza Doolittle syndrome". Further, Nickson *et al.* (2003), p. 186 argue that aesthetic skills are increasingly important because of changes in the labour market, and the fact that: "...the extent to which knowledge jobs are being created is often overstated and does not recognise the reality of large numbers of routine interactive service jobs." Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (1999), p. 10, have also argued with relation to the needs at the "softer end of the skills spectrum" that "...in seeking to address the demands of employers looking for the type of 'aesthetic labour' reported on by Nickson *et al.*, VET providers would appear to need to be thinking about speech training, deportment, and personal grooming classes rather than degrees, GCSEs or NVQs".

²⁷⁷ See Nickson, D., Warhurst, C. and Dutton, E. (2004)

²⁷⁸ See: Nickson, D., Warhurst, C. and Dutton, E. (2004), p. 3

²⁷⁹ See: Nickson, D., Warhurst, C. and Dutton, E. (2004), p. 7

²⁸⁰ Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006), pp. 34-44

Reporting on a qualitative study with 51 employers who hire entry level workers in the US, Rosenbaum and Binder²⁸¹ found that employers in the US could specify the academic skills needed in their area of work, and that they were willing to recruit or retrain staff at their own expense. However, they argue that: “When workers in the lowest level jobs lack basic academic skills, as they often do, they are stuck in these jobs”²⁸². The study identified strong links between some companies and schools, although there is a strong element of the chance features of personal relationships involved here. The employers commented that they can benefit from teachers’ recommendations of particular students (despite the risk of bias). The links between companies and schools have benefits, of course, but Rosenbaum and Binder point out that these links may represent barriers for other young people without the appropriate contacts.

Regional and local opportunity structures play a significant role²⁸³. Research on employers’ perceptions of the youth labour market in Cumbria²⁸⁴ showed the influence of their behaviour on the opportunities available to young people in terms of training, progression and recruitment. The difficulties outlined are particularly hard to overcome in rural areas where there are limited employment possibilities, and these are often negotiated through informal networks. Young people with relatively weak social networks are therefore at risk of marginalisation²⁸⁵. Changes in the labour market in an area such as Cumbria may mean that young men could benefit from a move into service sector jobs, but they may face bias on the part of certain employers in recruiting men for those roles. This is linked, again, to issues of ‘aesthetic’ skills.

Opportunities for young people in a region²⁸⁶ such as Cumbria are affected by the long-term decline in the manufacturing industry, and by the importance of the tourist industry in that region. Small employers in that field are less likely to offer training opportunities to their employees. Such research, combining analysis of the youth labour market, and consideration of young people’s behaviour with employer attitudes, is crucial if the problems surrounding post-16 destinations are to be addressed fully and effectively. An over-emphasis on the supply side, at the expense of the demand side, will not deliver the hoped for results. Canny²⁸⁷ points out that the increase in participation in Cumbria may have more to do with young people’s “...awareness of restricted local labour market opportunities rather than a growing interest in

²⁸¹ Rosenbaum, J.E. and Binder, A. (1997)

²⁸² Rosenbaum, J.E. and Binder, A. (1997), p. 74

²⁸³ See also: Golden, S. and Spielhofer, T., Sims, D., Aiston, S. and O’Donnell, L. (2002)

²⁸⁴ Canny, A. (2004)

²⁸⁵ See Cassidy, C., O’Connor, R. and Dorrer, N. (2006), pp. 32- 41 for analysis of the role social networks and leisure play for minority ethnic young people, with particular reference to the context of Glasgow.

²⁸⁶ For details about regional differences, see Green, A.E. and Owen, D. (2006). This issue is also linked to the issue of housing for young people, changes in the youth labour market and the precarious living circumstances of some young people. See: Ford, J., Rugg, J. and Burrows, R. (2002).

²⁸⁷ Canny, A. (2004)

educational participation”²⁸⁸. Those opportunities are concentrated in the retail and wholesale trade, hotel, restaurant and manufacturing sectors. The study highlights the importance of neighbourhood opportunity structure in considerations of young people’s transitions from school to work or to post-compulsory education and training. In a local labour market, the problems within recruitment opportunities for local employers mirror the problems within employment opportunities for young people. In this context, the question of whether young people are willing and able to move elsewhere to work is important. A move, however, involves a loss of the social networks and informal opportunity structures in their local area, as well as financial expense in terms of travel and/or accommodation costs²⁸⁹. In the lower-level service sector jobs, it may be that young people are competing with better-qualified students looking for part-time work.

Financial incentives play a role in employer involvement. Research has shown that “...training allowances provided as strong incentive for some employers to take on apprentices. In particular, it enabled them to take on more young people, younger apprentices and young people working fewer hours than a full-time member of staff, than they would otherwise be willing to do. Additionally, training allowance payments were said to give employers the opportunity to ‘try out’ apprentices before committing to them”²⁹⁰. The research reported that: “Training providers and LLSCs were keen to point out that most employers were encouraged to view training allowances as a short-term measure, and not as a substitute for engaging waged apprentices, although employer practice in this regard was somewhat mixed”²⁹¹.

So, what is to be done?

The level of post-compulsory participation continues to be a policy obsession. Post-compulsory participation rates in the UK still lag behind many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) competitors²⁹². But, where is the problem exactly? The policy focus on the group(s) classified as NEET may be an example of problems in defining policy targets, as this group is arguably far more heterogeneous than the group which is NET (not in education or training, but in employment). This is because there is a multiplicity of potential reasons why a young person may come to be classified as NEET, some of which may be positive and based on

²⁸⁸ Canny, A. (2004), p. 499.

²⁸⁹ See Jones, G. (2002), pp. 13-14

²⁹⁰ Spielhofer, T., Nelson, J., O’Donnell, L. and Sims, D. (2006), p. 61

²⁹¹ Spielhofer, T., Nelson, J., O’Donnell, L. and Sims, D. (2006), p. 61

²⁹² According to the most recent OECD data, the **United Kingdom** has an enrolment rate in education and training for 15-19 year olds of 79%, below the OECD average of 80.5% and the EU19 average of 84.7%. By comparison, the rate is 95.7% for Belgium, 91.4% for the Czech Republic, 89.8% for Poland, 88.8% for Germany, 87.5 for Sweden, 87.1% for France, 86.9% for Ireland, and 86.7% for Finland. Among the EU countries listed, only Italy (78.8%), Luxembourg (75.4%) and Portugal (72.7%) have lower enrolment rates. OECD (2006) p. 266

choice, some based on issues of structural disadvantage, some based on medical issues of a physical or psychological nature, some based on family, carer, parental and pregnancy issues and some based on youth offending and criminal activity. Often these young people are affected by a combination of the above factors, representing multiple disadvantage. The arguments here may have similarities with those used in the discourse about the long-term unemployed. For example, Nickson *et al.*, in reference to the variety of reasons for long-term unemployment, argue that care may be more important than work²⁹³. In the same vein, for some young people classified in the NEET group, care may be more important than education and training. In other words, it may be that the problems experienced by some of the young people classified in the NEET group are not necessarily, or even at all, of an educational nature, and thereby cannot be solved by 'tweaking' educational and vocational education and training (VET) provision.

Section 3: Policy problems and policy misunderstandings

Policy initiatives over the past ten years have repeatedly claimed to 'tackle' low participation, low achievement, poor connections of the education and training system with the labour market, and youth unemployment. They proposed a vision of a high-participation, low-attrition, internationally competitive and socially inclusive system. But despite recent policy busyness, the system seems to have behaved in unpredictable, and often unintended, ways. For example, expectations – based on policy discourse – that following certain policy initiatives the system will change in the direction of higher participation rates and better patterns of engagement of young people with the labour market²⁹⁴ do not seem to be fully consistent with the actual behaviour of the system over the past ten years, including lack of significant increase in participation rates and an increase in the proportion of young people classified as NEET (from 9% of 16-18 year-olds in 2003 to 11% as the provisional figure for 2005)²⁹⁵. Why and how this has happened are essential questions here. This section will expand the framework of our analysis to the wider policy context and will explore possible reasons why the system has failed to respond in the way desired by policymakers in the last decade. In order to do so, it will describe a number of recent policy initiatives,

²⁹³ "...there are the long-term unemployed who have been out of work for more than one year. The reasons for this long-term unemployment can vary. It might be because of family care responsibilities. It might also be because of a lack of work discipline due to drug or mental health problems. These people might need an intermediary labour market, such as 'work for benefit' programmes, for example, to familiarise them with required working patterns. (It might also be that some of these people need care rather than work and, supported by welfare, are the residually unemployed.) Nickson, D., Warhurst, C., Cullen, A.-M. and Watt, A. (2003), p. 196

²⁹⁴ See Wright, S. and Oancea, A. (2006)

²⁹⁵ DfES (2006f)

their targets, and comment on the impact they had, and will examine the level at which problems occurred. This will challenge current attributions of failure, which push it down the system to the level of institutional and individual actors and of delivery rather than the contested process of policy formation.

Policy initiatives and their outcomes

There are a number of current initiatives to encourage young people back into education and training, or into employment.

The initiatives can be divided into three main areas: active labour market policies (such as apprenticeship and the New Deal for Young People), education-based policies (such as Connexions and EMAs) and area-based policies (such as Excellence in Cities, which is now known as Aimhigher)²⁹⁶. Table 6 covers a selection of some of the more high-profile recent and current initiatives.

Table 6. Selected policy initiatives: Research issues

Initiative	Research/evaluations	Issues
Excellence in Cities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ introduced in three Phases, 1999-2001 ▪ extended to post-16 education in 2001 as Excellence Challenge (now Aimhigher) 	Ireland, E. and O'Donnell, L. (2004) <i>Post-16 and post-18 transitions: initial findings</i> . Slough: NFER.	Some improvements were identified, but it proved very difficult to ascertain whether these were due to Excellence in Cities or to other unrelated factors.
Education Maintenance Allowance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pilot 1999, 2000 ▪ roll out 2004 (announced in 2002 Spending Review) 	Maguire, S., Middleton, S. and Thompson, J. (2006) <i>Young people and the labour market: Evidence from the EMA pilots database</i> . Loughborough: Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP). Middleton, S., Perren, K., Maguire, S., Rennison, J., Battistin, E., Emmerson, C. and Fitzsimmons, E. (2005) <i>Evaluation of EMA pilots: Young people aged 16 to 19 years Final report of the quantitative evaluation. Research Report 678</i> . Nottingham: DfES.	The pilot study showed that a smaller proportion of young people were classified as long-term NEET in the EMA pilot areas, which could be linked to the availability of EMA (14.4% compared with 23.3% in the control areas, pp. 21-22). However, there is a problem of 'deadweight' because many young people would continue in education and training without EMAs; the increase in those engaging in education and training has been offset by a reduction in those following the work-based route.

²⁹⁶ Bynner, J., Londra, M. and Jones, G. (2004), pp. 39-40.

<p>Increased Flexibility Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ introduced 2002 	<p>Ofsted (2005b) <i>Increased flexibility programme at Key Stage 4. HMI Report: 2361</i> [online]. At: www.ofsted.gov.uk, accessed May 2006.</p> <p>Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., Benton, T. and Rudd P. (2005) <i>Evaluation of increased flexibility for 14-16 year-olds programme: Outcomes for the first cohort</i>. Slough: NFER.</p>	<p>There are problems with the selection of pupils to engage in IFP, which can lead to further discrimination against pupils at risk of disengagement. Further, there are also problems with the quality of some provision, attendance and attainment on the part of participants, as well as organisation problems, such as transport and timetabling, and concerns about the sustainability of the programme. FE is not properly equipped to deal with 14-16 year-olds in terms of numbers, facilities and professional development.</p>
<p>Entry to Employment (E2E)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recommended in the 2001 Cassels Report on modern apprenticeships ▪ pathfinder phase Aug 2002-July 2003 ▪ national roll-out 2003 	<p>Spielhofer, T., Mann, P. and Sims, D. (2003) <i>Entry to Employment (E2E) Participant Study. Final Report</i>. Learning and Skills Development Agency, October.</p> <p>Gentleman, S. (2006) <i>Promoting positive progression from E2E</i>. Research Report 052310. Learning and Skills Development Agency.</p>	<p>The participant study registered overall positive experience of young people in the pathfinder programmes. However, the gains reported were more at the level of personal development and jobsearch skills and much less at that of literacy and numeracy.</p> <p>Moving learners to Level 2 is not a requirement of the E2E framework, but providers are incentivised to achieve it. Further, the growth of a range of pre-E2E programmes (such as the n2n – “No to NEET”- project in Bedfordshire and Luton) suggests that the Level 2 targets may be too advanced, and may even militate against the progress of those classified as core NEETs.</p>
<p>Entitlement to Level 2 provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ announced in 2003 21st Century Skills White Paper ▪ trialled 2004/05 ▪ extended 2005/06 ▪ rolled out 2006/07 	<p>Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006) <i>Understanding young people in jobs without training</i>. Research Report 736. Nottingham: DfES.</p>	<p>Young people are not always aware of this entitlement. This also applies to employers, who are not necessarily supportive of Level 2 education and training, as it is not specifically job related.</p> <p>Young people point to the need for ‘brokerage’ or third party intervention to help them access Level 2 provision and entitlement²⁹⁷.</p>

²⁹⁷ See Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006), p. 30: “They’d probably be a bit annoyed because they’re paying me and I’m not there when they need me...they can’t really employ someone else when I’m somewhere else because they’re still paying for me.”

<p>Learning Agreements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pilot April 2006 	<p>Anderson, A., Brooke, B., Doyle, A., Finn, D. and Moley, S. (2006) <i>Understanding young people in jobs without training</i>. Research Report 736. Nottingham: DfES. (Pre-pilot phase report)</p>	<p>It is still very early in this initiative, but the pre-pilot highlighted the data problems in tracking young people in JWT.</p>
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Why is policy not making more of an impact?

If higher levels of participation are the main measure of the success of these initiatives, then previous analysis of participation by the Nuffield Review²⁹⁸ shows that significant progress has not really been made; instead, there has been relative stagnation at a moderate level of participation. Clearly, the overall participation statistics only tell part of the story, but, as increasing the participation levels to be more in line with other OECD nations has been the main driving force behind the policies to reduce the number of young people classified as NEET, it seems that the initiatives have been less than successful, despite significant investment.

Flexible and case-sensitive provision

Flexibility and case-sensitive policy are essential if initiatives are to achieve as much as possible with this highly heterogeneous group. There is a need for greater clarity and coherence, e.g. with regard to eligibility for EMAs, and to the duration of programmes such as the E2E provision, with confusion whether the 22-week guidelines referred to a limit on the time available with learners. Greater clarity about entry criteria might improve the information and guidance available to young people, and reduce the numbers entering unsuitable courses and not completing them. The multiple requirements of some learners classified as NEET means that there is a need for specific expertise in certain areas, such as anger management, learning disabilities, mental health and homelessness. This requires effective multi-agency working.

As Williams argues:

...one of the perverse effects of the current reform process is that pressure on schools to become more market oriented, to raise standards and deliver more outcomes is making it harder for them to accommodate the behaviours and specific support needs of those young people who give rise to the greatest challenges.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ See Hayward *et al.* Nuffield Review Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05.

²⁹⁹ Williams, R. (2006), p. 3

Williams proposes that improved provision for the so-called hardest to reach young people may not lie in mainstream provision, but rather in complementary provision³⁰⁰. Further, he argues that:

... too much attention has been paid to the invention and reinvention of structures, methods of assessment and performance measurement and not enough to process, practice and the need to flex the capacity of the system to meet the needs of those achieving the least.³⁰¹

The quality of provision

The issue is not only one of access to, but one of quality of provision, in a policy climate that has been “preoccupied with participation rather than with curriculum coherence, attainment and progression”³⁰². (See, for example, *Curriculum for the 21st Century*, Appendix VII this volume, for a discussion of the way forward regarding curricular issues).

The expectations of young people

It is important to manage the expectations of the young people once they embark on a course of learning and training; in particular, the fact that the rewards, in terms of further learning or improved employment opportunities, may lie in the medium to long term, rather than be readily available in the short term.

Approaches to learning

In terms of approaches to learning, intensive one-to-one mentoring³⁰³ has yielded results in some contexts and with some individuals. However, it is possible that this approach does not fully acknowledge the need for young people to work effectively in a

³⁰⁰ See also Buckley, J. (2004)

³⁰¹ Williams, R. (2006), p. 2

³⁰² Williams, R. (2006)

³⁰³ See Colley, H. (2006) for a critical discussion of the origins and limited evidence base for engagement mentoring. It identifies “...one of the questionable assumptions underpinning mentoring research and practice: that young people are viewed as passive recipients of the mentoring process” (p. 10). Also, “All too often, it seemed that mentoring had been constructed as a solution to the problems of government, agencies and employers – dealing with the NEET group – rather than as a solution to the problems disadvantaged young people faced themselves” (p. 16). Further issues raised include the need for specific training for mentors to work appropriately with young people with mental health problems, as well as the specific needs of vulnerable young people and the potential mismatch between the declared aims of mentoring programmes and the intentions of young people. For example, Annette, who had chosen to become a full-time mother at 18, viewed her progress in terms of her pregnancy rather than in the terms defined by the (anonymised) *New Beginnings* mentoring project: “Having been placed in care herself, she felt very strongly that ‘a child needs its mother when it’s young’. Unfortunately, Annette would probably register as a failure and a continuing problem within the framework outlined in UK social inclusion policies” (p. 13).

team and to communicate well with other learners and colleagues. Also, there may be over-reliance on certain features of policy implementation, such as the role of effective mentors, where there are problems in recruiting and training suitably skilled professionals. Sustainability of the initiatives, and of young people's progress within them³⁰⁴, is an issue which may need attention if initiatives showing some degree of success are to perform adequately in the future.

Public service reforms

A further problem emerges from the public service reforms of the past two decades, which have oriented public management and delivery towards increased reliance on management by objectives and results and ever tighter regimes of accountability. The use of targets and performance indicators can however be counterproductive in areas where a balance needs to be struck between social inclusion and economic growth agendas. For example, in the case of policy initiatives directed at increasing participation in education and training or at tackling unemployment, it can generate a prioritisation of 'hard outcomes' (e.g. getting qualifications or jobs), to the detriment of more qualitative educational gains. Soft outcomes, such as subtle attitudinal changes on the part of the young people, must be acknowledged and recognised.

Target-driven culture

Targets for those engaged in guiding and advising young people seem to be misplaced, as this encourages a search for short-term solutions, rather than solutions that will serve young people well in the medium and long term. Target orientation in this area may incentivise providers to favour those who are more likely to achieve such outcomes within a cost-effective timeframe, thus lead to further discrimination against those most at risk. An approach based on 'ranking' may lead to providers becoming increasingly reluctant to take on the learners that are hardest to reach. For example, in the case of E2E, confusions about the time constraints, as well as 'premium funding' practices have encouraged a risk-averse approach among providers, who may be reluctant to take on learners below Entry Level 3 (i.e. who are seen as less likely to achieve at Level 1 within the time frame of the E2E programme). Further, research with Coventry Employment Services on the New Deal for Young People programme revealed that

...a number of providers suggested that difficult NDYP clients, particularly those with special educational needs or records of drug abuse, were not being targeted. There was a working assumption that the programmes should deal with the most 'employable' youngsters first, especially in

³⁰⁴ "Progress made by individuals can also be fragile, and is not always sustained. 40% of participants who get a job after participating in the New Deal for Young People return to claiming Jobseeker's Allowance within six months. Progress in other areas of life – like giving up drugs or turning away from crime – can also be undermined easily." Social Exclusion Unit (2004), pp. 5-6.

terms of the national target of placing at least 40% of clients in unsubsidised jobs.³⁰⁵

This example highlights the potentially counterproductive nature of the target-driven culture, as it leads to potentially inappropriate referrals and to a potential lack of attention to those most at risk.

Potential tension between different areas of policy is a problem, especially within the context of a lack of vertical integration in terms of age-specific provision. We will return to this later in this chapter.

System behaviour and policy misunderstandings

Table 6 gave a flavour of the range of initiatives populating the policy space of the recent years. Such initiatives, launched at different moments in time and by different sponsors, create a fragmented landscape, in which any impact is almost unattributable. Some of the recent policies seem to be based on partial and fragmented understandings of the nature of young people's behaviour, as well as of the dynamics of the youth labour market and of the education and training system. The fragmentary character of recent policy is not only horizontal (or cross-sectional – hence the need for more joined-up policy thinking) but also vertical (in the sense of policy amnesia³⁰⁶ – lessons not being learnt from earlier policy initiatives)³⁰⁷. This raises questions for research, for example what do we know about young people's behaviour, the labour market, and the dynamics of the education and training system – and in what ways can this knowledge become part of enhanced education and social policy formation?

One of the reasons why the system does not seem to be moving forward at a satisfactory pace (i.e. one that would reflect the amount of initiatives thrown at it) might have less to do with issues of within-initiative implementation, and more with policy formation and the interaction between the processes and the outcomes of the various concurrent programmes, which involves elements of coherence, but also of conflict and contradiction.

Figure 1 (reprinted below)³⁰⁸ traces policy initiatives back from the actual patterns of behaviour of the system (including both education and training and the labour market), through the individual and institutional actors involved (e.g. schools, colleges, training

³⁰⁵ Hyland, T. and Musson, D. (2001), p. 64. See also Fergusson, R. (2002).

³⁰⁶ See Bailey, B. (2003); Hayward, G. and Fernandez, R. (2004).

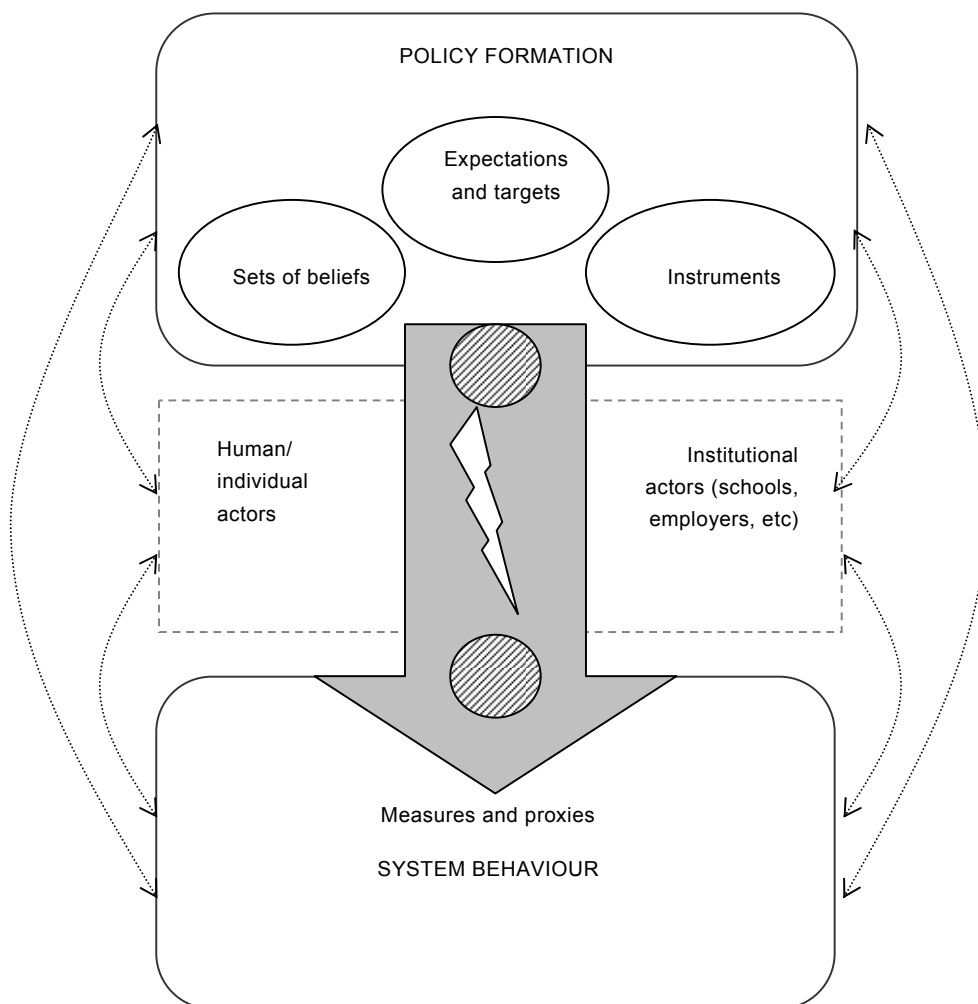
³⁰⁷ This fragmentation is mirrored by the young people's experience of the system, as they move upwards or laterally through the multitude of stages, programmes and schemes.

³⁰⁸ Figure 1 is a reworking of the framework used in the Annual Report 2004-05 for analysing the dynamics of the 14-19 system in England from the perspective of the relationships between structures, policies, and expected and actual behaviour of the system (Hayward, G. *et al.* 2005).

providers, information and guidance services, employers etc.), and to the level of policy formation (including not only the range of policy instruments, mainly hortatory and incentive-related, but also the set of beliefs, expectations and targets on which a particular initiative is based).

Education policy is a messy, non-linear process situated at the intersection of problems, policies and politics³⁰⁹ and of a variety of interests, beliefs, and expectations. The individual and institutional actors, either those expected to carry the policy through, or those on whom policy is expected to have an impact, bring to the process their own characteristics, sense of agency and identity, expectations, and interpretations. This makes the link between policy initiatives and system behaviour a non-linear, mediated one.

Figure 1. Policy formation, actors, and system behaviour



³⁰⁹ Porter, R. (1995)

The mismatch between policy intentions and system behaviour may originate anywhere along this continuum (the dark arrow in Figure 1): in misinterpretations of actors' characteristics, in unrealistic targets (e.g. the upper striped circle in the figure); in clashing interests and expectations; as well as in malfunctioning of the system in its wider context and of the actor networks within it (the lower striped circle). Unexpected behaviours of the system are therefore not necessarily an anomaly, or a consequence of a lack of understanding, capacity, or commitment on the part of the actors, but may originate in a mismatch between policy interpretations, beliefs and expectations and the characteristics of the structures and the actors in the field. At the policy formation level, such mismatches can seep into the formulation of targets and the design of instruments, and may undermine the potential for success of a policy initiative. For example, policies aimed at channelling young people into education and/or employment may neglect the socio-cultural circumstances of this process and the complex character of young people's engagement with education and training and the labour market. Targets based on hard outcomes may be counterproductive in areas such as information and guidance, where subtle attitudinal changes at actor level are crucial.

Interaction between concurrent policy initiatives is not linear either. While they may directly reinforce or undermine their respective effects, they also may become enmeshed in a complex network of overlapping positive and negative outcomes, running parallel (with their own discrete outcomes), or offset each other's outcomes through fundamental, though not explicit, contradictions³¹⁰.

A question that emerges is: do the recent 14-19 initiatives concerning education, training, employment and welfare represent an integrated, coherent programme? Are they uncoordinated or discrete interventions? Are they working against each other, e.g. by providing a confusing landscape of incentives to 16 and 17 year-olds?³¹¹ The odds are that there is a lack of coordination and even of contradiction built into current provision for 16 to 19 year-olds. For example, the 2005 ECOTEC report to the DfES³¹² notes a number of contradictions in the implementation of the 2002 Success for All post-16 reform programme: between initiatives requiring long-term investment and medium-term structural change; between provider-level and area-level priorities; and between initiatives aimed at widening participation and performance-related funding. Insufficient clarity about targets can generate further contradiction between initiatives with potentially competing aims (e.g. between retaining young people in education and training, and attracting them into employment), and there is a need for greater coherence regarding longer-term employment planning for young people.

³¹⁰ See, for example, ECOTEC (2005)

³¹¹ For example: "Labour market driven aims of New Deal and Modern Apprenticeships that attract young people towards employment can potentially be seen as conflicting with initiatives like Connexions, EMAs and Excellence in Cities, the aim of which is largely to encourage young people to stay in education." Bynner, J., Londra, M. and Jones, G. (2004), p. 42

³¹² ECOTEC (2005)

Nonetheless, and however difficult counterfactuals always are, the argument is sometimes made that it might be the case that the current proportion of young people classified as NEET would have been even higher had it not been for the recent governmental policy initiatives. For example, an evaluation of the New Deal for Young People programme by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research³¹³ found that the official estimates of the number of young people who found work via the New Deal for Young People (about 254,500) exaggerated its impact. The National Institute for Economic and Social Research provided a much lower figure, with the comment that, “inevitably, some of these people would have found a job anyway because of natural labour market turnover and the general expansion of employment in the economy” and that, “A little over 200 thousand young people left unemployment earlier than they would have done without the programme. Within this total, roughly 60 thousand more young people moved directly into work (including subsidised jobs) than would have been the case without [the New Deal for Young People]”. The evaluation also found that, “long-term unemployment amongst young people, at 52 thousand in March 2000, would have been almost twice as high without [the New Deal for Young People]”³¹⁴.

Further, some of the initiatives mentioned above have indeed had noticeable impact, for example on increasing participation (e.g. the EMA), flexibility or attractiveness of the system (the last two being invested with value by default in much of the official discourse, even though they can generate confusion and be quite devoid of educational value). However, the high level of ‘policy noise’ in the current context makes it difficult to discriminate and to attribute positive impact.

Wider social policy implications

The number of young people leaving education or training at 16/17 increased between 1992 and 2003 despite a plethora of policy initiatives directed at keeping them in the system. Some of these young people are in employment but a significant proportion are unemployed. Even those in full-time or part-time employment tend to be in jobs without good earnings³¹⁵, on-the-job training, or promotion/progression prospects.

The extent to which this is a problem at the individual level depends on personal and socio-economic circumstances and on individual perceptions of self and of the context. For some young people the decision to leave education and training and move into the labour market might be a positive choice, whilst for others it might be a case of ‘drift’ or of being pushed out of the system by various factors. Although moving to the labour market early may be a positive choice for some young people, these young people do

³¹³ Riley, R. and Young. G. (2000), pp. 1-2

³¹⁴ Riley, R. and Young. G. (2000), p. 10

³¹⁵ Good earnings are defined here as a family-sustaining wage within a given economic context.

not necessarily derive more satisfaction from involvement in paid work than they did from participation in education or training³¹⁶.

At the social policy level the problem becomes acute, with implications beyond the field of education and education policy.

Demographic shifts and policy futures

Demographic projections for the next 50 years show a continuous process of population ageing, fuelled by the declining fertility rates and by the increase in (healthy) life expectancy for both men and women. In 2001 the ratio of under 15 year-olds to people over 64 reversed, and the UK is now an ageing society (less so than, for example, Italy, but still significantly so)³¹⁷.

What this means for the future of social policy is that greater pressure will be exercised on to a pensions and welfare (including healthcare) system that was designed for a different context and population structure. The support ratio (i.e. the ratio of labour active population to that of labour inactive population) will change as the pool of young people available for entry into the labour market becomes smaller by comparison with the pool of pensioners. In such a context, greater expectations are placed on current and future generations of young people as contributors to the public budget. Potential solutions are likely to depend on extending the retirement age in the short term and increasing productivity in the longer term³¹⁸. This poses considerable challenges to the education and training system and makes the problem of those who leave at 16/17 more pressing in the medium term, as it seems that the social system will be less and less able to afford a quantitative loss of workers (to the welfare system) and a qualitative loss of skills and employability (with potential impact on productivity and employment rates). This raises further questions about the nature of the current social contract(s) in England and Wales.

³¹⁶ For some young people this might have to do with “damaged learner identities”, but we cannot assume that this is the norm – for example, the rewarding part of moving into the labour market might have more to do with the change of status of the individuals within their participant social networks.

³¹⁷ See Howse, K. (2004); Howse, K. and Oancea, A. (2006); Barr, N. (2006). For an analysis of demographic trends and their impact on the skills profile in the UK, see Her Majesty’s Treasury (2005), pp. 59-62. Recent OECD data forecast the decline of the population aged 15-19 in the United Kingdom over the next ten years. OECD (2006) p. 163

³¹⁸ Other scenarios that have been explored to alleviate this were programmes oriented towards encouraging a growth in fertility rate or encouraging replacement migration. These have by and large been rejected on grounds of low feasibility and side effects.

