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ABSTRACT

This document contains eight papers examining different aspects of categorization, divisions, and choice in further education (FE) that were commissioned during a study of tripartite pathways (for example, academic, vocational and applied) in education and training for 16-19 year olds in the United Kingdom. The following papers are included: "The Historical Perspective: Myths and Realities behind Tripartite Divisions in FE" (Bill Bailey); "The Consumer Perspective: Tripartism as a Response to Market Pressures" (Alison Wolf); "The Psychological Perspective: Tripartite and Other Divisions in Post-16" (Bryan Dockrell); "The Sociological Perspective: Post-compulsory Education Policy in Transition: From Crowther to Dearing and Beyond" (Denis Gleeson); "The Curriculum Perspective: Education and Training: The Prevocational Tradition" (Richard Pring); "The Employment Perspective: Stakeholders, Skills and Star Gazing: The Problematic Relationship between Education, Training, and the Labour Market" (Prue Huddleston, Lorna Unwin); "The International Perspective: Learning from International Comparisons" (David Parkes); and "Overview: Developing Qualifications for the Future" (Geoff Stanton). (Chapters contain references.) (MN)

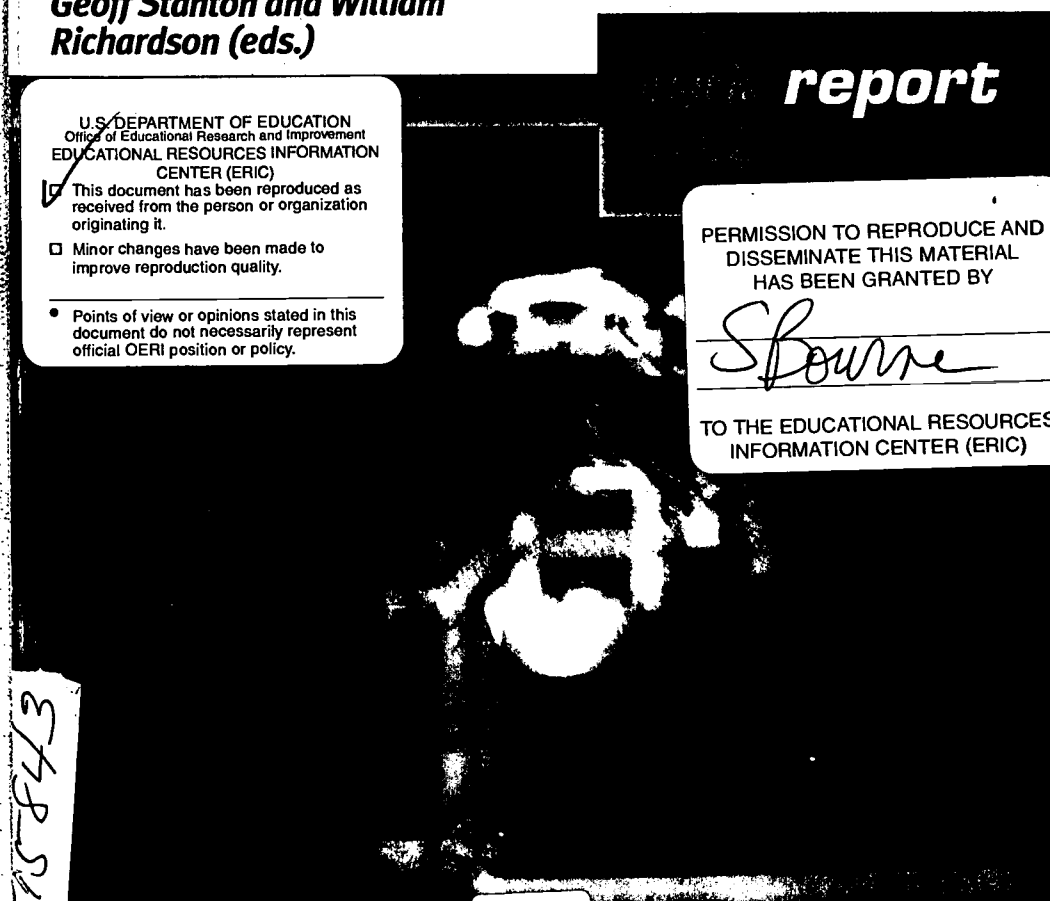
FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Qualifications for the future:

a study of tripartite and other divisions in post-16 education and training

Geoff Stanton and William Richardson (eds.)

report



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strategic research

The New Qualifications Agenda

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

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Contents

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Foreword

FEDA's research project from which this book derives explored the rationale for the ways in which post-16 education and training is organised and categorised. It investigated the origins, meanings and effectiveness of attempts in British education to divide learning and qualifications – and learners – into distinct types, the most recent of which is Sir Ron Dearing's proposal that there should be three 'pathways' for 16–19 year olds: academic, applied and vocational. The unequal status of such pathways has been the subject of continuing debate. Notions such as 'parity of esteem' have grown up which seek to neutralise unequal status. But they can only become reality as a result of questioning deep-seated attitudes and cultures, and reshaping values and structures for the challenges of the future.

> *Further education suffers because of prevailing British attitudes. Not only does there remain a very carefully calibrated hierarchy of worthwhile achievement, which has clearly established routes and which privileges academic success well above any other accomplishment, but there is also an appalling ignorance amongst decision makers and opinion-formers about what goes on in further education.*
>
> *(Learning Works the Kennedy Report FEFC 1997, p 1)*

The Dearing Review of 16–19 qualifications reported early in the life of the research, bringing to the fore the issue of 'tripartite' division. As we publish these findings, Dearing's recommendations are subject to review by the Government and a consultation has been launched to look again at the shape and further development of the qualifications framework. On the face of it, Dearing's three pathways are inimical to the degree of flexibility advocated by Tomlinson.

> *There is a world of difference between, on the one hand, offering courses of education and training and giving some students . . . [help] to gain access to those courses, and, on the other hand, redesigning the very processes of learning, assessment and organisation so as to fit the objectives and learning styles of the students. But only the second philosophy can claim to be inclusive.*
>
> *(Inclusive Learning. the Tomlinson Report, FEFC 1996, 1997, p 4)*

Dearing is also vulnerable to the kind of accusation levelled by Kennedy, because of the amount of FE provision which cannot fit comfortably within the pathways. On the other hand, he is clearly right to argue that the present system of qualifications is confusing.

The Government, for its part, has had to place severe limits on the resources which can be used to widen participation post-16 at all levels and also to make learning more inclusive. At the same time it is looking at lifelong learning as well as at ways of helping excluded groups of people move through learning to sustainable work, and at how technology can transform learning throughout life. In this context the theoretical analyses undertaken as part of this project are not only of academic interest, they point out some very practical ways forward, as well as possible pitfalls Without going back to the basic principles this project examined, the ambitions of Tomlinson and Kennedy cannot be realised.

This book is intended to contribute to this debate. The messages are strategic. They address the organisation of post-16 learning, the design of qualifications, the role and purpose of FE colleges, the policy-making process and the management of change.

Ursula Howard
Director, Research and Information

Introduction

Rationale

There is general agreement that significant differences in the needs of post-16 learners must be recognised and provided for, if learners are to achieve their full potential after the end of compulsory education. A diversity of schemes is therefore required to meet a diversity of needs. There is an argument for the range of provision being categorised in a way which ensures that an adequate choice exists, and which enables learners to select the best option.

However, although categories can be helpful, they can also be based on prejudice, outdated structures, historical accident, or simply confused thinking. Also, they can be created for one purpose (such as facilitating learner choice) and be used for others (such as selection or funding). In these circumstances the categories are not just unhelpful, they can make for divisions which are against the interests of individuals, and which produce barriers to the development of a healthy society and a competitive economy.

Although the question of how and whether to categorise post-16 provision is of fundamental importance, it has gone comparatively unexamined during recent reforms in the UK. Certainly, debate has not gone back to

first principles in order to check the soundness of the foundations upon which developments are taking place. It was in order to provoke and provide material for this debate that this book was produced.

Project methodology and the structure of this book

Several reasons and explanations are given for the ways in which post-16 education and training is structured. Sometimes the needs of employers and the structure of the world of work is emphasised. This, in turn, may influence, or be influenced by, the structure of our society, and its cultural assumptions. Another commonly quoted rationale relates to psychological differences between learners. A more recent emphasis has been on the importance of offering choice in the context of an educational marketplace. Reference is often made to practice in other countries, and to historical precedent within our own educational system.

In view of all this, the project from which this book derives commissioned papers on seven different aspects of post-16 education and training categorisation, divisions and choice:

- *The historical perspective*: which educational divisions have been used before, and what can be learned from previous successes and failures (Bill Bailey).
- *The consumer perspective*: how far tripartite structures in public education and training can be explained as a provider's (governmental) response to market pressures (Alison Wolf).
- *The psychological perspective*: what is known about differences in how and what people prefer and are best able to learn (Bryan Dockrell).
- *The sociological perspective*: how the structure of post-16 education and training influences, and is influenced by, our social norms and preconceptions (Denis Gleeson).
- *The curriculum perspective*: alternative ways of developing, structuring and delivering learning programmes, and the decisions about value which are implied or required (Richard Pring).

- *The employment perspective*: the relationship between post-16 education and training and the present and likely future demands of the world of work (Prue Huddleston and Lorna Unwin).
- *The international perspective*: how other countries structure post-16 education and training, and what are the significant differences and trends (David Parkes).

The project itself did not involve original research, but the authors were able to write from considerable personal authority derived from their previous work, and also to describe the contribution of others working in their field. A special feature of the project was that not only were seven different angles taken on the same issue, but each paper was scrutinised by all the other authors, plus other interested parties from colleges and the research community. The same treatment was given to a synoptic paper which reviewed all the others, and from which this introduction and the concluding chapters were drawn. Three seminars were held as part of this process. Therefore, each paper was itself examined from a number of perspectives.

Chapters One to Seven of this book are formed from the specialist papers. The final synoptic chapter draws upon the commissioned papers, plus the discussions held on them, in order to examine the structure of post-16 education and training from first principles, and to identify the implications arising for practice and policy.

Context

The agenda for current developments in post-16 provision has been largely set by the Dearing Report on qualifications for 16–19 year olds (Dearing, 1996). The remit for the Review which led to this report was constrained in a number of ways, not least that it was to focus on the pattern of *qualifications* intended for the *16 to 19 age group*. Although Dearing refers to the review of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) by Gordon Beaumont (Beaumont, 1996) which was taking place at the same time, neither Dearing nor Beaumont saw it as their job to take an overview of the needs of all adult learners, or to examine other aspects of Post-com-

pulsory Education and Training. Some of these aspects, such as where and when learning can take place, and the design of the course or learning programme, are particularly relevant to adults who vary widely in previous experience and current circumstances. The term *adult* itself conceals so many sub-categories that the value of using it at all can be questioned. A total of 76% of further education (FE) college students were over 19 in 1995–96. As Chris Hughes, principal of Gateshead College, commented, a hospital that in reporting on its activities merely classified three quarters of its clients as 'adults' could expect many further questions to be asked. (His seminar formed part of the project which resulted in this book.)

In the light of all this, the dangers inherent in basing so much on a qualifications structure designed for 16 to 19-year-olds is apparent. Furthermore, the analysis contained in this book shows that, even when applied only to the 16 to 19 age group, the assumptions underlying the threefold division of qualifications which Dearing used, and which predated his report, are, at best, unstated, and, at worst, unexamined. We should therefore pause before using these as the basis for a whole development programme. This is not to say that individual recommendations made by Dearing are not usefully pragmatic. However, the division of qualifications into the categories of *academic* (A-level), *applied* (GNVQ) and *vocational* (NVQ) (Dearing, 1996) is not arrived at by generalisation from what exists. Most qualifications lie outside these three categories. Forcing most things into this mould whether through legislation or through funding mechanisms, is likely to emphasise tidiness at the expense of fundamental policy aims. Even before the Dearing Report, the influence of the content and structure of qualifications on the whole of post-16 education and training had increased significantly in recent years. This is for two main reasons: most of the funding channelled to providers through Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and FE Funding Councils is now linked to qualification aims; the achievement of qualifications is used as the main and most public performance indicator.

The range and number of these qualifications is huge. The Dearing Review reckoned that there were more than 16,000 qualifications available to 16 to 19-year-olds, and there are more than 20,000 qualifications on the database created by the Further Education Funding Council for England

(FEFC[E]). In addition to learning in colleges and schools, candidates can prepare for qualifications with private training providers, in the workplace, in the community, and by various forms of distance learning. It could be argued that this is exactly as it should be. If, as the experts maintain, quality means fit for the customer's purpose, and there are a multitude of customers and purposes, good quality post-16 education and training is bound to be diverse, particularly if there is an intention to maximise participation. On the other hand, there are countervailing pressures. A plethora of idiosyncratic provision, falling into no discernible pattern, is so difficult to comprehend that this in itself becomes a barrier to participation and progression, as well as reducing the chance of individuals finding what best suits their needs.

On behalf of these individuals, the state aims to rationalise what is being provided, but it also has other reasons for seeking coherence. The state is also a customer, in that it pays fully or partly for much of this provision, through Funding Councils, TECs and Local Education Authorities (LEAs). It, therefore, has an interest in ensuring that provision is efficient, in the sense of having the lowest acceptable unit cost; and effective, in that it consistently embodies relevant national standards and serves the national interest. Of late, the national interest has often been equated with the interests of the economy and employment, but at other times and in other countries a wider view has been taken, in which the needs for the development of the community, the culture, citizenship and spiritual values have also featured. All these requirements generate a pressure for coherence and control, which can be in tension with the equally valid need for diversity and choice. One way of resolving this tension is to allow a diversity, but to create a *framework* which shows how different kinds of provision relate, and *criteria*, which provision must meet if it is to receive state support.

The point has been made above that the term *provision* could and should encompass a variety of things, including learning programmes and institutional facilities. However, the concentration on the reform and rationalisation of *qualifications alone* has not been confined to the Dearing Review. Thus, the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority has created criteria which individual qualifications must now meet if they are to count as A-levels, but has laid down no requirements about the nature of the

learning experience, or about how individual subject-based qualifications should be combined to make a programme for an individual student. While these A-level criteria are becoming more stringent year by year, those used by NCVQ with regard to NVQs and GNVQs may be moving in the opposite direction. NVQ criteria began by being so comprehensive and precise that only newly-devised qualifications could meet them. This has resulted in a situation where many pre-existing vocational qualifications have continued to flourish, but outside the framework. There are, therefore, moves to make the NVQ criteria more flexible.

Dearing recommended that all qualifications should be placed in a common framework in future. Since he based this framework on the three types of qualification for which national criteria have been developed, there is a close connection between the framework and the criteria. The framework does, however, raise a new set of questions.

If the framework had simply categorised qualifications by the level of achievement they represented, this would have differed little from what happens with regard to National Curriculum testing, on the one hand, and Higher Education, on the other. But the other dimension of the Dearing Framework distinguishes between different *types* of qualification which can represent the same level of achievement. Given that this approach would be unique to non-university post-16 education and training, there are a number of questions of principle that arise:

- Is a categorisation into types necessary, and what are its risks and advantages?
- Are these categories the right ones, and upon what assumptions are they based?
- Is it qualifications that should be categorised (as opposed to other aspects of provision, such as mode of study)?

The answers to these questions are not just relevant to the Dearing Report *per se*. They could affect the way in which the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which has taken on and combined the work of SCAA and NCVQ from the Autumn of 1997, should best divide up its work and responsibilities. They have implications for the appropriateness

of the internal structure of the DfEE, and for the policies it is developing, such as those relating to the links to be made between awarding bodies. This book throws some light on the issues at stake.

The role and purpose of further education colleges

Between them, further education colleges provide the full range of post-16 qualifications. Often, they are also involved in some Higher Education, and in the local provision of uncertificated recreational courses for adults. Other organisations are also involved in aspects of post-16 education and training, but schools and private training organisations cater for what might be said, by comparison, to be 'niche markets'. Therefore, colleges are affected by the assumptions underlying the overall qualifications framework, and by anomalies or inadequacies in it, more than any other form of provider.

It is also the case that the funding methodology applied by the relevant funding councils to English and Welsh colleges relate closely to what are called 'qualification aims'. Indeed, it could be said that the college sector is defined in terms of its qualifications in a way which would not be considered appropriate or even possible for schools or universities

Conversely, colleges are the major 'engine' for the delivery and further development of post-16 education and training, but you could be forgiven for not realising this from a reading of either the Dearing or the Beaumont reports. This is not to suggest that colleges should colonise all post-16 education and training provision, or that they are not crucially dependent upon being able to work collaboratively with schools, training providers and, most of all, employers. However, it is the case that colleges provide more A-levels than all other providers put together, and the overwhelming majority of GNVQs. Without colleges the NVQ initiative would have been even slower to get off the ground. In particular, colleges provide a crucial role in relation to small firms and to the self-employed, which is where NVQs must flourish if they are to impact on the majority of the workforce. Small firms provide an increasing majority of jobs, but need help with the administration of qualifications.

Thus colleges provide the most comprehensive interface with learners and potential learners. They therefore have the problem of how to organise themselves internally so as to provide the best quality and most accessible learning programmes, in a way which is comprehensible to their applicants and which relates effectively to the whole qualifications framework.

This book is relevant to these college concerns. It is for this reason that it contains discussion both about all post-16 education and training (meaning wherever this takes place) and FE (meaning what takes place in colleges). However, in order not to complicate further an already complex scene, this book does not focus on issues specific to Higher Education and recreational adult education.

Dearing's 1997 Review into Higher Education considered the purpose of higher education as well as its funding. One might ask how it could do otherwise. The purpose of a funding mechanism must be to enable key purposes to be achieved as efficiently as possible. But where is the debate about the purposes of FE? It appears that the Funding Councils think that such value judgements are nothing to do with them. It is perhaps more accurate to say that the value judgement they *have* made is that colleges should be rewarded insofar as they satisfy customer demand. This has led to a funding regime which embodies only the 'procedural' values of transparency and even-handedness. It has, however, been used to promote some policy aims: those of encouraging growth and driving down unit costs.

Most FE provision is purchased *on behalf* of individuals by the Funding Councils or by TECs. The TECs, despite being private companies, have their own government-provided funding linked to the achievement of preferred qualifications, amongst other things. These other things can include the development of the local economy. In the case of FEFC funding, however, since no judgements have been made about key purposes or preferred type of growth, it could be that colleges in deprived areas whose own preference would be to give priority to local people, are being tempted, or even forced by funding pressures, to reduce unit costs by recruiting more profitable students from communities other than their own. It would certainly appear that there is now no mechanism for the community of which a college is physically a part to exert much influence as a customer, despite the fact that it may once have owned the buildings.

The FEFC has made it clear that its responsibility is to ensure adequate and sufficient provision of further education, rather than to ensure that colleges as such survive to deliver it, as long as there are other providers available. 'It' is defined as provision which helps people gain access to qualifications. Thus, insofar as FE has defined purposes, these might be said, in this context, to be enshrined in the list of qualifications approved for funding.

This is why it is so important that these qualifications, and any framework into which they are placed, can be related to the actual client groups who wish to use colleges. There is already evidence, for instance, that an over-rationalised qualifications framework can result in some qualifications being created to complete a framework, for which there are no candidates. At the same time, too neat a framework could make it difficult to provide programmes for certain groups of learners, even though these meet their legitimate aspirations and enable them to succeed. (This is because programmes funded by the FEFCs or TECs have to lead to approved qualifications if they are to qualify for funding.) This would reduce the participation and achievement levels to which the framework is meant to contribute. The lesson from this is that the qualifications framework and the related funding mechanisms should be influenced by the mission and experience of colleges, as well as vice-versa.

In practice, the qualifications framework, the mission of colleges, and the method and level of college funding are very far from being in partnership. Each is defined independently of the other. Dearing reviews qualifications without detailed analysis of the main delivery mechanism. Independently of this, FEFC reviews the funding methodology for colleges and will probably maintain links to qualifications whose structure it may not be in a position to question. Remedying this demands something of colleges as well as others. Most attempts to present a coherent picture of colleges and their activities founder on the rock of their diversity.

Diversity as a positive characteristic of colleges

It is diversity which makes it so difficult to describe the college sector to an outsider, and which militates against it speaking with a single voice. It is the 'Yes, but...' sector. Does it provide for most 16 to19-year-olds? Yes, but

the vast majority of participants are over 19. Is it the most important provider of vocational education? Yes, but it also provides the majority of A-levels. Are most students part-time? Yes, but FE is also the biggest provider of full-time post-16 education and training, with more students than schools and universities put together. On the other hand, it could be said that this diversity is the defining and most valuable characteristic of colleges. All other providers of education or training are exclusive, in the sense of only catering for a certain age-group, band of ability, or kind of learning. Most colleges positively aim to be much more inclusive, and largely succeed. We should therefore celebrate this diversity, rather than bemoan it. FE's special value is that it is more fully representative of the totality of the learning community than any other form of provision. By the same token, it embodies all the current stresses and strains of that community, rather than being cloistered.

In each locality, colleges therefore act as a proxy for post-16 education and training as a whole, and the country more generally. Any barriers to progression, gaps in provision, misplaced boundaries, and so on, will show up, if not in individual colleges, then in their collective experience within a locality or region. This implies both that colleges should be involved in collaborative planning as well as in competition, and that there should be an efficient mechanism for the intelligence which they gain to reach and influence national agencies — particularly those managing the qualifications framework. In practice, it could be argued that independent schools probably have more influence on the design of A-levels, and large employers on the design of NVQs than do colleges on any of the national qualifications they offer. Also it is clear that GNVQs were designed so that the average secondary school could provide them, rather than to take full advantage of the facilities of FE colleges, and the vocational expertise of their staff. Why do colleges have so little influence, despite their fundamental importance to the delivery of these qualifications? Perhaps it is once again because specialist providers are so much easier for outsiders to understand, and because they find it easier to give a coherent message.

Rather than attempt the futile task of making colleges more comprehensible by oversimplifying the diverse range of services they provide, we need to re-frame our definition of what they do, and not use paradigms more

suitable to schools or universities. We could get some clues about how to set about this by looking at how industry offers an increasing range of products, while meeting common standards and keeping the products affordable.

At one time, every country had a large number of separate motor vehicle manufacturers, and it was by this means that the customer was given choice. Mass production techniques lowered the cost of cars, at the expense of choice and many of the manufacturers. We are now entering an era where technology allows the customer to choose from a range of options within a basic framework. These options can then be incorporated into the production of a specific product through computerised control of the process.