Globalisation and employment uncertainty

A number of aspects connected with globalisation combine to alter the current context for education and training and raise new challenges for the future of the education and training system; e.g. the internationalisation of markets, relocation of business interests and emergence of global networks, accelerated international capital flows, and migration. One of the outcomes of these processes is increased instability in global markets and uncertainty of individual trajectories within labour markets. Mills and Blossfeld³¹⁹ argue that such uncertainty is 'path-dependent' and 'institutionally filtered' (through employment relation, educational systems, national welfare states, and family structures), and that it can be reasonably expected that in all countries the global increase of uncertainty is experienced more directly by youth entering the labour market. A more uncertain employment relationship characterises the youth labour market than the adult one; such a relationship involves easy entry to the labour market, which is offset by lower economic/job security, shorter duration of employment, lower human capital investment on the part of the employer, and high rate of job turnover. What this could mean in relation to the stocks and flows presented in Figure 2 is that policy efforts based on the assumption that young people need to be sheltered from the vicissitudes of an unstable labour market by keeping them in education and training for a longer time at all costs might be flawed.

The discourse of 'youth'

One notable qualitative finding of several recent studies is that the concepts of 'youth' and 'childhood', and public perceptions of their rights and of the costs associated with their social reproduction³²⁰, have changed substantially over the past half-century. Life trajectories have become less linear, and the traditional descriptors of youth (e.g. starting a family or education) have been extended to other age groups too. A consequence of this is a blurring of the passage to adulthood: some young people acquire attributes of 'adults' much earlier than expected; some others enjoy such attributes in certain contexts (e.g. part-time work) but not in others (e.g. education); and for some the transition is heavily delayed. As early as 1992, Jones and Wallace argued that we "can no longer say at what age young people become adults, nor do we wish to – our concern is with trying to define the ways in which different groups of young people are accepted as 'adults' in different contexts"³²¹.

³¹⁹ Blossfeld, H.-P. and Mills, M. (2005)

³²⁰ The demographic pyramids show, for example, that "in the coming decades, the cost of social reproduction of young people will continue to dominate concerns of the policy landscape in North America, whereas in many European countries, the aging of the workforce is the more salient issue." Ruddick, S. (2003), p. 349.

³²¹ Jones, G. and Wallace, C. (1992), p. 4.

Policy responses to problems associated with youth have also changed and multiplied, as this section has shown. In many cases, Ruddick³²² argues, the extent of the problem has remained relatively unchanged (e.g. the proportion of 16 year-olds not participating in education and training, or that of 17 year-olds who are labour market inactive and not in education and training). However, the public discourse surrounding it perpetuated a negative discourse centred on containment rather than on seeking modes of valorisation. Oancea³²³ noted a shift in the descriptors used by English policy documents to portray young people in the last decade (the extent of which went beyond ideological differences), as well as a marked discrepancy between the policy and the research discourse of youth. For example, the 1996 DfEE White Paper *Learning to Compete*³²⁴ refers to “young people” 131 times and describes them in terms of employment, skills, careers, preparation, equipping, choice and entitlement; whereas the 2005 DfES White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills*³²⁵ gears its 418 mentions of “young people” towards opportunities, choice, pathways, stretching, engagement, motivation, support and guidance, disengagement, NEET, problems and needs. Both White Papers refer heavily to choice, achievement, and assessment.

The future of the labour market

The Nuffield Review comes to the end of its first three-year phase at a moment when the English 14-19 scene is (yet again) in a process of transition. The Nuffield Review has devoted a significant effort to describing and explaining the state of affairs which we are preparing to leave behind. The government’s aspirations for the future are fairly clear. What is much less so is where developments and trends will actually lead. There are various reasons for the future being clouded in uncertainty, some of which have been reviewed in the preceding chapters. An additional problem comes in terms of the future shape of the labour market.

This has two dimensions. First, due to demographic changes the 14-19 cohort will get smaller over the next few years. This may mean that, “young people will be in a seller’s market”³²⁶, and that therefore employers who traditionally recruit young people will have to compete harder with one another in a dwindling pool, thereby driving up youth wages. As the LSC notes³²⁷, “there will not be enough young people to go around and as a result employers will face a very competitive labour market for young entrants.” This in turn may serve to undermine the impact and appeal of EMAs (to young people) and Learning Agreements (to employers of young people in jobs without training).

³²² Ruddick, S. (2003)

³²³ Oancea, A. (2006)

³²⁴ DfEE (1996)

³²⁵ DfES (2005c)

³²⁶ LSC (2006c), p. 30

³²⁷ LSC (2006c), p. 8

Second, as labour market projections of the structure of job growth in England³²⁸ make clear, a polarising labour market means that while high-skilled occupations will expand, so too will a number of low-wage, low-qualification occupations. The middle of the labour market is expected to continue to 'hollow out', as polarisation increases. This development, coupled with the cumulative impact of the mass expansion of HE, may create a polarisation of the incentive structures facing young people. If a degree becomes the essential entry qualification to the vast bulk of higher level, better paid jobs, then the incentive to participate post-16 for those who are unlikely to gain access to HE may be reduced. This effect may be magnified if young people perceive, perhaps correctly³²⁹, that access to many lower paid service occupations is determined not by qualifications, but by uncertified generic skills and personal attributes and characteristics (voice, appearance, personality).

The combination of the two factors outlined above could have a seriously deleterious effect on post-compulsory participation rates. Far from cruising towards the English government's target of 90% participation by 17 year-olds, policy may find itself struggling to maintain current levels of participation. Certainly, given the changing incentives suggested above, the prospects for further major improvements in participation among relatively low-achieving youngsters may resemble the task of pushing a train uphill with its brakes on.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the 'sticky' issue of moderate and static participation rates and high proportions of young people classified as NEET or in JWT, and found that costly policy-induced system busyness was offset by participation inertia leading to small or non-existent increments in the participation rates of the target groups. The excessive focus on participation rates runs the risk of obscuring the need for raising retention and attainment rates. Participation alone is not the answer: it needs to be accompanied by improved retention and attainment in a context of high-quality provision and curriculum coherence.

The evidence reviewed can be summarised as follows:

Relatively static post-compulsory participation rate

The 'sticky' issue of the moderate and relatively static post-compulsory participation rate of around 76% has not gone away over the past decade, despite the raft of policy initiatives with this explicit aim. There are significant proportions of 16 and 17 year-

³²⁸ See LSC (2006c); Wilson, R., Homenidou, K. and Dickerson, A. (2006). Thank you to Ewart Keep for his input here.

³²⁹ See Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (2004); Keep, E. (2004a)

olds who enter the labour market or are classified as NEET, and these groups have long been a cause of policy concern.

Young people classified as NEET

The term NEET, used variously as a noun or an adjective in official and research texts, masks the heterogeneity of the young people classified in this residual statistical group. The term itself refers to an absence of activity, and as such lacks substance. Certain groups are over-represented amongst young people outside education and training, including those being 'looked after', teenage parents, young carers, young people with medical or psychological conditions, and young people involved in crime. Early classification as NEET can have a 'scarring' effect on young people's future prospects, predicting long-term unemployment and other social problems.

Jobs without training and apprenticeship

Those who enter the labour market at 16/17 are frequently in routine, low-paid jobs with few chances of progression (often in retailing, catering or hospitality). Those in JWT have not been a policy priority in recent years, arguably because they do not feature as a negative statistic (i.e. they are not classified as NEET), but feature as 'in employment'.

The work undertaken is, however, characterised by a high level of turnover of staff or 'churn'. Therefore, incentives for employers and young people to devote time and resources to training may be limited. This may explain the persistence of the proportion of young people in JWT, despite the policy intention that precisely this group would be attracted into apprenticeship programmes.

The decision to leave at 16/17

Policy discourse pathologises non-participation. However, for some young people this decision may be a positive one: in favour of parenthood, for example, or to care for a relative, or to move into a job of their choosing. This 'choice' may also be strongly conditioned by the young person's personal circumstances, their socio-economic background and their locality. As such, it may actually be more of a default mechanism than a choice, particularly for young people with poor GCSE results. 'Drift out of education and training' is the scenario that may befall young people who have not flourished in formal schooling, and do not have strong aspirations.

The nature of employer involvement

There is continuing mutual interest between employers and young people. Young people may appeal to employers because they offer cheaper labour than older employees. Young people are attracted by the opportunity to earn money and to

engage with the adult world, rather than remain in education and training. The progression routes from these jobs are somewhat limited, and both employers and young people in the labour market seem reluctant to commit time and resources to education and training beyond job-specific induction.

Policy initiatives and their (lack of) success

There is a discrepancy between the intentions and targets of the multitude of recent policy initiatives directed at increasing participation rates and the actual behaviour of the system. The numerous initiatives (active labour market, area based, or education and training) have involved significant investment of public resources, and effort on the part of the institutional actors, but the outcomes fell short of the targets. This has less to do with the type of policy instruments deployed, and more with the lack of flexibility of provision in relation to the context and expectations of the various actors in the system, including young people, employers, providers, and youth workers. Participation alone is not the answer: it needs to be accompanied by retention and attainment in a context of high-quality provision and curriculum coherence.

System behaviour and policy misunderstandings

The chapter examines wider policy implications, and mismatches between the following three levels: policy formation, individual and institutional actors, and system behaviour. The difficulties associated with achieving the policy targets derive in part from the fragmentary nature of policy formation, both vertically (in terms of the so-called policy amnesia) and horizontally (in terms of joined-up thinking and coherent provision).

Wider social policy implications

Even if leaving education and training at 16/17 may be an active choice of the individual, depending on socio-economic circumstances and personal expectations, it represents a significant social policy problem, in terms of the population support ratio (i.e. the ratio of active to inactive population) and in terms of minimisation of risk in a context of increased employment uncertainty and non-linear life trajectories.

On the basis of the evidence reviewed, we reflect upon the following characteristics of recent developments and initiatives, and suggest potential ways forward:

- Lack of ongoing fine tuning of policy expectations and targets in the context of the behaviour of the individual and institutional actors.
- Emphasis on hard outcomes. Need to acknowledge in policy formation the value of both soft and hard outcomes.
- 'Tunnel vision' regarding education and training reform in isolation from other factors. Need to recognise education and training as just one

constituent of the wider system that includes other factors such as current and predicted changes in the labour market, socio-economic change, regional differences, healthcare issues, demographics.

- Reform over focused on institutional structures and qualification frameworks while preserving the strong filtering function of GCSE. Lack of appropriate provision for young people with diverse backgrounds and requirements. This diversity and heterogeneity may indicate a need for case-specific provision and information and guidance sensitive to the contexts of individual young people.
- Lack of vertical and horizontal policy development. A more flexible approach to age limits on provision (such as the overlap between provision focused on education and training and that focused on active labour market policies).
- Negative discourse about young people – the NEET issue (consigned to the residual category and seen as a purely educational problem, despite the array of psychological, medical, criminal and other issues that may require support of a rather different nature).
- Lack of effective, reliable, detailed, consistent and regular data on 16 and 17 year-olds. Problem of the squeezing of more complex life courses into residual data categories, rather than recognition of heterogeneity. Need for more textured data in order to make appropriate support available to these young people. Need for policy attention to be given to the construction of datasets that are sensitive to the complexity of young people's and employers' situations, and their fast-changing nature.
- 'Implementation' model consisting of tight target-setting – management-accountability loop. Need for greater acknowledgement of and support for the active contribution of institutional and other professional actors.

CHAPTER 4

**Articulation between 14-19 education
and training and higher education:
Clear pathway or obstacle course?**

Introduction

This chapter asks to what extent articulation between 14-19 and HE is a clear pathway, and to what extent it is an obstacle course. The reality for the majority of the cohort is that their situation is located at some point on the continuum between those two extremes. For some young people, progression to HE is a natural choice, and a relatively straightforward process as they move from the traditional A Level academic Level 3 qualification pathway to an honours degree at university.

For other young people, however, the transition is not so smooth, nor so straightforward. The obstacles referred to in the title include the following:

- financial in terms of the cost of accessing HE
- the necessity of part-time work during HE studies
- socio-economic barriers to accessing HE
- dispositions and attitudes – some young people have difficulty envisioning the feasibility of their progression to HE
- a lack of local opportunity structures, or, at the other end of the continuum, an oversupply of opportunity, with institutional competition and advertisement making it difficult for some young people to make a good choice (this relates to a lack of advice and guidance at the secondary level)
- low levels of attainment in compulsory schooling, particularly GCSE results and the difficulty of gaining appropriate Level 3 qualifications
- potential progression routes from vocational qualifications³³⁰
- barriers for young people from particular socio-economic groups and ethnic origins
- barriers for young people from low-participation neighbourhoods
- barriers inherent in the familial, institutional and cultural contexts of young people from less advantaged backgrounds.

Mismatches and disconnections between 14-19 education and training and HE undermine the efficiency and success of the connection between these two phases of

³³⁰ The subject of a study by Hayward, G. and Ertl, H., titled *Degrees of success: The transition between VET and HE*, as part of the Economic and Social Research Council TLRP research programme. See: http://www.tlrp.org/proj/wphe/wp_hayward.html

education. Particular mismatches and disconnections were highlighted in focus group research undertaken by the Nuffield Review. Short reports are included as Appendix IV (focus groups with lecturers and admissions staff at 21 higher education institutions (HEIs)) and Appendix V (focus groups with students and staff at schools and colleges, and with first-year students at HEIs).

The former set of focus groups identified some mismatches in the knowledge, attitudes, study skills, approaches to learning, life skills and level of motivation of students. Focus group participants particularly criticised the instrumental approach to HE study by students, and their focus on assessment, which the participants viewed as a continuation of expectations created during 14-19 education and training.

The latter set of focus groups highlighted the importance of information and guidance for young people considering progression to HE, as well as the importance of informal and formal contacts with HEIs. Again, mismatches and disconnections were identified, in this case relating to information about the financial implications of HE, approaches to teaching and learning, and assessment practices at HE. There was also evidence of formal and informal contact between HEIs and schools and colleges which facilitated articulation and engagement.

The structure of this chapter is as follows:

- The current context of HE
- An exploration of six factors affecting the articulation between 14-19 and HE
 - i. The expansion of HE
 - ii. The attractiveness of HE for 14-19 year-olds
 - iii. Accessing HE, the widening participation agenda
 - iv. Different entry routes to HE
 - v. Retention and attrition
 - vi. Information, advice and guidance
- Concluding remarks.

Section 1: The current context of higher education

HE in England and Wales has, in recent decades, experienced a period of expansion and consolidation. The diversity of institutions has increased. For example, some HEIs attract international recognition and large numbers of students, whilst at the same time the last decade has seen an exponential increase of HE provision in FE colleges. The latter offers new opportunities for internal progression and entry to HE for students with

qualifications other than A Level. Other positive developments include improved arrangements for student finance and the increasing availability of summer schools and other outreach activities. Broadly speaking, HE has maintained its attractiveness for young people and employers with continued labour market benefits for graduates.

The government has statutory powers over 14-19 education and training but not over HE, except in the area of HE finance. Therefore, HE policy other than finance policy often takes the form of recommendations or guidance, rather than the statutory instruments found in 14-19 policy. To some extent, the policy busyness described in Chapter 1 of this Annual Report is also evident in HE, although HE has the autonomy to interpret policy more independently than 14-19 institutions. The consultation process regarding improvements to the application process, and the moves towards a possible introduction of post-qualification application, the changes to student finance enabled by the 2004 Higher Education Act, and a range of Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) policy instruments are examples of recent busyness.

One feature of the expansion of HE is the increasing institutional diversity and the development of institutional groupings, for example the Russell Group, 1994 Group, CMU Group (Campaigning for Mainstream Universities), the Non-aligned Group and the Mixed Economy Group. There are also increasing numbers of partnerships between FE colleges and universities for delivery of HE at degree and sub-degree level. In addition, there has been the changing formal status of various institutions, such as colleges of higher education becoming universities.

There is tension between increased government intervention regarding admissions policies and the desired levels of institutional autonomy. The focus groups with HEIs undertaken for the Nuffield Review highlighted particular problems with differentiation at the highest levels of achievement. This is linked with the recent and current proliferation of admissions tests³³¹, which are not only used by the most selective institutions. These tests are outside the regulatory framework, and in some cases work to subvert equality of opportunity as they are relatively expensive.

Further developments related to applications and admissions processes have been the Schwarz Review³³², and more recently the consultation on improving the application process and a recommendation to set up a delivery partnership to work towards post-qualification application by 2012. The extent of this development and its eventual impact are as yet unclear. Further, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions has been set up to provide an evidence base in the field³³³.

³³¹ See Appendix VI

³³² Admissions to Higher Education Review (2004)

³³³ Supporting Professionalism in Admissions is a HEFCE-funded project, with HE sector-wide membership, based at UCAS. It was established in line with the Schwarz Review recommendation that a central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues should be created. Admissions to Higher Education Review (2004)

Section 2: Articulation between 14-19 education and training and higher education

The following factors have been identified as important aspects of the articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE:

- i. the expansion of HE
- ii. the attractiveness of HE for 14-19 year-olds
- iii. the widening participation agenda
- iv. different entry routes
- v. retention and attrition
- vi. information, advice and guidance.

The first section, the expansion of HE, examines quantitative data on the changing nature of HE and entry to it, and also the effects of the expansion of HE both on the system and on those who do not enter HE.

The second section examines what draws increasing numbers of young people to HE study, including labour market and economic returns, and the wider benefits of HE.

The third section examines the widening participation agenda, the focus of much recent policy attention. On one hand, Aimhigher and other policy interventions have forced issues to be addressed; on the other hand, data confirm that the gap between participation of the higher and lower socio-economic groups is not being significantly reduced. In addition, there is a problem with widening participation interventions as 'bolt-on' activities and short-term programme funding.

Different entry routes and different experiences of entry are another important aspect of articulation. With regard to different entry routes, first, in respect of A Level, Curriculum 2000 has been problematic, particularly because of the introduction of atomistic assessment approaches and the facility to re-sit units. However, the current *14-19 Implementation Plan* will lead to a reduction from six to four units within A Level and seeks to address issues relating to differentiation at the top end of the ability range. Second, the introduction and growth of foundation degrees have promoted connections between vocational and occupational qualifications and HE study. Unfortunately, there are early indications that the latter has led to problems further

down the line in progressing from a foundation degree to a full degree and in terms of articulation between foundation degrees and the needs of the labour market³³⁴.

The fifth section, retention and attrition, turns to what happens to learners when they get to HE. It examines how students' progress is affected by (and reflects) both their preparation in 14-19 education and training and the way in which HEIs support them in their admission and induction.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG), the subject of the final section, is of central importance to successful articulation between the 14-19 phase and HE. It is to be regretted that robust IAG is not available to all learners.

i: The expansion of higher education: The changing nature of higher education and entry to it³³⁵

This section summarises trends over time in the nature of HE and entry to it. Data available from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for the 10-year period from 1996 to 2005 and from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the seven-year period from 1998/99 to 2004/05 were examined³³⁶. The objectives for this analysis were:

- to examine changes in the number of applicants and acceptances

³³⁴ QAA (2005)

³³⁵ A number of limitations of the data available relating to progression to HE have been identified. For example, currently administrative data do not capture information on all Level 3 achievement and flows from Level 3 to Level 4. Data on internal progression from Level 3 to Level 4 within FE are less robust than those on external progression, as some internal progression bypasses the UCAS system. The extent of the impact of this on foundation degree data is unclear. This gap needs urgent attention. In addition, data on part-time *applicants* are non-existent at UCAS. UCAS data only deal with full-time applicants, though part-time *students* are included in HESA data. Furthermore, use of UCAS and HESA data is problematic in that the two datasets use different modes of data collection and reporting. Finally, existing datasets do not allow connections to be made between an individual's employment status and student status, so it is impossible to tell which part-time students are also full-time or part-time employees.

It is also difficult to examine the differences between progression from various Level 3 pathways. For example, *Paving the Way* UCAS (2002) separates students with A Levels from those with GNVQ/AVCE whereas Connor, H. and Little, B. (2005) – using HESA data – include A Levels, GNVQ and NVQ in the same category as Level 3 qualifications. This difficulty, which highlights the complexity of the 14-19 qualification landscape, makes the findings difficult to compare for research purposes. Some of the above issues are currently being addressed, for example through the DfES Managing Information Across Partners initiative, which is seeking to develop national standards for data.

³³⁶ UCAS data used relate to applicants and course provision for full-time study at HE only, and for UK-domiciled applicants. In some areas where UCAS does not have any data (e.g. part-time study) HESA data have been used. The HESA data are based on students who actually start on a course and are generated by the 'returns' completed by HEIs at the beginning of the academic year.

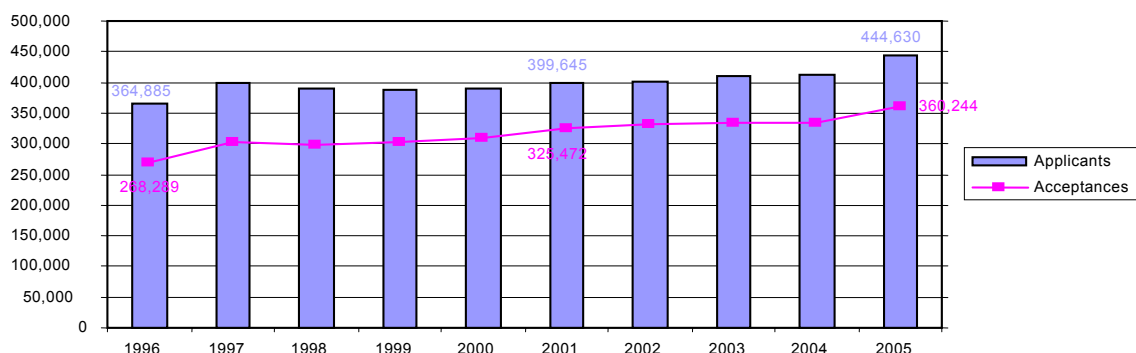
- to investigate the profile of those applying to (and accepting places at) HE
- to explore the development of different types of provision (e.g. foundation courses) and different modes of study
- to assess HE provision, the different types of institution and the courses/subjects offered.

Applicants and acceptances

Total applicants and acceptances

The overall number of UK-domiciled residents applying to HE has risen from almost 365,000 in 1996 to 445,000 in 2005, representing a 30% increase, whilst the number of acceptances has risen from 258,000 to 360,000 (a similar increase).

Figure 4. Applicants and acceptances in higher education 1996-2005



Source: UCAS

Age profile

The majority of those applying and gaining acceptance to full-time HE are of school age, and the proportion of 18 to 20 year-olds among total applicants has risen from 75% in 1996 to 78% in 2005. Although the number of mature students (21-plus) has increased slightly over the ten years, their share of the total number of acceptances went down from 22% to 20% (whilst the age group of 17 and under remained at 2-3%).

Gender

The number of women applying and being accepted has increased faster than the number of men. Female acceptances have risen from 51% of all acceptances in 1996 to 54% in 2005.

Institution attended before higher education

The table below shows the institutions attended before HE by those accepted to HE in 1996 and 2005 respectively.

Table 7. Type of institution attended before higher education

Institution type	1996	2005
Sixth form colleges	9%	11%
Comprehensive schools	27%	26%
FE colleges	26%	22%
Independent schools	11%	9%
Grammar schools	6%	5%
Sixth form centres	1%	1%
Other	1%	1%
Other maintained	4%	5%
Unknown	15%	20%

Source: UCAS

Socio-economic group

Those from managerial and professional occupations account for the majority of applicants, though the proportion fell from 57% in 2002 to 52% in 2005³³⁷. The proportion in the 'unknown' category has increased to almost a quarter of applicants (completion of this category is not mandatory).

Ethnicity

The majority of both applicants and acceptances are white; this has decreased slightly from an 82% share of acceptances in 1996 to 78% in 2005. Black Caribbeans have shown the largest increase in applicants and acceptances, whilst Asians have shown a more gradual increase over time³³⁸.

³³⁷ Data for socio-economic group are reported from 2002 as there was a change in classification in 2001.

³³⁸ Ethnic minorities form 7.9% of the UK population; Black Caribbean 1%; Asians 4%.
(www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk).

Country of domicile

The share of acceptances has remained constant (83% England, 8% Scotland, 5% Wales, 4% Northern Ireland).

Learning disability

The proportion of acceptances with a learning disability of some sort have increased from 1% in 1996 to 3% in 2005, possibly reflecting that access to HE for the disabled may be improving (although they remain a minority).

Type of higher education institution, degree type, mode of study, course provision

Type of higher education institution

Acceptances to universities far outweigh acceptances to FE or HE colleges. However, whilst the pre-92 universities have remained at a stable 41% share of acceptances from 1996 to 2005, the post-92 grouping has increased from 40% to 43%. Both FE and HE colleges have increased their share of acceptances (from 3% in 1996 to 5% in 2005 for FE colleges, and 7% in 1996 to 11% in 2005 for HE colleges)³³⁹.

Degree type

The overall number of acceptances on to a degree has increased from 246,000 acceptances in 1996 to 345,000 in 2005, representing 94% of all HE acceptances. However, the number of acceptances on to a Higher National Diploma (HND) has fallen dramatically since 2003 (down from 8% of acceptances in 1996 to 3% in 2005). There has been a corresponding increase in acceptances on to a foundation degree (up to 3% of acceptances in 2005).

Mode of study

The proportion of students in HE studying full time has fallen from 77% in 1998/99 to 74% in 2004/05, whilst the proportion studying part time has risen from 13% in 1998/99 to 18% in 2004/05. The proportion on sandwich courses has decreased slightly from 10% in 1998/99 to 8% in 2004/05)³⁴⁰.

³³⁹ This may be due to clarification of institution type (the 'unknown' category of institutions has disappeared) rather than an actual difference in the profile.

³⁴⁰ These figures come from HESA data provided to the Nuffield Review and UCAS.

Number and type of courses

- The total number of institutions running published courses (courses that are 'live' and can be applied to) rose from 259 in 2000 to 329 in 2006; this increase is largely accounted for by the increasing number of FE colleges offering HE provision.
- The total number of courses increased from 45,617 in 2000 to 51,934 in 2004, and decreased to 51,040 in 2006.

Effects of the expansion of higher education

The overall trend is for greater absolute numbers (and a higher proportion of the age cohort) to progress to HE, and this has led to an increasing polarisation between those who go to HE and those who do not. As Watson puts it, international evidence suggests that "the more the system expands, the greater will be the cost of not participating"³⁴¹. There may be problems inherent in HE as a so-called 'negative incentive', especially for those young people who do not like institutional learning and are reluctant learners. Teaching and learning processes in HE will need to be adapted to cope with potentially reluctant learners.

Keep³⁴² argues that the impact of HE expansion on the 50% who do not go to HE also creates a problem in terms of progression to the labour market, if the 'top half' who go to HE also access the 'top half' of the job opportunities. This means that young people with Level 3 qualifications may find themselves displaced in the labour market.

The requirement of a degree for a 'decent' job has led to a process of 'cascading', with those with degrees displacing those without degrees in the labour market. A further potential impact of HE expansion is that rates of returns may drop in jobs filled with graduates. The rates of return from some institutions and/or courses will be so low that it will not be worthwhile, in economic terms at least, to enter HE. Here, the responses and behaviour of employers are central. There have been moves for employers to actively recruit 18 year-olds, offering a direct route to employment without the risk and expense of HE study. For example, major accountancy firms including KPMG and Price Waterhouse Coopers explicitly recruit school leavers.

The Leitch Review of skills projects that if the 50% target is to be reached by 2010, 38% of the labour force will have a degree by 2020. This will mean that the range of jobs available to those without degrees will be restricted. Also, internal labour market progression may potentially be limited by a so-called 'iron ceiling'.

³⁴¹ Watson, D. (2005), p. 142

³⁴² Personal communication, 22 June 2006. See also Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (2004)

The situation will be one of increasing and acute polarisation, with graduates in the top half. Scenarios in response to this could include employers reacting to what are perceived to be 'low-level' degrees with a drop in rates of return to HE study, which would perhaps lead young people to complete their education with Level 3 qualifications instead, and could undermine the 50% participation in HE target. However, if the HE target is met, this could cause difficulty for the vocational route.

In order to meet the 50% target, there is a need to encourage those with vocational qualifications at Level 3 to continue to Level 4 study in HE. This might, in turn, displease employers, who require intermediate and technical skills in a buoyant labour market. This may call for a redefinition of a 'graduate job'. However, HE continues to be highly attractive to a large proportion of the cohort. The reasons for this attractiveness are explored and analysed in the following section.

ii: The attractiveness of higher education for 14-19 year-olds

This section examines some of the reasons why HE has proved attractive to young people, including rates of return, improved employment prospects and wider benefits. In doing so, it deals with one of the major factors that draw young people from post-compulsory secondary education and training into HE: the economic and broader returns to HE on the labour market. This is described and analysed in detail.

Labour market outcomes and economic returns

Policy documents and Aimhigher documentation consistently 'sell' HE on the grounds that a degree means higher earnings and a wider range of employment opportunities for the individual. Indeed, research on young people's decision-making consistently identifies higher earnings and career opportunities – "bigger and better jobs" – as an important reason for individuals to decide to go to HE³⁴³.

Evidence on the individual financial returns to a degree indicate that – looking at mean or average returns – employers pay a premium to employ graduates³⁴⁴. Moreover, most studies indicate that graduates are on average more likely than non-graduates to be in professional or managerial jobs, within a few years of graduation even if not immediately after completing their degree³⁴⁵. However, these broad patterns obscure varied outcomes among the whole graduate population: average rates of return mask large differences between very low and very high earnings, while some individuals find

³⁴³ UCAS (2002) p. 10, Connor, H. *et al.* (1999), Booth, A. (1997), UNITE (2005), MORI (2005).

³⁴⁴ Blundell, R. *et al.* (1997), Blundell, R., Dearden, L. and Sianesi, B. (2005), Purcell, K. and Elias, P. (2004), McGuinness, S. and Doyle, J. (2005), McIntosh, S. (2004), McIntosh, S. (2005), Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005), Walker, I. and Zhu, Y. (2005)

³⁴⁵ Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005). Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2005) similarly note job insecurity in the early years of labour market experience of the graduates in their longitudinal study.

the transition into 'graduate' employment problematic. Recent research also shows that returns from certain subject areas are decreasing.

However, there are caveats regarding the research on rates of return: studies tend to lack a control group of non-graduates; and it is hard to compare between studies because of the use of different datasets and different methodologies (e.g. highest qualification or specific qualification, whether the individual's highest or not; and qualifications or years in education). Also, there are caveats regarding labour market outcomes and how these are defined: disagreements regarding what graduate employment means in the context of the increase in the graduate population; and other changes in the labour market linked to broader economic developments³⁴⁶.

Moreover, there is some evidence that labour market outcomes have altered as student numbers (and the proportion of the population going to HE) have increased. The research evidence on whether there was a decline in financial returns to individuals over the 1990s is mixed. While some studies³⁴⁷ found little evidence of a significant decline in graduate earnings, other research found a slight fall in the immediate returns to a degree for recent graduates³⁴⁸. Purcell *et al.* found that the rate of increase of earnings for the 1999 cohort of graduates in their study had not kept pace with earnings increases more generally in the economy. They also suggest that the transition for graduates into the labour market may have become slower in recent years, with it taking longer for graduates to settle into a satisfactory career path³⁴⁹. Yet, as Elias and Purcell note, it is too early to tell what effect the increase in student numbers has had: "The impact of the expansion of higher education in the 1990s will not be fully reflected in the labour force for a further twenty years."³⁵⁰

Research evidence also points to outcomes becoming increasingly differentiated as the cohort of graduates has expanded³⁵¹. The degree subject studied has been found to affect both average economic returns and the proportion getting 'graduate jobs'. In general, researchers agree that science graduates, graduates in economics, accountancy, law and management, and graduates on "courses at the vocational end of the spectrum" (e.g. medicine, engineering and computing) gain a higher premium on their degree and are more likely to gain a 'graduate job' than their counterparts who study arts or social science degrees (though some studies have found different patterns for men and women). The nature of and definition of a 'graduate job' is itself in flux, and is being affected by the increasing number of people with degrees. Some of the differences mentioned could be linked to the different entry requirements for different

³⁴⁶ See Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006) pp. 98-99 for a fuller discussion of data limitations and methodological issues.

³⁴⁷ Brown, P. with Smetherham, C. (2005), Walker, I. and Zhu, Y. (2003)

³⁴⁸ Walker, I. and Zhu, Y. (2005), Sloane, P. and O'Leary, N. (2004)

³⁴⁹ Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005)

³⁵⁰ Elias, P. and Purcell, K. (2004) p. 73

³⁵¹ Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005), Purcell, K. and Elias, P. (2004)

subjects, however. Further sources of differentiation include degree performance and HEI attended (with graduates from pre-1992 universities earning on average more than their counterparts from post-1992 institutions, but also with substantial variation within smaller groupings of institutions such as the Russell Group)³⁵². There is also evidence that earnings are sensitive to type of school attended and A Level performance, even after graduation³⁵³. Moreover, ethnic minority graduates do less well in the labour market than white graduates, though the differences in employment rates are much smaller than for those with fewer qualifications, while Furlong and Cartmel found that those who were particularly socio-economically disadvantaged were less likely to have obtained graduate jobs³⁵⁴. The picture is complicated further as these sources of variation combine and interact with one another.