Modern educational techniques could provide for something analogous to take place. A college would present its curriculum offer as an array of units, which could be combined in specified ways to form qualifications suitable for the needs of different individual and corporate clients. Qualifications could be enhanced by the inclusion of extra 'luxury' components, and updated by having old units redesigned. Students who so wished could still take standard packages, which would bring the benefit of their being able to belong to a coherent learning group. Others, for whom flexibility was more important, would pick and mix, but under the guidance of a tutor who would monitor overall progress and ensure that the whole became more than the sum of the parts, and had currency.

This is a description that many colleges would already recognise. This kind of educational hypermarket (to switch analogies) is clearly different from a specialist shop, but no more difficult to define and use. If, however, the language we attempt to use is only that of whole courses and qualifications, it is like asking whether a hypermarket is really a grocer's or a hardware store. The equivalent misunderstanding may be happening with regard to the national educational debate. If what is on offer is categorised and funded at the level of whole qualifications, then the options available become artificially restricted.

This has not happened just because those concerned have not caught up with the latest techniques. This would be a comparatively easy matter to remedy. It is also because we are making outdated, dysfunctional or unexamined assumptions about our society, the world of work, how people learn, the way the market in qualifications functions, curriculum design, what takes place in competitor countries, and our own history. This is made clear by the later chapters in this book.

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Chapter

The historical perspective

Myths and realities behind tripartite divisions in FE Bill Bailey

Introduction

To reflect on the history of educational policy and institutions in England over the last century and a half is to confirm the continuity and persistence of the principles and practice of hierarchy, differentiation and, therefore, selection. Often, in their presentation (that is in their philosophical or ideological justifications) these differences have been tripartite between social classes, fractions of social classes, types of children and in the types of institution established to provide for them. The 'rule of three' has been a recurring concept in attempts to explain division and difference. However, its practical expression has often failed to provide a close or pure fit to the tripartite model. In some cases more (or fewer) than three classifications have been evident in practice. At a time when government policy is increasingly based on the existence of three pathways (A-levels, General National Vocational Qualifications and National Vocational Qualifications) and attempts to establish what Ron Dearing calls 'equal value' (Dearing 1996) for these routes and the qualifications they lead to, it is appropriate to review the history of alternative curricula in different institutions which were to have 'parity of esteem'. Not to consider the recent history would be to run the risk of repeating avoidable mistakes. This paper reviews some of

these attempts at differentiation, the aims they were meant to serve, and the notions or principles on which they were based. It goes on to examine some implications for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

Nineteenth century tripartisms

Plato's *The Republic* gave classical tripartism its philosophical justification with its division of those who counted in society: the philosopher (kings); the auxiliaries (merchant class); and the artisans – the gold, the silver and the bronze. The first class were to receive a liberal education, the second vocational training, with socialisation and basic vocational skills for the third group. This general representation of society (clearly from the top down, and omitting to mention the slave class beneath the three types of citizen) became a familiar image in English writing about society and education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was reflected in the 'reform' of English educational institutions from the 1850s onwards, when existing institutions were reconstituted, and new ones established by legislation, to meet the needs of the new 'class' society.

After this major reform, affecting all educational institutions, the public schools were to serve the upper classes, and secondary schools the middle classes. Elementary schools for the working classes, until then provided by voluntary church initiative, were to be provided by new, democratically elected school boards. The social origins and destinations of pupils were clearly reflected in the fee levels, curricula and leaving-ages of these three main categories of school. The structure of schools thus purposefully mirrored the social classes. However, it was not simply a reflection of the *status quo* – it was also intended to 'project' that class image and reality into the future. It is clear in the justifications of this functional model and system that this was the overall aim of the Acts passed during the 1850s and 1860s.

The threefold model did not stop at the level of the three-class society. The middle class 'secondary' sector was itself picked out, in the Schools Inquiry Commission (1868) and the Endowed Schools Act (1869), into three grades of school, respectively for the upper-, middle-, and lower-middle classes. These grades of school were further differentiated in their curricula

according to the projected school-leaving ages of the pupils which, in turn, reflected assumptions of future employment. Thus a tripartite model was elaborated, by the further distinctions in the middle class sector, into a five-track system. In practice, however, as existing schools were reformed and new ones built, it proved difficult to distinguish between the first and second grade secondary schools and so this became a four-track system. While the effect of the system was to confirm and perpetuate social status by means of the content and length of schooling, there was also an acknowledgement of the concept of meritocratic opportunity. This was translated into practice in the form of scholarships, notably to enable a small number of elementary school pupils to pass at 11+ into the 'secondary' school. Thus, the beginnings of the scholarship ladder and of competitive selection for the secondary grammar school curriculum were established.

The clear and explicit basis for this mid-nineteenth century reorganisation of English education was the justification of social class and the wisdom – or at least the necessity – of confirming in the children the social status of their father. At this time, before mass literacy and universal suffrage, the language of justification was clearly that of the preservation and perpetuation of class society. It is no coincidence that the final piece of the restructuring of the system, the 1870 Act, aimed at providing elementary school places for all working-class children, came quickly after the 1867 Reform Act. In the words of the statesman Robert Lowe, education was the key to the future, 'a question of self-preservation . . . even of the existence of the Constitution'. While the lower classes must be educated 'to qualify them for the power that has passed . . . into their hands', the higher classes must be educated differently, to preserve their position by 'superior education and superior cultivation'. Through 'greater intelligence and leisure' they will be able to 'assert their superiority' over the working classes and so 'conquer back . . . some of the influence they have lost by political change.' (Lowe, 1867) This was a clear statement of the major functions to be served by the stratified system of education. At that time it was expressed in the direct and unambiguous language of class authority and right to rule. The developing system, alongside this rationalisation, was one which divided children in line with their projected place in the social order. As the social historian Geoffrey Best writes:

And so the schools of Britain not only mirrored the hierarchical social structure (as, in the absence of a strong government determined otherwise, they were bound to do) but were made more and more to magnify its structuring in detail.[1]

(Best, 1985)

Tripartite secondary education

A further example of the tripartite debate relates to the development of state secondary education from the 1920s. The term 'secondary' continued to be confusing, since it retained its middle class connotation until after the 1944 Education Act, when it came to mean the second stage or phase of all children's education. Until then secondary schools, usually with their own preparatory departments, were still fee-paying and served a largely middle class *clientèle*. The pre-First World War Liberal Government had widened the 'ladder' from the elementary to secondary school by the Free Place Regulations of 1907, which required 25% of the intake of secondary schools to come from elementary schools. This change coincided, before and during the war, with the expansion in the numbers educated in the secondary schools. Faced with applications which exceeded the number of available places, local education authorities introduced selection procedures to determine who should have places in 'secondary' schools. Those not selected stayed behind in the elementary school until they left school.

As a result of the 1918 Education Act, the minimum school-leaving age was raised to 14 with effect from 1921. This confirmed that the majority of the nation's children would remain in elementary schools from 5–14. For the 11–14 age group in elementary schools the Act laid on the LEAs a duty to provide advanced courses 'for the older or more intelligent children' (Section 2), while Section 4(4) stated that no child should be prevented 'from receiving the benefits of any form of education by which they are capable of benefiting through inability to pay fees'. This provision led some LEAs to build new schools for these pupils. These were often called Central or Intermediate Schools and were conducted under the Regulations for Elementary Schools, which were less generous than those for secondary schools with regard to the numbers and salaries of teaching

staff, for example. In some towns and cities the local technical colleges established Junior Technical or Trade Schools, recruiting at 13 and providing pre-employment courses up to the age of 15–16. At a time when the large majority of technical education took place in evening classes, these 'schools' made use of college staff and accommodation during the daytime.

Clearly the nineteenth century structure was growing beyond its intended boundaries, as demand for scholarships at 11+ increased and elementary schools began to cater for all children up to the age of 14 and for some beyond that age. This was the situation reported on in 1920 by a Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places. Taking as its guiding principle the section of the 1918 Education Act referred to above, the Committee concluded that 75% of elementary pupils were 'capable of profiting' from a secondary education up to 16 or beyond.[2] If accepted, this approach would undermine the dominant idea that secondary education was only for the élite – middle-class children and a small number of bright working-class children.

The obvious way forward might have been to provide for a break at 11+ for all children, so that after the primary stage all would proceed to secondary education (in the process restoring to 'secondary' its logical meaning as the second phase of education for the majority). While some Labour local authorities and educationalists like RH Tawney advocated this principle, they had not generally followed its logical application: effectively that this would mean secondary status for all state-funded post-primary schools and would lead to a review of curricula provided in all such schools.

This issue was the subject of a report by the Board of Education's Consultative Committee in 1926 (Hadow Report), which gave official approval to the treatment of post-11 schooling as post-primary, but kept the term 'secondary' to describe the academic grammar school curriculum. Regarding continuing development, this meant the Hadow Committee was happy to recommend building on the various forms of selective and non-selective provision developed by the LEAs. While this can be seen as supporting local experimentation, it can also be seen as a way of avoiding a key issue. To accept what existed because it was there was, in the words of Brian Simon, to confuse 'the conceptual and the concrete' (Simon, 1974).

That is, there is a limit to the extent to which what has developed in the past by local initiative in response to social and industrial pressures can be the adequate and coherent basis for future development.

As the system continued to develop and these anomalies became more evident, the question of secondary education was again referred to the Consultative Committee in 1934, whose report appeared in 1938 (the Spens Report). This report replaced the limited definition of secondary education and accepted that all children should pass at 11 to a secondary school. The committee rejected the possibility of a single secondary school – then called the multilateral school – for reasons including the size of schools, the place of the sixth form and the difficulty of finding head-teachers able to lead both the 'grammar' and the 'modern' sides. Instead, a differentiated pattern of three types of school was recommended: the existing secondary schools (renamed grammar), the new secondary technical schools (based in the existing junior technical schools) and secondary modern schools. For the first time the hope was expressed that the three types of school would have equivalent status or 'parity of esteem'. (For example: 'We hope that our recommendations to secure parity of status for all forms of secondary education will make it easier to transfer pupils to schools better suited to their needs, and without creating any sense of slur or failure.') Since, however, the tripartite system recommended was combined with selection by mental testing, what was proposed was a hierarchy of schools in which the technical and modern schools could only be unequal partners after the brightest and best had been selected for the grammar schools. On the other hand, the Spens Committee specifically recommended a common curriculum in all three secondary schools from ages 11–13, to facilitate effective transfer between schools.

The system of secondary education for all established during the post-war decades officially followed the three-fold model proposed in the 1938 Spens Report. While the 1944 Education Act provided for education according to age, aptitude and ability, and did not mention any type of school, the acceptance of the 'rightness' of the differentiated and selective system in the Ministry and most LEAs made its implementation as national policy almost inevitable. Its inevitability had been reinforced by the recommendations of the *ad hoc* Committee on Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary

Schools, chaired by Sir Cyril Norwood, published in 1943. This committee's report had the effect of again rationalising the current provision by identifying just three types of 'child mind' – three 'rough groupings' of pupils which, 'whatever may be their ground, have in fact established themselves in general educational experience'.[3] Armed with this pseudo-psychological terminology, the Ministry led the LEAs into the era of what was to be tripartite selective secondary education for all children from the age of eleven upwards. In most places, of course, the secondary technical school did not feature. By 1958 only 3.7% of secondary pupils were enrolled in secondary technical schools, and the numbers of schools and pupils in them were in decline (see Bailey, 1990). Secondary provision post-war was bipartite rather than tripartite, and parity of esteem for the secondary modern schools and their pupils did not become a reality as parents increasingly realised the significance of the decision at 11+.

Tripartism and differentiation post-16

If we turn to aspects of post-school provision, it is possible to see other forms of the pattern of three, again more on paper than on the ground. After 1945 it was officially intended that, in the new system, only secondary grammar schools would keep pupils beyond the age of 15–16; for many, the academic route into higher education through the sixth form was a major function of the grammar school. Those who left school for work were to be provided for in one or other of the institutions of further education. Those training for skilled jobs were to attend the technical college for part-time day and evening courses, while the remainder were to be required to attend day-release classes at the county college from the age of 15–18. Had they ever come into being, the aims and curricula of the county colleges would have focused on supporting young workers through adolescence and their transition to work, with an emphasis on preparation for citizenship. These colleges were not seen as a priority immediately after the war and gradually receded from view as a policy aim to be implemented. As voluntary staying-on beyond the school-leaving age of 15 became more common, raising it further to 16 was increasingly seen by LEAs and teachers as the next educational advance, and as the alternative to compulsory day-release for all. Thus a tripartite provision for 15 to 18-

year-olds which would have continued the three secondary schools' emphasis on, respectively, the academic, the technical/vocational and the banausic/civic was not established. The majority of English youngsters continued to leave school at the earliest age allowed, and to receive no further education afterwards.

When post-school education became a subject of policy debate in the mid-1950s, it was as 'technical' not 'further' education. The White Paper of 1956 (entitled 'Technical Education') made it clear that the needs of the economy were the principal objective of this first political engagement in the post-compulsory sector after the war. To improve the service to industry and commerce provided by colleges, the government announced its willingness to provide the finance to build and extend colleges and their facilities, and proposed a system of national, regional, area and local colleges. The first of these, a limited number of Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs), were to have a national role in providing advanced courses for 'technologists' (there were 10 CATs by 1962). Beneath these was envisaged a hierarchy of regional, area and local colleges; the logic of this, not fully implemented, was that regional colleges (of technology) would make provision at a variety of levels including full-time higher university degree standard courses. Area technical colleges were to offer varying amounts of advanced work often for part-time students, while local colleges of further education were to provide mainly non-advanced technical courses for part-time students. Because of the speed of the expansion of student numbers from 1956 onwards, and the overlap of levels in many colleges, the clear distinctions in the proposed grading of the colleges were never fully carried through. Most of the attention, and the greater share of resources, were directed at the CATs, which were removed from the LEAs' systems as direct-grant institutions in 1962. Later in the 1960s, following recommendations in the Robbins Report on Higher Education (1963), they were transferred to the university sector as technological universities.

While the transfer of the CATs made a reality of the Robbins Committee's principle of a single, unitary or unified system of higher education, this was to last only two years. With the appointment of Anthony Crosland as the new Secretary of State for Education and Science in 1965 – and only a few

months after the publication of Circular 10/65 requesting LEAs to prepare plans for non-selective secondary education – a major policy change in higher education was announced. In a speech at Woolwich Polytechnic (a Regional College which had not been granted CAT status) Crosland put forward the view that the system of higher education must be based on the twin traditions of firstly the 'autonomous sector' represented by the universities, and secondly the 'public sector', the leading technical colleges and colleges of education. He rejected the unitary option as one which would lead to a 'continuous rat race' to enter the university sector and would fail to produce the necessary 'diversity' in higher education (see Van der Eyken, 1973, for extracts from this speech).

The White Paper of the following year, 'A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges', formally established the binary policy in HE, with the need for 'new' polytechnics as the second force in higher education justified on grounds of the relevance of their vocational courses; their greater susceptibility to 'social control' which made them more responsive to social needs; and the concentration of expensive facilities for full-time higher education in fewer centres (harking back to the systematisation envisaged in the White Paper of 1956).

The extent to which these policy objectives were achieved during the next two decades is very much open to question. The bifurcation of higher education as a matter of public policy seemed to many to be paradoxical at a time when progress was being made towards a common secondary school, at least in the state sector. Also, the high theoretical ideals of the vocational relevance and 'comprehensive' nature of the new polytechnics implied criticisms of the universities which were to influence the debate on higher education from that time onwards. But again, in 1965–66 as in 1956, the focus of policy had been upon the higher levels and institutions. There was little attention paid to 'the other colleges' in the White Paper's title; there was no framework for their development in their local contexts. Rather, as might have been anticipated, within a few years some Regional Colleges built up their advanced work and began to form, as Colleges or Institutes of Higher Education, a third force in the binary world.

The 'other colleges', then, were given no policy framework or steer by the White Paper of 1966. While 'advanced further education' (in the terminology of the sector) in the new polytechnics was given its role in the dual system of higher education, the 700 or so further education colleges whose work was in the area of 'non-advanced further education', were left to carry on and develop their work under the supervision of their LEAs. In some areas, from the early 1970s onwards, some LEAs redesignated their local college as 'tertiary', by transferring all post-16 courses and students from their secondary schools to the college. This gave the college a clear purpose as part of local tertiary system, in the position of a monopoly provider of state-funded courses of all kinds to students above the compulsory age of schooling. Other local authorities (such as the Inner London Education Authority) sought to develop their colleges' service to the wider community by encouraging them to provide for groups which at that time were not attracted to further education; this new work could include provision for students with special educational needs, adult basic education, and classes for ethnic minority students.

These kinds of local initiatives varied from area to area and so continued the development of FE as what has been called a 'patchwork quilt'. In the absence of any attempt to define a 'standard' or adequate course offer for them, the non-polytechnic colleges grew during the 1970s and 1980s in an unplanned and unco-ordinated way in their diverse local circumstances, though an important reform of technician and business education followed the setting up of the Technician Education and the Business Education Councils (BEC and TEC) in 1973 and 1975 respectively. The following section will review initiatives and changes during these two decades, with particular regard to the 16–19 age group (the school-leaving age was raised to 16 in 1972) in order to illustrate the recent historical background to current policies.

Policy and change in the provision for 16 to 19-year-olds

By the mid-1970s, opportunities for employment for 16-year-old school-leavers had declined owing to the decline of local industries in many areas. This change in the youth labour market coincided with a demographic rise

in the size of the 16-19 age group. The Manpower Services Commission, established in 1973, began to fund ad hoc schemes of work preparation or work experience for young people who had left full-time education and failed to obtain employment.

In 1978 these measures, designed to prevent demoralisation among unemployed school-leavers, were codified into a national scheme, the Youth Opportunities Programme, with a guarantee of an offer of a place during the young person's first year of unemployment. They took place mainly on employers' premises with the colleges providing an element of 'associated further education' which supplemented the teaching of basic skills in broad occupational areas in the work placement. This brought students into colleges who would not traditionally have entered further education because they were in unskilled employment for which no training or further education was thought necessary. They were the beginning of what was called the 'new FE'. While 'old FE' taught the necessary skills and knowledge for specific skilled occupations in industry and continued to do so, though on a diminishing scale, the new schemes were concerned with social and life skills, and basic and generic work skills, which were relevant to a range of jobs and would, it was hoped, enable the young people to cope with job changes in the uncertain labour market. As the problem of youth unemployment grew, colleges in many areas became more involved in these schemes, not least because additional funding, from the Manpower Services Commission, was available. In 1983, the programme was renamed the Youth Training Scheme and was extended to last two years as its terms expanded to include young employees who were then receiving no training. This latter group, forming 40% of the age group in the late 1970s, were already a cause of concern but with increasing unemployment they were lost from policy makers' view. YTS continues today with, nationally, 11% of 16-year-olds participating.

A second new 'start', at the same time, which related clearly to the changed youth labour market and the contemporary trend for more 16-year-olds to stay in full-time education, was the proliferation of one-year full-time courses. Those who stayed on voluntarily without the GCE O-level passes to enable them to take on A-level study, and who were undecided as to their likely employment, were usually offered GCE O-level retake courses

at this point. The pass-rates in these were often very low, leaving many students with little or nothing to show for their year's work. Teachers in schools and colleges – and the examining/awarding bodies connected with them – developed new programmes for this new and growing clientele. In schools these took the form of the (five) subject-based Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) which took students halfway to a GCE A-level. In the further education colleges a different approach was adopted, in that the City and Guilds (CGLI) Foundation Course and the Royal Society of Arts general pre-employment courses, among others, were more vocationally oriented grouped courses with a work experience component. The multiplication of courses of this kind made review and rationalisation necessary and prompted discussion of the curriculum needs of the young people concerned.

Two reports on this topic were published in 1979; the school-focused Keohane Report recommended the retention and general adoption of subject-centred CEE with assessment by examination, while the Further Education Unit (FEU) report, 'A Basis for Choice', favoured a common core of vocational preparation, assessed by portfolio and records of achievement. The Department for Education and Science preferred the FEU report and from this developed the new course and qualification, the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Preparation (CPVE) in the mid 1980s (run by a joint committee of CGLI and BTEC). The target group for this course tended to be defined as those of average or below average attainment (those who did not have the potential to take A-level) who did not have clear vocational objects in mind. The CPVE represented an interesting and important curriculum development for teachers and students, as its thematic structure and assessment styles enabled teachers to develop new ways of teaching young people who wanted to continue to develop their basic skills in a course of general and vocational education. The CPVE was not to survive; as an attempt to give order to a complex situation, it failed. In the late 1980s, the merged Business and Technician (now Technology) Education Council (BTEC) introduced its First Diploma, a more vocationally focused programme than CPVE, with a clear route of progression. The joint committee was disbanded and the CGLI given the responsibility of developing its Diploma in Vocational Education. These two alternatives to CPVE were also to fit more easily into the new structure of qualifica-

tions introduced by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) established after the publication of the Review of Vocational Qualifications published in 1986 (see Richardson, Woolhouse and Finegold, 1993).

GCE, O and A-levels were introduced in 1951 as single-subject examinations to replace the School Certificates. From that time A-levels have been seen as the courses for the highest attainers at 16+ and have remained a constant in 16–19 provision, while other schemes, like those outlined above, have been initiated and modified. During these 45 years, the numbers and proportion of the age group taking A-levels have increased, from a time when no more than 6% of 18-year-olds progressed to higher education to recent years when 36% of 16-year-olds have embarked on A-level study and 33% of the age group goes on to study in higher education. While A-level was originally seen as a course to be taken by students in grammar school sixth forms, during the last thirty years or so the number of A-level students in further education colleges has increased. This development of the further education colleges as alternative sixth forms was never officially decided; but by 1994–95 there were more A-level examination entries in colleges than in schools.

Frequently during the post-war period A-levels have been subjected to criticism for being overly specialised and for the effects on teaching and learning of their single-subject syllabuses and final examinations. While these issues have been referred regularly to advisory bodies and committees which have proposed various measures to broaden A-level studies, governments have been reluctant to reform the course and qualification. While, in recent years, some 'internal' changes have taken place, for example in the introduction of some coursework assessment and modularity, the position of recent governments has been to maintain the *status quo*, with repeated commitments to 'maintain the rigour and depth of GCE A-levels' (Dearing Review terms of reference)[1]. This consistent refusal to broach the reform of A-levels can be seen as the source of the Department for Education and Employment's (DFEE) advocacy of the multi-track system it has inherited – in the same way as the post-war tripartite system was intended to protect and preserve the secondary grammar school and its curriculum.