Wider benefits of higher education

Government documents also emphasise the 'wider' benefits of HE: both to the individual and society as a whole. For the individual, it is argued that HE is important for personal development, confidence building and so on. For instance, over half the 1999 cohort of graduates in Purcell *et al.*'s study reported that they saw HE as an opportunity to "achieve their potential" in a broad sense. This research suggests that these wider benefits are among the factors which attract young people to HE, though they appear much less important than economic and employment outcomes³⁵⁵.

The wider benefits identified as important in decision-making are difficult to quantify: how, for instance, can 'achievement of potential' or personal development be defined, or measured and analysed? However, research using the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 Birth Cohort Study identifies a number of other benefits of HE beyond enhanced wages³⁵⁶. Graduates in these datasets were more likely than non-graduates to report improvements in writing, mathematics, computing, and social skills. The authors see this as evidence that HE lays "the foundations ... upon which such skills improvement can be built"³⁵⁷. There is no dataset for young people born after these dates, so we do not yet know if or how the rapid expansion of HE in the 1990s affects these findings. These studies also found that graduates were more likely than non-graduates to perceive themselves to be in good health and less likely to report depression. Bynner and Egerton suggest that HE appears to bestow a "general sense of

³⁵² Battu, H., Belfield, C. and Sloane, P.J. (1999); Chevalier, A. and Conlon, G. (2003); Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2005)

³⁵³ Naylor, R. *et al.* (2002); Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005)

³⁵⁴ Simpson, L. *et al.* (2006); Connor, H. *et al.* (2004); Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2005) p. 29

³⁵⁵ Purcell, K. *et al.* (2005)

³⁵⁶ Bynner, J. and Egerton, M. (2001); Bynner, J. *et al.* (2003)

³⁵⁷ Bynner, J. and Egerton, M. (2001), p. 49

well-being”³⁵⁸. However, as these authors note, such effects may be mediated through the employment graduates find themselves in (i.e. more secure and satisfying jobs).

As previously noted, the government has consistently justified the expansion of HE on the grounds that an enlarged pool of graduate labour benefits the economy. But there may also be, according to Bynner *et al.* and Bynner and Egerton, societal returns to HE in terms of health and community activity³⁵⁹.

Approaches to learning and experience of learning³⁶⁰

Another factor in the attractiveness of HE noted by researchers is the different approach to learning and experiences of learning from that in 14-19 education and training. Young people indicate that greater depth of content, and a more independent approach to learning were part of the attractiveness of studying at HE³⁶¹. However, the difference between approaches to learning in 14-19 education and training and HE (and also the shift to lectures from class teaching) was also a source of anxiety to young people, particularly those on vocational Level 3 courses, and clearly has implications for the transition between 14-19 and HE which affect both HEIs and 14-19 institutions³⁶². In addition, students may be anxious about the mode of assessment in HE, particularly where this differs from what they have encountered before³⁶³.

Social appeal of higher education³⁶⁴

Social aspects of HE, the research evidence indicates, are a further draw for young people. University has traditionally been seen as something of a rite of passage: an experience of independence, living away from home in a new location, making new friends, and engaging in a range of social activities³⁶⁵.

What have been the implications of expanding student numbers and the diversification of the student body on social aspects of HE? Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds – and from certain ethnic backgrounds – are more likely to live at home (and thus have less access to these social aspects of HE)³⁶⁶. Moreover, for those young people who do move away from home to go into HE, social aspects of university life can be problematic. Such students, according to research, may feel they do not fit in with other students and that they have become isolated from old friends

³⁵⁸ Bynner, J. and Egerton, M. (2001), p. 50

³⁵⁹ Bynner, J. *et al.* (2003); Bynner, J. and Egerton, M. (2001)

³⁶⁰ See focus groups with schools and colleges and students in HEIs (Appendix V).

³⁶¹ e.g. Booth, A. (1997, 2001)

³⁶² UCAS (2002); Smith, K. (2004)

³⁶³ UCAS (2002); Middleton, S. (2006)

³⁶⁴ See focus groups with schools and colleges and students in HEIs (Appendix V).

³⁶⁵ See, for example, MORI (2005), and also Appendix V.

³⁶⁶ UCAS (2002); Connor, H. *et al.* (1999); Connor, H. *et al.* (2004)

and family. They may also lack the money to engage fully in a social life (or the time because they need to put in longer hours of part-time work than their better-off peers)³⁶⁷.

One important factor in this context is the current trend for more students to live at home. This decision is linked with the introduction of, and increase in, tuition fees, but also with cultural factors and lifestyle choices, such as maintaining part-time employment. These issues are linked with the context of the widening participation agenda, which aims to raise participation from particular groups that are currently under-represented in HE. The key issues of widening participation, including the important role of Aimhigher, are addressed in the following section.

iii: The widening participation agenda

The 'widening participation agenda' has been dominant in government policy in recent years. However, there is some confusion over the term in policy. The phrase 'widening participation' has been used in relation to policies aimed at **increasing** participation (i.e. increasing student numbers of people in HE), and also in relation to policies aimed at **widening** access (i.e. finding ways of recruiting more students from under-represented groups).

Since the election of Labour in 1997 there has been a range of policies to promote 'widening participation': improving access from students from hitherto under-represented groups. In 2002 HEFCE defined widening participation as "activities to recruit students from the groups that HEIs have identified as under-represented, and then to ensure their success."³⁶⁸ However, defining 'under-represented' groups and 'successful' participation is difficult. It is unsurprising therefore to find that there has been a lack of consensus about exactly what widening participation means and how it should be achieved.

Certain structural factors militate against progression to HE. These include:

Socio-economic group

People from lower socio-economic groups are less likely than their counterparts from higher socio-economic groups to go to HE³⁶⁹. In the 2003 HE White Paper, DfES noted that "those from the top three social classes [I-IIIIn] are almost three times as likely to enter HE as those from the bottom three."³⁷⁰ In 1960 4% of classes IIIIm-V participated in HE; this rose to 19% in 2000. In 1960 19% of classes I to IIIIn participated in HE,

³⁶⁷ For example Furlong, A. (2004); Furlong, A. and Forsyth, A. (2000, 2003); UNITE (2005)

³⁶⁸ Powney, J. (2002), p. 4

³⁶⁹ See Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005)

³⁷⁰ DfES (2003c)

rising to 50% in 2000. Thus the rate of increase was faster for lower socio-economic groups than for higher groups in this period. However, this increase was from a very low base and there was an increase in the absolute gap between the highest and lowest social groups (a gap of 27% in 1970 to a gap of 30% in 2000)³⁷¹. These figures must be interpreted with caution, as the proportion of the population in a particular social class, and also the definitions of these different classes in the relevant datasets, have changed over time.

Area of residence

Where young people live greatly influences their chances of attending HE. Young people in some regions are 50% more likely than their peers living elsewhere to enter HE, and inequalities between regions in participation rates have increased between 1994 and 2000. More than half the young people in some parliamentary constituencies progress to HE while in others it is fewer than 1 in 10. Census and electoral ward data also reveal substantial variation **within** cities and towns³⁷².

Ethnic origin

Minority ethnic people are proportionally more likely to participate in HE than white people, but certain ethnic groups are under-represented in higher status HEIs³⁷³. Connor *et al.* suggest that high levels of family support for participation in HE may mitigate the “social class effect” for some minority ethnic groups. However, rates of participation vary substantially between ethnic groups (from 39% to over 70%). Moreover, minority ethnic students are clustered at certain universities – mostly post-92 universities³⁷⁴.

Ethnic minorities are over-represented in HE, but under-represented in the older universities and over-represented in the newer universities. Boliver points to the inequalities of access to higher status universities in the UK, with reference to ethnic minority students³⁷⁵. She also argues that these inequalities in terms of access to higher status HEIs are likely to contribute to the reproduction of systematic social

³⁷¹ Bekhradnia, B. (2003); Layer, G. (2005)

³⁷² HEFCE (2005)

³⁷³ Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005)

³⁷⁴ Connor, H. *et al.* (2004)

³⁷⁵ Boliver, V. (2006) p. 34. The major finding of the research is that: “...even though higher education candidates from less advantaged social class and ethnic origins are less likely to apply to higher status HEIs merely encouraging such candidates to apply in greater numbers to higher status HEIs would not increase their representation in higher status HEIs to A Level comparable to their representation in higher education overall. Indeed, the lower propensities to *apply* to higher status HEIs observed for candidates from less advantaged social class and ethnic origins may even constitute, at least in part, a rational response to (apparently accurate) perceptions of higher status HEIs as institutions biased in favour of middle class and white applicants.”

inequalities regarding the 'returns' to participation in HE, as attendance at a higher status HEI significantly increases the likelihood of gaining a graduate job, achieving higher earnings, gaining employment and continuing in further study³⁷⁶.

The potential for subtle and unintentional discrimination against ethnic minorities is located at the point of access to HE, as well as in the HE experience for ethnic minority students. Therefore, particular support is needed for these young people to negotiate the transition, and potential social and cultural isolation, as well as for institutions to maximise their openness to all applicants and students. This applies particularly to the older universities.

Further, more ethnic minority acceptances, and particularly Black acceptances, come from the FE sector³⁷⁷. There are obviously inter-related issues surrounding ethnicity, choice of post-16 educational institution, and choice of post-16 qualifications which need to be acknowledged in research in this area.

Gender

The concern was previously about the under-representation of women – in 1970/71 they comprised just under a third of those in HE – but now women are 18% more likely to engage in HE than men³⁷⁸. However, beneath this overall picture some groups of women are under-represented. For example, within some ethnic groups women are under-represented compared with men, notably Pakistani and Bangladeshi women³⁷⁹.

Policy interventions

A range of government policies in recent years aimed at widening access have included:

- legislation (such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the Race Relations Act 2000)
- policies to develop clearer vocational pathways to and through HE, particularly through foundation degrees³⁸⁰
- targeting funding for additional HE places at institutions which demonstrate a commitment to widening access
- introducing a 'fair access package' in recognition of the financial barriers to participating in HE for students from lower income families. This includes:

³⁷⁶ Boliver, V. (2006) p. 34

³⁷⁷ Connor, H. *et al.* (2004) pp. 21-22

³⁷⁸ Haezwindt, P. (2004); Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005)

³⁷⁹ Connor, H. *et al.* (2004)

³⁸⁰ DfES (2003c); DfES (2003d)

restoring grants to lower income families; the abolition of the requirement to pay up-front tuition fees; extra funding to help vulnerable students; and access agreements setting out the fee levels the HEI wishes to charge, planned outreach activity, and the financial support it plans to offer students³⁸¹

- reforms to the admissions process: the Schwarz Review recommended a move to holistic assessment that, given variation in learners' opportunities and circumstances, took into account contextual factors alongside formal educational achievements in admissions decisions³⁸²
- dedicated funding for widening access and participation activities (such as Aimhigher)³⁸³.

How effective has such policy intervention been in widening access? We focus on Aimhigher as a high-profile policy intervention into widening participation. We discuss how far Aimhigher has succeeded in widening access, and outline the possible limitations of supply-side interventions with short- to medium-term funding as an approach.

Aimhigher: A success story?

Aimhigher, according to the website for practitioners, aims to "widen participation in higher education [...] by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented groups [in the HE student population]"³⁸⁴. The target, set in 2004, was to increase participation in HE by 5% over the next five years³⁸⁵.

There are four main strands to the programme:

- to develop partnerships between schools, colleges, LAs and HEIs to implement the scheme
- to provide dedicated funding for HEIs to develop outreach programmes (guaranteed till 2008)
- to provide better information about HE for young people

³⁸¹ DfES (2003c)

³⁸² Admissions to Higher Education Review (2004)

³⁸³ DfES (1998); DfES (2003c); DfES (2003d)

³⁸⁴ www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/programme_information/about_aimhigher.cfm. The programme focuses particularly on young people from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds, ethnic minority communities and the disabled.

³⁸⁵ Taylor-Whiffen, P. (2006)

- to provide extra financial help for young people through 26,000 opportunity bursaries of £2,000 per full-time student.

Reactions to Aimhigher have been mixed. “When an initiative such as Aimhigher has the transforming effect it has had, it is difficult to imagine life without it”, stated one of the FE participants in a survey of institutions engaged in the programme³⁸⁶. Staff and pupils who took part in our focus groups identified Aimhigher funding as crucial in enabling students to attend HE experiences and outreach activities³⁸⁷. However, the programme’s evaluators at the NFER conclude that “it is not possible to assess whether the long-term benefits of [this] policy outweigh the costs”³⁸⁸. Aimhigher, it appears, can have a significant impact for some individuals, but there is less evidence, at least to date, of a significant impact on widening access at the national level. Evidence of the impact of Aimhigher will now be assessed in more detail.

How far has Aimhigher succeeded in widening access?

Evaluations of Aimhigher point to positive outcomes from the programme for educational institutions and for young people. Aimhigher has led to the establishment or consolidation of partnerships involving schools, colleges, HEIs, community and voluntary groups, employers and training providers³⁸⁹. The availability of Aimhigher funding has also led to an increase in the number and range of widening participation activities which HEIs offer³⁹⁰, particularly in post-1992 universities and FE colleges³⁹¹. More generally, HEIs have engaged with widening participation through their admissions procedures (i.e. taking account of advice from partner schools) and through introducing support strategies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (study skills, financial support, careers advice). However, as the evaluators note, it is impossible to ascertain to what extent this can be attributed to Aimhigher alone³⁹².

Opportunities to engage with HE through Aimhigher activities have been found to lead to a better understanding of HE on the part of young people (particularly those opportunities which enabled young people to experience HE first hand such as visits to HEIs, summer schools and residential)³⁹³. There are indications that Aimhigher activities may motivate young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to become more

³⁸⁶ Bowers-Brown, T. *et al.* (2006), p. i

³⁸⁷ See Appendix V.

³⁸⁸ Morris, M. and Golden, S. (2005) p. 52

³⁸⁹ Aimhigher (2005); EKOS Consulting (2006); Judkins, M. *et al.* (2005); Morris, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Judkins, M. (2005); Morris, M. and Golden, S. (2005); Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005). See also Appendix V for similar findings on HE activities more generally.

³⁹⁰ Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005)

³⁹¹ Bowers-Brown, T. *et al.* (2006)

³⁹² Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005)

³⁹³ Cleaver, E. *et al.* (2003); Morris, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Judkins, M. (2005); Judkins, M. *et al.* (2005); Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005)

engaged in education³⁹⁴ and to consider HE³⁹⁵, and HEIs have reported higher levels of applications from schools taking part in outreach activities³⁹⁶. There is also evidence that the opportunity bursary benefits young people once they are at HE. Students in receipt of an opportunity bursary were found to be more likely to still be in HE after one year than their counterparts who did not receive a bursary. Bursary holders were also less likely to report that part-time work interfered with their studies³⁹⁷.

Yet there is little firm evidence which definitely links Aimhigher activities to a widening of access³⁹⁸. This chimes with broader concerns about the need for better monitoring of the impact of widening participation initiatives, expressed recently by the HE minister Bill Rammell³⁹⁹. Despite the investment of time and money in such interventions over a number of years – there has been designated funding for widening participation activities since 1998 – participation among lower socio-economic groups has remained relatively static over recent years⁴⁰⁰. Moreover, Aimhigher appears to have achieved greater recognition in FE colleges offering HE and post-1992 universities than in pre-1992 universities⁴⁰¹, reflecting wider patterns of institutional performance (on the basis of HESA performance indicators) regarding widening participation⁴⁰².

Part of the problem in identifying Aimhigher's contribution to widening access lies in the difficulty of separating its impact from that of predecessor schemes, and from other widening participation policy as reflected in, for instance, access agreements. Thus it is difficult to evaluate how far Aimhigher has led to increased participation or broader access, and whether it represents 'value for money'⁴⁰³. A pilot project investigating the

³⁹⁴ See Institute of Education case studies of Aimhigher South West schools. Available from www.asdan.co.uk.

³⁹⁵ The proportion of young people in Year 11 who stated an intention to go on to HE was greater in Aimhigher schools than in comparison schools, though, as the evaluators noted, it was not clear if Aimhigher led to increased motivation and a desire to go to university, or if those involved in Aimhigher activities were more motivated in the first place. Morris, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Judkins, M. (2005)

³⁹⁶ Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005), Bowers-Brown, T. *et al.* (2006)

³⁹⁷ Morris, M. and Golden, S. (2005), West, A. *et al.* (2006)

³⁹⁸ Morris, M. and Golden, S. (2005) p. 52

³⁹⁹ Sanders, C. (2006)

⁴⁰⁰ UNITE (2005), HEFCE (2006)

⁴⁰¹ Bowers-Brown, T. *et al.* (2006)

⁴⁰² HESA (2005, 2006); Stuart, M. (2005). DfES (2003d) indicates that people from manual socio-economic backgrounds with the appropriate qualifications were less likely to attend an elite university than those from a non-manual background. The main cause of differential access was found to be differential application rates – with those from manual backgrounds less likely to apply to elite universities than those from non-manual backgrounds – rather than acceptance rates, which were found to be broadly similar for both groups.

⁴⁰³ See Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006) Appendix D for a fuller discussion of the methodological problems with making causal claims linking multiple, uncontrolled, interventions with changes in participation patterns.

costs involved in organising Aimhigher activities, due to report in December 2006, may go some way towards addressing this issue⁴⁰⁴.

Also, it may be too soon to judge whether Aimhigher has had an impact. Much Aimhigher activity has been aimed at students in KS 4, so one would not expect much evidence of students engaged in the programme applying to university yet. Moreover, given the strong link between socio-economic group, attainment at GCSE and entry to HE, any changes in the relative participation of different groups are likely to be gradual⁴⁰⁵. There may, therefore, be a tension between the short-term nature of Aimhigher funding, which could threaten the sustainability of some activities, and long-term, incremental change⁴⁰⁶. However, some activities are becoming embedded in the 14-19 curriculum⁴⁰⁷.

Problems with design and organisation

Some features of the design and organisation of Aimhigher may limit its impact⁴⁰⁸. According to some research there has been a lack of systematic self-monitoring and evaluation by some Aimhigher partnerships⁴⁰⁹. Potential impact may also be dissipated by the diverse activities to which it is linked⁴¹⁰, and a lack of strategic coordination and sequencing of events in some partnerships operating on a decentralised model⁴¹¹.

Moreover, the programme potentially has a limited geographical and numerical reach. Aimhigher was initially targeted at only poor urban areas; areas of rural and coastal poverty have, in comparison, been neglected. The Aimhigher programme could also, potentially, only benefit students from partnership schools. Admissions staff stated that, when recruiting students in the context of widening participation, they relied on compact or partnership arrangements and recommendations from 14-19 institutions with which the HEI had links⁴¹². There is a danger that equally qualified applicants from

⁴⁰⁴ www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/programme_information/monitoring_and_evaluation.cfm

⁴⁰⁵ Newby, H. (2005); Whitston, K. (2005)

⁴⁰⁶ On Aimhigher funding see

www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/programme_information/about_aimhigher/funding.cfm

⁴⁰⁷ For example, the ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) has been adopted by a number of schools under the Aimhigher programme and may remain embedded in the 14-19 curriculum after programme funding ends. For more details see Institute of Education case studies of Aimhigher South West schools. Available from www.asdan.co.uk.

⁴⁰⁸ Case studies have been conducted by the Institute of Education of six schools and colleges under the auspices of the ASDAN Aimhigher programme which indicate some of the issues surrounding the design and organisation of Aimhigher. Available from www.asdan.co.uk.

⁴⁰⁹ Morris, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Judkins, M. (2005); see also EKOS Consulting (2006)

⁴¹⁰ Bowers-Brown, T. *et al.* (2006)

⁴¹¹ EKOS Consulting (2006)

⁴¹² Pennell, H. *et al.* (2004, 2005)

other schools who did not have links with that HEI or who had no opportunities to engage in the institution's outreach activities would not have the same opportunities⁴¹³.

Is Aimhigher the right way to widen access?

However, improving the design and organisation of Aimhigher could only go so far towards enhancing its impact. There are more fundamental problems inherent in dedicated short-term funding for a supply-side intervention of this nature as an approach to widening access.

Aimhigher works on a "deficit model"⁴¹⁴ of widening participation that problematises the student rather than educational institutions. It could be argued that it does not encourage HEIs, or indeed 14-19 institutions, to change in any fundamental way. Aimhigher (and similar interventions) have been described as "bolt-on" activities, additional to mainstream provision, not central to the institutional mission of HEIs⁴¹⁵.

Moreover, the main focus of Aimhigher is on getting young people into HE, and (with the exception of the opportunity bursaries) less on supporting young people if and when they enter HE. Thus, the programme fails to address fundamental issues which must be addressed if attempts to widen access are to succeed in the long term.

Supply-side interventions like Aimhigher cannot, in themselves, address deep-seated cultural resistance to HE, or affect the ethos of 14-19 institutions in any significant way. Researchers have identified cultural resistance to HE on the part of some young people⁴¹⁶, and resistance to the idea of HE for their children, and/or inaccurate knowledge on financial matters, on the part of some parents, especially those who have not been to HE themselves⁴¹⁷. Given the crucial role which cultural attitudes and expectations and family members can play in young people's decision-making about HE, such attitudes could constitute a significant barrier⁴¹⁸. Similarly, Aimhigher interventions cannot, in themselves, create and maintain the supportive and

⁴¹³ See Middleton, S. and Hayward, G. (2006) for similar findings on HE experience offered during the 14-19 phase more generally

⁴¹⁴ Bowl, M. (2001) uses this term in relation to widening participation in general

⁴¹⁵ See, for example, Layer, G. (2005)

⁴¹⁶ For example see Hutchings, M. and Archer, L. (2001); Archer, L. *et al.* (2005); Furlong, A. and Forsyth, A. (2003)

⁴¹⁷ Morris, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Judkins, M. (2005); Judkins, M. *et al.* (2005); Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005), pp. 61-82.

⁴¹⁸ Morris, M., Rutt, S. and Yeshanew, T. (2005); Connor, H. *et al.* (1999).; Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006) p. 114 argue, based on an extensive literature review, that patterns of participation in HE are highly influenced by family background and early experiences, and that interventions by the HE sector can do little to influence these trajectories.

encouraging ethos in schools which, research reveals, is important in encouraging students to see HE as a possibility⁴¹⁹.

There is also a limit on how far it is possible for initiatives like Aimhigher to stimulate demand for HE. Some researchers suggest that improved attainment at 16 and staying-on rates post-16 across the board will do more to stimulate demand for HE than a programme like Aimhigher which, although it might improve attainment and participation post-16 for some students, is inevitably limited in its reach⁴²⁰. Demographic changes are also significant. According to demographic projections there will be a decline in the 18-20 age cohort by 2020. This decline is projected to be steeper among lower socio-economic groups. This could lead to a decrease in both absolute numbers and the participation rates of students from these groups⁴²¹.

There may be ethical issues with Aimhigher's agenda of promoting the benefits of HE. This agenda is clear in the "key messages" identified on Aimhigher's website for practitioners: "Higher education offers young people the chance of better employment prospects, better jobs, greater opportunity, and better money, as well as the possibility to make lifelong friendships and have an enjoyable time," and "Higher Education is inclusive and has a variety of different entry points and pathways for progression, which gives choice to suit individual needs"⁴²². The possibility of impartial information and guidance within a programme whose aim is to 'sell' HE is questionable.

Aimhigher is an example of one specific initiative to widen participation. However, broader approaches are also required, for example, the changing of HEI institutional attitudes to non-traditional progression routes and vocational qualifications. Developments are required within HEIs, if the efforts, commitment and achievement of staff and students in 14-19 schools and colleges are to result in successful articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE. These developments could include greater co-operation of an informal and formal nature between 14-19 institutions and HEIs, as well as support for young people to visit open days and participate in summer schools at HEIs.

iv: Different entry routes

These next sections examine various characteristics of progression to HE from 14-19 education and training.

⁴¹⁹ Morris, M., Rutt, S. and Yeshanew, T. (2005); Morris, M. and Golden, S. (2005)

⁴²⁰ Bekhradnia, B. (2003, 2006); Gorard, S. (2005)

⁴²¹ Bekhradnia, B. (2006)

⁴²² www.aimhigher.ac.uk/sites/practitioner/programme_information/about_aimhigher.cfm.

Progression to higher education: An expectation?⁴²³

It appears that for some young people going to HE is less a proactive decision than 'the norm', that is to say, it is what their families, peer groups and schools expect. This can lead to some young people 'drifting' into HE, rather than taking a proactive and reflected decision⁴²⁴. However, there are indications that with the payment of fees young people in HE are behaving more as consumers than previously.

Research with young people confirms that, for some, HE was perceived as the logical 'next step' and indeed was central to the culture of their 14-19 or 16-19 educational institution⁴²⁵. Moreover, for some young people this institutional expectation coincided with the attitudes of family and friends⁴²⁶.

This level of expectation to progress to HE applies to some young people and some institutions. However, some educational institutions, it appears, provide little guidance regarding HE, and little support for those who want to go, and there is no expectation that all students will want to do so⁴²⁷. Also, for some young people – most notably those living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and/or those with no family tradition of HE – progression to HE was contrary to the expectations of family and friends⁴²⁸. There are particular barriers to progression to HE for some young people, according to their geographical location, socio-economic circumstances, and previous educational experiences⁴²⁹. These are outlined in some detail in the following section.

Barriers to progression

There are different types of potential barriers to progression to HE: situational barriers and other more subtle and implicit attitudinal barriers. Situational and institutional barriers to progression to HE include:

⁴²³ See focus groups with schools and colleges and students in HEIs (Appendix V).

⁴²⁴ Ozga, J. and Sukhnandan, L. (1998), Yorke, M. (1999). HEI staff in the focus groups also were also concerned that some students lacked a sense of purpose and had not reflected adequately on why they were in HE (Appendix IV)

⁴²⁵ Pugsley, L. (1998); Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005), Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (2000). See also Appendix V for similar findings.

⁴²⁶ UCAS (2002), Ball, S., Maguire, M. and Macrae, S. (2000), MORI (2005), Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005). See also Appendix V.

⁴²⁷ UCAS (2002)

⁴²⁸ Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2000, 2003); UCAS (2002)

⁴²⁹ Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006) p. 5 refer to situational barriers (direct and indirect costs, loss or lack of time, distance from a learning opportunity, created by an individual's personal circumstances), institutional barriers (admissions procedures, timing and scale of provision, general lack of institutional flexibility created by the structure of available opportunities) and dispositional barriers (individuals' motivation and attitudes to learning, which may be caused by a lack of suitable learning opportunities or by poor previous educational experiences).

Type of qualification

Those with vocational qualifications at Level 3 are less likely to progress to HE than their counterparts with academic qualifications (DfES estimates suggest at least 90% of students with A Levels progress to HE, a proportion which has remained stable over time)⁴³⁰. Only 40-50% with vocational qualifications at Level 3 progress to HE, and, among these, people from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to enter HE than others⁴³¹. UCAS found that students with Level 3 vocational qualifications lacked confidence and "it was a common perception that they had been channelled into a second rate qualification route, which destined them to access only a second rate HEI."⁴³²

Low attainment at Level 2

Those with lower attainment at Level 2 are less likely to progress to Level 3 (and therefore to HE)⁴³³. Thus, attainment at Level 2 is deemed crucial to increasing participation in HE. Indeed, HEFCE suggest that the growth in young participation in HE in 1994-95 was mainly driven by increases in the proportion of the cohort gaining five A*-C GCSEs⁴³⁴. However, Bekhradnia argues that improvements in GCSE attainment alone are not a sufficient condition for improvements at higher levels, noting that an increase of over 10% in the proportion of students achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs between 1994/95 and 2004/05 has not translated into an equivalent increase in numbers staying on post-16 or in HE participation two or three years later⁴³⁵. Whitston notes that attainment at Level 2 is sharply differentiated by socio-economic group, with less than a third of children from 'routine' occupational backgrounds achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs compared with three-quarters of children from higher professional families⁴³⁶.

Further, the question of who accesses HE can "mask the enduring inequalities throughout earlier stages of the education system. The large differences in attainment at 16 and 18 by social class (and also, to some extent, by gender and ethnicity) obviously have a very significant impact on whether or not higher education is judged to be a realistic option."⁴³⁷

⁴³⁰ Bekhradnia, B. (2006)

⁴³¹ Haezewindt, P. (2004)

⁴³² UCAS (2002) p. 17

⁴³³ Payne, J. (2004); HEFCE (2005)

⁴³⁴ HEFCE (2005)

⁴³⁵ Bekhradnia, B. (2006)

⁴³⁶ Whitston, K. (2005)

⁴³⁷ Brooks, R. (2002)

Financial concerns

Finance can be a significant barrier, particularly in the context of variable tuition fees and the increasing levels of part-time work in pre-HE contexts. Several studies identify considerations of cost as preventing some young people who were considering HE as an option from applying or from taking up offers of places⁴³⁸. There was no evidence of a major change in the pattern of student participation which related to the introduction of tuition fees and maintenance loans in 1998. Although applications have been lower during the 2005/06 academic year, perhaps in anticipation of the shift to variable tuition fees, it is still too early to draw any conclusions⁴³⁹. A particular concern for mature students was the lack of articulation between the system of student support and the benefits system⁴⁴⁰.

Personal networks

For some young people lack of support from personal networks (e.g. family and peers) may act as a barrier to progression to HE. Family and friends have been found to be a particularly important influence on young people, and even where the family is supportive, they may, through lack of knowledge and experience, be unable to assist young people in the processes of institutional choice and application⁴⁴¹. While the received wisdom is that family support is most problematic for students from lower socio-economic groups, the 2005 student experience survey revealed that family support for students going to university was lowest not for the poorest students, but for those from families not likely to be particularly well off but likely to be expected to contribute towards tuition fees⁴⁴². Family support was found to be particularly important and strong for ethnic minority students⁴⁴³.

⁴³⁸ Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003); Hutchings, M. and Archer, L. (2001); Archer, L. *et al.* (2005); Archer, L., Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. (2003); Schagen, S., Johnson, F. and Simkin, C. (1996); MORI (2005); Hesketh, A. (1999); Callender, C. and Jackson, J. (2005)

⁴³⁹ HEFCE (2005) argues that the large increase in raw numbers of entrants in the academic year 1997/98 is accounted for by changes in the size of the cohort that year. Bekhradnia, B. (2003) cites similar evidence from Australia and New Zealand which suggests that students have not been deterred by increases in fees from entering HE.

⁴⁴⁰ UCAS (2002); also Chapter 8 in Archer, L., Hutchings, M. and Ross, A. (2003) pp. 155-173

⁴⁴¹ Connor, H. *et al.* (1999); Pugsley, L. (1998)

⁴⁴² UNITE (2005)

⁴⁴³ Connor, H. *et al.* (2004)

Information, advice and guidance

IAG appears to be most problematic where there is no family or community background of HE⁴⁴⁴. According to the project director of Aspire, part of the Aimhigher scheme, guidance “doesn’t always travel to communities where it can be useful”⁴⁴⁵.

Lack of confidence and low aspirations

In some cases this may deter young people from applying to HE altogether⁴⁴⁶. In addition, research suggests that lack of confidence in their abilities has deterred state school students, and candidates from lower socio-economic and ethnic minority groups, from applying to Russell Group universities (or, as Boliver puts it, from sending out the positive signals of applying early and to multiple high-status HEIs)⁴⁴⁷.

Lack of local higher education institution

Lack of local HEI can be problematic for those who want to live at home for various personal, family and cultural reasons, particularly for those in rural and coastal areas. This can be a particularly important factor for mature students and young people from some ethnic minorities⁴⁴⁸. Shiner and Modood’s analysis shows that “ethnic minority candidates applied to local institutions at a greater rate than whites”⁴⁴⁹. This potentially disadvantages these applicants, as they are focused on a single application. Similarly, a local institution appears particularly important for applicants from lower socio-economic groups⁴⁵⁰. Moreover, the closure of particular departments in local HEIs may prove a barrier to students in that area who want to live at home while studying that subject. There have been developments, however, in distance learning and e-delivery systems, such as the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute in Inverness.

⁴⁴⁴ Ball, S., Maguire, M. and Macrae, S. (2000)

⁴⁴⁵ McRae, A. (2006)

⁴⁴⁶ For example Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003)

⁴⁴⁷ Keys, W. *et al.* (2002); Sutton Trust (2004, 2005); Boliver, V. (2006)

⁴⁴⁸ e.g. Connor, H. *et al.* (1999)

⁴⁴⁹ Shiner, M. and Modood, T. (2002) p. 218: “While one-quarter of white candidates’ applications went to institutions within their region of residence, this compared with approximately one-third of those made by Chinese and Indian applicants, with more than two-fifths of those made by Black Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Black Africans, and with more than one-half of those made by Bangladeshis.” Further, patterns of residence and application were also important, especially with regard to London.

⁴⁵⁰ See analysis of ‘localism’, and the barrier of travelling distances to HEIs, particularly for working class students, in Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005) pp. 85-87. For example, one interviewee (Alomgir, p. 86) comments: “I need to go to my local university because my studies need to fit in with my work and family commitments.”

Thus a range of interconnected barriers operate together to make the idea of HE 'unthinkable' for some young people, or to make participation more difficult and leaving early more likely for those who start HE⁴⁵¹. The operation of such barriers, these researchers suggest, leads to the over-representation of some socio-economic and ethnic groups – and the under-representation of others – among the HE student population.

Tangible barriers operate alongside more subtle attitudinal barriers. The attitudes and dispositions of young people, teachers, and HEI admissions staff and lecturers all influence the progression (or non-progression) of young people from 14-19 to HE. Young people's self-selection interacts with institutional selection on the part of both 14-19 educational institutions and HEIs.

Entry qualifications and progression routes

As the number of students in HE has expanded, progression routes to HE have become more varied. This has placed further demands on admissions procedures and the staff involved to develop appropriate knowledge and understanding of these different routes. This is partly (but not only) to do with qualifications and changes to qualifications. The effect of the introduction of specialised Diplomas on the variety of progression routes to HE will need extensive research⁴⁵².

A Level

Indeed, in the HEI focus groups (see Appendix IV) many participants did not mention any qualifications other than A Level, the unspoken assumption being that A Level was the norm. Other research indicates that many students also perceive these qualifications as the 'natural' stepping stone to HE (in contrast to other qualifications)⁴⁵³.

Most students still progress through the A Level route which has, however, not remained static. Indeed, current reforms of A Level are scheduled for completion in 2008. Changes to date include the following:

- reduction of university influence over A Level
- increased range of subjects
- introduction of Curriculum 2000⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Furlong, A. and Forsyth, A. (2003); Hutchings, M. and Archer, L. (2001)

⁴⁵² See Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. this volume.

⁴⁵³ UCAS (2002); Appendix IV.

⁴⁵⁴ See Hodgson, A., Spours, K. and Waring, M. (2005); Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2003)

- increased modularisation in both 14-19 provision and in HE

How have HEIs responded to these changes? Responses to Curriculum 2000 have been mixed. While the opportunities for a broader curriculum have been broadly welcomed, HEI academic and admissions staff have noted the problems with the frequency of assessment, the difficulties inherent in opportunities to retake modules (on the grounds that this makes differentiation more difficult), and have shown some resistance to Key Skills in their offer-making behaviour⁴⁵⁵. Similarly, the increased range of subjects has provoked mixed reactions. The expanded range of learning opportunities has been praised, but some academic and admissions staff have questioned the academic rigour of some of the 'newer' subjects⁴⁵⁶. Moreover, modularisation has been criticised for leading students to develop an approach to learning focused on discrete blocks of knowledge rather than a synthetic view⁴⁵⁷.

HEIs have also had to respond to changing patterns of subject uptake at A Level over time. The most newsworthy changes have been the decline in A Level entries for physics and chemistry, and for some modern foreign languages, notably French and German. Chemistry entries declined from 50,700 (6.12% of total A Level/Higher⁴⁵⁸ entries) in 1993 to 44,700 (5.02% of total entries) in 2004, albeit with a rise from 2003 to 2004. Physics entries show a steeper decline from 48,800 to 36,400 (5.89% to 4.09% of total entries) over the same period. French A Level/Higher entries fell from 34,400 in 1993 to 18,700 in 2004 (from 4.15% to 2.10% of total entries), while German entries declined from 12,600 to 7,900 (1.42% to 0.89% of total entries) over the same period. However, entries for Spanish have risen from 5,000 in 1993 to 6,200 in 2004 (0.60% to 0.70% of total entries). The move away from individual science subjects to double and single award science at GCSE, and the disapplication of modern foreign languages from the National Curriculum in 1998 followed by the shift to entitlement status in 2004, along with broader issues of curriculum and assessment design and teacher supply, have been cited as causes for the decline⁴⁵⁹.

HEI staff who took part in our focus groups felt that these changing patterns of uptake could lead to students being unprepared for HE study in some subjects which required the background knowledge and skills developed in, for instance, single science and modern foreign languages at GCSE⁴⁶⁰. Moreover, these trends have been linked with the closure of university departments, perhaps most notably in the high-profile media

⁴⁵⁵ Hodgson, A., Spours, K. and Waring, M. (2005); Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2003). For further evidence see Appendix IV and also the longer report: Wilde, S. *et al.* (2006).

⁴⁵⁶ See Wilde, S. *et al.* (2006)

⁴⁵⁷ See Appendix IV.

⁴⁵⁸ Although Highers are only taken by young people in Scotland, these young people may well apply to institutions in England or Wales. Therefore, these figures are relevant to an analysis of articulation between 14-19 and HE.

⁴⁵⁹ Wright, S. (2005b)

⁴⁶⁰ See Appendix IV.

reporting on the closure of the chemistry department at University of Exeter. It is difficult for a department to survive if there is not an adequate supply of potential entrants. HEIs thus have to deal with the potentially conflicting issues of student demand and research agendas (especially in the context of the Research Assessment Exercise).

Vocational qualifications

Increased progression to HE from programmes of vocational learning is essential for the government to come close to achieving 50% participation in HE for under 30 year-olds. However, this aim of increasing progression through vocational routes may contribute to the problematic development of the hollowing out of the skills profile and raises questions about 'graduate' employment, graduate employability and rates of return.

Fewer than half of those with vocational qualifications at Level 3 enter HE, and among these entry is more likely for those from higher socio-economic groups⁴⁶¹. Research suggests that students coming through the vocational route may not automatically consider HE as a future option⁴⁶². This raises questions about whether they should be expected and encouraged to do so, or rather focus on the vocational learning undertaken. Research has shown that Aimhigher activity around vocational pathways or work-based learning has been limited⁴⁶³. Nevertheless, in some subject areas vocational qualifications are highly valued as preparation for HE⁴⁶⁴, and there are indications that, once in HE, students with vocational qualifications do as well academically than as their peers with A Levels⁴⁶⁵.

Increasing progression from vocational programmes requires significant knowledge development on the part of admissions staff and high-quality information and guidance for young people when they make their Level 3 choices. A recent study into progression from vocational routes by Connor, Sinclair and Banerji found little evidence of overt discrimination against vocational qualifications in HEIs' admissions processes. However, it noted 'indirect effects of certain aspects of recruitment and admissions which could work against those holding vocational qualifications in some places, coupled with widespread, deep-seated attitudes which give lower value to vocational than

⁴⁶¹ Haezwindt, P. (2004)

⁴⁶² For example see UCAS (2002)

⁴⁶³ EKOS Consulting (2006). See also Appendix V for the view that university 'taster courses' were oriented towards A Level students rather than vocational learners.

⁴⁶⁴ See Appendix IV.

⁴⁶⁵ Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006). Recent research among students at Edge Hill University appeared to indicate that students with vocational qualifications at entry performed better in terms of their degree results than students with A Levels. Edge Hill University (2006)

traditional academic (i.e. General Certificate of Education A Level) qualifications. These negative attitudes are found both within HE and at earlier education stages⁴⁶⁶.

Research has identified a 'very uneven distribution' of entrants to HE with Level 3 vocational qualifications across the HE sector. They represent around 18% of the overall intake, but this figure ranges widely between institutions, from over 30% at certain institutions (mainly FE/HE colleges), to only a few per cent at some universities. There is also differentiation according to subject, with higher representation in courses such as maths and computing, business and administration studies and creative arts and design than others. Similarly, vocational qualifications are more common among students on HND, Higher National Certificate or foundation degree programmes than on honours degrees programmes, more common among part-time than full-time students, and more common among mature students than young people⁴⁶⁷.

Connor, Sinclair and Banerji found this uneven pattern to be a result of a number of factors:

- continuing lack of parity of esteem between vocation and academic qualifications
- lack of awareness and knowledge about vocational qualifications in many HEIs
- a lack of clarity in course entry requirements
- perceptions held by HE staff about subject relevance and 'curriculum fit'
- practices of benchmarking against A Levels (especially in the context of increasing numbers of young people gaining the highest grades at A Level)
- possible misconceptions about the commitment and ability of young people with different entry qualifications
- resource constraints within HEIs, leading to shortcuts in selection practices
- quality of advice and guidance
- personal barriers of low aspirations, lack of confidence and unfamiliarity with HE and admissions processes among those with vocational qualifications⁴⁶⁸.

⁴⁶⁶ Connor, H., Sinclair, E. and Banerji, N. (2006)

⁴⁶⁷ Connor, H., Sinclair, E. and Banerji, N. (2006); Connor, H. and Little, B. (2005). See also Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006).

⁴⁶⁸ Connor, H., Sinclair, E. and Banerji, N. (2006) pp. 3-4. See also Appendix IV for similar findings of a lack of knowledge of and understanding about vocational qualifications among admissions staff.

Positive engagement with vocational qualifications, and an interest in supporting more vocationally qualified applicants was, unsurprisingly, found to be more likely in recruiting courses and institutions. This included outreach work, changing internal attitudes through staff development and developing appropriate teaching, learning and assessment practices⁴⁶⁹.

Access courses

Access courses remain an important route to HE for mature entrants. Recent HEFCE research indicates that in 2003-04 about one in four first-time mature entrants to full-time degree programmes entered via an access course. Completion of an access course may not guarantee entry to an HE course: of the cohort who took access courses in 1988-99, 39% continued on to a degree or other undergraduate programme (with most going to post-1992 institutions with a tradition of mature entry and often less demanding entrance qualifications, and institutions near their homes). Rates of completion in HE for access students - two-thirds of access students on full-time degree programmes graduated within five years – compare favourably with those of other non-A Level entry routes⁴⁷⁰. However, about 10% of access courses are still outside the national framework: there are issues of variability.

The role of foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are an important new type of provision, with a strong element of articulation with pre-HE vocational provision. They were launched in 2001 as a “new vocationally focused route into HE”, with the aim of developing a qualification which would be valued in the labour market (with employers being involved in the design and review of programmes of the study) and at the same time enabling progression to an honours degree⁴⁷¹. Thus the intention was that they would be informed by both national occupational standards and the benchmarks defined by academic communities⁴⁷². Programmes are delivered in full-time, part-time, and both full-time and part-time modes, and are delivered both in educational institutions and in the workplace. As previously noted, numbers taking foundation degrees have increased rapidly since they were launched: HESA reports indicate over 21,000 students enrolled on foundation degree programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2003-04, a 91% increase in total enrolments from the previous year⁴⁷³. Some of this increase can be accounted for by the decline in opportunities to take HNDs (and indeed the

⁴⁶⁹ Connor, H., Sinclair, E. and Banerji, N. (2006) p. 4

⁴⁷⁰ HEFCE (2006)

⁴⁷¹ A Foundation degree takes about two years full time or three to four years part time. An additional 12 to 15 months full-time study (or longer part-time) would enable conversion to an honours degree.

<http://develop.ucas.com/FDCourseSearch/About.htm>

⁴⁷² Longhurst, D. (2005)

⁴⁷³ QAA (2005)

renaming of some HNDs as foundation degrees). However, this explanation would be over simplistic as foundation degrees are available in sectors in which HNDs were not and the age and gender profile of the student body has changed⁴⁷⁴.

A recent QAA review noted strengths in the learning and teaching on many programmes, and effective delivery partnerships between FE colleges, universities and employers. It also noted high rates of progression to honours degrees programmes or into relevant employment. However, some providers, the review found, struggled to achieve adequate employer involvement in the planning and development of foundation degrees, and subsequently in teaching and assessing students, potentially limiting the professional credibility of foundation degrees. Moreover, it noted that progression from the foundation degree to a full honours degree could sometimes be problematic, with, for instance, foundation degree graduates competing for a limited number of honours degree places⁴⁷⁵. However, foundation degrees are an HE qualification in their own right.

Concluding remarks on entry routes

This section on entry routes has outlined the diversity of routes to HE available. This diversity makes significant demands of HEI academic and admissions staff. Appropriate continuing professional development is required for these staff to remain up-to-date with current developments. Further, it is essential that young people receive appropriate advice and guidance regarding their subject choices and future career plans. This would facilitate effective articulation between 14-19 and HE and between HE and employment. In addition, appropriate responses from HEIs to the broad range of entry routes support high levels of retention and attainment at HE. A major break in teaching and assessment styles between 14-19 and HE conversely increases the likelihood of non-completion. The next section turns to the issues of retention and attrition.

v: Retention and attrition

Current policy initiatives seem to emphasise participation in HE, rather than what happens when students actually get there. However, research – with both students and university staff – reveals that the initial transition to university learning can be difficult. Students may arrive confused about the nature and purposes of university learning, with unrealistic expectations of the amount of work expected of them, lacking the skills to tackle the new modes of learning they encounter, and lacking detailed knowledge of their academic department, and the ways they will be taught and assessed⁴⁷⁶. Although

⁴⁷⁴ Longhurst, D. (2005)

⁴⁷⁵ QAA (2005)

⁴⁷⁶ Yorke, M. (1999); Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005). See also Appendix IV for the perception among HEI staff that many students arrive lacking the skills required to tackle learning at HE. Focus groups in 14-19 institutions

broadly aware that there will be a shift to more independent modes of learning, it appears that many students initially lack the strategies and planning skills to achieve this in practice⁴⁷⁷. Pre-induction and induction work have been found to be central to maintaining high levels of retention and attainment⁴⁷⁸. Personal support, study support and assessment feedback through the course are also important⁴⁷⁹. More broadly, “university learning environments”⁴⁸⁰ (teaching and learning styles, institutional procedures and culture and social life) and the nature of the relationships between staff and students can affect the student’s experience in various different ways⁴⁸¹.

Rates of attrition go some way to counteracting increased participation in HE. Firstly, about 22% of applicants each year do not enter HE or are not offered a place. There is a variety of reasons for this: some applicants withdraw from the process, some receive no offers, some do not meet the entry requirements, and some decline their offers. To maximise the number of young people who do take up a place, it may be important to improve information and guidance, so that, for example, young people do not necessarily choose the most competitive courses and/or institutions if they are unlikely to meet the grades required. Further, the key reason for applicants receiving no offers is low attainment at Level 3, pointing to the need for academic support at an earlier stage in order to avoid this disappointment⁴⁸².

Secondly, there is the issue of the retention of those who do start an HE course. OECD data showed a non-completion rate in the UK of 17%⁴⁸³. While the average non-completion rate of the OECD as a whole was much higher, it has been argued that non-completion should be a cause for concern, in terms of the expenditure of public money⁴⁸⁴, and in terms of its effect on the future life and employment chances of individuals⁴⁸⁵. Poor preparation is seen as a key cause of attrition⁴⁸⁶. Lack of

confirm that efforts at ‘preparation’ for HE in 14-19 institutions often focus on getting students there, and on ‘life skills’, rather than the skills needed for academic success (Appendix V).

⁴⁷⁷ Booth, A. (1997); Cook, A. and Leckey, J. (1999); Haggis, T. and Pouget, M. (2002); O’Connor, M. (2003); Smith, K. (2004); Waters, D. (2003); Smith, K. and Hopkins, C. (2005). See also the findings of focus groups with first year HEI students reported in Appendix V.

⁴⁷⁸ For example UCAS (2002); Cook, A. and Leckey, J. (1999); Gorard, S. *et al.* (2006); Haggis, T. and Pouget, M. (2002); Waters, D. (2003)

⁴⁷⁹ e.g. Booth, A. (1997, 2001), Haggis, T. and Pouget, M. (2002), Thomas, L. (2002), Waters, D. (2003), Yorke, M. (1999). Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005) argue that HEIs need to do more to explicitly promote the support for students which they offer.

⁴⁸⁰ Lizzio, A. *et al.* (2002) p. 43.

⁴⁸¹ e.g. Thomas, L. (2002, 2005)

⁴⁸² See Middleton, S. (2006)

⁴⁸³ OECD (2005)

⁴⁸⁴ Yorke, M. (1999) estimates that the likely cost of undergraduate non-completion in 1994-95 was approximately £91m.

⁴⁸⁵ Bynner, J. *et al.* (2003). Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005) note that although the individual may benefit in various ways from a programme they do not complete, early withdrawal could be a disadvantage in the labour market.

information about HE generally (but particularly about institutions and courses), entry for 'reactive' reasons (i.e. meeting the expectations of family, friends or school), and expectations of students about HEIs, and of HEIs about students, not being met all emerge as shortcomings in preparedness which lead to early withdrawal⁴⁸⁷. Social integration at university also appears crucial⁴⁸⁸.

Attrition rates are higher among disadvantaged young people than their more advantaged peers⁴⁸⁹. According to Forsyth and Furlong this is related to both financial problems and perceived social and cultural barriers – particularly for students in prestigious universities⁴⁹⁰.

However, variation in institutional attrition rates cannot be accounted for by such characteristics of the student population alone. Bekhradnia and Aston suggest that institutional organisation, academic culture, and approach to admissions philosophy might influence levels of student attrition and retention and indeed might account for differences in attrition rates between institutions with similar student populations⁴⁹¹.

Thus effective advice and guidance and preparation for HE are essential so that students know what to expect, as well as support – social, academic, and financial – when they enter and progress through HE. Institutional and familial habitus play a role here, and young people with little support from their school/college or family may struggle to navigate the progression routes to HE⁴⁹². The transition to HE is a difficult challenge for young people, in terms of academic challenges, approaches to teaching and learning and lifestyle issues, including financial hardship. Clear support structures during the early stages of this transition, but also throughout the HE experience, may go some way to alleviating these difficulties.

vi: Information, advice and guidance

IAG are essential in preparing and advising young people on the transition between 14-19 and HE. A range of Internet and paper-based sources are used. Guidance also comes from subject teachers, the head of sixth form, schools or college careers advisers

⁴⁸⁶ For example Ozga, J. and Sukhnandan, L. (1998)

⁴⁸⁷ Ozga, J. and Sukhnandan, L. (1998); Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005); Yorke, M. (1999)

⁴⁸⁸ Smith and Naylor (2001); Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005); Yorke, M. (1999). Connor, H. *et al.* (2004) suggest that isolation could be more of a problem for ethnic minority students.

⁴⁸⁹ Bekhradnia, B. and Aston, L. (2005); HEFCE (2005); Smith, J.P. and Naylor, R. (2001). HEFCE (2005) note that qualification rates are lower for entrants from low participation areas, especially for men. However, Bekhradnia, B. (2003) argues that broadly speaking, rates of attrition are similar for students of all social groups once school academic achievements are taken into account.

⁴⁹⁰ Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003). See also Yorke, M. (1999). Quinn, J. *et al.* (2005) note that finance was seen more as a pressure than the ultimate reason for withdrawal.

⁴⁹¹ Bekhradnia, B. and Aston, L. (2005)

⁴⁹² See Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005)

and Connexions advisers, and for some from family and friends⁴⁹³. Increasingly young people can also receive guidance in connection with government widening participation initiatives, for instance, student ambassadors in the Aimhigher programme were a source of information on issues such as student finance, but also on day-to-day student life (“what it’s really like”)⁴⁹⁴.

The sources of information used by young people include: social networks, educational institutions and written information⁴⁹⁵. Family habitus and social and cultural capital play a role here, as do “any implicit messages about HE conveyed through school or college activities”⁴⁹⁶. Young people make a judgement about the ‘feasibility’ of HE study and particular institutions for them personally, drawing on their respective cultural resources. This reflects the socially embedded nature of the decision whether to progress to HE, and to what kind of HE. Dispositions, financial resources and geography all play an important role.

Data from the focus groups suggest that the nature and quality of the guidance – regarding course and institution choice, and regarding course and subject choice at 16 and the impact this may have on progression to HE – is highly variable⁴⁹⁷. Guidance from 14-19 institutions can also be limited in its focus, with over-emphasis on full-time honours degrees, potentially neglecting other progression routes and part-time study options⁴⁹⁸. Moreover, those from higher socio-economic groups have access to advice and support from family and peers which is not available to many from low-participation neighbourhoods and/or those with no family history of HE⁴⁹⁹.

Guidance on financial issues is a particular problem. Ninety-five per cent of the 7,000 young people in Year 12 who completed a survey for Target 10,000 reported that they knew “little or nothing at all” about financial support or grants available at university⁵⁰⁰. Our focus group research with students in their first year at HE confirms a lack of knowledge or understanding about student finance, with some participants arguing that they had been inadequately prepared regarding both student finance and dealing with money and living expenses more generally⁵⁰¹. It remains to be seen whether the introduction of recent measures to simplify the delivery of student finance will help.

⁴⁹³ Middleton, S. and Hayward, G. (2006); Connor, H. *et al.* (2006). See also evidence from schools and colleges focus groups in Appendix V. See also the section on guidance and counselling in the section of this report titled *The education of 14-19 year-olds*.

⁴⁹⁴ McRae, A. (2006)

⁴⁹⁵ Brooks, R. (2002) p. 218

⁴⁹⁶ Brooks, R. (2002) p. 219. See also Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005)

⁴⁹⁷ See Appendix IV and Appendix V. This finding is echoed in MORI (2005).

⁴⁹⁸ MORI (2005). See also Wilde, S. *et al.* (2006)

⁴⁹⁹ Ball, S., Maguire, M. and Macrae, S. (2000); Pugsley, L. (1998)

⁵⁰⁰ Target 10,000 (2006)

⁵⁰¹ See Appendix V. See also MORI (2005) for similar finding.

Socially constructed differences in attitudes to borrowing money to learn are crucial in this context. Hesketh⁵⁰² argues that those from low socio-economic status families are far more cautious about borrowing. This also has an influence on the level of anxiety the young person feels about finances. This may be linked with geographical factors, and the desire to live close to home or at home. More recently, Callender and Jackson found that those from lower social classes are more likely to be deterred from going to university because of a fear of debt, even after controlling for a range of other factors⁵⁰³.

Conclusions

This chapter has identified key issues relating to articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE. These are outlined below.

Institutional factors

Mutual adaptation on the part of both 14-19 and HE institutions is required

Adaptation and intervention are desirable on the part of both 14-19 education and training and HE. HEIs may need to adapt to changes in 14-19 curriculum and assessment, rather than simply expect these changes to serve their purposes. This adaptation could relate to entry criteria and admissions processes, and to the nature of the teaching and learning which HEIs offer. Similarly, 14-19 institutions may need to focus not only on getting students into HE, but on preparing them for meaningful participation in HE. To achieve these goals, intervention and support for students in 14-19 education and HE, and communication between educational sectors, are required.

Conflicting pressures on both sectors make joined-up thinking and activity difficult

14-19 education and training and HE appear in some respects to be, *de facto*, working at cross-purposes. For example, the pressure on schools and colleges focuses on examination grades, whereas HEIs work towards a more incremental and synoptic approach to learning, and are not evaluated by degree results. HEIs are driven by the need for the successful recruitment of students, as well as success in competitive funding structures. On the other hand, the drive to retain students in HE means that a

⁵⁰² Hesketh, A. (1999)

⁵⁰³ Callender, C. and Jackson, J. (2005). Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2005) also noted that the most disadvantaged students were most likely to say that concern about debt had been a major factor affecting educational decisions.

close link between 14-19 education and training and the demands of HE study is crucial. These conflicting pressures, along with the policy tensions outlined above, militate against joined-up institutional responses to the problems of transition faced by entrants to HE.

Information, advice and guidance

There is a need for effective support and accurate advice and guidance for all learners

Currently, the levels of support available and the nature of the advice and guidance on offer (from 14-19 institutions and from friends and family) are highly variable. Financial guidance in particular appears to be problematic. It is also important that all young people have access to accurate information on which to base their decisions. A 'hard-sell' approach which attempts to persuade as many young people as possible to progress to HE seems inappropriate, particularly in the context of rates of return becoming more variable.

Teaching and learning

There are significant obstacles to progression related to teaching and learning

This is as true of the academic route, in which pathways to entry are relatively clear, as it is of the vocational route. The focus on getting young people into HE may have detracted from the nature and quality of the learning experience in 14-19 education and training, as well as from adequate attention to what is required to engage in HE learning. Further, the value of vocational qualifications should be used positively in progression to learning in HE.

Subject participation in the 14-19 phase and the viability of higher education institution departments

There is current media interest in the reduction in numbers taking A Level science subjects and of the actual or proposed closure of university departments in these areas. If HE is to depend upon a supply of appropriately qualified students in sciences for the future, interventions in the 14-19 phase may be necessary. In addition to sciences, there is also a concern within HE about a recent change to the National Curriculum whereby the study of a modern foreign language subject is no longer compulsory.

Policy tensions

Our analysis also points to a number of potential tensions within current government policy:

Increasing participation and changes in the rate of return to a degree

Labour market outcomes and rates of return for engaging in HE study are changing with the increased participation of the cohort in HE. The traditional argument of a degree allowing access to more satisfying and better-paid employment may become increasingly vulnerable as a greater proportion of the cohort enters HE. This raises the question of whether HE will continue to be attractive to young people if the returns become more variable, as recent evidence suggests they might.

Increasing participation and variable fees

The introduction of variable fees could potentially militate against increasing participation within the context of the aim to increase the diversity of young people entering HE. On the one hand, the availability of bursaries, associated with the introduction of variable fees, provides a level of financial support to students from lower income backgrounds and/or low-participation neighbourhoods which has not been available since the demise of maintenance grants. On the other hand, students from the lower ranges of middle income bands who may not be eligible for such support may face particular difficulties, as there is no available additional support for their parents and carers. The post-graduation repayment strategy delays the repayment of the money, but the sums involved may still deter young people from less privileged backgrounds from entering HE because of aversion to debt⁵⁰⁴. The variable fees increase the perceived and the actual financial cost, the opportunity costs and the perceived risk of failure involved in participating in HE. This applies to all potential entrants to full-time HE study.

Widening participation and improving completion rates

HEIs are facing the potentially conflicting pressures of the widening participation agenda and the push to improve completion rates. HEIs may need particular support in working towards these two aims simultaneously. Particular attention should be paid to positive articulation between vocational qualifications and HE.

⁵⁰⁴ Hesketh, A. (1999); Callender, C. and Jackson, J. (2005)

Policies emphasising collaboration and partnership and those which emphasise the sustainability of individual institutions

Policies such as Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks focus on collaboration and partnership, but this is partly at odds with other drivers (such as competitive funding arrangements and the Research Assessment Exercise) which focus more on the individual institution. This mirrors the tension between collaboration and competition in 14-19 policy identified in Chapter 1 of this Report.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE, the direction of travel of policy (towards increased participation and widening access) and policy interventions designed to achieve these aims. It has identified positive developments and achievements. For many young people, the process of articulation between 14-19 education and training and HE is relatively smooth. Participation has increased and HE is currently also attractive to large numbers of young people. There has also been some, albeit partial, success in widening access.

However, some young people encounter obstacles in progressing from 14-19 education and training to HE. Individual, familial, local, institutional, economic, political and societal barriers interact to make progression more difficult for some young people. Thus, improving articulation requires multiple, and interconnected, interventions in different areas, many outside the realm of education and training. Supply-side policy interventions are therefore inadequate in themselves to counteract the various barriers that limit the opportunities of some groups to progress to HE.

It is too early to assess the impact of current and recent developments – the expansion of HE, increased fees, increasingly variable rates of financial return, and demographic change. The evidence reviewed leads us to question whether HE will remain as attractive a progression opportunity for young people as it has been to date. It is also too early to tell what the consequences of current developments, such as the introduction of the specialised Diplomas, will be for those who do not progress to HE. This will require careful analysis and monitoring in the future.

Part III

Principles

Part III: Principles

Overview

The third part is a reminder that the investment in 14-19 is concerned not solely with better **training** for employment but also with the **education** of all young people for a better and more fulfilling future. This inevitably raises ethical questions about: the kind of life worth living; the quality of learning provided; the content of the curriculum; the role, training and professional development of teachers; and the ethos of the institutional partnerships.

Failure to raise questions about the values underlying policy and practice – failure to engage in ethical deliberation – may result in an efficient and effective 'hitting of targets', 'delivery of curriculum', yet fail to provide education for all.

CHAPTER 5

The *education* of 14-19 year-olds

Introduction

The previous chapters have done two things. First, they have outlined the various government initiatives to improve education and training in the 14-19 phase (to raise standards, to promote social inclusion and to increase their relevance to economic growth). Second, they have shown how these are reflected in the development of the specialised Diplomas in England and in the various transitional arrangements and trends from 14-19 into HE and the labour market.

The Annual Report 2004-05 argued that it is important to reflect on the aims which all these developments should serve, namely, the **education** of all 14-19 year-olds, and what is needed to achieve these aims. The issues, having been raised in that Report, needed to be developed further: What are the values? How might they be fulfilled through improved quality of learning? And what are the implications for teaching and provision of education?

The 2005 DfES White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* briefly sets out the educational aims in terms of helping all young people to realise their potential, part of which will be to give greater 'stretch' particularly to the more able. Subsequent papers (*Implementation Plan*, 2005, and *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*) emphasise the need to make young people more employable both for their personal sakes and for the sake of society. The reason for the second of these two DfES papers is quite simply, "Further Education is not achieving its full potential as the powerhouse of a high skills economy." Such an aim is, of course, crucially important, but employability must be set in the context of broader social and cultural considerations.

Hence, the Nuffield Review has asked the question: *What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?* – a question already posed in the discussion document, reprinted as Appendix VII, *Curriculum for the 21st Century*.

In pursuing this question, this chapter has two major objectives, namely, in the light of the evidence it has received:

- to examine the aims of education and the values which such aims embody
- to consider the learning (its style, content, teaching and organisation) best suited to achieve these aims.

The urgency of pursuing these objectives has been constantly put to the Nuffield Review by teachers, employers, HE representatives and private training providers, arising especially but by no means exclusively from the failure to engage many young people in education and training or to inspire those who do 'meet the targets'.

In doing this, the chapter is divided as follows.

First, it points to the difficulties in reaching consensus on inclusive educational aims, whilst arguing for the continuing need to examine those aims at every level of decision-making. Economic utility may not always be educationally valuable.

Second, in the light of those considerations, the chapter addresses the question, What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?, and sets out certain principles which should guide the deliberations.

Third, it reminds the reader of the broader social and cultural dimension of those being educated and trained, often ignored by those who set the targets for young people's learning.

Fourth, the chapter identifies groups of young people who need to be better catered for if the aims for education and training are to be inclusive.

Fifth, the chapter points to the implications for the infrastructure of learning, its assessment, its teaching and its provision.

Sixth, the chapter concludes with the implications of these considerations for policy and practice.

Section 1: Aims and values: Defining an 'educated 19 year-old'

Education and values

What idea can we have of an educated 19 year-old – the 'product' as it were of the reformed 14-19 phase of education – which is inclusive of everyone, which involves more than the possession of functional skills, and yet which recognises that intellectual excellence, as traditionally conceived, may not be achievable by everyone? What are the qualities, understandings, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are within the reach of all young people, albeit in different ways and to different degrees? The answer ought not to be 'the lowest common denominator' - literacy (irrespective of the use to which literacy is put), functional numeracy and skills relevant to a particular economic role.

Whatever the differences in the precise application of 'education' (people differ in their views about what learning is valuable), such disagreements take place within a broader context of agreement – namely, that to educate is to introduce people to a form of life which is regarded as, in some respects, life enhancing. It is to teach and nurture those qualities and understandings which, at least, are judged to enrich life and to foster distinctively human qualities. Therefore, the government, in setting the standards and

content of a National Curriculum, in determining which subjects are compulsory, in requiring certain forms of assessment, in promoting 'enterprise' and in prioritising certain modes of learning, is implicitly shaping what is judged to be an educated person.

It is important, therefore, to rehearse the different ways in which educational values are supported and justified – and how these different value justifications enter into and sustain different ways of perceiving the 14-19 phase. This ethical dimension which permeates policy and practice is too often neglected.

First, for some, **intellectual excellence** is what constitutes an educated person.