Because of its ability to direct ear-marked funding towards areas of policy priorities, the stake of the Department for Employment and its agencies (the Manpower Services Commission, Training Agency, and so on) increased from the 1970s up to the creation of the DfEE in 1996. Beginning with the funding of schemes for unemployed young people and adults, and responsibility for supervising the work of the Industrial Training Boards, and, later, the Training Enterprise Councils, the Department of Employment was given a central role in the vocational and training curriculum with the creation of the NCVQ after the Review of Vocational Qualifications published in 1986. Charged with establishing 'a comprehensive framework of national vocational qualifications', the NCVQ regulated examining and validating bodies in the vocational sector. The five levels in the NCVQ framework are familiar to practitioners in post-16 education and training, as is its emphasis on the assessment of competences and outcomes rather than on course design and learning experiences. These outcomes are expressed in units, the accumulation of which leads to the award of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Possible implications of the decision to merge the NCVQ with the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) will be discussed below.

Conclusion

From this summary of the principal developments in provision for the 16–19 age group a general conclusion has to be that this is an account of a succession of starts and initiatives, at different times, in response to particular needs and pressures. The effect of this has been to produce an accretion of courses, programmes and schemes with different rationales, curricular bases, teaching/learning and assessment strategies. Administered, until recently, by the agencies of different central authorities, with different funding regimes, they involved a growing proportion of the 16+ age group, but in the process added to the confusion and anomalies in 16–19 provision as a whole. In particular, the changes in the youth labour market, with other factors like rising achievement in the new GCSE, have led to fundamental changes in the participation of 16 to 19-year-olds. Twenty-five years ago only a minority of the age group received post-compulsory training or education – of either the A-level sixth-form kind, or a

work-related course in a technical college. However, the position now is that the majority of 16-year-olds participate in some form of full-time post-16 education and training. This shift to mass participation took place in established courses and in new programmes developed pragmatically in response to social changes and the 'needs' of target groups.

In important respects, then, the current situation for 16 to 19-year-olds is similar to that in post-primary education in the 1930s; selection by exclusion (or early leaving) has been replaced by selection by differentiation. Official government policy, as set out in the White Paper 'Education and Training for the twenty-first Century' (1991) and endorsed by the Dearing Review of 1996, favours routes or pathways leading to the three qualifications: A-levels, GNVQ and NVQ. Setting aside the issue of how quickly progress can be made in bringing traditional vocational courses into this framework (see Robinson, 1996), from a historical viewpoint there is clearly a question to be asked about how complete and long-lasting in implementation such a tripartite model would be. The justification offered in Chapter 4 of the White Paper, 'Equal Status for Academic and Vocational Education', is in terms of the 'free choice' of students, not as in the past their class, occupational destination or special aptitude. There is, however, mention that students should be 'encouraged to choose a blend of qualifications to suit their individual needs and talents'. As yet it is not clear how this blend will be made operational, nor how the Government's wish 'to remove the remaining barriers to equal status between the so-called academic and vocational routes' will be realised.

Plain statements of what the Government 'wants' in these areas are not likely to have more success than similar policies during previous periods of this century. Disparity of esteem has been the fate of these, as we have seen in this brief historical survey of educational differentiation. Furthermore, this policy failure has, in the past, after a period of experience and analysis, led to policies directed at more unified administration and common provision. From this viewpoint, the *Dearing Review of Qualifications for 16–19 Year Olds* can be seen as a recognition of the current importance of the 16–19 phase of education and training as a policy issue for government. With its reformulation of the three pathways, however, it is clearly in the national tradition of differentiation within the proposed

'framework'. While some see potential for change towards more unified provision (for example Young *et al*,.1997), it seems unlikely that the implementation of the Dearing recommendations will remove any of the long-standing divisions and anomalies in provision for 16 to 19-year-olds. While there may be incremental reform, the long-term significance of the Dearing Review is likely to be that, for the first time, the 16–19 pathways were officially proposed as being parts of a single 'coherent national framework covering all the main qualifications and the achievements of young people at every level of ability'.

For policy-makers the question remains: whether what has been constructed in the past in a piecemeal and unco-ordinated way can be seen to form, or be made to add up to, coherent or relevant provision for the twenty-first century, or even the next decade. Little attempt is made in the White Paper or by the Dearing Review to justify the envisaged pathways in terms of the needs of society or of the young people affected. It has been suggested above that, in the light of similar attempts in the past, it is unlikely that the three pathways will work in the way in which they are planned. This leads to the assessment that the proposed 'framework' is administratively convenient and uncontroversial at this time, in that it does not offend important interest groups. It is based on the assumption that what has been inherited from the past – with projected rationalisation of traditional vocational qualifications into the (G)NVQ framework – is the basis of the appropriate preparation of differentiated groups of young people for life and work the next century.

These are some ways in which the current 16–19 policies can be seen as bearing clear similarities with earlier attempts at differentiated 'models'. There is, however, one respect in which the situation differs from these earlier debates. In the cases of the class-divided nineteenth century structure, the post-war selective secondary system and the binary system of higher education, the rationale for differentiated curricula was paralleled by institutional separation. The significant contrast in contemporary 'tertiary' provision is that the 'routes' lack that clear identification with particular institutions. Sixth-form colleges, further education colleges, schools' sixth forms may, and often do, offer the range of courses: academic, general vocational and specific vocational. For some the place of

learning and assessment is the workplace. In those local areas where Tertiary Colleges are the main providers of post-16 education and training there is some sense in which that institution is identifiable with the whole range of provision. In most places, however, young people of 16, now in the post-compulsory phase, have a number of decisions to make, such as whether to stay on in full-time education, what course to choose *and* the institution in which to study. For students and parents this makes decision-making more complex and difficult. For policy-makers, it means that attention can be focused on the curricula and qualifications since these are not coincident with institutional identities and boundaries.

During the last twenty years discussions of the education and training of the 16–19 age group have referred to the ways in which divided responsibilities at the level of central government departments and among the many examining/validating bodies have prevented moves towards more coherent and comprehensible arrangements for the 16–19 age group. The creation of the Department for Education and Employment and the decision to establish a single Qualifications and Curriculum Authority may come to be seen as important steps towards removing the clear dichotomies and anomalies in the current situation. An understanding of the social aims and dimensions of educational policies and of the Dearing Review[1] suggests that the new Authority will be organised to reflect the current differentiated system of curricula and qualifications for 16–19 with its related rationale of 'equal esteem'. Certainly the resilient rhetoric of tripartism seems set to influence the educational opportunities and experiences of 16 to 19-year-olds for the foreseeable future.

Footnotes

1 For a brief account of the educational reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Simon, B The State and Educational Change 1850–1870. In Simon, B (1994) **The State and Educational Change: Essays in the History of Education and Pedagogy.** Lawrence and Wishart.

2 Report of the Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places (1920) Cmd.968. It is interesting to note the similarity of this guiding principle to that adopted by the Robbins Committee Report in 1963: 'courses in higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so' p 8.

3 Board of Education, Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools, p 2 (1943) Stationery Office. This and other issues are discussed by Gary McCulloch in Parity of Esteem and Tripartism. In Jenkins, J (ed.) (1995) **Studies in the History of Education: Essays presented to Peter Gosden.**

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Chapter 2

The consumer perspective

Tripartism as a response to market pressures

Alison Wolf

Introduction

This paper examines tripartite qualification structures in public education and training from one particular perspective: the relationship between providers and consumers. In this instance the providers are governments and their agencies, and the consumers are individual students and their families. Systems or structures of qualifications are quintessentially government creations, in a way that individual qualifications need not be. Individual awarding bodies, or educational institutions, or occupational groups, can offer particular qualifications without having any views on, or interest in, the merits of tripartism, bipartism, or the like. A nationally-applied tripartite curriculum, a tripartite system of schools, or a national framework in which all qualifications are allocated to one of three pathways – all these are the product of governments operating in a public (nationalised) sector.

Governments ultimately can impose tripartite (or other) structures to the degree that they control funding and/or enforce compliance by law (for example, through compulsory schooling). In most modern economies, the vast majority of students are to be found in public education, where governments can and do impose particular curricula, qualification structures, institutional arrangements and the like. However this paper argues that,

even when the monopoly seems near total, government 'providers' do not, in fact, operate in a vacuum or with complete freedom. Their decisions and actions are heavily influenced by the behaviour of the 'consumers'. Many education policies can very usefully be analysed as a product of both governmental objectives and 'market' forces, and in a way that long predates any overt attempts to create markets in state-funded education.

Of course, this focus on government providers and student consumers is, like any other, partial in what it describes. Nonetheless, it provides some especially interesting insights into the development of tripartite policies. Viewed from this perspective, tripartism appears as a governmental response to particular sorts of pressure and tension in the education system, and especially to changing demands associated with increases in student participation rates. Tripartite systems are not the natural product of differences in learning style, or a reflection of deep-rooted category differences in the sorts of things education and training institutions teach. They are not the only possible response to pressure either: a comparison of different countries facing similar pressures and demands indicates that a bipartite or four-track response is equally possible. Tripartism is, in fact, a limited and ultimately unsatisfactory way of conceiving of educational structure and policy. Defusing pressures in the short-term is its main, and also its very limited, contribution.

Key characteristics of modern public education systems

The education systems of modern industrialised and democratic nations are all dominated by a public sector, funded from general tax revenue. However, they all also retain smaller or larger elements of private funding and all are also, to varying degrees, responsive to the demands and opinions of both individual citizens and organised, non governmental groups. Even in a system as centrally designed and regulated as, say, that of France or Singapore, enrolments on different courses reflect demand from students and not just the central government's ideas of how many people should be studying what. In some parts of some systems – such as post-

school vocational education in the United States – it might seem that one has a 'pure' market system. However, even here, financial aid and incentives for students reflect governmental priorities.

We can see the UK and other contemporary societies as occupying different points on a spectrum, with a country's particular position reflecting the balance among a number of factors. Among these, two 'pairs' of factors are of particular importance.

The first 'pair' consists of the most fundamental objectives of any mass education system: *selection* and *skill development*. In this case the skills represent not simply the highly specific and/or vocational, but the whole gamut of academic and life skills, their associated knowledge and understanding, and the values which the society wishes to promote and instil.

Of this pair of objectives, the former, selection, is hugely important. Indeed, one can see it as a defining characteristic of modern industrial societies that selection through the mechanism of formal education is seen as legitimate in a way that other forms of selection are not. Many educational commentators take as their theme the dominance of the selection function in education; Dore for example, in his discussion of the 'Diploma Disease' (1976, 1997), or Randall Collins on the 'Credential Society' (1979), or Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1989) in his analysis of how educational (and social/economic) success is bound up with cultural characteristics and so legitimises the inheritance of wealth and status.

However, education is not only about selection. It is also about the inculcation of substantive skills (and values). In the last 150 years, during which prolonged education in formal institutions has become the norm, the most important of these skills have been reading, writing and mathematics (arithmetic), because these are also the most generally relevant in the workplace and in adult life. Indeed, their vocational relevance and dominance of the curriculum are if anything increasing, albeit at different levels from the past. Alongside these exist a shifting group of other substantive skills and subjects, including the needlework of the nineteenth century, the Marxist texts of Communist societies, history, science, foreign languages, and a

medley of more or less specific vocational skills – plastering, engineering, floristry, surgery, touch-typing. Both selection and skill development are fundamental purposes of any modern education system; they co-exist.

The other 'pair' consists, on the one hand, of *government*; and on the other of *individual students and their families*. In modern education systems, which are overwhelmingly state-organised and state-financed, one can see the former as the provider, the second as the consumer. The relationship has strong elements of the command economy. The government decides what is good for people – the qualification structure, the curriculum – and how much it will spend. Countries vary in the degree of control, and also in the extent to which governmental agencies decide precisely how many places there will be at each level and for each type of course; but all modern states have extensive powers in this respect. Students (for whom long periods of education are compulsory) take what they are offered, though they compete with each other within the system.

In practice, things are not so simple. Governments themselves have general objectives and values. Any government, however despotic, relies on certain groups to keep it in power; and in a democracy the process of building vote-winning coalitions, and satisfying the groups one represents, is constant. In many countries, historically and today, religious values, and the power of organised religion or religious parties, have played an important part in determining government policy on the curriculum. In contemporary Western countries, politicians and the social partners are alike in seeing education as essentially *about* economic growth and national competitiveness, and this has enormous repercussions both for government policy and, often, for the whole institutional framework of educational policy making. (For example, in Germany the regulations that govern apprenticeship are drawn up by representatives of employers, unions and government together; while in the UK, all NVQs must be based on, and only on, standards drawn up by lead bodies which supposedly represent and speak for a given occupational sector.)

In academic subjects, the influence of employment is less obvious; but other organised groups may be extremely important. Between 1980 and 1997, the maths syllabus in English schools (including GCSE and A-level requirements) has been subject to almost continuous change which cannot

be understood without taking into account the influence of both the universities, and their demands for disciplinary preparation; and the influence of teachers' curriculum associations, and associated 'reformist' ideas. Media headlines, voters' letters (those of parents and non parents), opinion polls – all affect government decision-making.

Ultimately, however, in public education systems, it is the government which produces its curriculum, its qualification system, its institutional framework. What is produced will reflect the various forces brought to bear on it; but also, directly and indirectly, its views on what the country 'needs' by way of skill development, and on how the selective functions of education should be carried out. All this is then offered to the consumers, to students and their families; and their response is far from irrelevant. In most countries, there is quite a considerable 'market' element to the process by which course development or course/qualification numbers are decided.

The usual modern pattern is one which lays down a common curriculum for the primary years, and for a good number of years beyond that. However, at some point in the education system, that more or less common core gives way to different options. Older students are able to apply for a particular course or qualification which they want, but it is not simply a question of fighting over government-mandated places; the number of students following an option also has some relationship to application rates. In parts of the system, the actual nature of the courses and qualifications may itself be opened up, and different bodies may be permitted to offer courses, which survive only if there is sufficient demand. The places in the system where enrolments reflect demand more than they do government fiat will vary from country to country, as will the extent to which enrolments reflect consumer choice rather than producer power – but there are some such points in every system with which I am acquainted.

At any given moment, one can analyse a country's education system in terms of how it balances the objectives of selection and skill development and of the relative influence of the two actors – the government and the body of 'consumers', students and their families. As the next section

explains, an analysis in these terms is especially helpful in explaining why tripartism may attract policy-makers; and why the sort of tripartism which attracts them tends to change.

Tripartism, selection and skills development

Tripartism has often been analysed as a way of institutionalising and codifying the process of sorting students hierarchically, and identifying those who will go to the top, middle or bottom of the adult occupational hierarchy. It has also been advocated, and analysed, in terms of the very different teaching and learning styles required for different content. However, one must then ask not why tripartism is so popular but why it is so *unpopular*. It has, in fact, been adopted only sporadically, within or across countries; and, as argued in more detail below, there is little sign that it arises naturally in educational systems. This section argues that when tripartite structures are adopted, this can best be understood in terms of the interaction between 'system' objectives, whether selection or skill development, and consumer demands. More simply, when there is a conflict between what the system wants people to learn, or do, or accept, and what the student population wants, tripartism may offer an administrative, defusing mechanism.

Tripartism and selection

It is in the Government's interest to organise education 'neatly', in the sense of having clear, definitive selection mechanisms, keeping the process of education as cheap as possible overall, and ensuring that able students go into areas which it considers important. The sort of direction of individuals which Communist countries attempted carries this impulse through to its logical conclusion. Individuals, however, have an interest in getting to the 'top'.

There are major inter-cultural differences, and differences over time, in how far people believe they have any real chance of getting very or even moderately high on the educational and occupational pyramids, and therefore in their particular aspirations. A hundred years ago, formal educational quali-

fications had fairly little to do with the life chances of most people. The local and family networks that got you an apprenticeship, or a place in a good firm with prospects, were far more important. However, in a modern society, education is the single most important route to, and the general legitimator of, success. Huge increases in the numbers following a full secondary education have been followed by comparable surges in higher education participation rates. (Clark 1995, OECD 1996, Wolf 1997).

The enthusiasm for ever more formal certification is completely rational in economic terms. The perceived hierarchy of qualifications is mirrored in the statistics showing economic returns to types of certificate; while the gap between those with and without formal qualifications has been widening (Bennett *et al* 1992, Karoly 1996, Robinson 1997). High youth unemployment has certainly given this qualification spiral an extra turn, as young people look for additional ways of standing out from their competitors; and some lower status courses are probably best seen, all over the West, as 'parking places' for those without a job rather than anything offering concrete short or long-term benefits. However, the long-term relationship between qualifications and success is illustrated not only by income statistics, but by the relationship between the local economy and staying-on rates. Thus, in late twentieth century Britain we find that the *more* vibrant the local economy, and the *lower* the rate of unemployment, the higher the numbers who stay on in education (Cheng 1995).

In this situation, any point at which there is serious selection among students, and winnowing out of individuals, will be a point of strain. Students want to stay in education, and gain the qualifications which they perceive as increasingly vital: and they therefore want selection to be delayed, and, as individuals, to remain 'in contention'. They (and their parents) do not want to be told at age 11, or indeed at age 16, that the most desirable options are definitively ruled out, and that their life has been decided for them.

In the past, the key selection points, in this and other countries, were at around 11 (the 11+, the start of the old French *lycée*, the division of German children between *Gymnasium*, *Realschule, Hauptschule*), or at around 14 – the separation into four tracks in the Netherlands, the division between vocational and academic tracks in modern France, the choice between CSE and O-levels. In every advanced industrial country, the

selection points are getting later and later, at least for the large majority of young people. (Some of Dearing's proposals attempt to reverse this for England; but this author would bet very little money on his success.) However, in every case, there still *are* key periods. Typically, these are when you do or do not enter a pre-university upper secondary course; and when university entrance itself takes place.

At these selection points there will be those who cope easily with the academic demands of school, and those who are failing badly. Those who are not coping so well may, quite rationally, tend to stop trying, play truant, and figure largely in the list of worries facing education ministers. However, there will also be a considerable number of students who either are not definitively failures, or who resolutely resist being labelled as such. These are the students who, in France for example, wish to repeat the year again and again rather than be relegated to the lower-status vocational track. They are the students who, in England, fill the GCSE Maths re-sit classes, trying to gain the elusive C grade that so many gatekeepers demand. But put more positively, they are also the students for whom democratic governments feel it is so important to offer official routes back up to higher level, higher status options. These are, potentially, highly desirable members of the workforce: they and their parents are also potential and actual voters.

One of the reasons for tripartite structures, from this perspective, is to provide for this troublesome 'middle group': those who have not (and in many cases should not have) accepted that they have reached the terminal stage of their education but who are also not absolutely clear candidates for successful selection onto the next rung or step of the pyramid. Routes that lead only into the workplace, with or without specific vocational skill training, are long-established, but decreasingly attractive to this group: because they are seen as low status, because they do not provide higher education entry, because they do not, in fact, offer a very good match with a labour market which, for young people, is characterised by frequent job and occupational changes in early years, and an increasing emphasis on the 'academic' skills of language and mathematics. At the same time, allowing unlimited entry into the traditional academic stream is likely to invite a

storm of criticism from large parts of the population, including higher education, and also prove unsuitable in substance for many aspiring students. A middle option for a middle group can defuse the problem.

It follows from this analysis that *tripartite structures will be more common at the key junctures than elsewhere in the education system*; and indeed I would argue that this is exactly the case. It will also follow that the *points where tripartite structures occur will change over time*, following changes in where key selection decisions take place. This too is illustrated in the next section. But it also follows that tripartism is a possible administrative remedy rather than a necessary corollary of an education system's objectives and development – and that other structures are equally possible. And if that is the case, trying to force the whole of an educational system into a tripartite model, regardless of whether it involves key selection points or not, begins to look rather odd.

Tripartism and skill development

This paper concentrates on the relationships between educational organisation, selection, and student/family demand. This is partly for reasons of space, partly to highlight a neglected perspective on educational policy, and partly because most tripartite policies are related to selection issues. However, the education system's role in developing substantive skills can also give rise to strains, and these too can make tripartite policies attractive to governments.

If we look at the last century in the major European countries, we find that every government has, at some point, taken steps consciously to promote courses which it believes are under-subscribed from the point of view of national welfare (see, for example, Bash & Green 1995). These tend to be 'technical', or 'work-related' and reflect current political views on what the economy needs to be strong and competitive.

In all these countries, both governments and students operate under the legacy of the highly bifurcated education systems of the nineteenth century. This essentially involved low-status mass education ending at about age 14; and a very high-status academic pre-university system which

concentrated overwhelmingly on classics and mathematics. (As discussed further below this was not a particularly English pattern; and nor is its legacy.) The relative status of these different pathways has lived on to a considerable degree: in particular the prestige of the academic/theoretical pathway tends to be self-perpetuating. (It is possible to combine very high status for engineering at university level with the dominance of theoretical/academic choices pre-university.) Employers may trumpet the importance of practical skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills and the like; but in fact they recruit largely by formal qualifications, using these to identify what they perceive to be the most generally intelligent and fast-learning group among applicants. Again, this is true generally: for example, a major reason for high levels of motivation and work among German school pupils is the importance of school grades in providing entry not merely to higher education but also to desirable apprenticeships (Soskice 1993).

I have argued elsewhere that young people's choices tend to be highly rational from their own individual point of view (see Wolf 1993, 1996, 1997). They are conscious of the relative hierarchy of qualifications; and also conscious that the nature of modern employment is rapidly changing and increasingly service-oriented. In this situation, keeping your options open and going for general education rather than highly specific technical or vocational training starts to look like the sensible choice.

For the most part, this bothers governments only insofar as it creates selection pressures (see above). Attempts to talk up 'parity of esteem' between vocational and academic routes, for example, tend to be just that – talk, aimed at reducing selective pressures and reassuring the potentially frustrated. However, sometimes the choices made by young people cut across government beliefs that particular occupations and particular trades are needed by the country.

The most obvious example is the periodic panics which occur over technical education. In some countries, historical and institutional factors and attitudes ensure that a considerable number of quite high-achieving young people enter technical routes in their late teens. In others, this is not the case. Some perceived skill shortages (for example, maths teachers or university engineers) are addressed by governments through specific financial

incentives, such as bursaries, or open-ended commitments to fund engineering faculties at a high per-student rate. (The latter example explains the large number of engineering faculties in UK universities, chasing students among whom there is a shortage of well-qualified applicants. The result, paradoxically, has probably been to reduce the status of engineering in the eyes of young people.) However, an alternative approach, which has been adopted on a number of occasions, is to try and create a special, visible, well funded and separate option. The objective is to alter students' choices, and make the shortage area attractive to the well-qualified. The tripartite structure of French higher education illustrates this. University Technical Institutes (IUTs) have been introduced alongside the universities and the *grandes écoles*, and given preferential treatment. In the UK, the ill-fated technical high schools of the post-war period were in part the product of comparable arguments (Sanderson 1994), as are the CTCs.

What should be emphasised, in these examples, is the centrality of the government as an actor. Institutional tripartism emerged because of government attempts to change consumer choices, and alter the relative desirability of existing pathways. There was also nothing essentially *tripartite* about the process. New sectors could, in principle, be the second, or the fifth, or even the fifty-fifth option.

The results of government intervention into qualification systems are very distinctive, and especially visible at the point of labour market entry and training. There is constant decentralised and ongoing changes in the nature of the labour market and in the training systems and requirements of particular industries and occupations. Left to themselves, these tend to produce a complex and changing set of courses and qualifications, whose relative desirability can alter hugely over time. If you find a neat set of exclusive categories, whether or not it is recognisably *tripartite*, you can be certain that this betokens government involvement and control; sometimes to regulate selection; sometimes to alter the choices made between types of learning, and often simply to regulate and monitor the flow of public funds.

Some empirical evidence: post-war developments in England, Germany, France and Sweden

This section discusses recent changes in the education systems of a number of European countries. England and Wales are discussed in the greatest detail; but a number of other EU states are examined to see whether tripartism has emerged in similar ways elsewhere.

In all these countries, there have been three shared and extremely important developments during the period 1965–95: a huge increase in participation rates in post-compulsory schooling; a huge increase in participation rates in higher education; and a major increase in the modal number of years of schooling during which students all, or mostly, pursue a 'common core' of studies. In the context of the world as a whole, the countries discussed are also very similar in other ways; wealthy, highly industrialised, democratic, market-based, with ageing populations and strong political concern over the need to remain competitive and upgrade skill levels in the population.

England and Wales

Primary education has been virtually universal in England and Wales for well over a century now. Forster's 1870 Bill is generally cited as the key date, but revisionist historians argue that this actually marks the nationalisation of primary education, and that well over 90% of children were already in school for six years or more before that (West 1975).

Compared to most other European countries, this has also been a system in which government control was relatively light and market forces relatively strong and visible. Until recently, there has been, by international standards, extremely little central control over the 5–16 school curriculum. Even the constraints imposed by the importance of public examinations for students' life-chances has been offset by the wide variety of courses offered by the examination boards. In post-compulsory education, there have been periods when enrolments were overwhelmingly 'demand-responsive', with active government intervention confined to such activities as the establishment of the Business Education Council (BEC) and the Technician Education Council (TEC), who later merged to become the Business and

Technology Education Council (BTEC). Colleges in particular have always been essentially oriented to consumer demand, because they cater to students for whom attendance is voluntary.

These freedoms have diminished markedly in recent years, through legislation and funding incentives, such as the National Curriculum, limitation of A-level syllabuses, the promotion of NVQs through contracts for training the young and adult unemployed and the proposed tight regulation of the qualifications which may be offered in publicly funded provision. At the same time there has been a movement to increase the influence of 'consumers' in other ways, by encouraging students and parents to compare and choose among institutions on the basis of 'quality indicators' (and particularly league tables). Choice among suppliers has been opened up; but choice of what is supplied has not.

Secondary education in separate establishments has been universal policy since the Second World War, and by 1974 the compulsory school leaving age had been raised to its current level of 16. At that time, two quite separate sets of public examinations existed which were designed for the 16-year-old age group: GCE O-levels and CSEs. However, in the 1980s, they were replaced by the first set of examinations to be designed for the age group as a whole. These examinations, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), are normally taken in eight or nine subjects, each of them receiving a separate grade. Since entry for these qualifications has been and remains voluntary, they provide a first direct indicator of consumer choice (as well as an example of a move into and out of bipartism rather than tripartism).

In the mid-1960s, almost half of those leaving school did so without any formal qualifications at all. By the mid-1980s this figure had fallen dramatically and now fewer than one in ten 16-year-olds fails to obtain any GCSEs. Among the 'qualified' there is a high degree of uniformity in the subjects taken. This uniformity has been greatly increased by the introduction of the National Curriculum which runs to the end of year 11 which is the normal point at which GCSEs are taken. Discussions over minority subjects, reducing the time for some subjects (and so not taking them at GCSE), GNVQ Part I and so on, take place at the margin: for the vast majority of students the bulk of their curriculum is a common one.

Throughout the 1980s, low participation rates by English students were a major source of discussion. In the mid 80s, 53% of the cohort still left full-time schooling at the first opportunity (age 16), and another 20% remained for only one further year, thus having insufficient time to complete the courses for the senior public examinations taken at age 18 (HMSO 1986, Spours 1995). However, between 1986 and 1995, this picture was transformed. Full-time participation at age 16 increased to 72%, with the remainder of the age group largely involved in apprenticeships or government training schemes which involved some part-time formal training. At age 17, 59% remain in full-time education, mostly working to complete advanced secondary courses.

Over the same period, higher education has expanded at an even faster rate than senior secondary enrolments. While university growth followed on from the post-war move to universal secondary education, in more recent years universities' appetite for students has directly affected the numbers staying on to 18, and the choices they make (Wolf op. cit). The first huge increase came in the 1960s, with the creation of a group of nine new 'plate-glass' universities, mostly built on out-of-town campuses near provincial towns, and an expansion of numbers in established higher education institutions. The figures for full-time students on undergraduate courses in UK universities rose from 98,000 in 1957-8 to 205,000 a decade later (HMSO 1968). From the mid-1980s, there was another sudden acceleration in growth of student numbers. By 1994-5, full-time home-domiciled first degree and diploma students numbered close to 900,000. There were also 285,000 part-time students (overwhelmingly UK-domiciled) studying for undergraduate degrees and diplomas and 335,000 post-graduates. This took the total university student numbers in 1994 to just over one and a half million.

England and Wales, then, experienced the three trends identified at the start of this section: towards a longer, more encompassing common or core curriculum, towards greater numbers staying on beyond school leaving age, and towards a mass higher education system. At the same time, there have been changes in the parts of the system which can be seen as clearly tripartite.

In the immediate post-war period, tripartism characterised discussion and, to some degree, organisation of the 11-15 age group in England and Wales. However, it is misleading to characterise FE and general post-16 education of this post-war period as tripartite.

In England and Wales compulsory schooling (years 1 to 11) is not currently tripartite in any real way. Education for 16 to 18-year-olds is being organised around three quite distinct types of qualification. However, beyond this point, it is again more misleading than otherwise to use a tripartite classification.

This change coincides with a move from a society where very few people went to university, and selection and life-chances were closely tied to the type of secondary school you attended, to one in which the qualifications taken post-16 are key. In other words, the tripartite area of the system coincides with an area of selective pressures, but has changed in line with changes in key points of selection. This is consistent with the analysis of the previous section. Equally interesting is the history of the latest tripartite developments, for it bears out another major thesis of this chapter: that tripartism is used as an administrative device only because and insofar as it is convenient, not because it derives from the basic goals of the education system.

The 'three pathways' proposed by Dearing for the 16 to 19-year-old age group and, by extension, for all post-compulsory non-HE awards, derive from the roughly tripartite nature of current provision. Of the three categories, A-levels are the longest-standing. GNVQs were introduced in 1992 and have *very* partially replaced pre-existing awards, notably some of the BTEC Diplomas. NVQs are a sub-set of vocationally specific awards, and in this age group are largely confined to young people on government-funded training schemes, and apprentices.

For the country as a whole during 1965-95, the increase in A-level students has been particularly striking. In 1966, approximately 15% of the cohort was following full-time A-level courses. By 1996, this figure had increased to 36%, and concerns over standards were becoming more frequent. By the early 1990s, virtually 100% of those who passed two A-levels or more went on to university, but they accounted, even so, for a decreasing percentage of the student body. The remaining places were taken up by adults

entering by access courses, and by young people who had taken full-time 'semi-vocational' courses, mostly BTEC National Diplomas (Smithers & Robinson, 1991 and HESA 1993 op. cit.).

The very partial and imperfect nature of the transformation of BTEC Nationals into GNVQs is central to the movement of tripartism from the lower secondary school to the post-compulsory, pre-university period. BTEC Diplomas and Certificates, and their BEC and TEC predecessors, were originally quite markedly 'vocational' in nature: that is they reflected and mostly responded to signals from the workplace. (In one of its first forays into controlling and 'tidying up' this part of education and training, the government of the mid-70s gave BEC and TEC something of a monopoly here, at the expense of City & Guilds.)

As participation rates increased, the nature of National Diplomas in particular changed. While their enrolments did not begin to rival those of A-levels – partly, no doubt, because they were not available in schools – they did grow steadily. (In fact, between 1985 and 1992, when GNVQs began to affect the picture, their growth rate was twice that of A-levels.) At the same time, they became increasingly important as a route into higher education. Many young people, who were unsure of their chances of success at A-level, or wanted to hedge their bets with a work-related course, chose to do a BTEC National, with higher education entry as their primary goal.

In other words, the awards became an important way of easing the pressure placed on the education system by changes in the key 'selection points'. The modal BTEC National student (like the modal GNVQ Advanced student) can be identified quite simply and clearly in academic terms, as having reasonably good GCSE results, which are nonetheless not good enough for acceptance onto a course of three A-levels. A very large number think in terms of HE progression. (This number is over 50% at any given time: but the individuals concerned vary, so that the proportion planning HE studies at some point during their two year diploma is closer to 70%: FEDA *et al*, 1995, 1997; FEU *et al* 1994.) Some Diplomas, such as Business, developed a flavour of general education; but at the same time, many others evolved with a much more specific, vocational and local purpose, oriented towards local industry or specific vocational areas like nursery nursing, fabrics or sports industries.

This process of development was organic (some would say messy), but did produce something which could reasonably be seen as a third educational option for the 16-19 age group. Alongside it, there existed a huge variety of vocational and other courses, catering to some young people (notably those entering craft trades), and to many adults.

In the 1980s, the British Government decided that it was imperative to systematise and regulate this mass of vocational qualifications. In doing so, its objective was, as many people reading this essay will remember, not a tripartite system at all. It was a *bipartite* system consisting of a large, encompassing NVQ sector, with A-levels continuing alongside, as the school-based full-time academic option (DES 1991).

The reason we now have three pathways, not two, is not studied government policy, but consumer demand. Continuing (and indeed growing) demand for BTEC Diplomas, alongside mounting evidence of problems with NVQ delivery, finally convinced Employment Department policy-makers that the bipartite option could not be implemented. The underlying demands by students, themselves responding to social pressures, were for something quite different from NVQs. Policy then moved to constructing a fully-fledged tripartite system (A-level, GNVQ, NVQ) with schools for the first time able to offer a wide selection of awards which had been previously seen as effectively post-education.

What would have happened to BTEC awards if the GNVQ reforms had never happened, or if NVQ rules had been loose and inclusive rather than rigid, demanding and often unrealisable? Would they have been able to continue performing two different roles, with some awards essentially vocational and others essentially providing the quite general education, alternative pathways, and relief of selection pressures, which characterise the middle layer of a fully tripartite system? It is impossible to know: but certainly the attempt to create full tripartism has highlighted these very different roles by emphasising general education and selection at the expense of responsiveness to the labour market.

Despite all the original lip-service to workplace entry as well as progression into HE, GNVQs very quickly became a general educational award for the middle achievement level of 16 to 19-year-olds. This was for

a number of reasons, not least the fact that no-one was thinking much about older students, but predominantly due to the insistence on including schools (inevitable once a government began to think of this as a wide-spread option) and developing a limited number of tightly-specified GNVQ subject options. GNVQs also involved a large number of changes in assessment and curriculum, and have had major implementation problems among their main (young) target audience. These problems were largely unnecessary, but have unfortunately become confounded with, and distracted attention from, their failure to provide for a large part of the pre-existing BTEC market.

Tripartism is largely about selection and sorting. The core population enrolled in its middle layer are those who have not made conclusive career choices. This is one reason why it is so difficult to define what ought to be taught. However, a very large part of what has been taught in FE colleges, and which is now being characterised as 'traditional vocational courses', has not been general and selection-oriented in this way. It has been *primarily* about particular jobs and skills, and it has not, in my view, been in any way tripartite or even bipartite in structure. Of course, there are status hierarchies in the workplace, and qualifications for which there are more or less demanding prerequisites, and lower or higher economic returns, but the picture is far more complex, and shifts far more rapidly, than is the case with the well-marked out pathways which determine progress through the full-time educational system.

The way in which GNVQ growth has stalled illustrates this very well. As explained above, when the government abandoned its attempt to create an encompassing bipartite model, it launched an encompassing tripartite one instead: but this, too, has failed to develop (FEDA *et al* 1995, 1997). Before NVQs and GNVQs, a quasi-market in post compulsory education produced a loose quasi-tripartite structure for 16 to 19-year-olds, and a complex array of more or less vocational and more or less general awards for the rest of the population. We now have four pathways for the young, because many of the BTEC Diplomas and other 'traditional' awards have survived outside the tightened, more rigid tripartite framework, in response to specific demands.

We also have a post-19 population almost none of whom are doing GNVQs, some of whom are doing BTEC Diplomas, more of whom are doing BTEC Certificates, and very many of whom are doing awards which do not fit the tripartite structure at all. Why should they? The clients for these awards are not primarily engaged in the teenagers' struggle for advancement through certification. Tripartism as a way of dealing with selection pressure is not a priority for them. One is left to question the sense of trying to push all the awards in the sector into a framework which was developed in the first place as an administrative response to a failed bipartite policy, and to the preferences of a very particular sub-set of the consumer population.

Germany

There is always a danger of constructing too elaborate a theoretical framework on the basis of too small a sample: and this is especially true in education, where systems always carry particular historical and cultural baggage. However, there are some interesting parallels between recent developments in England and Wales, and the post-war changes in the German system.

For well over 100 years Germany has been held up to UK policy-makers as an example to emulate. Today, we tend to know it best for its apprenticeship system (the dual system); but it is also characterised by a long-standing tripartite organisation of secondary schooling. The changes that have occurred here illustrate again the interaction between government policies and the choices of students.

The clear tripartite division of German secondary education only took on its current form quite recently. Historically, the upper-middle class sent its children to the academic *Gymnasium*; while for everyone else there was the general *Volksschule*. Today, in almost all the states, we have the academic *Gymnasium*, a certificate from which (the *abitur)* allows entry to university; the *Hauptschulen* or vocational schools, much admired abroad but increasingly rejected by young people at home, and the *Realschulen*, which follow a general curriculum with some technical elements and provide entry to higher-technical education.

Over the last few decades, *Gymnasium* entries have risen sharply, and so too have those of the *Realschulen*. They are the success stories of the last 20 years, with enrolments which have surged at the expense of vocational schools (*Hauptschulen*). However, the *Realschule* is not an institution whose own remit and objectives have ever been clearly defined by either state or federal governments, even as it has continued to grow. Current institutions include the descendants of a miscellany of institutions. Some of these were designed to teach the new subjects which were rejected by the super-tradition *Gymnasien* of the pre-war period (science, history, geography), others were designed as technical schools providing specific training of a pre-technical institute type.

The Max-Planck Institute, in their survey of German education, opine that:

> *The traditional vague designation 'middle school' points up a serious weakness of this school's position in the educational arena. It was difficult for the Realschule to make good its claim to independence and a distinctive character vis-à-vis the Volksschule and the Gymnasium. The 'psychological' and 'sociological' explanations of the Realschule's raison d'être reflected this difficulty more than they helped to overcome it. These explanations postulated a special type of person, 'practically and theoretically gifted' and a group supposed to have the occupational function of 'mediating between planning and execution'. The apologetic intention of these constructs was so obvious, though, that they failed to be convincing (1983: p 186).*

To paraphrase: if you're so dumb, how come you're so rich? Why has this 'weakly conceptualised' institution been such a success, increasing its share of the 'market' so enormously over the last 25 years? The most satisfactory explanation is, I would argue, that the *Realschule* provides an alternative route in a system where competition and selection are ever-more apparent. University entrance rates have soared in Germany as elsewhere; but entry depends absolutely on possession of an *abitur* and the *Gymnasium* course cannot be achieved by everyone. At the same time, young people and their families are convinced that they need a general educational qualification and a progression route onwards – both of which are provided by the *Realschule* certificate.

In 1970s and 1980s Germany, as in 1990s England, the emergence of a fully-fledged tripartite system indicates where selection pressures are at their highest in the system. Diplomas have always been important in Germany (reflecting, in part, the widespread requirements for a licence if one is to practise a trade) and there has always been a clear hierarchy associated with them. (Germany's great engineering companies are run by university-trained engineers with doctorates, not by products of the dual system of apprenticeship.) In Germany, as elsewhere, as labour market conditions worsen, and economic change accelerates, young people feel under increasing pressure to collect as many qualifications as possible – the more prestigious, the better. The 'best' apprenticeships are now often taken by young people with *abiturs* (this group would typically have less than top grades) who combine an accelerated apprenticeship programme with university studies; and there are moves to open up progression routes for apprentices into the higher technical institutions (though not the universities). In general, post-school pathways are becoming more complex, and less easily categorised into the two paths of apprenticeship or university. This same growing complexity means that they are not easily sorted into three pathways either.

France and Sweden

This section finishes with some brief remarks on two other countries, with very different traditions: the highly élitist French system, which emphasises the value of general education and the role of the school in developing national identity; and the Swedish system which is highly inclusive in its ethos, with a relatively long history of comprehensive education and high retention rates.

Over the last 10 years the French have, as a matter of overt public policy, greatly increased the proportion of young people completing studies up to *baccalauréat* level. In doing so, they have developed a tripartite *baccalauréat* structure: general, technical and vocational. This division, apparently close to that informing German school organisation, might seem to

argue for the 'reality' of this categorisation and the alignment of tripartism with some genuine differences in content and learning style. However, the underlying dynamic is rather different.

The technical *baccalauréat.* was developed much less as a way of dealing with participation and enrolment pressures than as a way of promoting certain curriculum objectives. The objective was to create courses that were more practical, employer-oriented, technical and modern than the traditional *baccalauréats*, and thereby to alter the choices made by able teenagers. In practice, although a few options have become well-recognised in the labour market, and relatively prestigious, the technical *baccalauréat.* has largely become the downgraded option to a general *baccalauréat.* Holders of it have a much higher failure rate at university; but it is nonetheless seen overwhelmingly as a general qualification.

The *baccalauréat professionnel* is the vocational option and had a different origin. Although it is again conceptualised with a greater workplace orientation than the GNVQ, its major purpose was to provide a vehicle for the expected and materialising explosion in numbers staying on to complete higher secondary studies. Although it is the same formal level of diploma, it is aimed expressly at a less academic population, who will have come either via lower-level vocational awards, or by dropping out of the technical *baccalauréat* programme. In other words, the tripartite structure of the current *baccalauréat* is as much the product of two separate governmental responses to two separate perceived problems as of any underlying tripartite logic.

Finally, in Sweden, major reforms to the whole of upper secondary education have not resulted in a tripartite structure at all, but in a bipartite one. Students in upper secondary school enter one of sixteen 'national programmes', all of which, in principle, allow progress to higher level studies and are therefore of equivalent level. In practice, however, these programmes fall into one of two groups: academic (recruiting over 40% of the age group) or vocational (recruiting almost all the rest). These reforms greatly reduced the number of vocational options at upper secondary level, and increased the general education component in all of them. They were the result of a major system-wide review which has made all upper secondary programmes the same length, and given them all a substantial

common core of general education, but provided for large amounts of differentiation within the two main strands. Students aiming for university entrance will normally select an academic option.

Sweden is an interesting example with which to end, because, in spite of its small size, it possesses a number of very large, highly advanced technical companies and is known for its world-class engineering. It employs large numbers of graduate engineers, but also large numbers of highly trained technicians. Moreover, because of their importance to the Swedish economy, these companies (which include, for example, ABB and Ericsson) have considerable influence with government policy makers; in education, as well as elsewhere. Viewed separately, therefore, the Swedish case leads one to question both whether there is any necessary link between industrial structure and tripartite organisation and whether tripartism is even a universal administrative response to common pressures from rising participation.

Conclusion

Tripartism is a common response to pressures faced by most modern societies; namely the increasing importance of formal education in the labour market, the increasing legitimacy of selection via education and the illegitimacy of other mechanisms, and the increasing numbers of young people who wish to use extended formal education and qualifications as a route to occupational and financial success. The advantage of tripartism for governments is that it offers a mechanism through which pressures can be reduced. Students in the middle track of a tripartite system may move on and up to higher education and higher status occupations; but this track is also important because it offers a prolonged period in which the less successful can be 'cooled out' of the education system and accept their relative 'failure'.

However, this paper argues that tripartism is neither a necessary nor a universal response to this situation. Moreover, tripartism is essentially an administrative and political response, and does not indicate that there are substantive three-way divisions inherent in the labour market or in student demand. On the contrary. British experience indicates that attempts to impose tripartism actually underline the essentially non-tripartite nature of the 'market' for qualifications, which is far more complex and dynamic than this over-neat structure would imply.

Selection mechanisms are extremely important for upper secondary school pupils – far less so for adults. The latter are often more concerned with concrete skill development than with selection for further study, or competition with their fellow-students. By attempting to force a tripartite structure on the whole of post-compulsory education, governments risk distorting provision across the sector. A short-term response to a failed attempt at bipartism, and political pressures relating to 16 to19-year-olds entering higher education, are not a sufficient basis on which to design education and training provision for the bulk of the nation's population.

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Chapter

The psychological perspective

Tripartite and other divisions post-16

Bryan Dockrell

Introduction

That there will be some divisions in educational provision post-16 is inevitable. Not everyone can, or indeed would wish to, become a microbiologist, a chef or a counsellor. The questions are about the alternative programmes provided. How should they differ? At what point should programmes diverge? For this chapter the question is about the differences among individuals and the appropriate pattern of provision they suggest.

Post-16 programmes vary not only in content and in purpose, but also in structure and mode of assessment. A modular structure which has been adopted for GNVQs but largely resisted for A-levels is becoming more common in higher education. Learning may centre on issues, and projects which address them, or on the assumed structure of the discipline. Assessment may be based on:

- the continuous evaluation of coursework
- an individual piece of work
- end of course examinations
- performance in the workplace.

There may be psychological differences to which these divisions correspond. For instance, could the different approaches be said to relate to different levels of abilities or students with different types of mind?

Human performance in any situation arises from a complex interaction of abilities and intentions (Raven, 1994). For the purpose of this chapter there are three psychological perspectives which appear relevant. They are the study of intelligence, cognitive science and neuro-psychology. Other crucial factors like intentions or motivations are only alluded to briefly.

Intelligence

This section presents a range of perspectives in thinking about intelligence which results in occasional acrimonious debate. At one extreme there are those, like Brand (1996), who stress the unitary nature of intelligence, following the tradition of Spearman, Burt and Raven. It is 'innate, general, cognitive ability' (Burt 1970), which people possess to varying degrees. Although it is accepted that there may also be special capacities which are independent of intelligence, such as musical talent, in general differences in educational provision should relate solely to *general ability*.