Liberal education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence.⁵⁰⁵

These words of Newman have been echoed many times⁵⁰⁶ in the shaping of education, which is seen to be primarily concerned with the development of the intellect and, therefore, with the 'initiation' into those forms of knowledge which constitute what it means to think. Such forms of knowledge (the sciences, mathematics, artistic appreciation, moral judgement, etc) give logical structure to enquiry and provide the mental tools to understand and operate within the physical, social and moral worlds we inhabit. However, many young people are unable to shine intellectually; there are limits, therefore, to how far they might acquire 'intellectual excellence'. Those, who can, normally progress up the academic route. Those, who cannot, would be directed to places and courses where they can learn to be useful. The unexamined distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' often embodies the false dichotomy between education for excellence and training for usefulness.

Second, for others, being **practically and economically useful** would be seen as the mark of an educated person; the demonstration of intellectual excellence, as traditionally conceived, would be seen, in fact, to be a poor preparation for life. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts (RSA) *Manifesto for Capability* in 1986 emphasised the capacity for 'intelligent doing'⁵⁰⁷. This notion of 'practical intelligence' or 'capability' has been a hallmark of the RSA, and is reflected currently in its *Opening Minds: Education for the 21st Century*, which is adopted increasingly by schools disillusioned by a target-driven National Curriculum⁵⁰⁸. The curriculum is conceived in terms of competences to be attained.

⁵⁰⁵ Newman, J.H. (1852), p. 121

⁵⁰⁶ See, for example, O'Hear (1987)

⁵⁰⁷ RSA (1986)

⁵⁰⁸ RSA (1999)

A third, and very different, tradition of education would emphasise the **formation of character or development of virtues** – the preparation of the next generation to live successfully within the economic, social, cultural and moral context in which they were to flourish⁵⁰⁹. Admittedly, since economic and social circumstances change, so do our understandings of what is humanly necessary and possible, thereby requiring constant deliberation about the right way of preparing the next generation – acquiring the dispositions related to good citizenship, to relationships in a more pluralist society, to openness to different social experiences and to understanding the changing economic world.

Therefore, in defining an 'educated 19 year-old, what *educational* values should prevail? Intellectual excellence (traditionally excluding the majority of young people)? Practical usefulness (emphasising capability, but perhaps relegating in status the intellectual virtues and aesthetic qualities)? Character formation (possibly embracing new definitions of citizenship)? Is there an educational ideal to which all might aspire, even though they may have special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, and even if their capacities for traditionally conceived intellectual excellence may be limited?

Those who doubt the significance of these questions might refer to the diminishing importance of the humanities and the arts in the idea of a general education post-14, as learning is increasingly geared to economic usefulness ('realising our potential' through the acquisition of the skills needed for a highly competitive economy⁵¹⁰). The arts and the humanities fit uncomfortably into the division between academic and vocational courses. On the other hand, practical learning no longer plays a significant part in the prevailing idea of general education, as standards are increasingly defined in terms of written accounts even when those standards concern practical activities, as is reflected in what happened to the GNVQ⁵¹¹. Under the cover of a 'new language' (see below), education and training are being redefined. Different aims and values are promoted. And a different conception of human flourishing is presupposed.

In resolving these difficulties, one needs to address two major considerations.

The first lies in some view of what it means to be fully or distinctively human. Bruner, in his pioneering social studies course 'Man: a Course of Study', identified three questions which should shape the curriculum: What is it that makes us human? How did we become so? And how can we become more so?⁵¹² Education would seem to be about the development – whether through character formation, practical capability or increased understanding – of those qualities which make us distinctively human.

⁵⁰⁹See, for example, MacIntyre, A. (1987). Also, but in a different way, the importance John Dewey attached to living and communicating within a community as central to the educational process exemplifies this tradition. See Dewey (1916), chapter 7.

⁵¹⁰DfES, Department for Trade and Industry, HMT and DWP (2003); see also Pring (2004)

⁵¹¹See the critical analysis by Ecclestone, K. (2006), and also Ecclestone, K. (2005).

⁵¹²See Bruner, J. (1966)

The second major consideration lies in the social context in which we nurture the growing humanity of young people. We live in community. Indeed, as the much neglected philosopher John Macmurray argued⁵¹³, a person's identity lies and develops in relationships to significant others. Those 'others' stretch from the immediate family, friends and colleagues to the wider society of which young people are part. To flourish requires living within a particular community and making a contribution to it. Hence, the qualities, knowledge and skills need to be relevant to living within and contributing to that community – the capacity to appreciate the problems which beset it, the skills to prosper within it, the knowledge to challenge those in authority, the moral qualities to develop a fairer and more inclusive society. On the other hand, a dysfunctional community will not nurture appropriate dispositions and qualities. Teaching young people to be human cannot ignore the wider social and cultural influences which affect what is learnt and valued.

Language of education

One reason why there is not the required ethical engagement within policy and indeed within professional practice is that the essentially moral language of education (concerned with human fulfilment and personal development) has been trumped by other forms of discourse derived from other areas of public life. Evidence submitted to the Review by a former senior civil servant, who had played a prominent part in the development of 14-19 policy, suggested that such moral judgement or language was not the business of government which had to respect the pluralism of values within society at large.

However, language cannot be neutral and does itself inevitably embody values under the false guise of neutrality. The language of education is being transformed into the language of management. That language is increasingly one of **curriculum delivery** rather than teaching, of **inputs related to outputs** rather than the struggle to understand, of making **efficiency gains** rather than changing pedagogy to meet more challenging teaching tasks, of **audits** rather than professional judgement, of **performance indicators** rather than the standards internal to the activity, of **economic relevance** rather than human fulfilment, of **clients and customers** rather than apprentices to a form of life and a way of thinking.

It is difficult to deliberate about the aims of 14-19 education when the very language of morality has been subverted by the language of business management.

⁵¹³ See Macmurray, J. (1961), Chapters 1 and 7, and Fielding, M. (2006)

Standards

Implicit in all that has been said is the importance of standards. It is the declared government policy to raise standards. Hence, detailed lists of standards are set for schools, colleges, teacher training and vocational trainers, shaping the learning experience for all young people 14-19. These standards are often spelt out as targets⁵¹⁴. However, the meaning of 'standard' is not entirely self-evident.

First, standards are not self-evident because the values they embody are rarely beyond dispute. There are different understandings of 'an educated 19 year-old'. Therefore, the imposition of targets, as proxies for standards, needs to be justified in the light of a broader ethical debate about the aims of education. The Association of Colleges is concerned about the publication of league tables since these do not reflect what the colleges themselves regard as the criteria of success (the **standards** of a good college) which they believe are intrinsic to their educational aims – namely, the inclusion of young people who, having been failed at school, have been prevented by school or sixth form college from proceeding with their studies. The struggle to renew students' interest in learning does not get reflected in the values implicit within the tables by which providers are judged – even though 'social inclusion' is at least formally an aim of government policy⁵¹⁵. A visit to a Steiner school by the Nuffield Review showed clearly how a very different philosophical position about human development and fulfilment is reflected in a different set of standards by which it would want its 'performance' to be judged – in, for example, its focus upon the arts or upon practical work. This affects profoundly what might be judged to be success. Hence, the defining of standards – central to the government's education and training strategy – depends upon the clarification of the educational values which underpin the system. This failure to clarify creates contradictions and anomalies within the system – and between the providers. It was pointed out to the Nuffield Review how the 'standards agenda' (narrowly conceived) gets in the way of the 'inclusion agenda'⁵¹⁶.

Second, there is something odd about the very notion of 'raising standards'. Standards are the benchmarks whereby performances are judged and evaluated. It is performance in relation to these standards which 'goes up or down', not standards themselves. Standards change so that we come to evaluate performance differently. Thus, the standard for 'good' GCSE results has recently been changed from **any** five A*-C to five A*-C including English and maths. The resulting shift in league table places of schools will not reflect falling standards but rather different positions in relation to a changed conception of appropriate standards. And that changed notion of

⁵¹⁴ See Keep, E. (2004b) for a critique of the target culture.

⁵¹⁵ See evidence in Association of Colleges document *Post-16 Achievement and Attainment Tables 2006*, submitted to the DfES School Performance and Accountability Division, January 2006. It was a point emphasised in this Review's visit to North Hertfordshire College of Further Education.

⁵¹⁶ Haines, S. (2006)

'appropriateness' is itself a result of value judgements being made about the kind of knowledge and understanding which young people should possess. For example, the decision to make ASDAN's Certificate of Personal Effectiveness at Level 2 equivalent to a 'good GCSE' is a recognition that certain qualities, reflected in certain performances, should be valued and seen to be constitutive of an educated young person⁵¹⁷.

Section 2: Curriculum for the 21st Century: Principles

The Nuffield Review, having raised these concerns, has issued a four-page document which suggests what should constitute a '21st century curriculum', embodying the learning achievements which might arise from the distinctively human qualities of all young people irrespective of their different talents, abilities and backgrounds (see Appendix VII). These would include:

(i) The pursuit of excellence

Excellence refers to the attainment of standards. What those standards are depends on the purpose of the activity. Moreover, they refer both to the attainment of the goal of the activity and to the means by which the goal is achieved. Standards by which the means are evaluated include not only effectiveness, but also elegance, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, awareness of consequences, aesthetic appreciation, and moral responsibility. People who are not intellectually high achievers might have a deep commitment to the standards which are intrinsic to their job. They may well have a critical eye for work which is done in a slovenly manner. They may have pride in efficient performance of the task. There is aesthetic pleasure in its accomplishment, and a sense of responsibility for what they are asked to do. Chris Winch⁵¹⁸ points to a different tradition of apprenticeship in Germany where the young worker is initiated into a form of life in which work activities, at whatever level, are understood within this broader context of understanding, standards and social relevance.

(ii) Knowledge and understanding

Education is associated with the initiation into forms of knowledge or understanding through which we make sense of the physical, social and moral worlds we inhabit⁵¹⁹. It is to be able to enter into, and to appreciate, what Oakeshott called the different voices

⁵¹⁷ For a description of this qualification initiative, see the national Aimhigher Practitioner website: http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/national_projects/asdan.cfm

⁵¹⁸ Winch, C. (2006)

⁵¹⁹ This idea of liberal education has been most influentially expressed by Hirst (1967).

in the conversation of mankind⁵²⁰. Such initiation can be, of course, at different levels and in specific voices of that conversation. Some may have a deep grasp of the sciences, but little acquaintance with the arts or humanities. However, many young people are excluded from that conversation – they lack the relevant concepts or tools of enquiry, even at a most elementary level. The Nuffield Review, however, questions whether that need be the case. As Bruner argued, different ways of understanding are shaped by key concepts which constitute the logical structure of that understanding and that can be taught at any age in an intellectually respectable way – albeit in different ‘modes of representation’⁵²¹. The extent to which this makes sense across the ability range is reflected in the new 21st Century Science suite of courses being developed by the examination body OCR in co-operation with the University of York and the Nuffield Foundation⁵²². A focus group of the heads of science departments of Hillingdon schools, for example, spoke with enthusiasm of the **educational** value of these courses for all young people, including those for whom science often seemed inaccessible⁵²³. This widespread relevance was reflected, too, in the humanities programmes initiated originally by Stenhouse⁵²⁴, but continued by so many teachers of English, drama and the humanities, wherein the personal world of the young people – their experiences, and their voices – was found a place in dialogue with the evidence from literature, history and other relevant sources.

(iii) Moral and social responsibility

All young people have the potential to be morally responsible and serious about how their lives are lived, relationships entered into, future employment decided upon. But such responsibility operates within a context of dispositions which need to be nurtured within the different communities to which they belong and in which they are educated. Schools and colleges, therefore, normally see themselves as moral, not just learning, communities⁵²⁵. Such moral and social seriousness is not peculiar to the intellectually excellent. It is learnt, and enables all young people to operate in a distinctively human way. The Nuffield Review has encountered many examples where young people, often dismissed as uneducable, have been transformed in an environment where the social context embodies values of justice and respect, and where the potential for moral seriousness is nurtured by the teachers⁵²⁶. Programmes of citizenship, arising out of

⁵²⁰ Oakeshott (1972)

⁵²¹ Bruner, J. (1960)

⁵²² Nuffield Foundation (2006); Jenkins, E. (2006a), (2006b)

⁵²³ See Nuffield Review Briefing Paper No.8 at www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

⁵²⁴ Stenhouse L. (1975), *passim*

⁵²⁵ The idea that a school should be a moral or just community as a condition for moral education and social responsibility is attested in research literature; see in particular Mosher (1980), Kohlberg (1981) and Dewey (1916), to whom Kohlberg expressed his debt.

⁵²⁶ This point is made strongly by the spokespersons for the colleges taking part in the UK Skills Challenge.

the Crick Report⁵²⁷, emphasise the positive part young people should play in creating and sustaining a healthy society. But that part requires active participation, meeting practical challenges, and attention to the school or college as a community. This concern is reflected in interesting innovations such as that of the Human Scale Education⁵²⁸ which, the Nuffield Review has noted, is testing out its ideas within the government's Building Schools for the Future initiative.

(iv) Practical capability

A liberal tradition of education, in focusing upon the world of ideas, has too often ignored the world of practice - the world of industry, of commerce, of earning a living, of practical usefulness. It is claimed that there has been a disdain for the practical intelligence - indeed, for the technological and the useful⁵²⁹. A few years ago, the Royal Society of Arts, which for 250 years has striven to bring together theory and practice, thinking and making, intellect and skill, produced its *Manifesto for Capability*, signed by distinguished scientists and philosophers, which stated:

There exists in its own right a culture which is concerned with doing and making and organising and the creative arts. This culture emphasises the day to day management of affairs, the formulation and solution of problems, and the design, manufacture and marketing of goods and services.⁵³⁰

The notion of 'capability', though hard to define, is important, but neglected by those who, in pursuit of a pure 'liberal learning', ignore its significance for intelligent living.

(v) Ideals and appreciation of 'big issues' which affect all

The critics of a general education based on 'subjects' point to the way in which big issues get neglected or treated in so fragmented a way that their moral and social significance is lost. For example, environmental change should be addressed in the education of all young people. (See the highly influential reports of the Brundtland Commission⁵³¹ and of the 1986 OECD Environment and School Initiative, which explored how concern for the environment should impact on educational practice⁵³².) But furthermore, as has been argued by Bonnett in his submission to the review⁵³³, "at the

⁵²⁷ Crick Report (1998), and the subsequent work of the Citizenship Foundation

⁵²⁸ The Gulbenkian Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation are funding Human Scale Schools, encouraging the restructuring of schools into smaller learning communities, thereby encouraging a greater sense of community.

⁵²⁹ Wiener, M. (1985)

⁵³⁰ RSA, 1986

⁵³¹ Brundtland Commission (1987)

⁵³² See Elliott, J. (1999)

⁵³³ Bonnett, M. (2005)

heart of any notion of *education* for sustainable development must lie a certain frame of mind involving some idea of an appropriate relationship with nature.” The same could be said of the many ‘big issues’ which affect us all and have both local and international dimension - racism, fundamentalism of various kinds, conflict between peoples and nations, poverty reduction and the phenomenon of violence. To educate is to open up what is humanly possible, and thereby to inspire and to enable young people to extend themselves beyond the immediate and the mediocre. Through literature and drama, example and narrative, or practical engagement with experienced craftsmen⁵³⁴, learners can be exposed to ideals which are worth pursuing. Yet little is said of this or the appropriate pedagogy for implementing it in curriculum changes taking place in the ‘general education’ of GCSEs, A Levels or specialised Diplomas.

(vi) Basic and wider skills

The previous Annual Report raised questions about the unquestioned reference to functionality in what are often seen to be self-evidently basic skills⁵³⁵. That criticism is particularly relevant to development currently taking place of the specialised Diplomas. Function must be defined in terms of that for which it is said to be functional, and that requires a detailed analysis of the job or mode of living for which the attendant skills are needed⁵³⁶. More recently, concern has been expressed about the neglect of the ‘key skills’ of speaking and listening. The concentration on ‘reading and writing’ (for which the standards seem more easy to specify) has led to the neglect of ‘speaking and listening’ (for which performance against standards is less easy to measure). Yet, the evidence over many years points to the priority which should be given to oral skills in the education of all young people – evidence which now seems almost forgotten. If the ‘student voice’ is important, especially in the re-engagement of young people in learning, that evidence for the importance of discussion and for the measurement of ‘oracy’ needs to be taken seriously once again. The Nuffield Review is reminded of the priority once given to the student’s voice in the creation of the Certificate of Secondary Education in 1964⁵³⁷, in the Bullock Report in 1975⁵³⁸ following the research at the London Institute of Education⁵³⁹ and elsewhere⁵⁴⁰, and in the sophisticated modes of its assessment developed by the Assessment of Performance Unit in the 1970s⁵⁴¹. That importance of place is also to be found in the centrality of discussion, disciplined by

⁵³⁴ See Fox, J. (2005)

⁵³⁵ Hayward *et al.* (2005), p. 47. This was based on evidence provided by Wake, G. (2005) and Watson, A. (2005)

⁵³⁶ Wake, G. (2005)

⁵³⁷ Curriculum Study Group, Ministry of Education (1963)

⁵³⁸ Bullock Report (1975)

⁵³⁹ Barnes, D., Britton, J. and Rosen, H. (1969)

⁵⁴⁰ Fox, C. (2002); Wilkinson, A. (1965) which gave the definitive account of the ‘oracy project’.

⁵⁴¹ Gorman, T. (1988) ; Wilkinson, A. (1965)

evidence, which was promoted by the humanities courses of the 1970s⁵⁴². A former tradition of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment - intensively researched – seems to have been lost, as a result of an accountability regime rising out of the National Curriculum reforms of the late 1980s.

(vii) Economic viability

A main thrust of educational policy has been to ensure that young people acquire the qualities, skills and knowledge required to meet the economic needs of the country and of their own economic viability. Such development is open to all young people at different levels and in different modes, responsive to the change economic face of the regions in which they live.

Therefore, all young people are educable in this broader sense. These values and accomplishments should shape the quality and organisation of learning 14-19. Such an inclusive understanding of an 'educated 19 year-old' would emphasise

- pursuit of excellence (howsoever modest that activity might appear to some)
- development of moral responsibility and seriousness
- practical capability
- an understanding, at different levels and in different forms, of the physical, social, cultural and moral worlds they inhabit
- social responsibility and commitment – the good citizen
- mastery of basic and wider skills relevant to everyday living and employment
- preparation for economic usefulness in terms of disposition, knowledge and skills.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that such an educational ideal, open to all young people, can be attained simply by setting new targets or creating new incentives. There is a wider social and cultural dimension, too often ignored, which the shaping of 14-19 needs to take account of. And there are specific groups of young people whose particular needs are in danger of being ignored within the education and training mainstream.

⁵⁴² MacDonald, B. (1973); Stenhouse, L. (1975)

Section 3: Social and cultural dimension of 14-19

By 'social and cultural dimension' is meant the social framework of values, relationships, pressures, expectations and forces within which young people are expected to succeed – and which help them to define success. Young persons' definitions of success might be very different from those of the system in which they are being educated and trained. That cultural dimension is too often ignored as targets are set, provision is planned and providers are judged in terms of criteria disconnected from the social worlds in which young people live.

The cultural dimension was especially raised by Stephen Ball in evidence to the Nuffield Review in its first year⁵⁴³. The evidence points to a cultural world, profoundly different from that of formal education, in which many young people define success, find value, seek personal identity, establish relationships, deal with finance and perceive the significance of work. As is argued in Chapter 3 (p. 138) of this Report,

... the concepts of 'youth' and 'childhood', and public perceptions of their rights and of the costs associated with social reproduction, have changed substantially ... a consequence is a blurring of the passage to adulthood – some young people acquire attributes of 'adult' much earlier than expected.

In many cases, formal education seems alien to this very different cultural world, in which communication has been transformed through the mobile phone and texting. This is a dimension of the 14-19 phase which is only just beginning to be explored by the Nuffield Review – not an easy undertaking. But it has considerable implications for the aims of education, for the 'voice of the learner' in the curriculum, for teaching approaches and for the expertise of those whose job it is to guide and counsel young people in the transition into employment, HE and further training.

One aspect of this concerns changing understandings of gender, sexuality and social diversity in relation to 14-19 year-olds, explored in the evidence to the Nuffield Review by Miriam David⁵⁴⁴. The complexities here are immense, as the interactions between gender, social class, family background, perception of career, ethnicity and faith shape the attitudes of young people towards personal relationships and social responsibilities. Just one example: recent research concludes that Britain has the highest number of teenage pregnancies in Europe – 40,000, many seeing that having a baby is a better option than a low-paid 'dead-end' job⁵⁴⁵. Such complexities may well suggest radical changes in the institutional provision of education and training of young people in terms

⁵⁴³ Ball, S.J. (2004)

⁵⁴⁴ David, M. and Alldred, P. (forthcoming)

⁵⁴⁵ Cater, S. and Coleman, L. (2006)

of teacher/learner relationships, teaching approaches, links to community services, financial incentives, guidance and counselling, and 'personalised learning'.

Adolescent well-being

There are broader questions about 'adolescent well-being', currently being explored by the Nuffield Foundation⁵⁴⁶, which impinge upon the aspirations and behaviour of young people and which cannot be ignored in any arrangement for their education and training. Evidence gathered by the Institute of Psychiatry on time trends in adolescent mental health⁵⁴⁷ indicated that the mental health of adolescents in the UK declined overall over the previous 25 years; 10% of girls and 13% of boys showed emotional disorders, clinically significant conduct disorders, hyperactivity or other syndromes. There is a rising level of self-harm amongst young people, as many young people are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of everyday living.

Such negative aspects of the social context affect profoundly how teachers see their role and find difficulty in carrying it out. Teachers and their representative professional bodies speak continually of the rising violence and indiscipline. In 2003/4, there were 10,000 permanent exclusions from schools, and over 200,000 learners who had one or more fixed periods of exclusion⁵⁴⁸. A large proportion of those permanently excluded is lost from the system and those included in this percentage have a strong likelihood of subsequent imprisonment.

The causes of this more violent and disruptive dimension to young people's lives are beyond the scope of the Nuffield Review. But any development of the 14-19 system must take this dimension into account – in particular, the implication for the diversity of provision – including the use of voluntary bodies and the Youth Service, whose expertise and different ways of relating to young people are too rarely understood and used⁵⁴⁹. The development of the 14-19 system must take into account also the resourcing of those with special needs, the training of and support for teachers, the more personalised organisation of learning, and the criteria of accountability. As the MacBeath report (*op. cit.*) says

As schools widen their intake and as teachers meet more disturbed and damaged children the need for pastoral care increases commensurately. This becomes particularly acute in disadvantaged communities where the issues are compounded by poverty, violent communities and turbulent domestic circumstances. (p. 25)

⁵⁴⁶ Nuffield Foundation (2004a)

⁵⁴⁷ Meltzer, H., Gatward, R., Goodman, R. and Ford, T. (1999)

⁵⁴⁸ DfES statistics quoted in MacBeath, J. et al, (2006)

⁵⁴⁹ See Davies, B. (2005)

Section 4: Inclusive education: Young people whose needs are frequently not met

In exploring what counts as an educated 19 year-old, the Nuffield Review was particularly conscious of three overlapping groups of young people whose needs are often not met within the aims of 14-19 provision, despite the claims that the system is inclusive. They are young people with SEN, those with disabilities and those who are disengaged from the formal system of education and training.

Young people with special educational needs

A major aim of successive governments has been that of social inclusion, following the Warnock Report of 1978⁵⁵⁰ and the subsequent Education Act of 1981. One major thrust of the policy has been the greater integration of young people with various learning disabilities into mainstream schools and colleges, together with the abolition of the formal labels attached to different kinds of handicap. The view seemed to be that all have learning difficulties in various ways and that it is a continuum between those who have few and minor ones to those who have many and large ones. Each needs to be treated according to his or her individual learning needs, and this is in many ways a forerunner of what is now referred to as 'personalised learning'. Furthermore, that recognition of individual learning needs seemed to give young people a greater opportunity for making the transition into employment or further training

However, the recent report of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee questions the wisdom of this policy for a wide range of young people⁵⁵¹. The policy "is failing to cope with the rising number of children with autism and social, emotional or behavioural difficulties." According to this report, many young people are being needlessly excluded from school because of behavioural problems. It is of significance that 60% of exclusions in secondary school are of those who are declared to have SEN. Many of these then join the ranks of those who are NEET and indeed of those who turn to crime. Certainly, questions were raised with the Nuffield Review about those with special learning difficulties and those in special schools or units once they reach the end of compulsory schooling. The 16-18 year-olds with special needs seem to be particularly vulnerable.

With this general criticism of the results (not the intentions) of the 1981 Act, Lady Warnock would seem to agree. In a recent Impact monograph, she reneged on key recommendations of her 1978 report⁵⁵². There is an imperative, she concluded, to

⁵⁵⁰ Warnock Report (1978)

⁵⁵¹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006)

⁵⁵² Warnock, M. (2005)

distinguish various kinds of need to ensure that the appropriate educational response is made and resources and provision allocated.

Therefore, in the context of these serious reconsiderations by contributors to policymaking, there would appear to be a growing problem which needs to be addressed by reforms within the educational and training system as a whole – the provision of more appropriate learning environments, the training of teachers not only in the knowledge of these special needs but also in more practical modes of learning, and the partnership with other educational providers, such as the Youth Service and voluntary bodies, which, less constrained by National Curriculum requirements or the need to meet centrally set targets, are better able to develop learning opportunities and experiences.

The MacBeath Report, referred to above, summarised the feelings of many teachers in the following words:

Practitioners in particular, conceived the educational system to be too inflexible to accommodate a broad range of needs, governed by the demands of the National Curriculum, by high stakes testing, parental choice and the strictures of Ofsted. All of these constrained any radical departure from the 'official' programme of study and its preferred pedagogy, based largely on whole class instruction. (p. 12)

Young people with disabilities

The paper from Steve Haines from the Disability Rights Commission, but drawing upon a wide and representative reference group on the particular problems faced by disabled young people in the 14-19 phase, has been particularly helpful to the Nuffield Review⁵⁵³. Across a number of indicators, young disabled people experience poorer outcomes: membership of the NEET group (27% of the 16-19 year-olds with disabilities are NEET, compared with 9% of the non-disabled); 21% aged 16-19 having no qualifications; and being much less likely to proceed to HE. This is despite the evidence from the YCS that the aspirations of disabled 16 year-olds have risen to the same level as those of the non-disabled 16 year-olds. As the paper from the Disability Rights Commission says,

The greater participation of disabled adults in employment and across society places new demands on the 14-19 system to ensure that young disabled people participate, progress and attain.... This will require all those involved with the 14-19 system to rethink the impact of current objectives, culture and practice.

The problems seem particularly acute when many of this cohort leave school, namely: few appropriate courses and a poor curriculum; lack of skill amongst those who teach;

⁵⁵³ Haines, S. (2006)

the move into non-work options; age cut-off points in the social services; AND lack of suitable information and guidance about access to HE⁵⁵⁴.

The idea of an educated 19 year-old that has been argued for embraces those with SEN and those with disabilities. At the same time, those same aims need to be reconceptualised to reflect the progress and achievement of young people, who, for whatever reason, are not able to progress as far or as quickly as other young people in some aspects of their learning. Alternative approaches to learning should “embody greater opportunities for them to participate fully in society as adults”. That is, however, not always easy, for as Haines says, referring to Miller *et al.*⁵⁵⁵

The standards agenda depends too much on measures of success defined by summative assessment and external verification. The effect is that there is less incentive to differentiate the curriculum and use formative assessment that can benefit young disabled people’s learning.

The disengaged and the disaffected

It is a matter of grave concern that so many young people seem to be ‘disengaged’ from formally provided education and training. This is partly reflected in the ‘NEET group’, although, as this Report argues in Chapter 3, such a ‘group’ is a statistical classification, partly reflecting the absence of statistical data and including a highly heterogeneous lot of young people (those who are pregnant or young mothers, young offenders, young people who have not been able to find employment, 18 year-olds on their ‘gap year’ prior to university, ‘carer children’ – an estimated 175,000 start the day by washing and feeding sick parents⁵⁵⁶, etc.).

As with the ‘NEET group’, the classification ‘disengaged’ is very broad and heterogeneous. At one end, it includes the large number of those who have been excluded either permanently or temporarily and those who have offended, as previously mentioned. It also includes those who have left at the earliest opportunity, not seeking any further education and training and very likely to be taking low skilled jobs with little prospect of development or security. Furthermore, it includes those who have neither left nor been excluded, but who are a constant cause of disruption, with a deep sense of failure and with a sense that the curriculum is irrelevant to their lives as they see them. Amongst such a group there is a disproportionate number with SEN, as is shown above.

But disaffection and disengagement might also prevail amongst the ‘successful’ students – those who pass their examinations, progress to the university or further training, but who do not value the learning which takes place. Such ‘learning’ is for this group seen to be a means to an end, not intrinsically worthwhile and not transforming

⁵⁵⁴ ALI report (2006); Open Society Institute (2005)

⁵⁵⁵ Miller, O. Keil, S. and Cobb, R. (2005)

⁵⁵⁶ Report of Children’s Services Network, TES, 5 May 2006

how they think about themselves or the world in which they live. And this is an unexplored territory; research to date has focused on the obviously disaffected, not upon the disaffected but academically able.

Given the variety of those who fit into the 'disaffected category', it is important to make distinctions in what is said about the causes of, and solutions to, the problems of disaffection. Already the Nuffield Review has pointed to the problems arising with those who have learning difficulties. But the research of the Centre for Economic Performance⁵⁵⁷ argues that many young people are prevented from attaining the necessary skill levels because of rigid curriculum and teaching styles before they are 16. This results in their being disengaged from formal learning, including progression to apprenticeships. NFER research claims that disengagement from learning of a sizeable minority is a European, not just a British, phenomenon, arising partly out of lack of opportunities for engagement in 'vocational education', difficulties in negotiating 'transition points, negative selection which takes place at different stages, and high levels of exclusion'⁵⁵⁸. The recent report from the LSDA, now the Learning and Skills Network, which analysed data on young people in the last five years of compulsory schooling, points to frequent truancy, poor performance at ages 11, 14 and 16 and social deprivation as characteristics of many within this group⁵⁵⁹.

Solutions, tentatively offered⁵⁶⁰ and by no means applicable to such a heterogeneous group, would seem to be fourfold.

First, what and how such young people learn must be a prime consideration. The opportunities for more experience-based and practical modes of learning have transformed many young people who otherwise would remain disaffected. Although such modes of learning might have a 'vocational purpose', they should not be confused with the much more specific vocational learning which directs a person to a particular career or employment. The success of the much more widely applicable experience-based and active learning lies in working practically, in making and in creating, in finding success in the acquisition of a new skill. According to the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), programmes should be designed so that learning is available in bite-size packages and success achieved at frequent intervals through an appropriate way of assessing their success⁵⁶¹. The Nuffield Review witnessed much of this in the IFP, the Centres of Vocational Excellence, the various 'challenge programmes' of ASDAN and UK Skills⁵⁶² and the programmes of some private sector

⁵⁵⁷ Steedman, H. (2006),

⁵⁵⁸ Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005)

⁵⁵⁹ McIntosh, S. and Houghton, N. (2006)

⁵⁶⁰ See Archer, L., Halsall, A., Hollingworth, S. and Mendick, H. (2005); Ball, S.J., Maguire, M., Macrae, S. (2000)

⁵⁶¹ NIACE (2004)

⁵⁶² UK Skills is an independent organisation which champions skills and learning for work through competitions, awards and events (www.ukskills.org.uk)

learning providers. The evaluation of the IFP, for example, found that, of the first cohort starting in 2003, 90% stayed on to further education or training instead of the target of 75%, that two-thirds aimed at a qualification at a higher level than they had studied at school, that there was evidence of improved confidence and social and employability skills. Mike Cox, LSDA's executive director, said:

This research shows that by providing the right kind of education that offers flexibility and choice, young people who may have become disaffected at school can be motivated to stay on and achieve qualifications.⁵⁶³

With reference to the fundamental aims of education and the idea of an 'educated 19 year-old', there needs to be a way in which all young people, not just the academically successful, can have a sense of achievement, a feeling of pride in a task well done and in meeting the standards which are intrinsic to the chosen activities.

Second, the location in which learning takes place can make a difference – whether in schools of 'human scale'⁵⁶⁴, or in an appropriately structured adult environment, or in college with better facilities for more practical work, or under the aegis of the Youth Service. The value of this change of location is borne out by the evaluations of the IFPs⁵⁶⁵. It is increasingly difficult to keep many young people within the confines of a school, usually designed for much more formal modes of teaching and learning. On the other hand, there are dangers in expecting a quick fix from other agencies. Bernard Davies shows how the Youth Service's success with deeply troubled young people was rightly acknowledged by the government in such schemes as the Youth Action Scheme, and in the work of Connexions, but he argues also that too often outcomes were required without the processes being put into place which would give rise to those outcomes⁵⁶⁶.

Third, the kind of guidance which such actually disaffected or potentially disengaged people receive can make a difference. As argued in Chapter 3 (p. 130), it is:

... important to manage the expectations of young people once they embark on a course of learning and training; in particular, the fact that the rewards ... may lie in the medium- to long-term ...

There is a confusing plethora of qualifications to aspire to without clear guidance as to which would be the most suitable. Perhaps, as a direct consequence of this, there is a high degree of non-completion.

⁵⁶³ NFER/LSDA (2006)

⁵⁶⁴ Tasker, M. (2003)

⁵⁶⁵ Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., Benton, T. and Rudd, P. (2006); Higham, J and Yeomans, D. (2006)

⁵⁶⁶ Davies, B. (2005)

Fourth, the support and mentoring that the disengaged young people receive, including links to the wider community, is seen by the research of the Youth Justice Board⁵⁶⁷ to be crucial. This was a point emphasised by the NFER research referred to – a meeting of the emotional, social and behavioural needs of a large number of young people. A new pilot 14-16 Engagement Programme for those who may be disengaged or are judged by teachers to be likely to become disengaged has been devised as part of the government's 11-19 reform agenda. The national design template for this has a focus on personal and social development, work experience and the acquisition of functional and wider key skills.

Section 5: Implications for 14-19 provision

There are important implications of this analysis for 14-19 provision, in terms of:

- learning and the curriculum
- assessment and qualifications
- guidance and counselling
- teaching and teacher preparation
- provision of learning opportunities.

Learning and curriculum

Listening to the learner's voice

A lot has been said to the Nuffield Review about the need to listen to 'the learner's voice'. There is research evidence to show that giving that 'voice' a more prominent part leads to improvement in the quality of learning⁵⁶⁸. It is necessary, however, in finding 'a place for that voice', to distinguish between: (a) involving the learners in planning the learning which is to take place; (b) responding to that voice in teaching; and (c) making that voice central to the process of learning – where the experience which the young people bring to school or college **becomes** the curriculum.

With regard to the involvement of learners, the Nuffield Review has been impressed by the work of the English Secondary Students Association⁵⁶⁹, which has a growing membership of school students and which is conducting training programmes to give them confidence in public presentations, 'citizen juries' and so on. But Rudduck's work

⁵⁶⁷ Youth Justice Board (2006)

⁵⁶⁸ See in particular the extensive work of Jean Rudduck (2005)

⁵⁶⁹ www.studentvoice.co.uk

was more concerned with responsiveness to the student voice in the teaching itself, partly (if not mainly) because the articulation of ideas or of problems is crucial to the development of understanding. The very best work in the humanities has always understood this. Drama lessons, par excellence, enabled young people to articulate their feelings and understandings of human relations and predicaments. The Humanities Curriculum Project put discussion, informed and challenged by evidence, at the centre of the learning experience⁵⁷⁰, as indeed, did many projects. It is generally felt (though this needs to be explored in greater depth) that the scope for discussion has diminished under the pressure to cover content which is related to the ever more detailed targets measured by tests. A lively tradition of oral work in the classroom, reflected in Chapter 10 of the Bullock Report⁵⁷¹ and once an integral part of the examination of young people, is now almost forgotten.

More radical, however, is the example of the voice of the young person becoming a central component of the curriculum – not just an aid to the learning of someone else's curriculum. This is by no means an alien concept in youth work, where so often those who have opted out of school, or been excluded from it, find a place where their voice is taken seriously and where a better understanding of their situation and the world in which they live is provided.⁵⁷² Hackney College, supported by UK Skills' pilot project with three FE colleges, created the opportunity for young people aged 14-16 to create, as part of the curriculum, a film of their growing-up in Hackney – the challenges, the aspirations, the prejudices, the challenges to be overcome. Their voice became part of the curriculum⁵⁷³.

With reference back to what was written on disengaged and disaffected young people, much could be learnt from the principles of youth work, which are applicable to all young people. These, set out in the 'manifesto' already referred to⁵⁷⁴, include:

- starting where young people are starting
- dialogue with those who are disengaged – and thus listening to their voice
- enabling engagement in activities which they volunteer for
- encouraging outward looking, critical and creative responses to their experiences
- balancing power in young people's favour

⁵⁷⁰ Stenhouse, L. (1975)

⁵⁷¹ Bullock Report (1975)

⁵⁷² Davies, B. (2005)

⁵⁷³ www.ukskills.org.uk

⁵⁷⁴ Davies, B. (2005) p. 7

- being responsive to the young person’s peer networks.

Practical learning

The antithesis between ‘academic studies’ and ‘practical learning’ (wrongly confused with ‘vocational’) is deeply embedded in our culture. This, together with its detrimental impact on the learning experience of young people, has been thoroughly explored over the last few decades⁵⁷⁵. John Dancy, in his eloquent address to the British Association as long ago as 1965 (a time when, indeed, the Ministry of Education issued a White Paper on liberal aspects of technical education in FE colleges⁵⁷⁶) argued for the incorporation of technology (the making things work) as an essential ingredient within a liberal education – the unity between art, science and technology, between imagining, experimenting, making and thinking – which still remains embedded in the traditions of the Royal Society of the Arts. Such a unity is destroyed, to the detriment of all, where the division is made between the academic (the world of abstractions and the transmission of knowledge) and the so-called vocational and practical. There is a danger that the new specialised Diplomas will reinforce that distinction and division, rather than address and solve it.

The central importance of hands-on learning is self-evident to many whom the Review consulted. Indeed, its value is reflected in the DfES *14-19 Education and Skills* White Paper. It is reflected, too, in a wide range of innovative practices, both past and present, which have been brought to the attention of the Review. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), launched in 1983, integrated theory and practice through making and designing which transformed the experience of learning for many young people across the ability range⁵⁷⁷, but it ended with the National Curriculum and with a regime of accountability which put much more focus upon writing as an outcome than upon ‘doing’ as an outcome. The more recent emphasis upon practical modes of learning is usually associated with the less able and the disengaged, which does a huge disservice to a way of knowing which benefits all young people.

However, the developments under the RSA Opening Minds (Competences) initiative⁵⁷⁸ and the many innovative projects of Edge⁵⁷⁹ are a constant reminder of the value of practical learning. The Practical Learning Entitlement of Lewisham College indicates to the Nuffield Review what can be achieved through more practical routes into creative thinking and making⁵⁸⁰. The pilot Challenge Programmes of UK Skills shows how

⁵⁷⁵ See Wiener (1985); Barnett, C. (1986)

⁵⁷⁶ Dancy, J. (1965)

⁵⁷⁷ See Dale, R., Harris, D., Bowe, R. *et al.* (1990)

⁵⁷⁸ RSA (1999)

⁵⁷⁹ www.edge.co.uk Edge is an educational foundation for making practical and vocational learning a route to success for young people 14-25 years old

⁵⁸⁰ West, A. (2006)

practical projects (e.g. creating and constructing flower beds in a primary school playground or pampering elderly people in a hair and beauty course) made demands on the enterprise, creativity, co-operation, construction skills, organisation and moral responsibility of young people which transformed them from reluctant to enthusiastic and responsible learners⁵⁸¹. The evidence to the Nuffield Review of an experienced history teacher, who also teaches car mechanics, is a most persuasive argument for the introduction of practical learning (doing and making) as a valid way of understanding - more effective than the attempt to grasp the problems in a purely theoretical way. John Fox's ideas are being put into effect in a centre for practical learning shared by several schools within an Oxfordshire partnership⁵⁸².

Experiential learning

Connected with, but logically distinct from, practical learning is the learning which arises from the exposure to a wider range of experiences and from the systematic reflection upon significant experiences. These are not, as it were, to be 'left outside the classroom' as though they are of no educational interest. The considerable work on the benefits of experiential learning is rarely acknowledged on the formal curriculum except through the now compulsory 'work experience' between 14 and 16. But the *educational* benefit of this input depends on the quality of provision and supervision by the work experience providers. The Nuffield Review came across some excellent examples provided by private training providers (e.g. the motor mechanics experience at Skidz in High Wycombe). But that quality is not universally found, and the problems of its assessment need to be addressed. Indeed, it is in part due to its success in recognising such experiences within its award scheme, that the ASDAN awards (in particular the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness) have proved so popular (over 30,000 young people are now taking this qualification - a rise of 25,000 in two years)⁵⁸³. The DfES and the WAG have recognised the importance of experiential learning in supporting the building and resourcing of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), shared by schools, in which the young learners are able to be practically engaged in various kinds of making, designing and creating⁵⁸⁴.

Potential of information and communications technology

Although frequent reference has been made to the Nuffield Review about the potential of ICT for the extension of learning and particularly the promotion of independent learning, the evidence is not clear - certainly not so clear as to demonstrate that the use of the Internet is a solution to many of the problems identified. A review of the

⁵⁸¹ www.ukskills.org.uk

⁵⁸² Fox, J. (2004), (2005), (2006)

⁵⁸³ Brockington, D. (2005a)

⁵⁸⁴ Egan (2004, 2006)

evidence – the different uses of ICT for different kinds of learning and for different groups and ages of students – is urgent. Kent's Building Schools for the Future programme has made the 'ICT revolution' an integral part of its development, and the Nuffield Review intends to remain closely connected with this project. But the Nuffield Review is impressed with one particular development, namely, the use of Online Organic Communities by the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY). These provide a forum in which young people are able to engage in problem-solving and philosophical discussions, prompted by an experienced teacher. The research into this by Juss Kaur⁵⁸⁵ has implications beyond the immediate concerns of NAGTY. Students, who feel alienated from their peers and constantly struggle to fit in with the norm, feel empowered and able to control their own learning and develop higher order thinking skills.

Wider key skills and qualities

The general principles, embodied within the notion of 'wider key skills', have already been discussed. The implications for the organisation of learning within the 14-19 phase are threefold.

First, there needs to be a more central place for the development of 'oracy' (the ability to listen and to speak) – to attend to argument, to articulate ideas and to engage in social interaction intelligently and co-operatively.

Second, such competence should be assessed in such a way that the skills and qualities are not distorted. In each of these – practice and assessment – the considerable past experience and research should not be forgotten or neglected. There needs to be more room for discussion as a key ingredient in the learning experience of all young people, where their voices, opinions and understandings are articulated and indeed challenged – not easy at the beginning of such a process and requiring the development of social and oral skills. With regard to assessment, ASDAN's Certificate of Personal Effectiveness qualification is one example of how such assessment can have a legitimate place within the national framework of qualifications⁵⁸⁶.

Third, the wider key skills provide the scope for a broader educational approach to what might otherwise be a narrow vocational training – a point constantly emphasised in the evolution of pre-vocational qualifications⁵⁸⁷. Indeed, the occupationally relevant learning should be seen as the context for this wider understanding of learning (see

⁵⁸⁵ Kaur, J. (2006)

⁵⁸⁶ ASDAN (2005)

⁵⁸⁷ A list of abbreviations illustrates this point: CGLI 365, CPVE, CoVE.

David Brockington's update on the status of generic employability skills within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)⁵⁸⁸.

Curriculum structure: The place of subjects

As indicated in the previous Annual Report, the idea of a subject as a 'building block' in the curriculum is contentious. Certain core subjects are seen traditionally to be the basis of a more 'academic curriculum', whereas many, who are concerned about the 'relevance' of the curriculum and the need to engage more young people in learning, or about a more vocational preparation for the future, would argue for a curriculum more based on practical activities or on work-related experience⁵⁸⁹. But this should not be seen as an 'either-or' debate, and subjects at their best represent ways of enquiring into, and of understanding, the world which have withstood critical scrutiny and the test of time. They, therefore, provide the resources upon which teachers and learners need to draw. They are also the ground for professional associations (e.g. the Historical Association or National Association of Teachers of English) through which teachers maintain their knowledge and love of learning which they communicate to the learners. As Dewey argued (although such arguments seem not to have been noted by his critics), subjects

embody the cumulative outcome of the efforts, the strivings, and successes of the human race generation after generation.⁵⁹⁰

However, within the logical structure of the subject matter, there is much to be explored in terms of the selection of content and of the promotion of modes of enquiry. The subjects themselves, and the selection of material within each, need to be justified in terms of how they contribute to the aim of education spelt out above – and for all young people, not just those whose leaning style is characterised by the more traditional intellectual approaches. The QCA's Futures curriculum is currently engaged in an exercise to show how different subjects contribute to the broader educational aims.

Both the need for exploration and the opportunity to engage in it can be illustrated from what is happening in science and the humanities.

In the sciences, there is an example of curriculum reform, based on wide consultation and participation by teachers, arising from a well-researched report by the Nuffield Foundation, taken up by the examination board OCR and translated into a curriculum in co-operation with teachers and the University of York – an illustration of how the system is able to respond quickly and imaginatively to research and professional

⁵⁸⁸ Brockington (2005b)

⁵⁸⁹ See the references to Edge and the RSA above, but also (as an excellent example) Fox, J. (2005)

⁵⁹⁰ Dewey, J. (1916) p. 129

judgement. The Nuffield Foundation asks: “Why is science taught in schools?” The answer it gives is twofold. “One reason is to inspire and educate those young people who will go on to use science professionally in their working lives A second, equally important, is to develop in **all** students the scientific literacy needed to play a full part as active and informed citizens in a modern democratic society, where science and technology play a key role in shaping everybody’s lives, as householders, parents, patients, voters or jurors.”⁵⁹¹ On the basis of the evidence presented to the Nuffield Review⁵⁹², it is clear that there has been an impressive attempt to meet the aims as set out above, reflected in 21st Century Science, a suite of new GCSE science courses for 14-16 year-olds intended to match the diversity of students’ interests and aspirations⁵⁹³. Another initiative which shows valuable innovations within the system is the Royal Society Partnership Grants – to ignite enthusiasm for science by linking practising scientists and engineers with schools. Since 2000, over £550k has been given to 350 schools and 40,000 pupils have participated⁵⁹⁴.

These developments will be watched with interest. There is every reason to be concerned about the decline in the number of people who are progressing to A Level physics and chemistry, thereby (amongst other things) reducing the pool of qualified people who are able to teach these subjects in school – and thus very likely continuing the downward spiral. A recent report by Smithers and Robinson⁵⁹⁵ shows that the number of A Level examination entries in physics has halved since 1982; one in four universities which had significant numbers studying physics have stopped teaching the subject since 1994. In the next three years, the Nuffield Review will be attending to the consequences of this decline in certain subjects and to the possible solutions (in particular, the effect of the reforms at KS 4). But it may be the case that the articulation between 14-19 and HE may need the latter as well as the former to make adjustments. 14-19, and A Levels in particular, are not simply there to serve the universities.

The second case – that of the humanities – provides a different tale, where there has not been the same success in responding to the perceived difficulties of the learning within history and geography. What seems to be lacking is a systematic approach to curriculum change that addresses the curriculum as a whole in terms of the values which need to be embedded within the learning experiences of all young people 14-19.

⁵⁹¹ Nuffield Foundation (2006)

⁵⁹² Howson, J. and Sprigade, A. (2006); Jenkins, E.W. (2006a, 2006b), papers given to the conference held by the Royal Society, 10 March, 2006, *Increasing uptake of science post-16*.

⁵⁹³ Teachers’ reactions to these developments were tested out at a meeting of Heads of Sciences from Hillingdon Schools, a note of which is on the Nuffield Review website.

⁵⁹⁴ An example would be the link between Neatherd H.S., Dereham, Norfolk, with the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, University of Cambridge, which helped 20 science club members explore the solar system.

⁵⁹⁵ TES (2006) 11 August

The humanities (history, drama, geography, literature, etc.) do particularly address the human story – what, in the words of Bruner⁵⁹⁶, makes us human, how we became so and how we might become more so. That is why the humanities should remain central to the educational experience of all young people. The Nuffield Review is concerned about the decline in the importance attached to the humanities post-14 – they are not part of the Core 14-16 – and the possible neglect of them in the specialised Diplomas as these are developed under the aegis of the SSCs. They are the area of the curriculum where matters of deep personal concern to young people might be addressed, not determined simply by economic and employment needs. Indeed, they provide appropriate context for much needed political and citizenship education. Evidence submitted to the Nuffield Review by Martin Roberts of the Historical Association and David Lambert of the Geographical Association shows how history, geography and citizenship could be considered together in a GCSE course to provide young people with a better understanding of the modern world and of their responsibilities as citizens of it⁵⁹⁷.

The above examples illustrate both the possibilities and the difficulties in curriculum development, within the subject context, as a professional response to the perceived needs of young people. They bring to the fore some of the principles of genuine curriculum change within the present system and climate, as well as the obstacles which are often to be encountered. As Eleanor Rawling argues in her evidence to the Nuffield Review⁵⁹⁸, curriculum development has been the forgotten term in the 1990s, reflecting a prevailing lack of interest in teacher or school development in the creative change process. Hence, it will be an uphill struggle to ensure that teachers once again assume the responsibilities for development which were once taken for granted. Meanwhile, the many specific attempts to develop a more flexible, inclusive, practical and motivating curriculum have been put by the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools to the QCA: REAL Steps (Edunova-Ultralab), RSA Opening Minds/Competences, Enquiring Minds Project (Bristol), Personalised Learning, Accelerated Learning, NAGTY programmes etc. What the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools proposes is a forum, including a conference, where the best of curriculum developments in the UK can be brought together with a view to the creation of an influential alliance⁵⁹⁹.

Assessment and qualifications

The Nuffield Review was made aware of serious difficulties in the system of assessment. As the Working Group on 14-19 Reform interim report stated, “the burden which external assessment currently places on learners and teachers alike is a significant

⁵⁹⁶ Bruner, J. (1966)

⁵⁹⁷ Lambert, D. and Roberts, M. (2005)

⁵⁹⁸ Rawling, E. (forthcoming)

⁵⁹⁹ Evidence from Mark Hewlett, Chair of Centre for Study of Comprehensive Schools, 19 May 2006

issue within 14-19 programmes.”⁶⁰⁰ This clearly affects the nature and the quality of learning, since much of the assessment is ‘high stakes’ both for learners (in terms of selection for post-16 provision, choice of courses, and employment) and for providers (in terms of league table places, recruitment and funding).

Purposes of assessment

The following are the main purposes:

- ‘assessment for learning’⁶⁰¹ through giving accurate feedback to the learner
- diagnosis of learning difficulties
- reaffirmation of ‘national standards’ as determined by the DfES via the QCA
- account of a student’s achievement at the end of a stage in education
- selection of students for particular purposes (e.g. university entrance)
- accountability of the various providers and of the system as a whole.

One major difficulty in the present overburdening and highly expensive system lies in the confusion of these purposes and the use of instruments of assessment which, though appropriate for some purposes, are inappropriate for others. For example, the GCSE and A Level perform several and conflicting functions:

- statements of appropriate standards (detailed specifications being provided by the QCA)
- summative statements of achievement at the end of a stage of education
- tools for selecting (some schools specify grades for proceeding to the next level)
- accountability of the system (e.g. the proportion who attain five GCSEs graded A*-C)
- accountability of individual schools, leading to league table placements.

The failure to make these distinctions has led, in the view of the Nuffield Review, to a very expensive system of assessment which affects detrimentally the quality of learning.

⁶⁰⁰ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2003)

⁶⁰¹ See Black and Wiliam (1998)

First, standards, affirmed by public examinations and shaping the content and process of learning, are not self-evident, and require more justification than they receive. They should relate logically to the purpose and value of the activity assessed. There is widespread dismay that the criteria for awarding grades do not always reflect what it means to succeed in the different kinds of learning⁶⁰². And this problem will be exacerbated where coursework for A Level examinations is reduced, for that (say, in geography) provides the opportunity for practical enquiry.

Second, detailed specification of the criteria for the award of grades encourages teaching to the detailed specifications, rather than to an understanding of key ideas. As the report of the Assessment Reform Group argued, "The high stakes attached to the results encourage teaching to the test and excessive practising of test-taking. Research confirms that this can result in pupils being taught to pass tests even when they do not have the skills that are supposedly being tested."⁶⁰³ The Ofsted 2006 survey refers to the "teaching to the test" in the preparation for examinations, getting pupils to give the correct answer without understanding what they meant⁶⁰⁴.

Third, assessment of learning within subjects as a record of achievement at the end of compulsory schooling fails to do justice to many qualities nurtured through school in a cross-curricular way, thereby downgrading the status of those achievements. Such assessments and assessment processes contrast starkly with the broad view of learning goals reflected in the DfES *Every Child Matters* policy document⁶⁰⁵.

Fourth, what purports to be a criterion-referenced system is regarded by government and employers as essentially a pass/fail examination. Consequently, students graded below C in the GCSE examinations, or schools with a certain proportion of students below C, are regarded as failures. Their attainment, limited though it may seem to some, is in effect almost totally dismissed.

Fifth, the exams currently in operation are seen not to discriminate for purposes of university selection. The head of Wellington College, said, "At the end of the day, you can't discriminate between so many As, and the intellectually gifted from the well-drilled." That failure to discriminate was reaffirmed by the Nuffield Review's focus groups of university admissions tutors⁶⁰⁶.

Hence, the national examinations normally taken at 16, 17 and 18 unsuccessfully try to combine the different functions of *setting standards* (disputed by professional and academic experts within the respective areas), **giving an account of individual and institutional attainment** (but thereby narrowing what is to count as personal and

⁶⁰² Ofsted (2006b), small-scale survey on the teaching of maths, TES 16 May 2006 (gov't-news@wired-gov.net)

⁶⁰³ Assessment Reform Group (2005) pp. 7-8; also (2006) for summary of relevant research

⁶⁰⁴ See also Ofsted (2006b)

⁶⁰⁵ DfES (2003a) – see www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

⁶⁰⁶ See Appendix IV to this report

institutional achievement), and **discriminating between students for selection purposes** (in which they are deemed to have failed by universities themselves). What they in fact do is: first, set out, in an increasingly detailed way, what teachers must teach irrespective of their professional judgement; and second, give a 'certificate of failure' to the many young people who otherwise might continue with their formal learning. Overall, they fail to provide 'assessment for learning', to motivate the disengaged to remain in education, or to give the kind of information which will help universities and employers to select.

The way forward

Separating 'assessment for learning' from 'assessment for accountability'

The Assessment of Performance Unit in the 1970s showed how, through stratified and randomised light sampling (creating little disruption in schools), one might provide an account of standards within the educational system across the range of learning experiences. This separated the assessment of individual children from the assessment of national standards (as has been partly adopted in Scotland), but at the same time provided benchmarks against which schools might assess their own performance.

Teacher assessment

The role of teachers in summative assessment of learners was the focus of the Assessment Systems for the Future project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation⁶⁰⁷. The report of the project argues that, in the light of the evidence reviewed, "The negative consequences of summative assessment for learning and teaching can be minimised by appropriate use of teachers' judgments," so long as appropriate steps are taken to ensure quality assurance and control and so long as there are available the resources and tasks to support the teachers. Wales is moving in the direction of less dependence on external tests with greater reliance upon teacher assessment⁶⁰⁸.

Reconsideration of the existence of the GCSE

The main purpose of GCSE was to provide a terminal examination at the end of compulsory schooling, at a time when most young people left school for employment or vocational training. In fact, the vast majority of the cohort now remains in education and training, making the GCSE, as a terminal examination, redundant. Well-moderated teacher assessment would be more useful in providing the basis for transition to the next stage, and would have the advantage of removing a major factor in the discouragement of many young people from continuing with their formal education.

⁶⁰⁷ See Assessment Reform Group (2005)

⁶⁰⁸ Mortimore (2006), p. 35

Restoring relations between external assessment and curriculum development

The long tradition of awarding bodies' involvement in curriculum development, in partnership with schools and universities, has decreased as the regulatory body (QCA) specifies in greater detail curriculum content and the system of marking, and as the universities play a less significant role in the exam boards. The Nuffield Review, however, was reminded of exceptions that show how connections between external assessment and curriculum development might be maintained – for example the recent suite of courses in 21st Century Science produced by the OCR exam board in collaboration with the University of York and Nuffield Foundation and ASDAN's suite of certificates resulting in the Certificate Of Personal Effectiveness, both referred to earlier in this chapter, and reflecting a broader view of learning.

Differentiating the most able for purposes of selection

New tests are being required by leading universities in medicine, law and other subjects. These create further hurdles for school leavers. There are already three tests in medicine and a further eight by Oxbridge in history, languages, maths and physics. Furthermore, the uniTEST for arts and sciences is being trialled by a further seven universities. These new assessments cost up to £95; sixth formers applying for medicine could end up paying £180 to take separate tests; companies are charging £495 for test coaching. With one or two honourable exceptions, they are developed independently of awarding bodies and not subject to the complex process of validation which tests affecting so many young lives need. Assessment which lies outside the recognised framework of qualifications should be brought within it, changing that framework which is proving 'unfit for purpose'. Otherwise, there will be a further overburdening of the system, which will at the same time discriminate, because of costs and coaching, against the very people the government wants to attract into the more inclusive system of education and training.

Clarifying the role of the examination regulator

The role of the QCA is increasingly ambivalent. It was established as a regulator to set out the specific conditions which public examinations need to meet if they are to attract government recognition for funding purposes. But, as these conditions become more detailed, so the regulatory function of maintaining standards becomes one of curriculum specification. Hence, there has emerged a conflict between the development and regulatory functions of the QCA, and a diminishing of the role of awarding bodies in curriculum development. At the same time, questions have been raised with the Nuffield Review about the capacity of the regulatory body to engage in such curriculum development.

Coordinating the examination reforms

There is a lot of anxiety in school about the number of reforms to the examinations, seemingly uncoordinated and very demanding in time. 2008 has been described a 'meltdown year'⁶⁰⁹ with the launch of functional skills examinations, the introduction of the first five specialised Diplomas, the new statutory KS 3 ICT tests, the removal of course work for many GCSEs. Over roughly the same period, there are changes in GCSE and A Level science, without (in the perception of the teachers) the two reforms being developed together.

National Qualifications Framework, and the idea of equivalence and of progression

The current, but developing NQF aims to provide a comprehensive account of all qualifications which deal with the complexity of assessing the many kinds of learning at many different levels, whilst being accessible to the users of the qualifications. To be accessible, so it is assumed, the NQF has to be kept relatively simple with equivalences drawn between the different qualifications. The danger is that, in keeping within a simple model of qualifications with 'equivalence levels', the nature and process of different kinds of learning might be reshaped to fit the NQF. The notion of 'equivalence' is unexamined. Equivalence can be in terms of number of modules, of difficulty level, of content, of time required, and of the thinking and doing skills involved. In many respects, such equivalences are logically impossible to provide. Moreover, the NQF offers a standardisation of achievement which does not reflect the processes of learning which they are intended to represent. The pursuit of consistency, standardisation and equivalence is perhaps the pursuit of a chimera.

To sort this out is important. Level 2 apprenticeship qualifications (e.g. in engineering and in retailing), though seen as equivalent in terms of level, can differ widely in terms of difficulty, contact hours and appropriateness for progressing to further study. In this there is nothing new. Equivalence is assumed, for matriculation and league table purposes, between A Level grades across subjects, but there is evidence that those achieving an average of B at GCSE are much more likely to achieve an A at A Level in certain subjects than others (especially the sciences), thereby affecting the choice of subjects to study⁶¹⁰.

Furthermore, despite its simplification, the NQF fails to be accessible to the users. A survey commissioned by DfES⁶¹¹ discovered that only 45% of companies had any useful understanding of NVQs – 20 years after their commencement. The NVQ had failed to become the major qualification for skills in England. Indeed, they added to rather than

⁶⁰⁹ TES (2006) 3 August

⁶¹⁰ See Howson, J. and Sprigade, A. (2006)

⁶¹¹ TES (2006) 3 March

resolved the confusion between qualifications, increasing bureaucracy and jargon. Only one in six understood the 'equivalence' between NVQs and academic qualifications. One in 20 said they would avoid recruiting people with NVQs. This was despite the fact that wide-ranging employer consultation and employer representation were involved in the National Council for Vocational Qualifications board and the development of its qualifications. Despite claims to equivalence within the NQF, employers regarded the academic qualifications as the ones which matter.

One difficulty which arises from the Nuffield Review is that too often the framing of qualifications precedes thinking about the kinds of understandings and skills which need to be assessed and the kinds of assessment which are appropriate for those kinds of learning. Qualifications should reflect the aims and nature of learning, not determine them.

Guidance and counselling

It has been made clear to the Nuffield Review countless times that a comprehensive and highly professional careers education and guidance service is crucial to the appropriate retention of young people and to their progression to the most appropriate educational, training and occupational opportunities. That is recognised in many DfES papers, such as *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work* (2005); *Youth Matters* (2005); *14-19 Implementation Plan* (2005). The reason is straightforward. The wider the choices and the more complex the future for which young people are being prepared, the more extensive and informative is the guidance required. Careers education and guidance now starts at KS 3, as young people make choices which affect the routes they take at the age of 14.

The Learning and Skills Act, 2000, established Connexions, which oversees the programmes of guidance and counselling and which provides personal (or careers) advisers with access to all pupils. The DfES document *Careers education and guidance in England* (2003) provides a National Framework 11-19 for the curriculum. In addition, schools have had a statutory duty since 2004 to provide work-related experience for all young people 14-16.

However, an LSDA document⁶¹² reviewing the evidence concludes that:

... good quality IAG (information and guidance) is patchy and that learners want more help with their choices. There is evidence that learners who receive good quality IAG achieve better and are less likely to drop out of learning or change course after they are 16.

⁶¹² Donohue, J. and Thomson, S. (2006), p. 6

This is confirmed in the 2005 Ofsted Report⁶¹³, which pointed to the limited grasp by the learners of the range of qualifications available and also, at the end of KS 3, of the different possible routes post-14. Chapter 4 of this Annual Report, in reviewing the evidence on guidance and counselling for entry to HE, points to the range of sources from which young people receive advice, sometimes misleading, concerning courses and financial implications of proceeding to HE. Sometimes that advice is shaped by the dominant, but limited, ideas of academic success of particular schools or colleges.

A Learning Support Network document reports a review of the recent evidence⁶¹⁴ and concludes, amongst other things, that the more interventions or advice are geared to supporting the learner (with a rich programme of interviews, group sessions, careers related information, curriculum support and practical activities) rather than the needs of organisations, the more successful they will be. But that requires a big investment of time and resources, and it needs to be seen as part of general education, rather than some 'information giving' disconnected from the main educational programme. That in turn requires not only specialist staff with a well-maintained system of information about careers, qualifications and HE, but also the non-specialist teacher to be better prepared for the kind of advice and help required through the general curriculum.

All this has extensive implications for the continuing professional development of teachers as well as the training of a well-informed cadre of careers advisers who are kept up-to-date with the rapid changes in qualifications, routes into HE and further training, relative economic benefits of different choices and financial consequences of progressing to HE. The research reviewed in Chapter 4 showed that, despite the investment in guidance, the majority of young people were unaware of the financial implications of HE choices. Indeed, the seriousness with which guidance and counselling is seen by government in the 14-19 progression does not seem to be matched by an acknowledgement of the difficulties in its implementation.

Teachers

The previous report, and the briefing paper *Curriculum for the 21st Century* emphasised the need to see the teacher as a curriculum developer, not just as a curriculum deliverer. It is important to see the teacher as one who is immersed in that which he or she has to teach, for it is not just the facts or formulae which have to be transmitted but a love of that which has to be learnt. And that applies as much to the practical and the vocational activities as it does to the traditional subjects.

The teacher aims to get the learner inside a way of thinking, indeed, a form of life, to which he or she already belongs and is committed. Such a teacher is a mediator of the cultural understandings, which we have inherited, to a new generation of learners. This

⁶¹³ Ofsted (2005c)

⁶¹⁴ Donohue, J. and Thomson, S. (2006)

applies, too, to the teachers of so-called vocational subjects - to the teachers of joinery and construction, of hospitality and hairdressing. The learner is being introduced to an activity which has its standards of accuracy and relevance, and which the teacher believes to be important and seeks to impart through example and correction. There is a wider dimension (aesthetic and economic, moral and social) to vocational areas, with which the learner needs to be acquainted. To acquire 'vocational skills' can be an educational experience in which this more holistic dimension is also conveyed. Indeed, as Winch demonstrates in his account of the apprenticeship training in Germany, the holistic dimension is intrinsic to the preparation of skilled employees⁶¹⁵. In this respect, too, the Nuffield Review has witnessed inspiring teaching taking place in workshops where learners are initiated into practical, work-based activities.