Following Burt's later thinking, Vernon (1961) recognised the role of general intelligence but also attached importance to the role of 'group factors'. From this point of view, people not only have varying degrees of general intelligence but also of verbal, mathematical, spatial or mechanical capacities. Different educational provision should, according to this approach, take account not only of general ability but of the relevant *specific abilities*.

On the other hand there are those who follow Thurstone's theory of *intelligences*, which people possess to varying degrees. Thurstone stresses the importance of different abilities, and the limitations of the concept of general intelligence. Gardner (1993) specifies seven *intelligences*, including *linguistic reasoning*, *mathematical/logical ability* and *spatial ability*. These three are, of course, comparable to the abilities identified above, but

Gardner makes the distinction between the earlier, virtually universal development of them at a basic level and later developments which are the consequence of specific experiences which are usually school-based.

Gardner has a wider view of what constitutes intelligence than earlier theorists. The most obvious example is musical talent, the existence of which Spearman himself recognised, but, unlike Gardner, saw as being independent of intelligence as he defined it.

Perhaps more controversial is what Gardner calls *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence. It is not that the differences in kinesthetic skills, the skills of the sportsman and the craftsman, have not always been recognised, but that they were thought to be of a different order from verbal or numerical skills. Gardner's example of mountaineering illustrates the point. Not all individuals high in verbal or numerical reasoning skills will also have the kinesthetic abilities needed to be good mountaineers. Nor will all those low in verbal or mathematical skills have the kinesthetic skills necessary for mountaineering. The argument that there is an underlying kinesthetic ability which is different from other skills is plausible and may well be relevant to success in a variety of studies.

Gardner also names *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* intelligence. Current concern with personal qualities, particularly by employers (Coldstream, 1997), indicates how important both can be. They are obviously crucial for some purposes, whether they are classified as *intelligences* or not.

It seems likely that different fields of study require different levels of verbal, mathematical or other abilities, and therefore intelligence theory has implications for the design of post-16 provision. These differences don't appear to correspond directly to A-levels, GNVQs, NVQs or other forms of educational provision. It seems, in fact, that they cut across them. Verbal, mathematical or spatial abilities, for instance, are required to a greater extent for some A-levels than for others, and the same applies to GNVQs and NVQs.

The distribution of intelligence

Intelligence theory is based on the notion of unitary latent traits underlying the complexity of behaviour. Each trait is usually taken to be a continuum, and not divisible into discrete groupings. Each individual falls somewhere on these continua. It is clear that with most physical characteristics 'groupings' are arbitrary: people do not fall into simple mutually-exclusive groups such as 'tall or short', 'fat or thin', but are distinguished by small gradations. So it is with intellectual characteristics: any grouping such as 'clever or dull', 'good' or 'poor at mathematics', is arbitrary, for here too the gradations are small and the distributions continuous.

It is also postulated by many psychologists that abilities follow a normal distribution, also known as the *bell curve*. In this they are like most natural characteristics, such as height for example, but not necessarily like man-made indices such as income. That is, there are a few individuals at either extreme who are reasonably easily identified, but most people fall into a middle group and it is difficult to differentiate among them. There are a few very tall or very short people but most are 'of medium height'. The same is generally thought to be true of mental factors. There are a few who are very high in general intelligence or in specific abilities and a few who are low. Most people fall into the average group amongst whom differentiation is more difficult.

In summary, whatever theory of intelligence is adopted, there is no reason to assume discrete, mutually-exclusive groups. Everyone falls somewhere on the distribution curve, and breaking them into groups is arbitrary and reflects external requirements. It is particularly difficult to make divisions among the two-thirds of the population in the middle-range of abilities.

The perspective of intelligence in post-16 education

Much of the English research on intelligence related to an earlier tripartite division, that of secondary schools in the forties and fifties. A psychological rationale was offered for this secondary school provision. As early as 1926, the Hadow report proposed secondary education for children with: 'minds, and by no means minds of an inferior order, for which the

most powerful stimulus is some form of practical or constructive activity'. This is a position interestingly echoed in current debate, and could be called the *types of mind* approach. Twelve years on from Hadow, the Spens report had shifted to discussion of different levels of 'innate, all round intellectual ability' indicating an acceptance of the concept of general intelligence. With Norwood, five years later, the pendulum had swung back again. There is the child 'who can follow a piece of connected reasoning . . . and is sensitive to language'; there is the child 'who is interested in the control of material things . . . and . . . has the necessary insight into the intricacies of mechanisms' and there is the child 'who is interested in the moment . . . Relevance to present concerns is the only way of awakening interest'. This marks a return to the *types of mind* approach.

These arguments confuse a number of different dimensions. They assume that sensitivity to language and interest in the control of material things are mutually-exclusive, and that both are unrelated to relevance to present concerns. In fact, every person can be rated on each of these variables and will have an individual combination of them. Moreover, Burt vehemently rejected Norwood. 'Any scheme of organisation that proposes to classify children . . . according to qualitative mental types rather than according to general intelligence is in conflict with the known facts of child psychology' (Burt, 1944).

What was the evidence for either position? In 1954 Emmett provided considerable evidence for the predictive validity of general intelligence which was backed up by Hope's follow-up studies in 1984. These showed that success within all kinds of secondary school was best predicted by measures of general intelligence. These findings were confirmed by unpublished studies of the Scottish Council for Research in Education carried out in the seventies and eighties. They showed that measured intelligence at eleven was the best predictor of success in comprehensive schools even when the scores of the children were known neither to the schools nor to the children themselves.

But what of special abilities? In the late forties and early fifties the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* published a series of articles on the issue as a symposium. There were arguments made for practical and spatial tests for selection for technical education, but even the proponents

of this had to concede that the contribution of such a test to predictive validity was small (Peel, 1949). One study concluded that the top 30% of the population in general intelligence could be divided into three groups: 'a group . . . with a significant bias to verbal ability and academic interests; a group with an insignificant bias of interest and ability; and . . . a group with a significant bias of practical ability and technical interest' (Lambert 1949). Unfortunately for the advocates of the importance of specific abilities, the middle group was the biggest, approximately 40% of her sample.

It is hardly surprising that a later British Psychology Society Monograph (1957) which reviewed existing research concluded that 'classification or streaming of pupils by different types of aptitude and interest is possible only to a limited extent . . . and allocation must be based on general ability and all round attainment'.

If, as many people assume, comparable concepts are a basis for the current tripartite division, even if this is unstated, then these are not old, unhappy far off things of interest only to Wordsworth's solitary reaper.

Three questions arise from this for current post-16 provision:

- At eleven plus children were being selected for ostensibly different types of educational programmes in different institutions. Are current educational divisions thought to be as clear cut? Are A-levels, NVQs and GNVQs assumed, even tacitly, to relate to different types of mind, or to level of ability or has the question simply not been asked?
- Is general ability as good a predictor of success at 16+ as at 11+?
- Have abilities developed differentially by 16 or are they as undifferentiated as at 11?

The first issue relates to the rationale for current differences. As noted above, the three divisions at sixteen plus have resulted in programmes that differ in many ways. This raises the following questions:

- Is there a rationale for these differences?
- How are the students in the three current types of programme thought to differ? For example, are A-level programmes designed for the student 'who can follow a piece of connected reasoning . . . and is sensitive to language?

- Is the description of the student 'who is interested in the control of material things . . . and . . . has the necessary insight into the intricacies of mechanisms' assumed to apply to some, if not all NVQ students?
- What differences among students are the programmes designed to cater for?

The occupational prospects for young people with NVQs give rise to a set of related questions. Does the shift towards service occupations in the labour market mean that the old divisions between programmes, which may have related to identified and measurable mechanical or spatial abilities, have become less relevant? In a service economy, are social skills and different levels of ability to reason (general intelligence) likely to be the important criteria for success?

The question regarding the role of general ability is addressed by Fitzgibbon's studies of 1992. They confirm that all round attainment, as demonstrated by average GCSE grades, is the best predictor of A-level results. It is a better predictor of scores in individual subjects at A-level than the GCSE score in the same subject. As always, music seems to be an exception to this.

On the issue of differentiation of abilities, there *is* evidence of differentiation with age and social and educational experience. Studies in the UK, US, Sweden and South America (Dockrell, 1965) show that using conventional measures of ability, special abilities become more prominent with age. The extent and the form of the differentiation depends on the educational programme and on cultural factors like social class. Students in academic programmes developed linguistic abilities which comparable students in other programmes did not. Students in technical programmes developed spatial and mechanical abilities. There is, however, some suggestion that, as with language, there is a critical period for the acquisition of fine and gross motor skills. For language (according to Pinker's studies in 1995) it is thought to be the first two years of life. For motor skills it is early adolescence.

Intelligence theory would suggest the possibility of a division between A-levels which require traditional academic intelligence, largely involving verbal and/or numerical skills, and those NVQs which require practical

ability dependent presumably on visuo-motor skills. High visuo-motor skills, however, do not imply lower general intelligence or verbal skills. Some people have both. Nor, unfortunately, do low verbal and mathematical skills imply high visuo-motor skills. Some people have neither. However, students with high visuo-motor skills but lower verbal reasoning scores have succeeded in some technical programmes in the past. Of course, assumptions made about intelligence affect the design of the programmes themselves. For instance, the German system seems to assume that only students with lower general intelligence will be in vocational programmes, whereas in France the three types of *baccalauréat* seem to assume comparable general intelligence among students in each programme but differences in specific skills and interests.

Cognitive science

In *Cognitive Development* (1991) McShane described the course of human development from the perspective of cognitive science. In a later article he and colleagues assert that:

> *. . . the cognitive science framework assumes that the operation of the mind consists of interactions among three components: an architecture of cognition; mental representations; and processes that manipulate these representations.*

Architecture is a metaphor also used for computers:

> *The hardware of a computer consists of a number of functional units connected by data paths, operating under the control of instruction units. The arrangement of these units is called the architecture of the computers . . . The architecture of the cognitive system is the innate and invariant structure by means of which the content of experience is processed and stored by an organism.*
>
> *McShane J, J Dockrell and A Wells, 1992*

In other words, the architecture is innate and invariant, wired in, and sets the limits to cognitive development.

Mental representations are ways in which information from the environment is organised in the cognitive system. They include schemas, mental models, and images. These representations are the products of interaction between the structural constraints of the cognitive system and the information available in the environment. They are acquired in the process of development.

Processes are the manipulations of mental representation. Central processes are concerned with, for example, inference, planning and problem solving. They may develop without conscious instruction but they can also be taught (Sylva, 1996).

Cognition theory could also have implications for the design of educational provision post-16. However, there are few signs that consideration has been given to how provision should relate to the innate architecture, and the acquired representations and processes. This would mean creating divisions to take account of: differences in wired-in abilities; different mental representations which students have acquired from their environment, particularly their schooling; and/or to processes which have been acquired in the course of their education.

The perspective of cognitive science in post-16 education and training

The findings and theories of cognitive science, as with any other branch of psychology, can only be relevant to a coherent and consistent pattern of division among qualifications and learning programmes. The three components to thinking identified by cognitive science – the architecture of cognition, mental representations, and processes – indicate how students will differ among themselves. Whether or not these differences will relate to educational provision depends on the nature of that provision.

To what architectural features, mental representations and processes, if any, does a tripartite system relate? Are the differences between post-16 students best thought of as between those with more or less general potential rather than those with different specific abilities? If the differences between post-16 educational programmes relate to differences in

specific abilities which are not 'wired in', there is a value judgement to be made: should educational programmes try to identify students' strengths and work with them, or try to compensate for their deficiencies?

To what extent will abilities have developed differentially? The body of processes – acquired generic skills – are likely to be relevant to different ways of functioning. Some individuals will have acquired some processing skills (planning, problem-solving) from social experiences or by incidental or planned learning in school, as Geary (1995) points out. Other individuals will have had different experiences and so may have acquired different, or fewer, processing skills.

Specific mental representations (bodies of acquired knowledge and specific skills) presumably are relevant. One is hardly likely to obtain an A-level in Classical Greek without having gained some vocabulary and some understanding of grammatical rules. In Latin the notion of declensions and conjugations would be examples of specific schemas. Nor is a craftsman likely to be able to use a lathe without some specific training. Are youngsters likely to have developed mental representations in the form of individual bodies of knowledge and sets of skills which are pre-requisites for further learning by the age of sixteen? Is there any reason to expect them to coincide with the requirements of three different pathways at 16 plus?

Neuro-psychology

Recent neuro-psychology has been concerned with the role of different parts of the brain, which are thought to be organised as independent *modules*. It has led to the conclusion that: 'the human brain is made up of innately-specified modules, simply triggered by environmental input' (Karmiloff-Smith, 1996). While the structures are taken to be universal, the potential of individuals will vary and the development of specific modules may have been affected by failure to develop before birth or by damage resulting from disease or accident. Research on adult brain damage after strokes and accidents shows very specific consequences, for example selective impairment in grammar while the lexicon is left intact. The modules are believed to be highly specialised.

In 1995 Geary indicated how these modules are influenced by culture and education. There are, he suggests, biological primary and secondary abilities. Primary abilities are innate, highly specialised neuro-cognitive systems incorporating 'goal structures, procedural skills and conceptual knowledge'. Language is a universal human capacity (a biological primary ability) which calls on a goal (a wish to communicate), a procedural skill (grammar), and knowledge (vocabulary). Reading, however, is *not* universal. It is a secondary biological ability: that is, it has to be actively learned. Its acquisition depends on a range of specialised abilities. Geary states: 'The acquisition of reading-related abilities appears to involve the co-optation of primary language and language related systems.' The development of secondary abilities requires the use of the innate primary abilities which are universal and need little social encouragement: 'Children appear to engage in number related activities and games throughout the world.' Secondary abilities, on the other hand, require 'sustained formal, or informal support'. The first are acquired by inherently enjoyable play, the second only by directed learning, usually in school.

Perhaps more generally familiar neuro-psychological features are the different left brain/right brain functions. These form the basis for contrasts between rational, language-dominated thinking and creative, imagery-based thinking.

No consideration seems to have been given to how innate modules and acquired secondary abilities relate to the categorisation of post-16 learning. It may be, of course, that the post-16 divisions themselves are not sufficiently coherent for contemporary neuro-psychology to be helpful.

The perspective of neuro-psychology in post-16 education and training

This approach gives rise to three questions:

- Do A-levels, NVQs and GNVQs require varying groups of secondary abilities?
- Is the general level of development the best guide to success at sixteen plus?
- Have secondary abilities developed differentially by the age of 16 and can they thus be related to different educational programmes?

The first and second questions have been addressed above so the third question will be discussed in this section.

Geary's notion of modules in the brain places emphasis on separate abilities. Virtually all children develop the primary abilities: language and basic number skills appear to be universal. However, primary abilities are displayed at varying ages and, indeed, some children never display them without very special help. Both Geary and Gardner have pointed out that early learning is social and appears to depend on adult encouragement and peer group interaction. There are, then, broad general differences which could be used to select for different programmes.

In reviewing the research Geary asserts that the secondary abilities which children develop are largely a function of schooling. Innate factors, which are presumably at least partly genetic, provide the basis for the acquisition of secondary abilities, but their actual acquisition depends on the acquisition of the relevant primary abilities. Social and cultural experiences also determine the extent to which particular modules develop. However, formal educational experiences play an increasingly significant role. Therefore, by the age of sixteen, some students will have acquired particular secondary abilities and related groups of abilities, but not others. Other students will have acquired different abilities. Furthermore, these abilities will have developed to different degrees.

Thus educational provision post-16 *could* be related to acquired secondary abilities. This would however merely reinforce the effects of previous social, cultural and educational differences. Is this desirable?

The left/right brain distinction could also be relevant. There are educational programmes predicated on the notion that the usual pattern of schooling is devoted exclusively to language and logic and needs to be balanced with a compensating emphasis on imagery and divergent thinking. This may be so, but does this in any way correspond to the three pathways proposed for 16 to 19-year-olds? Do not all students, regardless of their study area, need this balance?

Conclusion

Success in education or in an occupation depends on a combination of general ability, specific abilities and personal qualities. Each of the three psychological perspectives discussed in this chapter is concerned mainly with cognitive abilities. They each give weight and importance to both genetic and experiential factors. In other words, there are innate, invariant 'wired in' differences, and there are acquired abilities. There is evidence that social experiences and educational programmes play a role in the development of specific abilities. These differences are recognised in different ways by the different varieties of educational programmes around the world.

Personal qualities such as motivation and interests are also relevant (Weiner, 1992). All people have their own individual motivations. A clear occupational goal might be appealing to some, while others may wish to keep their options open. The macho image of physical labour may appeal to some, but deter others. Such motivational factors will overlay the other psychological differences discussed in this chapter. The question is the extent to which these factors should affect the process or the outcomes of post-16 programmes.

Abilities are generally thought to fall along a continuum. While most of us can think of individuals who fit one of the ideal types defined in some tripartite systems, how typical are they? Each of the psychological perspectives allows for extremes, such as the existence of very high and very low general ability, or musical talent, or mathematical skills. However, human abilities are best thought of as being on a bell-shaped continuum, with most lumped in an undifferentiated middle. Therefore, people cannot be grouped into neat, mutually-exclusive packages. Any attempt to put all sixteen-year-olds into one of three procrustean beds is to deny, or to attempt to destroy, the reality of human diversity. An alternative approach was adopted by the Swedes, who twenty years ago created twenty two *lines* within their higher secondary education. However, even a programme as diverse as this will not reflect the great range of differences in interests and talents among sixteen-year-olds.

The defining of three post-16 pathways is an administrative convenience. It may be a necessary one, but it is hard to reconcile with the realities of the varieties of human nature. By the age of sixteen students have acquired a range of specific abilities. Although there is a necessary neuro-psychological basis for these, the secondary abilities, such as the more advanced problem-solving skills, for instance, are learned either socially or in school. In his entry in *Who's Who*, Sir Osbert Sitwell said that he was educated during his holidays from Eton. Those who are not fortunate enough to have a Palazzo in Florence are more influenced by their schooling. To repeat, for most people, what is and is not acquired is a function of formal educational experiences.

If there is no psychological justification for a tripartite division, and certainly not a rigid one, what is the alternative? It is to maintain breadth and flexibility, and to permit, to encourage if not to require, the opportunity to combine academic study with vocational and practical studies. Why must we be classicists but not carpenters? Can't we have a range of flexible educational provision which goes some way to allowing for each individual's unique combination of skills and abilities?

Is it not possible to allow for change as individuals discover opportunities in society and capacities within themselves which they had not previously recognised? Lifelong learning is an old slogan. Perhaps lifelong development might be in accord with the realities of the human psyche. A broad programme of diversified studies can continue until first degree as in Scotland and indeed beyond as in the US. English sixteen-year-olds should not be fitted with a straight jacket.

As noted at the start of this chapter, specialisation will happen at some point. The question is when the differences in curriculum should begin and on what basis the differentiation should be made. How, if at all, should post-16 divisions relate to the psychological differences among students? Earlier educational initiatives, usually referring to secondary education, were explicitly related to the psychological theories of their time. Current post-16 initiatives seem either to be ignoring this dimension, or making more implicit assumptions.

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The sociological perspective

Chapter

Post-compulsory education policy in transition: from Crowther to Dearing and beyond Denis Gleeson

Background

In the past decade, patterns of participation in further education (or post-compulsory education) have changed dramatically, increasing from 30% in the early 1980s, to 70% plus, in 1994–95 (FEFC 1996). In 1994–95, 3 million students were enrolled in further education (2.2 million of whom were in provision funded by the FEFC), of which 10% were GNVQ, 8% NVQ, 10% GCSE and 18% A/As level students. At present 70% of 16 and 17-year-olds are in full-time post-16 education, most of them in FE colleges rather than schools, with 8% in part-time education. Additional to this, government assumptions imply an increase of 20% in student numbers over the period 1994–1999, and a 5.5% growth in the full-time equivalent number of adults in further education, in the same period (FEFC 1996). At the same time it is acknowledged by the FEFC that institutions funded by the Council will need to make efficiency savings of at least 5% each year in the period 1996–1999. Thus, in order to meet fiscal targets colleges will be expected to finance capital and other programmes through Private Finance Initiatives. Within these constraints, three developments are likely to take place in FE colleges during the next three years:

- closer integration of institutions with Business, Commerce and Industrial Networks, including TECs

- increased investment in staff development linked with investment in new technology and technologies of learning associated with increased numbers of students and a shortfall in staff
- further reduction in average levels of funding with implications for staffing, management and professionalisation.

Essentially, the main funding method demands that institutions maximise recruitment and retain students on courses which enable them to achieve a range of qualifications. On the other hand, on a declining funding base, it demands a new 'flexibility' in relation to learning and provision which encompasses wider student participation, following different modes of study in a variety of contexts. Going to college and studentship is increasingly taking on a different meaning linked with new technologies of management, learning and age participation.

Expansion in a sector which now commands £3 billion of public funds can be explained in various ways; as a substitute for employment, through to improved GCSE results, raised pupil expectations and better careers advice. From a voluntaristic system catering mainly for a minority of school leavers destined for academic or trade training, the boom in staying-on and returning has had two dramatic effects:

- creating the foundations for universal post-16 provision
- generating credential inflation to meet diverse demand.

By far the biggest thrust has been in the tertiary domain (Green 1986) – from Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) to Youth Training Scheme (YTS), Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), Certificate of Extended Education CEE, Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and Schools, G/NVQ, Modern Apprenticeship and Welfare to Work – suggesting a long line of initiatives in search of a policy solution. With 16–19 and adult student numbers growing in tandem, policy interest in post-compulsory education has never been as great, in terms of its relationship with HE, economic growth and cost-effectiveness and its accommodation within the mainstream of State Education Policy.

A major problem facing this emerging sector is that neither policy element has been informed by research, and its growth is underpinned by successive, often contradictory, government initiatives. Recent retro-modern attempts to place a tripartite ordering on such haphazard developments have had a tendency both to look back and to plan for an idealised 'Fordist' model of schooling and selection (Green and Rikowski, 1995). According to Ainley (1996) this model and its accompanying tripartite divisions broke down after the long post-war boom in 1974 with the oil crisis, and with it the economic basis of full employment. In seeking to revive essentially tripartite principles the Dearing Report is open to criticism for ignoring mistakes of the past which, under similar circumstances, failed to deliver the missing vocational 'middle ground' of English education. One is reminded here of Katz's observation that historic compromise is part of an English policy tradition which seeks to:

> *. . . preserve the traditional and respond to the modern by avoiding the resolution of uncomfortable dilemmas . . . their evasions of the essential confrontations have left Britain with unresolved and debilitating tensions.*
>
> *Katz, 1965*

If the tensions to which Katz refers underline a legacy of missed opportunities in the policy-making process, the reality is that they remain with us today, largely unaddressed. To avoid 'reinventing the wheel' it is important, as Reeder (1979) points out, to revisit this recurring debate, in order to address unchallenged policy assumptions which restrict a more enlightened vision of 14–19 education and beyond. An immediate priority, argues McCulloch (1991), is to revise Crowther's original notion (but to replace its tripartite connotations of three types of mind), with the 'rehabilitation of the practical', an issue which I return to later in the paper. Another, is to embrace a unified credit and modular approach, across GNVQ, A-level and work-based (NVQ) provision, on lines advocated by the National Commission on Education (1995). It is to some of the policy-related issues associated with such debate that I first turn.

The changing policy focus

Post-compulsory education and training has in the past decade attracted the interest of the government, trade unions, employers' representatives, educationists and increased participation of students themselves. Moreover, international monitoring of post-compulsory education by the OECD and the World Bank, in terms of assessing national economic growth and development, has raised global interest in post-school issues. In Britain recent interest has followed on from various influential Government White Papers (1991, 1994) which acknowledge that decades of failure to invest in post-compulsory education have left Britain with a vicious cycle of low skills, low wages and low productivity. At long last, partly driven by such argument, there appears to be an emerging consensus that post-16 education and training provision in England and Wales has not worked for a majority of school leavers, or in meeting the perceived need for a better trained workforce. The view has emerged among parties who were previously sometimes antagonistic (the Conservatives, Trade Unions, CBI, Labour Party, the National Commission and various Left and Right 'think tanks') that nothing short of a 'skills revolution' is required to arrest Britain's downhill economic spiral. This has become part of Labour's 'New Deal'.

In various and contradictory ways such apparent consensus has placed post-compulsory education at the centre of policy debate in Britain and elsewhere. Once viewed as marginal and the hand-maiden of British industry, further education has become an integral part of mainstream mass education. This has been influenced by a number of contradictory factors, ranging from the collapse of traditional youth and adult labour markets through to the initiation of a centrally controlled, but locally generated, internal education market. Related factors such as improvements in GCSE and A-level results, the take up of vocational qualifications and increased student participation rates, mean that post-16 education and training reform is seen as a matter of building on success. Despite the lack of enthusiasm for science and engineering, there are encouraging signs that more adults and young people are taking advantage of the broadening FE curriculum framework, with its emphasis on parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications, credit transfer, work-related training and improved higher education provision and access (FEFC 1996).

Moreover, with G/NVQs and Modern Apprenticeship now on stream, there are also signs that post-compulsory education is, at last, opening up the range of opportunities first envisaged by the Crowther Report in 1959. From an all time low of less than 20% of school leavers participating in full-time post-compulsory education in the 1960s and 70s, there has been a steady increase with more than 70% of school leavers now going on to some form of further education and training (Smithers and Robinson 1993).

Diverse influences at home and abroad, unemployment, decline in manufacturing, changing technology and work organisation, marketisation and global factors, have meant that political interest in post-compulsory education has become a universal phenomenon. Such factors, increasingly associated with post-industrial change in society and production, have brought into question traditional distinctions between school, education and work including those associated with academic and vocational education. Two other related factors have also placed post-compulsory education high on the political and policy agenda. The first concerns the transition from an élite to a mass system of further and higher education, which involves changing values, hierarchy and differentiation in the emerging new system. Here, policy issues to do with progression into higher education, course development, student recruitment and employment, organisation and resource management, feature significantly. The second concerns the control of funding and costs, as unprecedented student numbers become absorbed into post-compulsory and higher education (Ainley 1994: Brown and Scase 1994). Not only has this attracted Treasury interest in further and higher education policy, but it has also raised new questions concerning both the relationship between post-compulsory education, economic growth and efficiency, and how to categorise and differentiate institutions, qualifications and students in the emerging mass market. It is to both aspects of this equation that this paper is addressed.

Categorisation and differentiation

Viewed optimistically, the impact of market forces has radically altered the traditional base of post-16 compulsory education and training. Increasingly, the shift of resource towards the student challenges conventional patterns of course and institutional development, creating new pathways and patterns of provision. Despite worries about the fragmentation and diversification associated with the recent mass expansion of post-16 education and training there is, according to Robertson (1993), a discernible policy thread running through the reform process which will hold it together. Evidence for this, Robertson argues, is reflected in an emerging credit culture which will allow students to 'trade' in the market place. Following the introduction of G/NVQ this policy has informed a systematic tripartite (re)ordering of an already expanding tertiary sector (Gleeson 1983; Green 1986). In seeking to place order on a previously chaotic qualifications jungle, the Dearing Report has tacitly endorsed government claims to have closed the long-standing division between high status academic and low status vocational courses. A key attraction here is the role G/NVQ plays as a parallel but equivalent route toward employment and higher education. The intention particularly with G/NVQ is that it will have equivalent status to A-levels, encouraging both staying on and upskilling, providing progression both to university and to work, and thereby bridging the historic academic–vocational divide. Two related questions arise: can G/NVQ fulfil these multi-functions and, whose interest and what economic purpose does this so called alternative route serve?

In addressing this question the lack of historical sensitivity in current debate needs to be noted, not least because, as McCulloch (1991) argues, it threatens to distort the reform process. Awareness, for example, of the historical antecedents underlying Dearing's proposals should at least enable future policy-makers to avoid 're-inventing the wheel'. This would seem important given Crowther's recommendations for the absorption of an 'alternative route' within tripartite structures, more than three decades ago (Crowther Report 1959). In promoting GNVQ today as the alternative to an essentially fragmented academic route, polarisation has been approved to the exclusion of integration between the two. On one level rejection of the Higginson Report (DES 1988), which proposed radical changes to the

long-established and repeatedly criticised A-levels, has legitimated continued pressure from right wing groups for the retention of A-levels essentially unchanged. However, the government remains committed to the continued development of outcome-driven, essentially work-based NVQs as the central basis for its vocational training reforms. With the growing, if belated, recognition that these two radically different types of qualification did not add up to an appropriate post-16 provision, G/NVQ has taken on the appearance of a political solution, designed to satisfy the differential requirements of employers, labour markets, and post-compulsory education itself. Failure to respond to calls for a unified system of qualifications that cross the 14–19 age range, has resulted in G/NVQ both meeting the needs of industry and responding to the pressure for increased participation. Although the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and subsequently the National Curriculum emphasised curriculum breadth and a technical/vocational perspective for all young people, the White Papers (ED/DES 1991; 1994; 1995) sought to establish a three track system for academic and vocational programmes, and progression post-16 which has been redrawn in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Three parallel pathways in post-16 education and training

Academic	GNVQ	NVQ	Equivalent job level
Post-graduate		Level 5	Professional, Middle management
Degree		Level 4	Higher technician, Junior management
A/AS level	GNVQ Advanced	Level 3	Technician, Advanced Craft, Supervisor
GCSE (Grade C or better)	GNVQ Intermediate	Level 2	Basic Craft
	GNVQ Foundation	Level 1	Semi-skilled

While this paper deals with various aspects of differentiation and its rationale in a primarily English context, it is worth remembering that most European educational systems also have or had tripartite divisions. These divisions, linked with legitimating notions of parity of esteem are premised on a variety of distinct but parallel routes between academic, technical and vocational tracks, including alternance-based approaches. Though parity of esteem is not a new concept in the British context, it has hitherto had little positive influence on the ways in which the academic-vocational divide has been perceived in practice. Traditionally, the widespread 'common-sense' belief in tripartism is represented by the division of people into Plato's *men* of gold, bronze and iron. The history of its translation into English education in the twentieth century represents, according to Reeder (1979), a series of ill-fated attempts to reproduce these natural divisions in the Education system, which others maintain reflects Britain's class structure and lack of competitiveness (Wiener 1981; and Barnett 1986). This recurring policy theme also has its roots in the struggle between old humanists, industrial trainers and public educators which has characterised the history of state education in England and Wales (Williams 1965). Coffey (1992), for example, points to the way that a tripartite hierarchy of educational provision in Britain was explicitly linked to class divisions in the late nineteenth century. Professional education in the public schools stressed leadership whereas the middle class and skilled working class received a general education in grammar schools. The remainder (if they were lucky) received job-related training in elementary schools, where the emphasis was on 'obedience' rather than leadership. By the twentieth century, the divide between grammar schools and public schools had narrowed, at least in curricular terms, as the growing middle classes sought the same academic education as had developed originally for the sons of the aristocracy. Tripartism by then had become the division between academic, technical and practical routes. This is seen most clearly in the Norwood Report of 1943, which was the precursor to the 1944 Education Act and the political settlement that followed it, a central principle of which found expression in the British secondary tripartite system of grammar, technical and modern schools in the post-war period.

A belief in three clearly differentiated types of people is fundamental to one of the dominant ideological belief systems in British educational politics. Skilbeck (1976), following Williams (1965), called this belief 'classical humanism'. Raymond Williams' notion of the English school curriculum as a compromise between the old humanists, the industrial trainers and the public educators might have led one to expect that the rise of the comprehensive movement and the subsequent expansion of further education would provide the ideal context in which to realise a public educator's model of the curriculum, at the expense of the old humanists and the industrial trainers (Whitty 1992). Such optimism was not to reckon with the combined class interests which underpinned classical humanism. For those whose views are close to this ideal such tripartism is seen as the 'natural order of things'. There are four logically separate but commonly conflated assumptions within this tripartite 'common-sense'. Firstly, that people fall naturally (socially and genetically) into three distinct types: academic, technical and practical. Secondly, that these are closely correlated with 'ability' as it is generally understood. Thus, the most able are naturally academic, the least able are practical and the technicians fall into the middle category. The third assumption is that schooling and the curriculum should similarly be divided into different types of provision, to correspond to these different types of people and ability. The fourth assumption is that the opportunities and needs of the labour market also fall into the same neat divisions. None of these statements stands up to logical and empirical examination when taken in isolation let alone together, but such ideological beliefs are notoriously resistant to rational challenges. Not only do such beliefs live on but in the 1990s they have also become overlain with class, market, qualification and funding-led effects.

Though social class is not specifically referred to in the Norwood Report as the criteria for three types of learning, the allocation of pupils to three types of school corresponded to the perceived needs of a reconstructed post-war economy, which were closely associated with class, gender and occupational divisions. The critical determining factor of general intelligence testing for ability as the instrument of differentiation at 11+, obscured the deeper relationship between social class and education. This relationship was trenchantly observed by researchers in the 1950s and 1960s including Glass (1948), Floud and Halsey (1957), Crowther (1959),

Douglas (1967) and Jackson and Marsden (1962). Evidence of middle class dominance in grammar school education, for example, linked with convincing statistical data of wastage from grammar schools, that tripartism both impeded equality of opportunity and the flexible skill requirements of an expanding economy (Halsey, Floud and Anderson, 1967). For Bernstein such research described but did not explain the deeper principles of social, economic and cultural control which gave rise to such inequality. At the centre of Bernstein's (1978) analysis of education is the role it plays in the cultural reproduction of class relations as the order of things in what is learned in the classroom and workshop. Central to his argument is the way education constitutes a major influence in the structuring of experience and identification through the curriculum, the message systems of which are rooted in the wider society. The influence is not, however, mechanical but finds expression in the cultural reproduction of class relations, which significantly impact on levels of pupil achievement, expectation and life chances (Halsey 1988; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980). Bernstein illustrates the point with reference to the persistence of ideology and power in reproducing strongly- held belief systems:

> *How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. From this point of view, differences within, and change in, the organisation, transmission and evaluation of educational knowledge should be a major area of social interest.*
>
> *Bernstein, 1977*

The significance of Bernstein's analysis here is that it offers a way of critically examining the cultural and economic assumptions underlying 'common sense' theories of social difference. In Frankel and Reeve's (1996) view, any study of further education which does not recognise the significance of such principles from school into FE and beyond, would be incomplete. Their work points to the ways in which FE has historically served the educational career aspirations of distinct occupationally defined strata, essentially those in the lower professions, tradespeople and skilled

workers. In institutional terms, FE came to be situated between the elementary and junior secondary schools, grammar schools, public schools and universities. Though FE today has evolved to become more diversified – to include a middle class constituency, an emphasis on expanding its links with HE and provision for adults and the unemployed – its curriculum traditions remain overlain by occupational imperatives, class and status divisions which differentiate academic, vocational and work-based routes (A-level, GNVQ and NVQ). Although these divisions are not of FE's making, a further problem is that they are largely designed for the 16–19 age group, despite the fact that three quarters of the sector's students are now adults. As Frankel and Reeves point out:

> *. . . many older adults and people not seeking employment are now excluded from a further education curriculum oriented to industry and the reskilling of the workforce. There is evidence that the further education curriculum is juvenescent and unadapted to the needs of adults.*

This, plus the continuation of gendered provision in areas associated with childcare, nursing and secretarial studies (female) and construction, engineering, science and technology (male), suggests that class, race and gender divisions cannot be separated from the curriculum and qualification base of FE (McCrae, McGuire and Ball, 1996). As further education strives to meet increasingly diverse needs, which embrace service to the community, customers, consumers, local and national skill targets, there is evidence that a combination of markets, funding and tripartism is impeding its development and responsiveness. While a more unified approach to the curriculum and qualifications will not automatically overcome social and economic divisions within and outside FE, it will contribute toward a less fractured and inclusive FE environment.

The myth of tripartism

Once even a cursory examination is made of twentieth century English educational history, a glaring paradox is apparent. Despite the dominance of this apparent tripartite perception, the middle strand of the three has always had a troubled and low key existence. Until the 1960s, the focus

was on three types of schooling. The 'top' and 'bottom' of the system are well known: the grammar schools that developed out of the public school tradition and the various schools that evolved from the elementary school into the secondary modern schools of the 1950s and 60s. Despite various attempts to develop technical high schools in the middle, less than 5% of all secondary pupils attended such schools in this period, with less than half of all LEAs making nominal provision for such schools. Slightly over 20% of all school leavers progressed into grammar schools and significant numbers of working class pupils in grammar schools dropped out early, indicating a pattern of wastage bemoaned at the time by a cross-section of parliamentarians (Jackson and Marsden 1962). With the exception of 10% of school leavers entering apprenticeship or trade training, the vast majority of school leavers entered semi-skilled or dead-end jobs, mainly from the secondary modern sector (Roberts 1987). This latter cohort were not very visible because of the relative full employment and economic expansion in the 1960s: a period in which the warning signs of decline in demand for traditionally skilled labour became increasingly apparent. The oil crisis, decline in manufacturing and rising unemployment from 1974 onwards further exposed the failure of tripartite divisions around the social class lines of the 1944 Act, which aimed to reflect and reproduce expected skilled openings in society at the time.

Though Crowther (1959) anticipated this looming crisis with recommendations for innovative 14–18 post-school reform, the historical lessons of that period went unheeded. Attempts to explain such policy failure with reference to the loss of technical schools has become a convenient feature of contemporary historical folklore. In reality, it was policy and funding neglect rather than the loss of technical schools which accounts for the 'missing prong' of tripartism. The real tripartite division was operating between private schools, grammar schools and the rest. More recently, Whitty and others (1993) show how the latest rebirth of the technical school, the CTCs and Technology Schools, have largely repeated these earlier experiences. This line of argument, about the lack of a technical stream, which was first popularised by the Black Paper writers of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and later given credence by the then Labour prime

minister, James Callaghan in his Ruskin speech (1976), has influenced more than two decades of Conservative education reform in search of the missing 'middle ground' of English education.

Following comprehensivisation in the 1960s and 1970s, and with the later exception of CTCs and technology schools, the focus largely changed from separate technical schools to technical curriculum provision. McCulloch (1989) argues that the initial conception of the TVEI was originally aimed at this middle group of 'technical' young people, though, as the initiative developed, the objective became one of providing vocational education for *all* – largely by teachers and LEAs *redefining* TVEI as a cross-curricular initiative at institutional level. GNVQ, following CPVE and TVEI can be seen as the latest in a long series of attempts to establish this middle, technical higher vocational track, now seen as lying between A-levels and NVQs. McCulloch (1989) and Sanderson (1994) both demonstrate the dangers of attributing simplistic explanations for the failure of technical education in Britain, and both list a range of inter-related, complex factors. As Gleeson and Hodkinson (1996) argue, this complexity can be explained by:

- an inevitable internal tension within classical humanist tripartism
- conflicts between this widely held classical humanistic ideology and other deeply held but possibly less dominant educational ideologies within English society.

The internal tensions in classical humanism arise because, in English society, very few people have naturally aspired to the technical route. As people strove for what Bourdieu (1984) called academic 'distinction' both technical schools and secondary modern schools began to ape the grammar school curriculum long before comprehensivisation became the norm. At the same time, anxious aspiring parents wanted their offspring to attend grammar, not technical, schools if they passed the eleven plus. In essence, middle class families saw anything other than grammar (or public) school as inappropriate, seeing both technical and modern schools as for the working class. In this context, the upwardly-mobile working class were also more likely to aspire to the academic grammar school route than to a technical career that kept them firmly below the class equivalent of the glass ceiling. This process was reinforced by the common system of taking young people with the best eleven plus passes for the grammar schools and giving the

technical high schools (where they existed) at 11 or 13+ those who were left (Jackson and Marsden, 1962). Thus, a technician was identified not through a positive interest in or aptitude for technical studies, but simply as someone who was not judged capable of an academic career. This partly explains the lack of investment in technical schools, which were more expensive than grammar schools. In such an élitist system, the self-interest of the dominant groups suggest that most money and resources should be spent on the top level, not the middle, even though common sense suggests that technical education will, inevitably, be more expensive.

Late twentieth century post-16 tripartism in England focuses on separate institutions as well as a separate curriculum. This is partly because of the marginal position of sixth form colleges in the FE reform process. These had been originally set up within school regulations to provide traditional academic education based on A-levels as part of a recognised comprehensive education system. It was often an old grammar school that was transformed into a sixth form college. The new post-16 funding arrangements abruptly moved them from the schools sector in 1993 giving them independence from LEAs with funding provided by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They exist alongside the predominantly FE colleges, which have a very different history and ethos (Smithers and Robinson 1993). Research by Robinson and Burke (1995) suggests that many sixth form colleges are striving to preserve their élitist, academic ethos, based around provision of A-levels to full-time 16 to 19-year-old students. Many will not offer more than a token GNVQ curriculum in one or two occupational areas, though this is changing. The risk is that if high status institutions like public schools and sixth form colleges do not take GNVQ seriously, the new middle vocational track will be squeezed every bit as effectively as were technical schools in an earlier age. Furthermore, a belief in a technical strand 'for other people's children', reinforces the status and sense of well-being for those who have succeeded on the academic route. From this point of view, a middle stratum that is weak in practice but strong in rhetoric meets the status needs of the academic elite. Thus, to succeed in the vacuum left by a failure to create technical schools, GNVQ has the task of breaking out of this vicious circle, and to avoid being 'diluted' by schools offering it without additional physical or human resources.

GNVQ and the 'middle ground'

One of many ideological conflicts relevant to GNVQ lies between classical humanism and what Skilbeck (1976) called 'reconstructionism'. Within a reconstructionist ideology, the educational system is seen as a means of restructuring society normally for economic ends. This can be seen in the repeated calls for more or better vocational or technical education, in order to close the skills gap between Britain and her rivals, to make industry more competitive and to ensure future prosperity. Such beliefs were almost as strong as classical humanism within the previous Conservative Government, and are advocated by the influential CBI, among many others. Such a reconstructionist argument is frequently restated in the official rationale for GNVQ, which stresses the need to raise the standards of education and training across the board. Hence the National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs) expressed government commitment to 50% of any year group achieving NVQ Level 3 equivalence by the turn of the century, with these targets likely to be increased upwards in the immediate future.

Such universalist views of attainment run counter to the classical humanist view that a norm-referenced hierarchical distribution of ability, and therefore appropriate qualifications, is part of the natural order of things. Paradoxically, the previous Conservative Government could, at the same time, have proclaimed NTETS as official policy and created new A* grades for A-level and GCSE because 'too many people were getting an A' grade. Moreover constant talk of A-level as the gold standard has set GNVQs (and NVQs) a difficult cultural and educational task for New Labour. To succeed, at least in the terms of those government directives that brought it into existence, GNVQ must establish a credible vocational middle track while simultaneously raising levels of education and qualification in ways that are acceptable to the mass of the English public, be they parents, young people, teachers, employers or politicians. Already, there are rumblings that the maths and science levels in GNVQ are not high enough and that the modular base of GNVQ, compared with A-levels, render it an 'easy option'.

There is also a growing gulf between GNVQ and NVQs (Hodkinson and Mattinson 1994). Unless students have topped up GNVQ with NVQ units, they may have few relevant workplace skills. This means that many young people leaving at 18 or 19 with GNVQ Advanced Level may need to take NVQ Level II once they start work. This shows that the official picture of three equivalent pathways post-16, where the normal progression would be from Level III, including GNVQ Advanced, to Level IV or its equivalent is over simplified (see Table 1). Furthermore, young people with GNVQ Intermediate or Advanced may have turned down opportunities to train at NVQ Level II when they were over 16. They may, therefore, see a move into this level of training, following two or three extra years of full-time education, as a step backwards. Because the launch of GNVQ has been so closely linked with the value of qualifications in the labour market, it is likely that many of the young people flocking to take these new courses, are doing so in the hope of gaining access to HE and getting a good jobs, or a combination of both. But education does not create jobs for students. Unless there are widespread changes to the ways in which labour markets, industry and job opportunities are organised, progression for many GNVQ students will be difficult no matter how good the actual course provision may be (Finegold and Soskice 1991). Currently the legacy of recession and youth unemployment in Britain, including growing disparities in wealth and income, undermines qualification-led reform and the rhetoric of parity of esteem, which goes with it. If there were hopes that the supposed skills revolution would counteract the decline in manufacturing and the expansion of the service sector, then these have not been realised. Traditionally, industries such as engineering, construction and energy have had the highest concentrations of young people with formally-recognised qualifications. With decline of such traditional 'Fordist' industries the need for formal training has been increasingly determined by the demands of an expanding, mainly low-skilled service sector, and to a lesser extent by a minority recruited into high-tech 'Post-Fordist' information-based industries, a division to which G/NVQs do not easily relate. Not surprisingly, recent aspects of post-compulsory education expansion reflect rather than challenge this trend, revealing stark contradictions between the rhetoric of up-skilling expressed in government reports and the reality of segmented 'casualised' labour markets.

For Hutton (1995) the combination of New Right thinking, markets, and tripartite education policies has not only destroyed the post-war social and economic settlement, but it has also brought about a segmented 30, 30, 40 society. The first 30% he describes as 'disadvantaged', the second 30% are made up of the 'marginalised' and insecure; and the last category is that of the 'privileged' whose market power has increased since 1979. From this viewpoint, he argues, judgements about the appropriateness of youth and adult training provision have to be revisited in both economic and educational terms if they are not simply to replicate and reproduce such tripartite segmentation. Elsewhere McCrae and others (1996) argue that such forms of inequality cannot be separated from the ways in which post-compulsory institutions operate in the competitive market-place. They point to the ways in which the dynamic of this market is inflected by class and ethnic relations and the way the class and ethnic composition of institutions is, for some 'choosers', a criterion for selection or rejection. The composition profile of a college can, for example, become part of the reputation and, subtly, the basis for the marketing strategy of FE institutions.