However, the Nuffield Review has become aware of problems which need urgently to be addressed – and has valued the conversation it has had with members of the Training and Development Agency for Schools who are tackling this. In particular, the development of the specialised Diplomas raises problems about the preparation and qualifications of teachers:

- Few qualified teachers in schools have the experience or the skills relevant to teaching the specific vocational content.
- People who do have such skills and experience (e.g. bricklayers, hairdressers, engineers) may not have the degree level background to qualify as teachers.
- Those who teach these skills in FE are not qualified to teach 14-16 in schools – and, indeed, may not want to.
- Teachers qualified to teach in schools can teach in FE with no further training – their Qualified Teacher Status carries an implicit ability to teach vocationally, whereas post-compulsory education trained lecturers can teach 14-16 in the colleges, but not in schools, even though many of the school learners sent to college have 'challenging behaviour'.
- There is a shortage of qualified staff even in FE in some diploma areas (e.g. a major college closed its plumbing course because of shortage of staff).
- It does not help to have two different bodies responsible for teacher qualifications post-16, leading to Qualified Teacher Status and to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Status respectively, the latter of which, but not the former, being renewable only upon completion of CPD.

⁶¹⁵ Winch, C. (2006)

The solution requires:

- the exploration of alternative, part-time routes by which people, with appropriate experience and skills might attain Qualified Teacher Status (e.g. through tailored foundation degrees such as the one started at Brighton University, albeit for different purposes)
- recruitment of people with relevant skills and experience as teacher assistants or as higher level teachers assistants
- identification, at a regional level, of the need for such teachers, and of the routes into Qualified Teacher Status, because the changing regional economic circumstances, such as the closure of a factory, could make available a lot of skilled people who might want to be 'converted' into teachers
- 're-qualification' of FE staff through CPD
- conversion courses for teachers in schools, although in many diplomas the nature of the skills to be learnt will make this nigh impossible – it may be difficult for a historian to become a skilled bricklayer
- CPD **entitlement** for those who are to teach the diplomas, and for teachers qualified outside the UK who lack the experience and skills to teach in a way that is expected of them. (In schools in certain regions there is a major dependence on such staff, especially in the sciences.)
- CPD entitlement to address the disjunction between the focus on knowledge as the main component of subject-based teaching and the focus upon skills development within the more experiential approach implicit in the emerging specialised Diplomas
- CPD focused specifically upon teachers from abroad whose previous training ill prepared them for many of the innovatory programmes in England and Wales (e.g. 21st Century Science).

Both problems and solutions are partly acknowledged by government. The Minister for Schools, Jacqui Smith, announced, at the Annual Conference of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, £50 million to support and train staff in the new vocational courses, to be delivered mainly by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and by the Quality Improvement Agency, including the upskilling of the existing workforce. But the nature of the problem is such that neither the spending of money alone nor the development of in-service material can produce a solution.

Provision

The implications of the curriculum principles, outlined above and recognised by the government in several White Papers and consultation documents, is that no one institution can 'go it alone'. Partnerships between different providers are essential. The Nuffield Review has, therefore, examined several of these partnerships to see both the benefits and the difficulties in the development of them. A list of these case studies is given in Appendix III, and brief accounts are published on the Nuffield Review's website. But the research of LEACAN reveals a very patchy picture. The Nuffield Review's case studies reveal well-established partnerships in, for example, Stevenage, South Gloucestershire and Wolverhampton, and very positive developments in Bradford, Kent and Oxfordshire, but the LEACAN research shows that in many LAs they have hardly got off the ground⁶¹⁶.

These partnerships, however, are generally between several schools and a college. They involve common timetabling, shared funding, employment of a coordinator, and partnership presentation of examination results. There are many interesting variations. However, the Nuffield Review concludes from the evidence that more radical measures are required:

- extension of the partnerships to include a wider range of expertise, especially that of the Youth Service⁶¹⁷ and voluntary bodies⁶¹⁸, which have excellent records of engagement with young people who are excluded or who have dropped out of education
- joined-up thinking and action between the different public services which relate to education, as indeed is envisaged in the joint White Paper *Every Child Matters* (e.g. police working in schools to help keep young offenders out of the courts)
- extended services in schools, which have already been developed in some schools and are expected of all, and which, according to Ofsted⁶¹⁹, enhance self-confidence, improve relationships, raise aspirations and create better attitudes to learning

⁶¹⁶ Tirrell, J., Winter, A.M. and Hawthorne, S. (2006)

⁶¹⁷ See Davies, B. (2005)

⁶¹⁸ For example, Changemakers and UK Skills

⁶¹⁹ Ofsted (2006a)

- more opportunities of a practical and experiential kind in facilities shared by several schools (such as the increasing number of purpose-built CoVEs arising from government initiative⁶²⁰) and within the wider community
- seeing the school or college much more as the centre for the organising of learning (much of which may take place off the school site), and for the monitoring of the quality of outside provision
- ensuring that education and training take place within a more 'human scale', the advantages of which have been made clear through the research reviewed by Human Scale Education and being implemented through the support of the Gulbenkian, Paul Hamlyn and Esmée Fairbairn Foundations through small schools in partnership with others or small schools within large schools⁶²¹
- support for employers, especially the small employers, who would like to provide work-based experience but who often find it too onerous, financially and administratively, to do so (but an excellent examples of this would be Newham College's development of a centre for innovation and partnerships with more than 1,200 local entrepreneurs and businesses, and an Access diploma from its focus on social exclusion and economic regeneration in that borough)
- links with universities as reflected in several Aimhigher programmes
- the "creation of local, transparent quality assurance systems alongside national awarding and validating systems"⁶²².

The Nuffield Review has been made aware of the many ways in which, through local partnerships or shared curriculum reforms, opportunities are opened up for more co-operative provision. These have been made possible by a range of government policies and initiatives – e.g. the encouragement, and now requirement, of 14-19 Partnerships⁶²³, the quite massive Building Schools for the Future Programme (which is the biggest single government investment in improving school buildings for over 50 years)⁶²⁴, the Networked Learning Communities, the development of CoVEs, and many others. At the same time there are new opportunities for curriculum developments,

⁶²⁰ There are already over 500 CoVEs focusing upon the delivery of skills and Level 3 which, though not specifically geared to 14-19, provide support and expertise.

⁶²¹ Human Scale Education is a charitable body which has thoroughly researched the benefits of smaller scale educational units, and is presently being supported by the Gulbenkian, Paul Hamlyn and Esmée Fairbairn Foundations in creating such units in schools. See Tasker, M. (2003) for a summary of relevant research.

⁶²² See Chapter 1

⁶²³ See, in particular, Arnold, R. (2006) for a detailed account of the achievements of several partnerships.

⁶²⁴ www.bsf.gov.uk

especially in science and mathematics, arising out of the criticisms of major reports⁶²⁵. The Centre for Excellence in Science Teaching at the Universities of York and Leeds is already having an impact upon science teaching, and the same might be expected from the equivalent Centre in the Teaching of Mathematics.

A more innovatory conception of partnerships is provided by the Chief Executive of Rathbone. He advocates a greater role for the independent work-related and voluntary sectors.

... the reform of 14-19 education has to look beyond the goal of reforming mainstream schools and colleges. There is ... a need to explore on a much, much larger scale than has happened before, the development of complementary educational provision or pathways that provide many of the so-called 'hardest to reach' learners with settings that more closely meet their learning and personal support needs.

This includes small-scale learning and work settings, integration of formal core and work-related curriculum with social and welfare support, advocacy services, voluntary bodies and private training providers which offer services which schools cannot by their nature deliver⁶²⁶.

However, this radical opening up of more flexible provision is difficult to reconcile with centrally imposed accountability (and with the consequent culture of competition in an environment where increased co-operation not competition is required), reflected in the managerial language referred to earlier and in the public service reform principles (which exude from White Papers with their specific targets and high-stakes testing). Colleges in particular face the problems of: (i) focusing on the educational needs of socially excluded; (ii) catering for employers' needs; and (iii) raising standards as they are defined in the league tables. As Martin Tolhurst, Principal of Newham College, argued:

Too much of the current thinking emerges from agencies that are too far from the customer and too influenced by national lobbies, such as the Confederation of British Industry, to know what employers want and what actually works.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁵ Smith Report (2004)

⁶²⁶ Williams, R. (2006)

⁶²⁷ TES (2006) 3 March

Section 6: Looking to the future

The developing 14-19 phase of education and training has a threefold aim: to raise standards, to provide the skills and knowledge which the economy needs and to be inclusive. But there are tensions over the pursuit of the three aims together. Standards, narrowly defined, exclude too many young people as uneducable; the pursuit of economic relevance undermines traditional definitions of standard; and the broadened definitions of standard, in order to be more inclusive, evoke accusations of falling standards.

There is no simple answer to these tensions other than continually to ask, at every level of decision-making, political and professional, *what counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age* – and to eschew the impoverished language of management through which this essentially moral question is answered. Only in the light of the answers to that question can one define the appropriate standards, see how all young people might be included and turn skills training into something educationally valuable.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This Annual Report has continued to focus on policy developments within the 14-19 phase (with particular reference to the development of the specialised Diplomas), on the impact of these policies on participation and retention (with particular reference to groups classified as NET and NEET) and on the broader educational issues concerning the quality of learning for all young people, including those who are disengaged and who have special needs. The Report also addresses parallel developments in Wales.

The Nuffield Review has, therefore, been committed to a deep, historical and comprehensive analysis of all major dimensions of 14-19 education and training, including the philosophical values and purposes upon which it is founded.

The Report recognises the achievements of respective government departments: the considerable increase of investment in the infrastructure of school (*Building Schools for the Future*); the support for development of partnerships between providers; the increased emphasis upon practical learning; the development of Learning Pathways and the creation of the Welsh Bac; the provision of a 14-19 statutory entitlement to a broader curriculum; the recognition of the many different kinds and levels of achievement in a unit and credit-based NQF and improved links to HE (through, for example, foundation degrees).

However, the Nuffield Review has also highlighted the persistence of deep-seated problems concerning the structure of the system, its performance and the conduct of the policy process. These themes, in particular, form the core of an ongoing debate between practitioners, policymakers and researchers about the most effective way of tackling reform of 14-19 education and training in England and Wales. In the light of the evidence it has received, the Nuffield Review concludes that policymakers tend to address symptoms of these deep-seated problems rather than tackling their underlying causes. Moreover, in responding to symptomatic problems, government has attempted to implement a whole range of policies at a very fast pace. This the Nuffield Review has termed 'policy busyness'.

While, as we have indicated above, many of these reforms will bring about improvements in some areas, the Nuffield Review is not convinced that the main 'policy drivers' (namely, reformed NQF, efforts to increase access to HE, national target-setting and creation of specialised Diplomas) will result in the step change in 14-19 system performance which the government desires and the system requires. Indeed, as the Report points out, improvements in participation, retention and achievement are not proportionate to the level of investment and effort. As one member of the Directorate expressed it, "It's like pushing a train uphill with the brakes on." Perhaps a radical re-appraisal is needed of policy, of how policy is designed and implemented, and, indeed, of the kind of learning which would meet both national and personal educational needs.

In pursuing its assessment of the evidence, the Nuffield Review has achieved the following:

- examined the many datasets to give a historical and comprehensive account of participation, retention and progression, and shown where there are gaps in the data upon which policy is based (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- paid particular attention, following the analysis of the participation, retention and progression within the system, to those who fall outside it – the characteristics of this mixed group of young people and the reasons why they opt out (Annual Report 2005-06)
- explored the organisational arrangements for 14-19 education and training, developing the new concept of 'strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems' (Annual Reports 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- provided a detailed account of policy initiatives and the mechanisms employed for implementing policy, including the debates around the Working Group on 14-19 Reform reform proposals, the DfES 14-19 White Paper and the current development of the specialised Diploma (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- addressed the different manner in which Wales is tackling the Learning Pathways 14-19, and lessons which England might learn (Annual Report 2005-06)
- reviewed the evidence on transition from school, college or the workplace to HE (Annual Report 2005-06)
- raised issues about the role of employers and the youth labour market in the education and training system and their effect on the framing of 14-19 policy and the system performance (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- raised questions about the educational aims and values which permeate the changes and which have implications for the nature, organisation and provision of learning (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- pioneered an innovative approach to reviewing evidence through the ongoing involvement of policymakers, practitioners and researchers, each providing their own particular perspective on policy, practice and performance (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06).

Main findings of Annual Report 2005-06

Chapter 1. 14-19 policy and organisational developments in England

Policy busyness

There has been an unprecedented number of policy initiatives affecting 14-19 education and training through, for example, the setting of national targets, the creation of new qualifications, specific and short-term funding, and new regulations. The impact of so much policy and the cost and problems of implementation are rarely appraised.

Implementation phase

The current implementation phase, together with the 14-19 infrastructure being put in place, focus primarily on vocational and applied learning and leave the general track largely untouched.

Collaborative partnerships

Partnerships have enabled the establishment of vocational and applied learning opportunities, particularly for 14-16 year-olds. But the 'drivers' for institutional collaboration are not as strong as the 'drivers' for institutional competition, such that the system in England could still be described as 'weakly collaborative' with weak governance at the local level. The swift pace of reform may make implementation more difficult.

Alternative proposals

Proposals for strongly collaborative learning systems, capable of meeting the needs of all 14-19 year-olds in an efficient way, whilst also addressing historical divisions, are put forward.

Effect of the partial nature of reform

Partial reforms, together with the weaknesses of organisational arrangements, may be unable to address pressing issues of social division and inefficiencies in 14-19 provision.

Chapter 2. 14-19 institutional developments in Wales in the wider policy context

Divergence and similarities

While the aims of 14-19 policies in England and Wales are very similar, as are their underlying problems, there is divergence in terms of policy strategy (e.g. the Welsh Bac and Learning Pathways 14-19), mode of governance and accountability.

Policy

The 14-19 reforms in Wales cover both general and vocational education. The Welsh education system is more locally determined and national policy levers play a less divisive role than in England. This has resulted in a higher degree of policy consensus around Learning Pathways 14-19 in Wales than around the 14-19 White Paper in England.

14-19 practice

Practice at the local level in Wales, as in England, is at an early stage, despite the differences highlighted above. There is, therefore, a role for the Nuffield Review to bring practitioners, policymakers and researchers from both countries together to discuss issues of mutual interest in order to engage in practitioner and policy learning.

Interdependence

Despite democratic devolution since 1999 and a desire by the WAG to forge its own path in education policy, 14-19 developments in Wales continue to be tied to those in England, because of the two countries' common qualifications and HE systems and the UK-wide labour market.

The future of 14-19 reform

It could be argued, therefore, that future reform in Wales is intimately tied to developments in England and that both countries would benefit from a more unified and radical approach to 14-19 curriculum and qualifications reform.

Chapter 3. Young people outside education and training

Modest increase in participation

Recent initiatives have involved high transaction costs, but have achieved at best only modest increases in participation rates.

Retention and attainment

There is overemphasis on participation rates and lack of appropriate attention to retention, attainment and progression.

The NEET group

The heterogeneous group classified as NEET is a policy priority, but the diverse needs of the very different kinds of young people who are included in this group have not been fully recognised.

Young people in work at 16/17

The labour market continues to provide a range of job opportunities for 16 and 17 year-olds. Most of these are low skilled, poorly paid and without training. Tackling this issue should become a policy priority.

Excessive focus on supply-side initiatives

Intended changes in the system, including qualifications, will fail unless their value is recognised by employers and young people. To achieve this requires attention to be focused on to the demand side so that vocational qualifications become more linked to licences to practice, thereby raising their status.

Policy formation

Those who form policy need to acknowledge the value of outcomes which cannot always be expressed in quantitative terms (e.g. the provision of careers advice and guidance).

Holistic planning

Education and training should be recognised as just one constituent within a wider system that includes different demands from the labour market, socio-economic change, regional variations, healthcare issues and demographic changes.

Future of the labour market

The demographic changes in the 14-19 cohort and labour market projections of the structure of job growth could have a serious deleterious effect on post-compulsory participation rates.

Appropriate provision for young people with diverse backgrounds and requirements

The diversity and heterogeneity indicate a need for case-specific provision and information and guidance sensitive to the contexts of individual young people. Policy expectations and targets need to be more finely tuned to the perceived needs of young people.

Data collection

A more robust, systematic and long-term perspective on the collection of data, which goes beyond immediate concerns with the latest policy initiative, is needed. Such data collection should be placed in the hands of an independent body to avoid the need for continual tendering of data collection and the consequent disruption in the quality of time series data.

Chapter 4. Articulation between 14-19 education and training and higher education

Transition

For many the process of articulation between the 14-19 phase and HE is relatively smooth. HE is currently also attractive to large numbers of young people, and participation has increased. There has also been some, though only partial, success in widening access.

Obstacles

Individual, familial, local, institutional, economic, political and societal barriers interact to make progression more difficult for some young people than for others. Supply-side policy interventions cannot in themselves counteract the various barriers that limit the opportunities for some groups to progress to HE.

Adaptation of higher education

To overcome these obstacles, HE may need to adapt to some of the changes taking place 14-19, just as there may be adaptation in 14-19 to meet the needs of HE.

Quality of learning

The focus on progression into HE with particular attention to examination performance may have detracted from the quality of learning for 14-19 year-olds, and what is required for effective engagement in HE.

Clearer pathways needed for those with Level 3 vocational qualifications

Some pathways from 14-19 to HE are relatively clear, whereas others are more complex. Progression to HE can be problematic for those with vocational qualifications. There is a need for these qualifications to be used positively in progression to HE.

Increasing participation and changes in the rate of return to a degree

Labour market outcomes and rates of return for engaging in HE study are changing with increased participation. The traditional argument of a degree allowing access to more satisfying and better-paid employment may be less strong as a greater proportion of the cohort enters HE.

Policy tensions and unpredictable outcomes

The introduction of variable fees could militate against increasing and widening participation. They increase financial cost, opportunity costs and the perceived risk of failure involved in participating. The outcomes of current policy are unpredictable, but these tensions could lead to consequences other than those intended.

Chapter 5. The education of 14-19 year-olds

Central to the work of the Review has been the questioning of the *educational* aims and values which underpin the changes taking place or envisaged. To do that, the Review posed the question, What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age? The deliberations which have surrounded the discussion of that question have led to a range of critical debates and recommendations for the future. In the light of the evidence received, the Nuffield Review draws the following conclusions:

Values

- The development of education and training requires moral deliberation at every level of decision-making, especially the school. Teachers, the custodians of educational values, must be central to that deliberation.
- The values which underpin such deliberations should arise from a respect for all young people irrespective of social, ethnic, religious or intellectual background. That respect means a place for their voice in education – the

experiences, concerns and views which they bring into school and college, but refined through discussion and critical examination.

- The system of education, therefore – targets, assessment, qualifications, and curriculum – needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to such deliberations at local as well as national levels.

Special needs

- The education of those with learning difficulties and disabilities requires special attention since too many are ill served by an inflexible and narrow definition of standards and by inappropriate provision.
- The failure of many to engage in education is a major problem and needs closer analysis (a disproportionate number has learning difficulties and disabilities), but that failure is partly due to inappropriate targets, learning experiences and forms of assessment.

Learning

- The value of learning through practice, discussion and experience needs to be rediscovered, appropriately assessed and built into the education for all young people. This will require considerable extension of the programmes commenced through school/college partnerships.
- The development of the wider key skills should draw upon the research and experience of previous developments, reflected, for instance, in the Bullock Report, which now too often seem forgotten.
- The present commitment of government to guidance and counselling through the increasingly complicated system of choices needs even greater commitment and resources, especially in the expertise of professional counsellors and the teachers.

Assessment

- The burdensome system of assessment needs a complete overhaul, ensuring assessment for learning rather than assessment for accountability, appropriate assessment for practical and experiential learning, differentiation of students where necessary for progression, and diversity of standards for different kinds of learning.
- Greater clarity is required of the regulatory responsibilities of the QCA, of the relation of those to its curriculum development and of the continuing role of the awarding bodies in relation to that curriculum development.

Teaching

- The professional role of teachers in the moral deliberations referred to and in the consequent development of the curriculum needs to be forcefully reaffirmed, together with the need for the CPD that enables them to take on this professional responsibility.
- The staffing of the more vocational courses (e.g. the specialised Diplomas) requires urgent consideration, especially the training or retraining of teachers and the promotion of teaching assistants with relevant expertise and experience.

Partnership

- To achieve all this, the policy on partnership between providers needs, first, to include a wider range of partners (including the youth service, voluntary bodies and private training providers), and, second, to see the school or college more as a centre for organising and monitoring learning, much of which will not take place within the confines of the school.

The future

The Nuffield Review has been extended for a further three years. The main aims of this new phase of the Nuffield Review will be to:

1. argue, in the light of the evidence accumulated by the Nuffield Review, for a high quality and inclusive education and training system fit for the 21st century
2. continue monitoring the changing world of 14-19 as outlined above, with a view to informing policy and practice at every level
3. help schools, colleges, HEIs, employers and the wider community *to make sense* of the many changes within 14-19 policy and provision, and of their implications for the education and training system as a whole
4. ensure that the Nuffield Review has greater impact upon policymakers, professionals, employers and the general public and to continue its dissemination through regional and national conferences, through its engagement with the many networks it has established, and through targeted briefing papers.

The questions shaping the Nuffield Review will be:

1. What **educational** principles and practices should characterise the system which prepares all young people for the future?
2. What is needed to improve the current education and training system in order to reflect these principles and practices and to support the development of all young people?
3. What policy developments are being, or should be, initiated to ensure high quality education and training for all 14-19 year-olds and a coherent and inclusive 14-19 system?

The Nuffield Review, therefore, will continue to argue for a vision of education and training which is soundly based on evidence and on how other countries envisage the future of their education and training systems.

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List of abbreviations

A Level	Advanced Level
ALC	Aims, Learning and Curriculum – Nuffield Review working group 2004-05
ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
AS Level	Advanced Subsidiary Level
AVCE	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CCET	Community Consortium for Education and Training
CGLI	City and Guilds of London Institute
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPVE	Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education
DDP	Diploma Development Partnership
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
E2E	Entry to Employment
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HND	Higher National Diploma
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ID	Institutional Dimension of 14-19 Reform in England – Nuffield Review Working Group 2004-05
IFP	Increased Flexibility Programme
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
JWT	Jobs Without Training
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority (formerly LEA)
LEA	Local Education Authority
LEACAN	Local Education Authority Curriculum Advisors Network
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LGA	Local Government Association
LLSC	Local Learning and Skills Council

Appendix I: List of abbreviations

LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency (now Learning and Skills Network and QIA)
NAGTY	National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth
NEET	Not In Education, Employment or Training
NET	Not in Education or Training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RSA	The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SFR	Statistical First Release (DfES)
SSC	Sector Skills Council
TES	Times Educational Supplement
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
Welsh Bac	Welsh Baccalaureate
YCS	Youth Cohort Study

New national entitlement⁶²⁸

We want to ensure that every young person is offered a choice of learning pathways – including the option of more theoretical or more practical approaches. In future, we want every young person in a school or college to be entitled to pursue any one of the 14 lines of specialised Diploma at an appropriate level for them, wherever they are in the country. For 14-16 year-olds, this will be in addition to the existing National Curriculum.

The national entitlement for 14-16 year-olds

All 14-16 year-olds will continue to study the National Curriculum: English, maths, science, information and communication technology, physical education, citizenship, work-related learning and enterprise, religious education and health and careers education. This will take up around half of the available curriculum time.

Young people will have a choice about how to spend the remainder of their time and will be able to select from options including:

- as now, an arts subject, design and technology, a humanities subject and a modern foreign language; and
- in the future, any one of the 14 specialised Diploma lines at an appropriate level.

The national entitlement for 16-19 year-olds

There will be a new national entitlement for 16-19 year-olds to study towards any one of the Diploma lines. They will also be able to study English and maths to at least Level 2.

The new national entitlement will be in place from 2013

Making sure that every young person has this full set of choices will take a considerable period of time. This is because we must ensure that the new qualifications are right, and that schools, colleges and training providers are properly equipped to teach them.

The first five specialised Diploma 'lines' will be available for first teaching in 2008, and information from awarding bodies will be in schools and colleges a year ahead of that, to allow them time to prepare. The next five lines will be in place a year later and the final four from 2010. We will then be able to put in place the full national entitlement.

⁶²⁸ Taken from the DfES 14-19 Gateway website <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=26&pid=215&ctype=TEXT&pptype=Single>, accessed August 2006.

Case studies

The Review has kept in close touch with the ways in which, at the local level, schools, colleges, private training providers, local authorities and the LLSCs are working together to provide partnerships for the delivery of 14-19 education and training. These brief case studies of Bradford, East Oxfordshire, Kent, Lewisham College, Oxfordshire, Stevenage and Wolverhampton can be found as Briefing Papers on the website⁶²⁹ under 'documents'.

Reference should be made also to the extensive review of partnerships by LEACAN: Tirrell, J., Winter, A.M. and Hawthorne, S. (2006) *Challenges Facing Partnerships: Current developments towards implementation of 14-19 in local authorities*. Sheffield: LEACAN 14+ Ltd.

⁶²⁹ www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

Focus groups with higher education institutions

Perceptions of admissions tutors, higher education lecturers and other staff⁶³⁰ on students' preparedness for entering and engaging with higher education from 14-19 education and training

Introduction

How well does 14-19 education and training prepare young people for HE study? Focus groups⁶³¹ were held with staff at 21 HEIs to gain evidence on their perceptions on this issue. The level of current interest in this area is revealed by the extensive media interest in the preliminary results of this study⁶³².

In this analysis, preparedness for **entering** HE is differentiated from preparedness to **engage with** HE, and this distinction frames the analysis of the perceptions of the HE staff who took part in the research. Preparation for entering HE is defined by the **outcomes** of 14 to 19 education (including examination results, personal references from teachers and other, extra-curricular achievements), but preparation for engaging with HE is defined by the capacity to engage with the *processes* involved in, and demanded by, HE level study (including the requirement for independent study, coping with greater complexity of subject matter, self-motivation and the pressures of juggling 'learning and earning').

⁶³⁰ Focus group participants included admissions officers, admissions tutors from a variety of disciplines, staff responsible for curriculum planning and delivery (particularly the first year of HE study), curriculum specialists, senior managers, liaison officers, and widening participation officers. The total number of participants was nearly 250. Focus groups were held at 21 HEIs to reflect the diversity of the institutional landscape of HE in England and Wales (12 pre-1992 institutions, four post-1992 institutions, four FE colleges offering HE and one university college).

⁶³¹ Focus groups, according to Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996, p. 4), offer the opportunity to "elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas of participants about a selected topic" and can yield a great deal of information in a relatively short time. Focus group research – involving group discussion around a pre-defined theme – was therefore selected as an appropriate methodology for this study.

⁶³² See, for example, Boone (2006); Education (2006); Lightfoot (2006); MacLeod (2006); Mansell (2006); Shepherd (2006).

Researchers have identified lack of **preparedness** as a key factor in student non-retention in HE (e.g. Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998, Yorke 1999). The academic, emotional and wider social aspects of preparedness are, of course, interlinked⁶³³.

The fieldwork

The fieldwork took place between February and June 2005. An initial schedule of questions was developed in the light of pilot focus groups at three HEIs, and the same revised schedule was then used at all remaining institutions. Discussions lasted 90 minutes. There were between eight and 10 participants in the majority of focus groups, which the literature suggests is the optimum size. There was participation by subject specialists, admissions staff, and staff in other relevant roles such as widening participation, learner support and school liaison work.

Research findings

Iterative investigation of the data led to the identification of three main areas discussed by the focus group participants with regard to students' preparedness for HE study. These are:

- motivation of students
- students' knowledge and qualifications
- study skills and approaches to learning.

1. Motivation of students

Most participants identified motivation as a key characteristic of students who successfully engage with HE. Motivation of prospective students is difficult to gauge, of course, but participants indicated that the personal statement and reference could be useful here, as well as evidence of relevant extra-curricular activities, part-time work and work experience. Some participants questioned the objectivity and validity of both

⁶³³ Much of the research on the transition from school to university focuses on social and cultural aspects of the transition to HE, for example Tinto (1993); Yorke (1999); Forsyth and Furlong (2003); Furlong (2004). On the academic side, a number of studies assess the transition from 14-19 education and training to HE within specific subject disciplines: for instance mathematics (Hoyles *et al.* 2001; Hoyles and Kahn 1997; Cox 2001), English (Smith 2004; Smith and Hopkins 2005), history (Booth 1997; 2001), geography (Birnle 1999; Bryson 1997), and German (Macaro and Wingate 2004). This work is valuable, but much of it is on a small scale, often looking at one course in one institution. Fewer studies cut across disciplines to examine the learning processes at school and HE and the (potentially problematic) transition between the two. Cook and Leckey 1999; O'Connor 2003; and Lizzio *et al.* 2002 are among the exceptions. This focus group research was not limited to one subject area, and the participants were indeed not only subject specialists, but included a wide range of HE staff.

the personal statement and the reference because of the varying levels of support available to students attending different schools and from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The personal statement is not 100% foolproof but reading between the lines you can distinguish genuine interest from someone going through the motions.

The participants focused on the need for students to reflect upon *why* they are studying at HE and some were concerned that students lacked a sense of purpose. Moreover, there was some disappointment on the part of tutors that studying because of intrinsic interest in the subject – or “a genuine thirst for learning” – seemed to have waned considerably, in their experience, whereas more instrumental motivating factors (getting a degree in order to get a job) seemed to dominate: “Students are more motivated to be successful, but the downside is that they do not come to expand their minds.” This instrumental motivation could, it was argued by participants, be explained by changes in 14-19 education, particularly the focus on the assessment framework – the current culture suggests that nothing is worth doing unless it is marked.

2. Students’ knowledge and qualifications

In terms of the certification of students’ outcomes from 14-19 education and training which are used for admission to HE, the main source of evidence is, of course, examinations. The most obvious example is A Level, but GCSEs and other qualifications are also of relevance to students’ applications to HE. Participants commented on the usefulness of detailed information on grades, but were also keen not to place too much emphasis on them:

More information on grades would be useful. But if made an official requirement this could lead to more emphasis on the things we want to de-emphasise.

A Levels were argued to be the best available indicator of the level of students’ knowledge. However, questions were raised about the usefulness of examination grades in predicting future performance at HE. Some participants argued that the level of knowledge displayed, even by students with the highest grades, was inadequate for HE study. However, of greater concern was the application of that knowledge. It was argued that students seemed to be motivated by searching for right or wrong answers – “the A Level system produces rote learners” – while many HE lecturers, particularly in selecting institutions, expected students to recognise the complex nature of knowledge, and demonstrate the ability to work with abstract concepts and apply knowledge in different contexts⁶³⁴.

⁶³⁴ This finding is echoed in research findings that focus on the perspective of a number of specific disciplines e.g. Booth (1997); Hoyles *et al.* (2001); Kitchen (1999).

Modularity

Participants argued that modularity had led students to develop an approach focused on discrete blocks of knowledge, rather than on a holistic view. They felt this meant that there was a lack of focus on the synthesis of knowledge, and that the incremental development of increasingly complex subject-specific knowledge was undermined, as shown by the quotes below:

With modules, students sometimes focus on peripheral items and not the basis of subjects. They lose the synoptic aspects.

The only thing they are interested in is getting a mark in the short term. The modular system means they forget what they've learnt.

However, some participants also acknowledged the growth of modularity at HE as well:

There has been a change because of modular development in A Levels. The focus is on gap-filling rather than a coherent approach. Physics, though, is a linear subject, so this is a real problem. I would like to see a backtrack from modular examinations, although our hands are not clean at universities either. There is a need for longevity in the learning process.

Mathematical and linguistic fluency

Participants within and across institutions (selecting and recruiting HEIs, and including representatives from the most competitive courses) argued repeatedly that the mathematical and linguistic fluency demonstrated by students was not at an appropriate level. However, the entry requirements for HE study would seem to presuppose particular levels of literacy and numeracy on the part of successful applicants (i.e. success in GCSE and Level 3 examinations and coursework).

What could the potential reasons be for this mismatch between preparedness for entry to HE and engagement with HE in terms of mathematical and linguistic fluency? Participants suggested that there was a lack of practice in essay-writing in the 14-19 curriculum, with an emphasis on short answers in the assessment procedures. Participants described how students in arts subjects, even those with the highest A Level grades, struggled with the task of building a logical argument in their essays. In terms of the manipulation of number, participants argued that students had not had enough experience in 14-19 education and training of applying mathematical knowledge, working with mathematical concepts and working at mathematical problems⁶³⁵.

⁶³⁵ A finding echoed in studies of the transition from A Level to university mathematics (Cox 2001; Hoyles *et al.* 2001; Kahn and Hoyles 1997).

Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications were not mentioned at all in some focus groups, the unspoken assumption being that A Levels were the norm. However, in some subject areas such as engineering particular vocational qualifications, especially BTEC qualifications, were highly valued. Some participants said that vocational qualifications were viewed as problematic in admissions decisions, even among those at institutions or in charge of courses which supported the principle of progression to HE through a vocational route. Some focus group participants, including admissions staff, acknowledged that they were not familiar enough with the content and structure of vocational qualifications:

Admissions tutors are asking students for information about BTEC Nationals; there is a massive gap of understanding.

A lot of admissions staff in HE and in positions of influence themselves studied traditional programmes. They have therefore a limited knowledge of GCSE, the vocational route and qualifications frameworks.

Subject choice

Participants commented on the substantial variation between the options different 14-19 institutions offer and the fact that the same opportunities were not available to all students. Many were positive about the breadth this increased range of subjects allowed, at least in principle: it was seen as evidence of positive outcomes of changes in 14-19 education and training such as Curriculum 2000⁶³⁶. On the other hand, some participants were concerned that **depth** of subject knowledge or skills was not being adequately developed.

Focus group participants from a number of institutions were concerned that some pupils were receiving inadequate advice and guidance regarding subject choice and subject combinations at 14 and 16. There were concerns that the quality of guidance varied between institutions, leaving some students disadvantaged. Thus inadequate guidance was felt to undermine the ability of some students to engage in HE study.

Moreover, participants were concerned about the changing patterns in the uptake of particular subjects. They felt that certain degrees required the background knowledge and skills developed in certain subjects at GCSE – modern foreign language and single science GCSEs were the most often mentioned – and by extension at 16-19, and that therefore the preparedness of students for engaging in HE study in some subjects was under threat.

⁶³⁶ See also Hodgson, Spours and Waring (2005)

3. Study skills

Information technology skills

Focus group participants reported that students had well-developed information technology skills, such as the ability to use information technology packages and to locate information on the Internet. However, they argued that HE study also required an ability to engage critically with material on the Internet, which they felt many students lacked. The following comments reveal some of their concerns: "they think that just to print something off is to have understood it"; "some students simply cut and paste from websites without accrediting their sources"; "they don't appreciate that information on the web is of varying quality and value"; "they don't know how to write essays – they just assemble bits from the Internet".

Focus group participants also stated that HE-level study required well-developed research skills (information retrieval or 'library skills', strategic use of the Internet). Their comments however, imply that students leave 14-19 education and training with inadequately developed research skills: "they can only cope with electronic format"; "they think if it's not on the net it's not worth knowing". Participants also argued that students were entering HE having had insufficient practice at independent research.

Time management

Participants praised students' ability to juggle a range of demands on their time and energy: it was noted that many had already had to balance the demands of schoolwork and part-time employment. However, participants were concerned that long hours of part-time employment would leave students less time for academic study – "if a student has a half-day off they are more likely to spend it working in Tesco than working in the library" – and less time for other valuable extra-curricular activities⁶³⁷.

Approaches to learning

In terms of indicating their preparedness to enter HE, maximising attainment in examinations is a rational approach for students to take, since good examination grades often enable students to clear the first hurdle in progression to HE. However, focus group participants argued that students' preparedness to engage with HE is undermined by this approach, as it does not promote the search for deeper understanding, but rather an instrumental approach focused on achievement in the examination situation.

Moreover, focus group participants felt that students came from 14-19 education and training with an inadequate grounding in referencing conventions and an inadequate understanding of issues of plagiarism.

⁶³⁷ This finding has been corroborated in other studies, e.g. O'Connor (2003); Forsyth and Furlong (2003); Metcalf (2003); Little (2002); Hodgson and Spours (2001).

A further criticism of 14-19 education and training was that it did not encourage students to take responsibility for their work and engage in independent research⁶³⁸. Concerns were expressed in particular about coursework. It was argued that some students might receive excessive support – "How can you tell who's actually done it?" was how one focus group participant put it. Focus group participants argued that students struggled to take sole responsibility for their work, an essential requirement essential for engaging with HE study.

What could the potential reason be for this instrumental approach to examinations and the validation of learning? Focus group participants argued that 14-19 education and training is characterised by constant assessment, which leads to 'teaching to the test' and an instrumental approach to learning on the part of students whereby their motivation is not governed by acquiring knowledge, but rather by acquiring credit in the examination process. The process of so-called 'teaching to the test' was perceived to encourage surface learning strategies, rather than deep learning strategies.

I don't like the 'empty file pad syndrome', when students arrive at a seminar with an empty pad, waiting for the solutions simply to be communicated to them. The attitude is often: 'What do I need to know in order to be able to do the examination?'

Participants argued that there is a risk-averse learning culture inherent in 14-19 education and training related to the dominance of external assessment and an orientation towards examination success.

Concluding remarks

According to many participants, there seems to be a mismatch, in certain areas, between the outcomes of 14-19 education and training (which are used as evidence in admissions decisions) and students' preparedness to engage with the process of HE study. There appear to be differences between what is required to become a successful learner at HE (from the point of view of the staff engaged in teaching and learning and admissions staff who participated in the focus groups) and what facilitates successful outcomes in 14-19 education and training.

The following are some of the main criticisms of 14-19 emerging from this research:

- over-emphasis on assessment, rather than on a synoptic understanding of the subjects studied
- the development of instrumental approaches to learning on the part of young people, linked with the assessment culture and modular courses

⁶³⁸ Cook and Leckey (1999), Haggis and Pouget (2002) and Smith and Hopkins (2005) similarly found that students struggled with independent learning.

Appendix IV: Focus groups with higher education institutions

- the lack of development of independent study skills, particularly with regard to finding and using sources appropriately, recognising plagiarism as an intellectual crime and developing a willingness to work towards a deeper understanding of the subject independently, rather than being led to answers by teachers.

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Focus groups with students and staff at schools and colleges, and with first year undergraduates

Perceptions of students and staff on articulation between 14-19 education and training and higher education.

Introduction

The term articulation represents the two-way process of how 14-19 prepares young people to enter HE, and, conversely, how the demands and expectations of HE can have an impact upon the content and quality of learning in schools and colleges. Consequently the focus group research reported here addresses the issue of preparedness and the influence of HE amongst the other parties involved in the process (students and staff at 14-19, and HEI students, to compare and contrast these findings with those obtained previously from HEI staff). This 2006 research project addressed the following objectives:

- to investigate how well prepared students are for HE
- to explore how the demands and expectations of HE have affected teaching in schools and colleges in terms of:
 - content
 - learning styles
 - general enrichment activities
 - guidance and counselling.

This report concentrates on the qualitative research which was conducted amongst schools and colleges and HEIs. For the former, students who were planning to progress into HE and staff involved in their progression took part in group discussions which covered the broad areas of planning for HE, expectations of HE, preparation and information, advice and guidance. Within HEIs, first year undergraduates took part in group discussions which covered the same essential areas, but involved their reflections on how their schools/colleges had helped them gain access to HE and what, in particular, was helpful, or could have been improved.

At the same time a separate research project was commissioned by QCA which explored the type of HE experiences provided within schools/colleges in order to assist progression into HE. Some findings from this research have been included within this report (with permission from QCA).

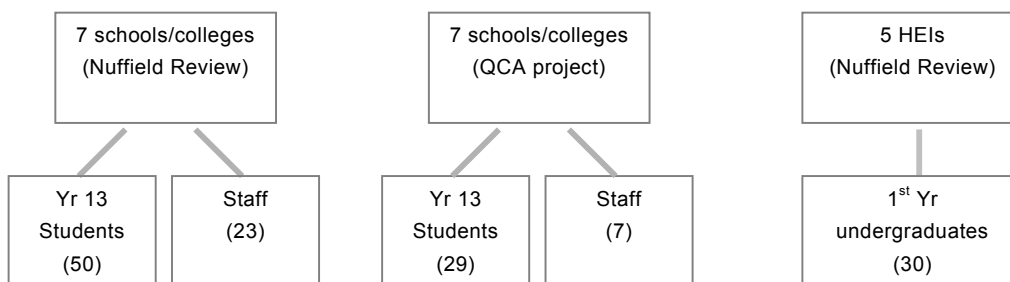
The objectives of the QCA project were:

- to investigate provision of 'HE-style experience' in schools and colleges with particular reference to the use of HE modules
- to report on why it is offered, how it is managed, which students take up the opportunity and why, and how successfully it meets its objectives
- to explore how current practice can be further developed and to provide case studies of effective practice.

Methodology

Qualitative

Qualitative research methods were used to explore the experiences and opinions of students and staff regarding HE. Where possible, these were conducted as group discussions, but sometimes in-depth interviews were used for individual respondents. All interviews were conducted on the school/college/HEI premises and were recorded for subsequent analysis. The group discussions lasted just over an hour whilst the in-depth interviews varied between 15 and 45 minutes (those with staff tended to be longer). Fieldwork was conducted from March to May 2006 and was divided between seven schools/colleges on the Nuffield Review, a further seven schools/colleges for the QCA project and five HEIs for the Nuffield Review.



These were spread around the country in a number of regions (South West, Wales, Midlands, North, South East) and represented both rural and urban schools (grammar schools and comprehensives), sixth form colleges, FE colleges and different types of HEI. Interviews were conducted by staff at UCAS and researchers from the Nuffield Review, using agreed topic guides.

Quantitative

In order to investigate the experiences of first year undergraduates quantitatively, questions were placed on the Student Opinion Panel focusing on retrospective perceptions of students regarding the provision of HE experience whilst they had been at school.

The Student Opinion Panel is operated by Opinionpanel Research Ltd and has 35,000 panellists who can be contacted for online questionnaires. These panellists are recruited primarily through UCAS which invites new first year students to join in October each year. Students are also recruited on specific campuses that need a sample boost and many panellists join either through word of mouth recommendation or after reading about the Panel in the press. All panellists are verified to check that they have an academic email address (ac.uk) before they are allowed to join. They are compensated for completing a survey with Amazon gift certificates.

For this survey, participants were selected using a filter question to ensure that they had had some sort of HE experience before becoming a student. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to identify those elements that had proved most useful to the students when they made the transition to HE and/or what other activities might have facilitated their progression (and success) when at university. The survey was completed by 127 students.

Research findings

Preparation for HE may be interpreted as developing students in ways that help them achieve a place in HEI, but this is only part of the issue as students also need to be equipped with the requisite skills to succeed in HE once there.

At the moment there seems to be greater emphasis amongst schools/colleges on preparedness in the sense of achieving the necessary outcomes (in terms of grades to meet offers), having the necessary 'life' skills and having sufficient information, advice and guidance to select appropriate courses and HEIs at which to study. Consequently, in many schools/colleges there is little remaining resource to ensure that students enter HE with the skills that will equip them for academic success.

There is a perceived 'gap' in the teaching and learning style prevalent in schools/colleges compared with that at HEIs (emphasis at school on being taught whereas in HEIs the onus shifts on to the individual to learn). Some schools have therefore devised a system that gradually shifts from a teacher-directed style at the beginning of Year 12 to a more self-reliant, independent style of learning in Year 13. This type of approach might be more widely adopted in order to enable all students to start their HE career on an equal footing.

The following are recommendations regarding how this change might be introduced:

- Advice and guidance may be needed to enable schools/colleges to foster the appropriate 'academic' skills by modifying their existing teaching and learning styles. This should be possible within the existing offer of A Levels and vocational qualifications, rather than needing to introduce a new qualification.
- This advice and guidance should:
 - identify the essential skills required for success at HE study
 - recommend ways in which these skills can be developed whilst at school/college
 - encourage pupil attendance at residential courses
 - increase participation in work experience to engender enthusiasm for courses and subsequent careers.
- The overall aim will be that (by the end of Year 13) students become:
 - more independent
 - research orientated
 - proficient in essay writing and note taking,so that overall, students will be competent in:
 - study skills
 - time management
 - modes of learning.
- As all students need to benefit from this approach, it has to be widely available and therefore incorporated into 'mainstream' teaching and learning. Although additional components such as an Advanced Extension Award or Open University module might well 'stretch' individuals and facilitate the development of the right skills, these are only currently available to a very limited minority of students. Similarly the excellent HE experiences (such as The Sutton Trust) are only available to specific categories of student (e.g. first generation applicants) and need to be more accessible.

The following sections detail the main areas of investigation, drawing on Nuffield Review and QCA data, within this study, which were:

- motivation of students
- expectation of HE
- preparation for HE – 'life' v. 'academic' skills
- improvements in preparation for HE.

Motivation of students

Students were motivated to go into HE by two main drivers. Some thought of a degree as a 'stepping stone' for their future career, or as a means of pursuing their interest in a subject, keeping their career options open until later.

These findings correspond with those seen amongst HEI staff who were concerned at the shift in emphasis from studying due to intrinsic interest in the subject to seeing HE as a means of gaining a career.

Given that the 2006 year of entry will be the first cohort of students to enter HE under the new system of fees and bursaries, it was interesting to note that current school/college students intending to apply to HE did not seem to have been put off by the introduction of fees. Their attitude seemed to be "it's the same for everyone" and their faith that their degree would enable them to get a well-paid job meant that they were not deterred by the post-graduation repayment strategy. Some students were already planning on working part time and/or during the holidays in order to supplement their funds whilst studying. As many of these students (particularly those on EMA) were already doing part-time jobs whilst in the sixth form, this did not represent a major obstacle to them.

Expectations of higher education

Students who stayed on in the sixth form in grammar schools or comprehensives were generally expected by their school to progress into HE, so their programme of study and associated activities were geared towards that end.

Grammar schools tended to only offer A Level qualifications to their students, whilst comprehensives and colleges tended to provide a broad spectrum across both A Level and vocational qualifications. These had generally evolved due to student demand and local competitive pressure, rather than due to any influence from HE, according to staff at the schools/colleges.

For students at FE colleges, there was less of an automatic expectation of progression into HE. Although some students felt that this was not a good thing for them because it meant that not all students would be working hard in order to achieve the right grades for HE, generally there was a feeling that moving to college was a step closer to life at university because there was greater individual freedom and independence.

Some students reported that their parents expected them to go into HE, whilst others commented that it was not so much an expectation as appropriate support to encourage them in whatever they wanted to do. If students had other members of the family or friends already in HE, this was very beneficial in that they could provide advice and guidance on the application process, selection of courses and HEIs and a 'what it's really like' experience at a university.

In terms of students' expectations of HE life, they anticipated that it would be very different from school in that they would have to become much more independent and responsible for their own study and levels of achievement. Most students felt that in school and college the emphasis was on being taught, whereas at university the onus shifted to the individual to learn. They expected that the larger numbers of students on courses would mean less contact time and supervision from lecturers, less personal support and strict deadlines for completion of work with consequent penalties for lateness. These differences tended to produce mixed feelings amongst students as they were excited about the prospect of going to HE, but also a little apprehensive.

The expectations of school/college students of 'life at university' were realistic when compared with the opinions of first year undergraduates. However, whilst those still at school/college expected the use of technology at HEIs to be better than that at their own school/college they could not really appreciate how the use of such systems as Blackboard/WebCT would be integrated with course delivery, management and assessment. At some universities these systems were used extensively, and students could access all key course information on a virtual system, find notes for lectures and complete multiple choice tests for assessment purposes.

Preparation for higher education: 'Life skills'

To allay any anxieties, the best way to gain insight into 'life at university' was to attend taster courses or residential visits as school/college students claimed these gave the most realistic experiences. Consequently, those students who had had the benefit of these experiences felt that they had influenced their choices regarding both courses and HEIs as they became much more determined to gain the right grades in order to pursue their chosen course at their chosen HEI. This type of experience was particularly valuable to first generation HE applicants who could not call upon previous family experience to help them. The best examples of this sort of experience were provided by the Sutton Trust and (for those who could afford it) Medlink/Medsims courses for prospective medical students. Aim Higher was one external organisation that was often cited by staff in schools/colleges as being crucial in providing the funds to enable students to attend (and benefit from) some of the HE experiences available to them.

Schools and colleges provide a baseline level of activity to provide information, advice and guidance on topics such as courses, HEIs, careers, applying to HE through UCAS and understanding finance in terms of the new fees and bursaries. These are supplemented with a wide array of activities and experiences in order to help students through the process of applying to HE and preparing them for the experience when they got there. These can be divided into those that are orientated more towards improving 'life' skills and those that are oriented more towards developing the appropriate 'academic' skills.

Each organisation offered a range of activities that contributed towards cultivating appropriate 'life skills'. These could be enrichment activities that might involve sporting

activities, trips away, voluntary work or work experience. This latter point was highlighted by students as one of the key elements that helped prepare them for HE (e.g. prospective medical students need to have some experience of the health service).

Preparation for higher education: 'Academic skills'

In order to develop 'academic' skills, some schools have modified their mode of teaching in the sixth form, moving from a traditional approach concentrating on teacher delivery at the beginning of Year 12 to a much more independent style of learning by the end of Year 13. This long-term development approach is necessary in order to foster the requisite skills to enable students to succeed in HE. These have been identified as: being capable of independent study, knowing how to conduct research activities, write extended essays, read around the topic, take notes, present ideas in a clear and coherent manner, evaluate research journal articles and manage time efficiently.

Some schools have supplemented their 'standard' offer of A Levels and vocational qualifications by offering Advanced Extension Awards or Open University modules to stretch their most able students. The students themselves appreciated the opportunity to take these additional qualifications, as they hoped that they would provide a point of differentiation in their application to HEIs and possibly also improve their performance at A Level. At present, however, it seems that only a minority of students take on this additional study, which is completed outside the normal school timetable.

Those using the Open University modules felt that these would help to develop the appropriate skills for success at HE because the students would need to be more self-reliant, independent and organised to complete the module.

The assessment methods used by HEIs varied by course and organisation, but students were unlikely to have considered this as a key criterion in selecting their HEIs. For A Level students who might be used to both exam-based and coursework assessments, this might not be a major issue, but for vocational students, whose work was predominantly judged on continuous assessment, the switch to exam-based assessment could be very detrimental. One member of staff observed that the government aim to widen access and increase participation was not reflected in a change of attitude amongst HEI admissions tutors. That is, taster courses still seemed to be orientated towards A Level students rather than vocational learners, and university support systems did not seem to have been adapted.

Improvement in preparation for higher education

Schools and colleges vary in the extent to which they prepare their students in terms of both 'life skills' and 'academic skills'. Consequently some students will be better prepared than others.

Only a minority of schools/colleges offered extension activities to stretch their most able students and these were the Advanced Extension Award and Open University modules. These students appreciated the opportunity as they hoped to provide a point of differentiation in their application to HE and improve their performance at A Level.

The use of Open University or HE modules might well facilitate the acquisition of the right skills amongst pupils, but at the moment take-up is relatively low for Open University modules and almost non-existent for HE modules. Whilst the use of Open University modules might be more widespread if the benefits of using it as an extension activity were more widely communicated, use of the HE module will still be impeded by the perception that it would run more at the convenience of the HEI involved, rather than to meet the demands of school/college students.

The range of provision of HE experiences that address 'life skills' (short-term experiences that introduce students to life at university and illustrate course content) can be very helpful in clarifying students ambitions and providing the motivation to work hard to get on the desired course at the chosen HEI. The 'best' type of experience are residential courses such as those offered by the Sutton Trust as these encompass lectures, group tasks, demonstration of HEI facilities, tutors and students on hand to discuss course content and options, as well as providing HEI accommodation. However, not all students can benefit from all experiences offered, as many have specific eligibility criteria (e.g. first generation applicants).

These sorts of 'life skills' include enrichment activities as teaching staff believe that academic success is not the only criterion for selection for places at HE. As well as fulfilling requirements to increase the chances of success in gaining a place, these experiences are also offered for the development of the individual, regardless of their future path.

Similarly, information, advice and guidance is offered to all students to help them on whichever pathway they choose and is not solely geared to HE progression. However, in organisations where the vast majority of students make the transition to HE, it is an expected outcome and therefore activities are geared towards that end (so that those choosing not to progress to HE are making an informed choice).

Whilst HEIs frequently offer study skills workshops for freshers, the emphasis on this sort of provision and the pastoral care required to support some students needs to be increased, in order to reduce the drop-out rate in the first year of university amongst those who cannot cope with the new demands being made of them.

There is a particular concern that vocational students might be at a disadvantage in moving from a system that is based predominantly on course assessment to one that is more exam focused (if that is the case in most HEIs) as they may suffer more than A Level students in making the leap from school/college to HEIs.

Higher education admissions tests

BMAT	BioMedical Admissions Test	For entry into medicine and veterinary schools
HAT	History Aptitude Test	For entry to modern history and joint honours degrees involving modern history at University of Oxford
MSAT	Medical Schools Admissions Test	For entry into medicine
MML	Modern and Medieval Languages Test	For entry to modern and medieval languages at the University of Cambridge
LNAT	National Admissions Test for Law	For entry into Law
STEP	Sixth Term Examination Papers	For entry to mathematics at the University of Cambridge
TSA	Thinking Skills Assessment	For entry to computer science, natural sciences, engineering and economics at the University of Cambridge
UKCAT	UK Clinical Aptitude Test	For entry to medical and dental schools
uniTEST		Generic admissions test being piloted by a number of HEIs in 2006

Source: www.ucas.ac.uk

Pre-interview tests are used in physics and mathematics at the University of Oxford.

In 2005 the Sutton Trust and NFER began a five-year study into the validity of the use of the Scholastic Aptitude Test in university entrance.

CURRICULUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The need to develop a deeper national debate

This paper arises from a Working Group of the Nuffield Review and does not reflect the work of the Review as a whole. The Working Group focused on the aims, values and curriculum principles which should shape 14-19 developments. Its deliberations were reflected in chapter 3 of the Annual Report 2004-05. As the Secretary of State said in the 14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan, “not enough young people feel engaged by the education on offer”. Many remain disengaged. Even for those who do succeed, there is disquiet about the quality of learning, and about the range and richness of experience they receive.

Solutions are too often sought by policymakers in the reform of qualifications, in ever more targets and tests, in the creation of more vocational routes, and in quick answers such as more ‘stretching’. Rarely are more fundamental questions asked about:

- the aims of education, and the values which such aims should embody;
- the learning best suited to achieve these aims.

The Nuffield Review⁶³⁹ believes that reform must begin with deliberation about the aims of education and the curriculum principles which embody those aims. It starts with the question:

What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age? In particular,

- What ideals of achievement and commitment should they be invited to respond to?
- What knowledge and understanding should all young people be helped to develop?
- What big issues, ideas and questions do all young people need to face and discuss?
- What qualities and virtues (intellectual and moral) should be nurtured?
- What social competences should be taught in preparation for adult life?
- What interests should young people be enabled to develop to enrich their lives?
- What guidance do all young people need to choose a fulfilling career?
- How might greater international awareness be developed?

The 19 year-olds we have in mind are not just the academically able, but all who, at different levels and in different ways, are capable of deepening their thinking about the world and of addressing with moral seriousness the problems they face. The following statements arise from widespread deliberations and from evidence and papers received by the Working Group. They are proposed, not as conclusions reached, but as statements to be debated by all who have a stake in education and training.

⁶³⁹ The Nuffield Review is an independent examination of every aspect of education and training 14-19. It was established in 2003 under a Directorate of Richard Pring (Lead Director), Geoff Hayward, Ann Hodgson, Jill Johnson, Ewart Keep and Ken Spours. Its synthesis of research and views on 14-19 policy and practice are available in its two Annual Reports available from the Nuffield Review (info@nuffield14-19review.org.uk) or from the website (www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk).

The urgency of the debate

- The failure to engage so many young people in the educational enterprise;
- the impoverished language of education in terms of 'performance targets', 'efficiency gains', 'curriculum delivery', 'audits', 'customers', and 'academic/vocational tracks';
- the diminishing of educational values through the pursuit of economic relevance;
- the declining interest and participation in certain core subjects (e.g. the sciences);
- student ignorance of key issues and essentials for intelligent living in today's 'global society';
- students' poor understanding of, or interest in, the conditions for democracy;
- the low status given to the more practical and experiential modes of learning;
- the failure to prepare so many with the qualities and basic skills for employment;
- the impact of an examination driven system on the quality of learning;
- centralised decision-making replacing the professional expertise of teachers;
- the failure to adapt initial and professional development of teachers to 14-19 needs;
- competition between institutions rather than the collaboration required for inclusive provision.

How might these concerns be addressed?

The Working Group has tentatively established the following aims and principles which should shape the curriculum.

Aims-led, by constantly returning to the question

What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?

And, in particular

- *by creating national and local forums* with teachers, young learners and the wider community, to deliberate the aims which should permeate the curriculum and the schools and colleges;
- *by introducing ideals* which inspire and are worth pursuing;
- *by nurturing a defensible set of values* which will sustain young people in the future;
- *by ensuring the disposition to take responsibility* for the environment and the wider community;
- *by providing insight into the physical, moral, social and economic worlds* of young people, including the big issues about changing cultural and ethnic contexts;
- *by preparing young people for employment* in terms not of occupation-related skills but of the self-knowledge, basic competences and understanding for making wise choices.

Focusing on quality and modes of learning, in particular

- *by being more student-centred*, building on students' experiences of their lives and communities;
- *by engaging young people* through practical and experiential ways of learning;
- *by listening to the voices of the learners*, in particular the reasons for disengagement.

Translating educational aims into the curriculum, in particular

- *by ensuring entitlement to a minimal National Curriculum framework*, not a detailed curriculum and not restricted by place, time, age or background;
- *by re-appraising the knowledge, skills, and attitudes* required for the 21st century, reflecting:
 - cultural and economic changes in society;
 - employability and economic prosperity;
 - maintenance of democracy;
 - requirements for healthy living, physically and mentally;
 - environmental sustainability;
 - social inclusion;
- *by developing subject knowledge*, but as servers rather than as determinants of educational aims;
- *by recognising the arts and humanities for all*, too often neglected in the pursuit of economic efficiency;
- *by developing vocational routes as vehicles for general education*, not as occupational training;
- *by providing opportunities* for enjoyment, challenge, creativity and personal fulfilment;
- *by integrating guidance and counselling* into the curriculum.

Assessing for learning, in particular

- *by giving primacy to assessment learning* rather than accountability, being formative and respecting practical and personal achievement;
- *by creating a framework of qualifications*, ensuring flexibility, progression, inclusion and challenge.

Respecting teachers, in particular

- *by recognising teachers as curriculum developers* rather than deliverers of someone else's curriculum;
- *by reforming initial training and professional development*, so that teachers have the intellectual resources, time for thinking and skills relevant to 14-19 developments.

Strengthening providers, in particular

- *by ensuring collaborative provision* – partnerships, rather than competition, between public, private and voluntary 14-19 providers, reflected in arrangements for funding and admissions.

Reforming policymaking, in particular

- *by attending to the voice of the teachers and learners*, and recognising the limited expertise and power of civil servants and politicians to manage the details of education and training.

The way forward

The Review is promoting a wider public debate through conferences and its extensive network of schools and colleges, based on this document, Annual Reports and background papers to be found on the website.

The key question for everyone is: What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?

- What are the knowledge, skills and competences without which such a person cannot think and behave intelligently within the modern world?
- What moral and intellectual virtues need to be nurtured?
- What values and ideals are neglected in the provision of education and training?

For teachers and professional associations

- What are the implications of such values for the organisation of learning?
- How might subject knowledge be better organised to serve broad educational aims for all?
- How might the voice of the learner find a constructive place in the curriculum?

For learners

- How might your voice play a part in the improvement of learning?

For QCA and examination boards

- How can assessment for learning be freed from assessment for accountability?
- How can practical learning and personal achievement be assessed?
- How might a qualifications framework ensure general, flexible and progressive education for all?

For teacher educators and trainers

- What experiences and qualifications are lacking in the teaching profession for the provision of an inclusive 14-19 phase of education and training?
- What changes need to be made to (i) professional development and (ii) initial training of teachers for the implementation of an inclusive 14-19 curriculum?

For employers

- What role can employers realistically play in the improvement of education and training opportunities?
- What are the barriers to employer support for work-based education and training?

For Ministers and policymakers

- How might there be continuing dialogue between teachers, learners, the community and policymakers to ensure meaningful learning for all young people?
- What steps should be taken to ensure the collaboration between public, private and voluntary institutions to achieve an inclusive 14-19 provision?

Please use our website for further information about this developing debate and how you can become involved - www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

The following people contributed to the seminars which have led to this discussion document: Tony Breslin, Dave Brockington, Jane Buckley, David Egan, Viv Ellis, John Fox, John Gay, Joe Harkin, Andrew Hunt, David Lambert, Peter Mason, Anna Pendry, Richard Pring, Eleanor Rawling, Helen Reynolds, Catrin Roberts, Martin Roberts, John Shaw, John Somers, Sally Tomlinson, Geoff Wake, Anne Watson, Ann West, Kathy Wicksteed, Chris Winch, David Wood and Susannah Wright.

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*All publications are available online via the link to 'documents' at:
www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk*

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Index

14-19

- 14-19 Action Plan 66, 73, 82
- 14-19 Entitlement 21, 25, 28, 30, 35, 40, 42, 45, 48, 54, 56, 58, 263
- 14-19 Implementation Plan* 21, 25-26, 29, 32, 34, 36-39, 41, 45-46, 76, 100, 108, 148, 222
- 14-19 Partnerships 21, 25-26, 36, 40-41, 44, 46, 50, 52, 54-56, 63, 227
- 14-19 Pathfinders 21, 25, 38, 40, 46-52, 54
- 14-19 prospectus 42, 46-47

A

- A Levels 28, 31-33, 37, 62, 66, 68-69, 76, 85, 118, 145, 148, 156, 168, 171, 173-175, 181, 200, 215, 217, 218, 221
- Abbreviations used in this Report 261
- Access courses 175
- Advisory Committee membership 301
- Aimhigher 161
- Annual Report 2005-06 – main findings 235
- Apprenticeships 27, 31, 37, 93, 100, 102-103, 111, 113, 126, 139, 197, 207, 221
- Articulation between 14-19 provision and HE 143

B

- 'Busyness' of policymaking 25, 36, 46

C

- Case studies 265
- Conclusions from previous reports 15
- Contributors to chapters of this Annual Report 303
- Core Group membership 307
- Curriculum 2000* 34, 68, 100, 148, 171, 271
- Curriculum for the 21st Century 197, 223, 287

D

- Disability 205

E

- Education and Inspections Act 42

- Education Maintenance Allowance 93-94, 100, 116, 126, 128, 134, 137
- ELWa 42, 61, 69, 71, 74-76, 82
- Employers 121
- Employers' Concordat 66
- Engagement with the labour market at 16-17 96
- Entry and Foundation diploma awards 35
- Entry to Employment 100, 103, 116, 127, 128, 130
- Extended project 33

F

- Focus groups 267-277
- Foundation degrees 175

G

- General Diploma 34
- Good practice transfer 51

H

- Higher education 146
 - Admissions tests 285
 - Expansion of HE 138, 147, 149, 153, 158
 - Focus groups with HE institutions 267
 - Information, advice and guidance 178
 - Labour market outcomes 154
 - Retention 176
 - Selection 220
- Higher education applicants and acceptances 150

I

- Information, advice and guidance 149, 170, 178, 222
- Inspection in Wales 77

J

- Jobs without training 111

K

- Key concepts driving DfES policy 27

L		R	
Labour market and young people	120, 137	References	243
Learning Country	62, 82	S	
Learning Pathways 14-19 ...	17, 62, 64, 70, 73-74, 82, 85, 233	Schwarz Review	147
Learning routes	65	Special educational needs	204
Learning Visits	50	Specialised Diploma Gateway	45
Leaving education at 16-17	114, 118	Specialised Diplomas	30
Local authorities in Wales	70	T	
Local governance	40	Targets in Wales	77
N		Teachers	223
National Qualifications Framework	221, 233	Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform ..	14, 16
'NEETs' ...	15, 17, 89, 93-94, 100-101, 104, 107, 121, 124, 126, 128, 134, 137-138, 204	W	
Nuffield Review publications 2003-06	291	Wales - institutional developments	59
P		Wales - policy process	79
Policy	21	Weakly and strongly collaborative systems ...	16, 37, 43, 54
Policy and organisational developments in England	23	Welsh 14-19 Networks	73
Policy documents 2005/06	28	Welsh Bac	62-67, 70, 78, 83-84, 233
Policy levers and drivers	76	Welsh Local Government Association	71
Political context	13	Y	
Politicised policy process	38	Young people outside education and training at 16	101, 104
Principles in 14-19 education	187	Youth Cohort Studies	96- 97, 102
Progression	89	Q	
Q			
QCA	33, 53, 214, 220		

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