> *We are perceived in the community as a black college . . . we don't attract people from the south of Mainwaring, Morland, moving towards Wentworth, the wealthy part of the LEA which is more white . . . we serve increasingly the north end of the LEA which is where the deprivation is . . .*
>
> *College Vice-Principal, quoted in McCrae and others 1996*

In this context, where curricular, institutional and 'niche' market dynamics intersect with class and race, 'new' forms of structuring between institutions arise. Already, significant research on the transition from school to work stresses the stratification of such inequality (Furlong 1992, Banks *et al* 1992, Bates and Riseborough 1993, Kerckhoff 1993). This contrasts sharply with policy assumptions based on individualism and free choice which accept the primacy of A-levels and offers G/NVQ as 'the alternative route'. Yet, despite increased student participation, the evidence is that the limitations on school leavers' choice – between work, dole queue, Youth Training, A-level and full-time vocational education (now GNVQ) – remains much the same as a decade ago. Ostensibly, GNVQs are designed

with the intention of enabling young people to progress either to higher education or into employment, allowing virement and freedom of movement between academic and vocational courses. Yet both transfer and progression routes and virement are problematic within existing tripartite structures. So, what are the alternatives?

Beyond tripartism

In the past five years substantial government reform has radically altered FE's voluntaristic tradition. In response to a combination of mounting social and economic pressures, recession, unemployment and lack of international competitiveness, a rapid series of reforms have been put in place. Following the influential White Paper: Education and Training for the 21st Century (1991), the sector has been re-engineered around the FE and HE Act (1992), involving NCVQ, FEFC and creation of the internal market. This arguably has had both beneficial and limiting effects. On the one hand it has increased student participation, and encouraged new models of curriculum delivery and greater institutional responsiveness. On the other, it has overstretched the financial resources of institutions, introduced false economies because of competitiveness and tripartism, and failed to raise the education and skill level of the nation significantly. A central problem has been the mode of delivery associated with putting quangos, qualifications and markets in place, in a funding-led model which has little to say about the process of teaching, learning and curriculum. Yet, as Flint (1996) has argued, the total picture is not quite so pre-determined as it appears. There are signs, for example, that incorporation and post-16 education and training expansion has let the 'genie out of the bottle'. At college level there is evidence of an emerging unified, credit and modular based system on lines advocated by the National Commission on Education, which has influenced new forms of school, FE, HE and community partnership. According to Flint (1996) the momentum of such change is not, however, likely to be best served by the amalgamation of NCVQ and SCAA into a single qualification authority (QNCA).

Further education works well with schools generally, but its future is as part of a coherent post-compulsory system, not tied to and sub-

sumed within a monolithic and schools focused curriculum and assessment authority. Why not a National Tertiary Qualifications body, where the emphasis of 16–19 curriculum and qualifications would be at point of entry into higher levels of education and into work, rather than the culmination of an educational experience? The development of (G)NVQs at Levels IV and V would be overseen here, and the work of the lead bodies co-ordinated.

Flint THES, 23.8.96

Here, Flint draws attention to the importance of building on existing knowledge and experience of course design. As a college principal he adds weight to the argument that the latest resurrection of tripartism, with parallel A-level, GNVQ and NVQ tracks, is a recipe for innovation without change. There has, of course, been much talk in the 1990s of bridging the academic/vocational divide by creating new pathways through modular-style course programmes. This, however, linked with an over-arching national certificate or diploma overlaying unchanged A-level, GNVQ and NVQ provision (Dearing 1996), will not go far enough, particularly in relation to a growing adult clientele. It not only fails to address the historic tensions referred to so far, but it also ignores weaknesses within existing academic and vocational traditions which are widely acknowledged as narrowly subject-based, and age, gender and occupationally specific. The feature of over-specialisation, most noticeable in A-level and NVQs, sets Britain, and particularly England and Wales, apart from most other nations, and provides further indication of the tension between nation state planning and the requirements issuing from globalisation. It also ignores Hutton's (1995) analysis of a '30–30–40 workforce', where many are unemployed while others have to survive on insecure short-term contracts. Traditional specialisms have been based on assumptions of full employment and jobs for life, rather than the need for career development jobs linked with lifelong learning. In a twenty-first century that promises a further acceleration in the explosion of knowledge, young people will not be well-served by a post-compulsory education which is defined largely on the basis of past experience of employers' needs.

In these circumstances, challenging tripartism is not just a technical or a curricular matter. It would be naive, for example, to regard Conservative Government policy on Youth Training, City Technology Colleges, G/NVQ and Modern Apprenticeship as isolated policy incidents disconnected from broader New Right political agendas. This policy discourse (which New Labour has inherited) surrounds vocationalism and the plethora of other training initiatives in the 1980s. It is positioned within several favoured projects which were central to the previous Conservative Government's overall social and economic strategy, one of which includes the Job Seekers Programme. These projects include fiscally driven social, economic and welfare policies for restructuring the workplace, for controlling the inner cities, for Trade Union and industrial relations reform and for replacing planned education, housing and welfare with market-oriented provision. Increasingly, marketisation, competition and corporate status for schools and colleges are having limiting downward educational effects: firstly in ensuring adherence to an ever-decreasing funding base and, secondly, in bringing forward uncomfortable decisions about how institutions should compete rather than co-operate in the market-place. Such factors not only reinforce and reproduce principles of inclusion and exclusion associated with social class, gender and race, but they also underpin a political system which encourages passivity rather than active participation and learning in the public domain. Taken seriously, Young (1993) and Brown and Scase's (1994) view, that new technology and a combination of academic and vocational options proves the potential to enable young people to become multi-skilled, is important. This needs to be tempered with the realisation that it is knowledge combined with democracy which provides the substantive basis for a learning society (Avis and others 1996).

In challenging tripartism, therefore, it is necessary to address a broader vision of citizenship and learning, in fact, a different vision of post-compulsory education which will sustain the personal development of all. New concepts of specialism will need to be found in which a broader integration of theoretical and practical knowledge is provided for and where traditional knowledge categories and boundaries are transcended. These will not be created by bridges or by bolted-on key or core skills post-16, or beyond. Young's (1992, 1993) work on organic specialisation is important here, in drawing attention to relational aspects of knowledge, experience

and skill in the curriculum. At the same time it is crucial to revise Crowther's original notion of 'the practical' as a way of enhancing the process of academic and work-based learning, a message that has been lost along the way. To avoid reinventing the wheel it is important to remind ourselves of the historical route we have travelled, and to ask awkward questions concerning what Crowther refers to as 'the rehabilitation of the practical'. My intention in raising such questions here is to stimulate debate rather than to provide, in the short space available, a thorough-going analysis of the aims of polytechnical education.

Does vocational education have to be non-academic?

We know that many forms of education which are directly linked to employment are not seen as 'vocational'. These include the high status courses, such as degrees in medicine and law. Their place in higher education is never challenged. But what of those which do not command such status? Can we not devise courses in catering, engineering, hair-dressing or business and administration that also contain a coherent mix of critical theory and practical application? Within post-compulsory education in Britain there is a strange polarisation in current vocational provision. For those in work, NVQs emphasise practice to the extent that theory can be entirely missing. On the other hand, GNVQs, designed for full-time education, have no requirement for practical experience in the workplace – real or simulated – and both are fundamentally uncritical.

Why does vocational education have to be closely tied to assumptions about employers' interests?

There are two related issues here. The first relates to the desires of some young people for an education that prepares them for work and training. If this is acceptable for those studying science in order to go on and read medicine to become doctors, why should it not also apply to those who wish to have an education that can lead them to a career in catering or motor vehicle maintenance? Perhaps we need to consider the links between education and employment from the young person's perspective, rather

than assuming that it would be the same as an employer's. We also need to examine more carefully the balance between specialisms which are seen by some as career specific, and the benefits of a broader-based general education.

The second issue relates to a central theme of this paper. It has been argued that education should not be determined by an economic imperative based on outmoded divisions. Therefore, if what are now called vocational studies are to be included across the post-compulsory curriculum, should they also be subjected to scrutiny for the intrinsic interest they can command, and for their contribution to citizenship, democracy and a sound general education? This is the kind of question that Dearing, among others, has brought to the fore, but which still needs consideration.

What is the place of the practical in general education?

Once the vocational curriculum is separated from the 'causal' link with employer needs, we require other reasons for its inclusion. One of these must relate to the need for practical education to balance more restrictedly academic approaches. This raises the currently neglected question about what practical education is, and what and who it is for. Here, four different types of answer present themselves, and hence four different reasons for the inclusion of the practical, although the list is not definitive.

- The first concerns the benefits of learning from practical experience. If key aims of learner autonomy and citizenship are to have more than rhetorical value, all learners must acquire the means of generating their own theoretical understanding. The uncritical rehearsal of others' theorising is not sufficient. Knowledge and understanding must square with learners' personal practical experiences if they are to have proper meaning and value and, for this, learners will need at their disposal the skills necessary for their continual critical examination of practical experience.

- The second stresses the practical application of theory or knowledge. This can take place in almost any subject, and might include putting on a play, conducting a scientific experiment or running a simulated business. The important point is that knowing and understanding are not enough – that education must go further.
- The third type of practical application concerns physical dexterity and the notion that education should not neglect physical skills. Once more, these skills could be developed in a wide variety of contexts, not all currently included in 'vocational' education. Hairdressing, cooking, mechanical engineering, laboratory experiments and making electronic circuits are just a few examples.
- The fourth type is of a different order. Practical, in this sense, implies the ability to be proactive in a practical way, rather than expecting someone else to either give a lead or do things for you. Often, though not always, this type of 'practicality' is a team and community effort. Examples would be when students organise their own events, become involved in local community events, run a college newsletter or produce their own concert. The central question then becomes, can we ever justify a general education that does not celebrate and develop all these forms of the practical, for all young people?

What should be the role of learning in the workplace?

Attention has already been drawn to the current paradox, whereby vocational courses in full-time education may have no requirement for work-based experience, while work-based training programmes have no requirement for off-the-job experience. Yet we know that most young people identify with work experience of various types, not least because they are treated as adults in adult surroundings, in sharp contrast to what they see as the infantilisation of full-time schooling. As school-leaving ages continue to rise, with a growing number staying in full-time further education until they are 20 or older, this issue is of growing importance. Furthermore, is it not at least plausible that work environments could release novel learning opportunities which, for many young people, could be profitably blended with other experiences in their post-16 education?

This relates to the previous question. Where relevant, the understanding of applied practical skills is likely to be greatly enhanced in a working environment linked with post-16 education and training. It is time to be less squeamish about such matters if policy-makers are to take the education-industry relationship seriously.

If a current problem for educationists, policy makers and politicians is one of how to respond to such questions, the reality is that the same questions have been on the table, unaddressed, since Crowther (1959). In the Post-Dearing and post-election climate the situation is more complicated as the principles of marketisation and managerialism, as well as the alternative ones of democracy and professionalisation, are all under siege. Some policy rapprochement between the two approaches looks on the cards, but will it be enough? In contrast with more unified approaches being developed elsewhere in Sweden and Scotland, there remains a lack of policy consensus or political will in England to move in this direction. According to Spours and Young (1996) there is a danger in forcing through a response to Dearing based on an Advanced Diploma, which has neither the backing of Higher Education and employers and, importantly, where the principles of integration linking academic, vocational and work-based knowledge remain unclarified. Research on professional opinion among teachers and lecturers favours strengthening the framework offered by Dearing rather than trying to move directly to a Baccalaureate-type Diploma.

> *If qualifications reform is undertaken in an incremental, planned and well managed way with adequate resourcing at each stage, a consensus for change can be established in a system far more fragmented and complex than north of the Border . . . if lessons can be learned from TVEI, and it is recognised that much of the capacity for innovation in England is local not national, it is not unrealistic to envisage a unified system within 10 years.*
>
> *Spours and Young 1996*

The message here is that we are at a 'half-way house' stage in a transition that is likely to proceed slowly and incrementally. In the meantime, the lesson from TVEI (Gleeson and McLean, 1993) of teachers implementing real change in spite of, rather than because of, any direct lead from gov-

ernment, looks set to continue. Perhaps if policy-makers expressed less frustration with educationists and social scientists for failing to provide them with answers to their problems, they might just reflect on this lesson. Fat chance one might say. Put another way, there is a need to understand the way values inform new policy thinking, whose values should these be, and how they should be represented. As Avis and others (1996) have sought to argue, in spite of the apparent importance attached by the New Right to education and training in revitalising the British economy, the reality has been an 'economising of education' (Kenway 1994) dominated by downsizing and fiscal objectives, which have led to a serious fracturing of Britain's public sector institutions without adequate replacement. Instead of becoming the socially progressive Post-Fordist society advocated by some commentators, Britain has gone down a selective and market-driven route, in which the rights and opportunities of citizens and workers have been increasingly diminished. The danger is that piecemeal market funding, and qualification-led reform will reinforce this process by driving the lifelong learning agenda into a franchised cul de sac creating a 'Marie Celeste' model of learning in which real teachers and students rarely meet, but are nevertheless 'on roll' (Frankel and Rèeves, 1996). This model of the *virtual student* may satisfy the accounting procedures of funding agencies, but in this form it represents little more than an educational version of 'care in the community', serving mainly the interests of a low-skilled service economy.

It may well be that full employment is a thing of the past: but that does not necessarily mean full-time work is at an end or that FE cannot make a contribution to the economy and jobs. Rather, it requires new thinking about the nature of work, including its construction, distribution and relationship with education and society. The conviction that no such alternative strategy is possible has been sustained by a popularist cultivation of nationhood and vocationalism, backed by a corresponding state craft which has ensured that New Right education policy has remained unchallenged by internal dissent, or external critique – at least until recently. Yet, as the limitations of Nation State Vocationalism as a basis for enlightened reform become more obvious, there remains little to build on in terms of alternative values and priorities. If, in Hutton's terms (1996) '. . . a great opportunity may yet go begging . . .', (presumably a message to New

Labour) it is worth remembering that lifetime learning is not just about markets and economic competitiveness: it is also crucial to a developing national culture and quality of life. The two, however, need not be separate. Driving unemployed youth and adults into training as an 'acceptable alternative' to unavailable work in the form of Welfare to Work is, however, unlikely to support this end. Neither is reduction of the '21 hour rule' to 16, as the number of hours per week of formal teaching which a student can receive from a college before losing benefit entitlement, likely to inspire educational access to the most needy, including those with special educational needs.

At present the combination of centralised fiscal restraint and a tendency for the DfEE, FEFC and other bodies, to hide behind the crumbling market which they helped to create, is limiting FE's room for manoeuvre. What is called for now are funding and support mechanisms which place learning as much as funding at the centre of post-compulsory education policy and practice. This will require New Labour's greater recognition of the strategic national importance of FE in delivering quality learning, at a local level. A strong FE system will, at college level, be greatly enhanced by:

- placing learning, knowledge and skill at the centre of its operations
- developing a unified curriculum which accommodates progression across the 14–19 and adult age range, involving academic, vocational and work-based learning for all
- ensuring that managers, lecturers and governors work co-operatively in defining the FE curriculum
- making decisions based on independent evidence where labour market and community need are held in balance
- being accountable to a National Further Education Council, which subsumes the existing FEFC remit alongside a broader professional, pedagogic and research role.

What I have sought to argue is that it is in the public interest to encourage greater breadth of further education and training than the current limitations of market, funding and National Vocational Qualifications permit. Wholesale changes now taking place in the methodology of funding and provision for post-compulsory education reflect outcome rather than

process-based considerations, when clearly the two must connect. Moreover, attempts by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), FEFC and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) (now QCA) to colonise youth and adult provision with a tripartite formula is not best placed to secure the diverse learning needs of post-16 education and training students, or the conditions of a learning society for the twenty-first century (Hyland 1994). Such an approach is altogether too narrow, restrictive and out of step with growing provision in colleges which falls largely outside the traditional frame of GCSEs, A-levels, NVQs and GNVQs. The reality is that a majority of young people and adults work and study via a combination of routes, modes and approaches which a tripartite curriculum, training and accreditation approach barely accommodates. In Flint's (1996) terms, 'the genie is now out of the bottle'. However, claims about the importance of FE in the process of national economic regeneration will remain simply slogans unless there is a serious recognition that the requirements of youth and adult learning consist of much more than the limited conditions of tripartism allow. It is to this neglected aspect of the Post-Dearing policy debate that this paper is addressed.

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Chapter

The curriculum perspective

Education and training: the prevocational tradition Richard Pring

Introduction

It is interesting to observe how, in the deliberations about the future shape of education and training post-14, little is learned from past experience – even the recent past. The planning of the National Curriculum in 1987 hardly referred to the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) which, at the total cost of nearly £2 billion, had tackled many of the problems that the National Curriculum aimed to solve. It could be argued that the original intentions behind TVEI were different from those behind the National Curriculum as they came from different Departments of State. But TVEI, as it came to be developed by teachers, addressed the same central question: how best and in what way can we educate young people, given, firstly, the social and economic world they have to inhabit and, secondly, the importance of educating all young people whether academically gifted or not. The General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) is the successor of those prevocational qualifications CGLI 365, Certificate of Prevocational Education (CPVE) and Diploma of Vocational Education (DOVE) which, however, receive no acknowledgement.

First, therefore, I start this analysis by reflecting upon that prevocational tradition which has had such an impact upon schools and colleges within the last fifteen years, and which was perceived by teachers to offer a way of

tackling the educational problems which they had perceived. The National Curriculum, its reform by the Dearing Committee, the development of the GNVQ, the current changes to the A-level and the pronouncements of the major political parties all indicate that this tradition has been ignored. In doing this, I refer to many of the practices which I witnessed as evaluator of several projects within the TVEI and CPVE initiatives in order to illustrate a mode of educational thinking. Secondly, I draw out some of the curriculum consequences of this way of thinking. Then I continue by underlining the philosophical assumptions. I conclude by exploring the way forward: the lessons to be learned from 15 years of experience.

The prevocational 'tradition'

A basis for choice

When the Further Education Unit (FEU) was established by the DES in the late 1970s, its first task concerned what to do with the growing number of young people who were registered on full-time pre-employment courses – many of whom, unable to get jobs, were knocking at the doors of colleges demanding further education. And, yet, neither the academic tradition, represented by A-levels, nor the vocational tradition, represented by training for specific jobs, was appropriate. More often than not these young people were the school 'failures', those deemed unsuited for academic study. At the same time, they were not clear about the jobs or careers they wanted to be trained for. The FEU was left with the question: What counts as a continuing general education for a growing number of young people who were alienated by past failure, disillusioned with education, ignorant of what future employment had in store but who recognised that learning mattered?

The FEU produced *A Basis for Choice* (1979) which set out principles addressing the problems of diversity in a time of economic and social change. In so doing, it challenged many of the preconceptions about educational purposes and about processes of learning that dominated the curriculum of both schools and colleges. Furthermore, it had far reaching effects upon developments which were then to take place both in further education and in schools but which have been neglected in recent stan-

dardisations of the curriculum. Those principles encapsulated the tacit understandings of teachers as they grappled with the problems of educating young people, often reluctant learners, frequently those who were 'failures' by traditional standards. Hence, the swift adoption, by colleges and schools, of the City & Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) 365 courses, the rapid take-up of CPVE, the immediate transformation in 1982 of the TVEI from the narrowly vocational prescription of Lord Young, the then Secretary of State for Employment, into something exciting and educationally defensible.

A Basis for Choice addressed two questions:

- What sort of learning do these young people personally need to prepare for adult life?
- What skills and knowledge does British society need from these young people if it is to survive?

It was a two-way movement arriving eventually at the same place: the quality of the transaction between teacher and learner. One move came from a concern about the person in terms of the skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes necessary to live a worthwhile life. The other move came from consideration of what the society needed from the next generation of adults both economically and socially. The analysis did not start from the 'given' of most educational thinking – from the list of subjects which are normally to be found in schools. Perhaps the end point *might* be the same; the starting point was different.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI)

In November 1982, the Prime Minister announced the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). This caused consternation in schools for several reasons:

- The initiative was introduced by the Department of Employment (DE), not the Department of Education and Science (DES). This signalled a radical departure from the understanding that the curriculum was essentially a professional matter, 'the secret garden' entered into only by teachers.

- The curriculum proposals were narrowly and vocationally conceived. This indicated a departure from a liberal tradition which tended to be disdainful of studies which were vocationally relevant and practical.
- There was an accompanying threat that, if local authorities were not prepared to go along with these proposals, then technical and vocational schools would be established outside the education system. That signalled a challenge to the authority of the educational establishment and to the system which had provided compulsory education for a century.

The inability of DES to effect change had been a long-standing source of frustration. In the 1980s there was not the power to make schools and LEAs spend money in the way that government wanted. TVEI, through a different Department of State, was the first example of targeted funding where much needed money was dependent on detailed curriculum conditions laid down by government.

However, very shortly after the announcement of TVEI, the narrow conception of vocational relevance which it encompassed (stressing job-related skills) was quickly transformed by the teachers into something defensible within a liberal tradition, and remarkably like the curriculum principles of the FEU initiative. It did not remain faithful to the original statements of government ministers. The importance of this is two-fold:

- The experience of TVEI demonstrates that 'ready made' curriculum thinking at the centre is transformed, when it leaves the centre, in the very practice of teaching; there are limits to the effect of central prescription.
- The *idea* of vocational relevance was not rejected, and this in turn helped to transform the liberal tradition into which it had to fit.

To put in a nutshell what happened, the TVEI curriculum liberalised an otherwise narrowly conceived vocationalism and vocationalised a liberal tradition which had too often ignored relevance to the world of work.

September 1983 saw the beginning of 14 pilot TVEI schemes. Each year for the next four years further schemes started until almost every LEA had a consortium of TVEI schools. From the beginning no rigid pattern and no specific content were imposed. Indeed, several of the proposals emerged from work already contemplated within schools which, suitably adjusted,

met the criteria established by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) for TVEI schemes. To such schools and colleges the curriculum problem might have been posed thus: 'What sort of curriculum would you establish from 14 to 18 to ensure progression, coherence, and vocational and technical relevance?' Or, more realistically: 'How would you adjust what you already do to ensure these things?' TVEI could be seen, crudely, as a lump sum given to groups of schools with a view to solving a curriculum problem, and each pilot was expected to produce its own distinctive solution from which others could learn. It is difficult now to appreciate the significance of this way of thinking: the 'centre' (the Secretary of State) identifying the problems and the framework within which solutions must be found in general terms, but leaving the solutions themselves to the imagination and expertise of the professionals.

Those solutions had to meet broad criteria which were very diverse (relating, as they did, to aims and values to be pursued, styles of learning to be adopted, curriculum design and planning to be followed) and which rapidly came to be defined by the MSC. The thinking behind the criteria and within the FEU's *A Basis for Choice* is summarised in the following section.

Prevocational principles

1 The curriculum had to show the relevance of *vocational needs* to the individual and society. The concept of 'vocational' was not itself defined and came to be quite generously interpreted, as explained below.

2 Closely connected with the first principle, was the requirement that the curriculum should ensure progression and coherence from 14 to 18 – from secondary school into further and higher education or into training. In putting both these criteria together, schools placed greater emphasis upon careers guidance and counselling against a background of work experience. 'Knowing thyself' in relation to subsequent career choices was seen as a central, not peripheral, curriculum concern.

3 'Relevance' was construed in terms not simply of what should be learned but also of the *process of learning*. 'Learning styles' became a central focus of the prevocational curriculum for two reasons:

- The relevance, even in vocational terms, of the curriculum depended on the habits and styles of learning which were acquired and which would affect subsequent learning beyond school and college.
- In the absence of appropriate styles of learning, the young people themselves would, in many respects, feel alienated from what schools, colleges and training courses had to offer. Therefore, there was an emphasis upon more practical modes of learning which were referred to by Bruner (1960) and others as the 'enactive' and 'iconic' modes of representation.

4 'Learning styles' would benefit from the advances in *information tech nology* (IT) in several ways:

- Technology enabled information to be stored and made accessible, so that, properly used, it could transform the process of learning. IT created the opportunity for learning to be much more resource-based, much less dependent on constant interaction with the teacher.
- Technology provided techniques for the learner to organise and to develop work which had too often been neglected such as media studies, art and design, creative work in English and investigations in history or geography. Word processing, too, was a skill which was seen to benefit all in whatever walks of life they were preparing for.

5 There should be a *technological content*, not simply as an aid to learning, but as an end in itself. This was an implicit criticism of a school curriculum which, rooted in a classical past, largely ignored technology as a distinct kind of knowledge, despite the technological advances which had transformed society and individual lives.

6 The curriculum would focus much more upon personal needs. It had to be 'relevant' not simply in general or abstract terms but particularly to each individual. Hence, there was an emphasis upon *personal effectiveness* as well as upon the guidance and counselling already men-

tioned. Personal and social skills, personal confidence and the capacity and the confidence to communicate ideas to different audiences became important curriculum objectives.

7 In preparing young people more adequately for life after school, the 'relevant curriculum', would emphasise both *communication skills and practical numeracy*, and these might be seen as permeating all or much of the curriculum. Thus, it was seen to be important to enable young people not only to read and to write well, but also to be able to listen and to convey their intentions and meanings orally.

8 Too often the curriculum had been seen as a closed shop, the 'secret garden' of the professional educators. But others, too, were now seen to have a place within both the planning and the execution of the curriculum, particularly employers. Thus, the curriculum should be more *community conscious*, relating to it and drawing from it the ideas and resources which would enhance the learning experience. The world of work provided experts, such as engineers, who were not always available in schools; it provided a different environment in which learning could take place; it provided a challenge to assumptions, often unquestioned, about the content and process of learning within school or college.

9 The TVEI curriculum encouraged *co-operative learning* and teamwork rather than competition and individualism. This was an extension both in the thinking on learning styles and of demonstrable relevance to the world of work.

10 An emphasis was placed upon *equal opportunities*, countering the imbalance between boys and girls in achievements in science and technology, and opening up opportunities to girls which had too often been seen as inappropriate for them. This often required a change of attitude.

11 A different curriculum with different emphases and aims required a re-examination of the standards whereby achievement was judged and of the ways in which those achievements were to be assessed. In particular, it was argued that there should be greater emphasis upon continual and

formative assessment, reflected in regular *profiling* of each student, providing a more generous and positive picture of the achievements and qualities of the student.

To summarise these criteria, and to see a distinctive set of ideas beneath the wide range of prevocational practice, is not easy. But perhaps it is best summed up by the concept of 'relevance'. The view that education was primarily concerned with the 'perfection of the intellect' was distinctive of a particular and contrasting liberal tradition. With this view came the development of intelligence in its various disciplined forms: mathematical, scientific, historical, and so on. Such a 'perfection of the intellect' could ignore the practical relevance of what is learned or, indeed, reference to the world of work; the well-trained mind would, so it was held, later be turned to whatever life had in store. But it was precisely that separation of the theoretical from the practical, of the intrinsically worthwhile from the useful, of understanding from skills and personal qualities, of 'knowing that' from 'knowing how', of the intellectual virtues from the practical dispositions required in the non-academic world, which was challenged by the prevocational principles and practice. And that challenge was reflected in the renewed importance attached to the relevance of what is learned, firstly, to the felt needs of the learner, and, secondly, to the needs of the society for which the learners were being prepared. Hence, central, though often not clearly articulated, was a distinctive view about what needed to be learned, and how learning should be pursued, in preparing young people appropriately for the late twentieth century.

That at least was the emerging ideal, even if (as is always the case with the school curriculum) it did not always appear so in practice. It should, however, be noted and stressed that this ideal was essentially an educational one, by no means confined to the upper age range of the secondary school. Indeed, as Hartley (1987) so persuasively argued, there was much in common between such developments and a tradition of primary education as represented by the Plowden (1967) and other reports.

The initial criticisms of TVEI, on the other hand, arose from the standpoint of a liberal education in which sharp contrasts were drawn between a curriculum which 'liberated' through focus upon the 'perfection of the intellect' and a curriculum which emphasised practical modes of learning,

utility, and relevance. Education in schools was contrasted with the training provided by employers; knowledge and understanding were contrasted with skills acquisition; liberal values of intrinsic worth were contrasted with the utilitarian ones of economic value; intellectual virtues were contrasted with the newly-arrived commercial virtues of enterprise and entrepreneurship; the autonomy of educational traditions and institutions was contrasted with the need for greater influence by employers and for greater control by the Department of Employment.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to whatever is planned in the formal context of learning. Pupils do, of course, learn all sorts of things at school which are not part of the curriculum, and in recent years, by extension, the term 'hidden curriculum' has arisen to describe the unintended effects of the planned learning activities. But curriculum must be understood broadly so that it means more than the syllabus – the often brief accounts of the 'content' to be covered. It embraces the overarching aims and values as well, the ways in which learning is organised, the methods adopted and the links between teaching and assessment.

For this reason, one needs to be cautious in talking about the prevocational curriculum. There was no distinctive content prescribed by the FEU or by TVEI, no teaching method, no specific organisation of learning, no one favoured mode of assessment, except a certain core of learning experiences and learning objectives including an emphasis on technology. There were many different curricula, as different schemes developed their own response to the central initiative within the broad criteria as I have outlined them. But a distinctive curriculum 'philosophy' did emerge, a distinctive view about the aims of secondary education which was translated into a set of characteristic practices.

This emergence of a distinctive 'philosophy' had three causes:

- There was a profound feeling among many teachers that, as far as many children were concerned, there was something fundamentally wrong with the way in which the knowledge to be acquired was organised and taught; so many poorly motivated students could not be accounted for simply by reference to bad teaching. And there had been a long tradition of teachers attempting different, more relevant programmes of learning. The innumerable 'ROSLA buildings' (those erected for the 'Raising of the School-Leaving Age') in our schools, dating back to the 1960s, is testament to this. TVEI 'legitimated' what many teachers had always wanted to do.

- There had long been, 'waiting in the wings', a very different and alternative view of education. It was reflected in the Spens Report's (1938) attack on the typical grammar school curriculum (especially that of science) which advocated a much more practical approach. Theory is embedded in practice and, for most pupils, should be approached through practice. Why not a science course for the country grammar school child, based on such practical pursuits as bee-keeping? But the Spens Report advocated what had been argued so cogently much earlier in the writings and practice of Dewey (1977) who criticised the 'false dualisms' of theory versus practice, of academic versus vocational, of education versus training and of thinking versus doing.

- TVEI in particular developed a network of teachers who shared their thinking and their practice on a regular basis. They issued newsletters and conferences, held regional and national meetings and came together in examination boards. TVEI, but also the other prevocational developments, provided the opportunity for teachers to think together about the curriculum and assessment and to be active in a curriculum development which tackled problems too often ignored. In such circumstances, there arose a shared 'philosophy', implicit maybe, but embedded in the practice of many teachers and many schools and colleges.

That emerging set of interconnecting curriculum ideas might best be demonstrated through a few curriculum practices.

Assignment-led learning

Traditionally the curriculum has been seen as an aggregate of discrete subjects. Each subject represents a set of concepts, principles and facts which need to be learned. The precise content of each subject may be disputed, but in many respects the National Curriculum has for practical purposes settled that issue; the attainment targets and programmes of study are spelled out in some detail.

There are several difficulties in this understanding of the curriculum. The emphasis on content might lead to an omission of important skills, qualities, or aptitudes which cannot easily be spelled out in terms of the content of particular subjects. The National Curriculum's belated attempt to include the cross-curriculum dimensions, themes and skills did not overcome this problem. Furthermore, the subject approach to curriculum planning frequently relegates to secondary importance the process of learning and the more broadly conceived aptitudes and qualities which transcend subject boundaries.

An alternative approach which was characteristic of quite a lot of prevocational work was that of 'assignment-led learning'. Thus, an assignment would be so structured that engagement in it would require the exercise of a range of skills, the acquisition of knowledge, the understanding of certain situations and operations, the development of particular qualities. Moreover, such assignments can be pitched at various levels of complexity.

Let us take, for example, the first assignment of a Year 10 class (mainly 14-year-olds) in a city comprehensive school within one of the initial TVEI schemes. There were some able students, but there was a preponderance of low attainment boys and girls, with one or two who had behaviour difficulties which had brought them in regular contact with the police. After a few introductory weeks, they had to put themselves into groups of five, choose a leader and a rapporteur. As a group they had a camping assignment which involved putting up a tent, cooking a simple meal in camping conditions, striking camp and leaving everything, including equipment, as it had been found. The teachers structured and monitored the assignment, thoroughly debriefed each of the groups afterwards but interfered only when absolutely necessary. Firstly, the establishment of

groups was a major task only slowly achieved, but the debriefing plus subsequent groupwork reflected a developing awareness of group dynamics and of teamwork. Secondly, putting up the tent was a complex business requiring close attention to instructions and co-operation between team members. Thirdly, in this and subsequent assignments turns were taken both to lead and to evaluate the various skills and qualities which the respective assignments demanded. Indeed, the marking of the assignment required detailed pre-planning by the teachers which included a clear criteria of success, the range of communication, personal and social skills involved in a co-operative group task such as this and the powers of reflection and of evaluation which led up to the debriefing. Gradually, through the year, one saw the growth of team co-operation, mature groupwork, the capacity to take responsibility without over-dependence on the teacher, a readiness to follow carefully instructions and to go to other sources for finding out what to do.

Of course, there is nothing original in such an approach. Anyone familiar with BTEC will recognise the power of assignment-led learning in putting together, in an integrated framework, a range of skills, understandings, personal qualities and problem-solving approaches which otherwise might be neglected. However, it was a fairly novel approach to curriculum planning in schools.

Resource-based learning

It is often felt that too much dependence on the organisation of learning is put upon the personal intervention of the teacher. Greater independence should be fostered. Learners should, to some extent, be able to set their own agenda and have the intellectual tools and the resources to pursue that agenda. Hence, the emphasis upon resource-based learning.

Take, for example, a West Country school that used TVEI to develop Supported Self Study (SSS). SSS entailed a radical shift not in the basic organisation of the curriculum into subjects (although, in fact, this school produced a thoroughly modularised school curriculum) but in the approach to teaching those subjects. Thus, the library became the centre of resources and materials which would enable the learner to pursue an indi-

vidualised path, or to seek enrichment of a course of study already being taken, or to find remedial support. Teaching shifted from being a one hundred per cent interaction with a whole class to the careful structuring of learning experiences, the development of resources to support those experiences and the tutoring of students in the use of those resources. From the learner's point of view, it required a degree of sophistication in the use of resources and in the organisation of time which few young people have but which are vital qualities and skills for further learning. SSS, therefore, soon entered into almost every module in the school curriculum, changing the normal relationship between teacher and student (Rainbow 1987).

Design and technology

Typical of the curriculum in many schools is the discrete nature of its different components. Art is insulated from design, technology from home economics, 'making' from feeling and appreciating. Indeed, it is a reflection upon the conservativism of curriculum thinking that technology has so rarely been seen as a distinctive subject. The curriculum model of the Assessment of Performance Unit in the 1970s considered technological understanding and know-how to be reducible to science and mathematics. It had no significant place in the curriculum, unless as Craft, Design and Technology, and then mainly for the less able. Even when Design and Technology did become a popular A-level course, it was treated as of inferior significance by universities and colleges for selecting students for courses in Engineering and in Art and Design.

Prevocational courses provided many examples of a challenge to this insulation of the designing from the making, of art from design, and of the useful from wider moral and social considerations. It frequently brought subjects which were seen to be totally disconnected together in the same teaching space, for example, CDT, art, design and home economics, anticipating many of the recommendations of the National Curriculum foundation subject 'Design and Technology'.

For example, one school developed an integrated design and technology course from art, home economics and CDT with a range of interrelated activities looked after by an interdisciplinary team of teachers. The work

was exciting and motivating; there was an emphasis upon design and visual satisfaction, an intermeshing of the functional and the aesthetic which is so rare to achieve. The juxtaposition of the erstwhile CDT workshops, the Art studios and the Home Economics practical rooms enhanced the work on fabrics, stimulated by links with an outside designer seeking ideas for a new synthetic material. The computerised knitting machine symbolised the integration of technology, design, art, home economics and business studies (Pring 1989).

Economic awareness

Prevocational education challenged an ideal of liberal education which was perceived to be disconnected both in ethos and in content from the economic realities of the world of industry and commerce, an understanding and appreciation of which played little part in the curriculum. Indeed, it was central to the prevocational courses that there should be much greater economic awareness and a readiness to accept commercial aspirations and know-how as perfectly respectable and legitimate pursuits in school. For that reason, mini-enterprise schemes were encouraged and business studies promoted as a subject. 'Enterprise' became an educational virtue.

There were many examples of business studies taking on a new lease of life under TVEI, partly because of the resourcing, partly because of the more practical and activity led modes of learning which it endorsed, and partly because of the links with the wider community which were established. Again, there was little that, in some form or another, had not occurred previously. But TVEI gave respectability to activities which too often had had the status of activities for 'low achievers' and injected a degree of rigour in the planning and execution which often had been lacking. Hence, the encouragement of mini-enterprise in various forms, community-based projects, links with employers through work placements.

For example, a group of Year 12 students carried out a term's project on the marketing of a new product to encourage local tourism. One project researched the possibility of developing local cheeses with a view to promoting sales through tourism. The research was extensive depending on surveys and interviews, investigations into the manufacture of cheeses,

financial analysis and market strategies, and close partnership with local farmers and tourist officials. To do this the students were organised into simulated companies with role-playing chairmen, secretaries and marketing managers. The final report had to be well-presented and defended before an audience of fellow students, staff and the local community.

Profiling and assessment

Teachers have often been at odds with the 'official curriculum' of secondary schools in that they have recognised and wanted to record a wider range of qualities and achievements than those recognised by the normal system of assessment encouraged by public examinations. That system has almost always promoted the assessment of the literary and mathematical abilities which can be expressed on paper in controlled conditions. But it is apparent to teachers that there are intellectual, aesthetic and personal qualities – all the product of education – which cannot be assessed in this way. Practical numeracy, sensitivity to others, perseverance on a task, various forms of problem-solving, co-operation in teams, leadership, the capacity to listen to others and to marshal one's arguments in response, oral skills and so on – all these were emphasised and had to be acknowledged in the assessment of achievement.

This took two forms:

- There was the need for regular profiling of the student on the basis of these different qualities. A lot of development work went into systems of profiling and into the staff development it required. Initially some of these profiles were produced by the City and Guild of London Institute for their 365 courses. But those were early days in the profiling movement and the list of CGLI competences was soon seen to be too impoverished for a more generous picture of student achievement. Indeed, TVEI played a major role in the thinking behind profiling and Records of Achievement, and in the training of many teachers for taking on this new role.

- The public examinations reflected the traditional interests of the academic community and failed to do justice to the different kinds of learning experiences and the achievements that many of the prevocational developments represented. How can a system of examinations which records individual achievement reflect the greater sense of, and commitment to, co-operative learning which employers so value? How can they reflect the oral and the listening skills? How might they record and take into account the capacity to analyse a problem, hypothesise a range of possible actions, test them out in the practical context and design an appropriate solution? The practical capacity to do these things might not be adequately reflected in the theoretical capacity to write about them on paper. Hence, fundamental to the developing curriculum philosophy was a challenge to the implicit definition of standards which public examinations embodied.

Moreover, the final profile would refer to the range of different achievements. Thus, the Record of Achievement of one 18-year-old stated the two A-levels in Design and Technology and English, the GCSE Mature in Mathematics, the RSA certificate in IT, the Grade 7 in Music, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at gold level, and the range of experiences which the girl thought important in promoting herself to potential employers and admission tutors.

These examples of curriculum practice in modes of learning, vocationally related subjects and assessment and recording are not intended to prove or to establish anything, but simply to illustrate how prevocational developments might be seen to endorse a practical, more integrated, more community-directed, more economically and technologically aware conception of education. This new concept would be more relevant to life after school while remaining rigorous in aims and in the assessment of those aims. In so doing, it sought ways, not of improving standards, but of challenging the standards as they were traditionally conceived. Being able to work co-operatively and fruitfully in teams was a worthwhile aim; it was something that required knowledge, understanding and sensitivity; it was an ability that could be acquired or learned; in other words, it had a rightful place in the curriculum, even though frequently neglected. It was vocationally relevant, and yet compatible with the very best traditions of liberal learning.

Again, being able to follow complex instructions, to work out a plan of action, to organise a range of activities in a given time, to monitor and to evaluate the whole operation – these are all activities requiring valuable skills and knowledge which can be learned. Teaching them through 'doing' is teaching just the same.

However, perhaps an important lesson from all this is that both CPVE and TVEI failed to create a *system* of assessment related to what was already established in schools and colleges and to provide routes into the next stages of further and higher education or into employment. Whatever the merits of curriculum reform and design, they must be seen within a coherent system of assessment.

Philosophical assumptions

Such curriculum developments, in that they met the broad criteria outlined above, were a challenge to the prevailing traditions of liberal education, on the one hand, and vocational training, on the other. That tradition of liberal education, in pursuing the 'perfection of the intellect', required learning to be organised into discrete forms of knowledge, which themselves were defined in terms of key organising concepts, facts to be known, and principles of understanding. To that extent, it tended to encourage book-based and didactic modes of teaching, to neglect more practical modes of learning and to regard the aim of such learning to be 'knowledge for its own sake'. By contrast, vocational training derived its 'curriculum' from an analysis of the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs; at its centre was 'on the job' preparation – practical, with clear, behavioural objectives; and the values enshrined within it were those of utility and relevance to the task in hand. (Pring 1995 develops this contrast.)

The original critics of TVEI saw the exchange of one tradition for the other, the substitution of training for education, of utility for intellectual virtue, of specific skills for broad understanding, of doing for thinking. But in challenging this dichotomy, and the critics who appealed to it, the TVEI schemes also challenged the underlying educational aims and values which had prevailed in schools for too long and which, some would argue, were at the base of so many social and economic difficulties. Why cannot one be

trained in an educationally respectable way? Why cannot one enter the halls of theory through the portals of practice? Why cannot intrinsic value be found in the useful and the relevant? Why cannot skills be seen as an ingredient in the development of knowledge and understanding?

Looking, therefore, more deeply at the curriculum developments encouraged within this prevocational tradition, I see three major features of a more philosophical kind that deserve closer attention. 'Tradition' may seem an inappropriate term for a mode of thinking and of organising the curriculum which seems so recent. However, I use that word to refer to a set of ideas which are embedded in practices even when not articulated and which have their roots in a way of thinking which has a history. The prevocational practices of the 1980s are a re-assertion of a philosophical way of thinking which is by no means as recent as the prevocational courses referred to in this paper.

The aims of the curriculum

To give the curriculum aims as opposed to specific curriculum objectives is to outline the values which the curriculum is expected to serve – the 'perfection of the intellect', 'economic utility', 'citizenship', 'personal growth and maturity' and so on. The dominant values of the particular liberal tradition which we have inherited are those concerned with the 'perfection of the intellect' – hence, the emphasis on learning for its own sake as opposed to preparing for life after school and rather didactic approaches to teaching so that a syllabus can be covered.

A different set of values or aims might be argued for, namely, those concerned with the whole person: practical, economic, social, political, as well as intellectual and curious. An account of these components of what it means to be and to grow as a person needs to be developed at much greater length, but suffice to say now that education in its broadest sense should be concerned with a range of learning which, though requiring intelligence, does not focus on that rather narrow range of learning concerned mainly with the perfection of the intellect for its own sake. Moreover, in the past and in other societies there has often been a connection between education and initiating the next generation into the values and economic practices of

the society. Society has an obligation to ensure its own survival; there is something wrong, if not hypocritical, in academics dismissing those very studies and practices which make academic life possible.

A basic aim, therefore, of prevocational courses was to re-assert the values of vocationalism in this broader sense and to question the separation of theory from practice, and of the intrinsically worthwhile from the useful. The link between vocationalism and the wider personal development, requiring intelligence, understanding and powers of reflection was well expressed by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*:

> *A vocation means nothing but a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person because of the consequences they accomplish, and also to his associates. The opposite of a career is neither leisure nor culture, but aimlessness, capriciousness, the absence of cumulative achievement in experience, on the personal side, and idle display, parasitic dependence on the others on the social side. Occupation is a concrete term for continuity (p307).*

Perhaps a stipulative definition, but not arbitrarily so, since it is made within a broader context of educational values, of continuity of experiences, of personal integrity which requires connections between different aspects of one's life. Vocationalism for Dewey requires that enlargement of the mind which enabled the trainees to see the significance of what they were doing in a broader context of human and social values and of personal aspirations. Such a broader context, rightly understood, would for example lead into political education – not the abstract consideration of political philosophies (that would come later) but the practical, immediately relevant concern to be involved in those groups who exercise power over peoples' capacity to fulfil their vocational aspirations.

In this way, but not making explicit the interesting shift of values and of educational aims, we can see the ideas of liberal and vocational education coming together in the curriculum.

The kind of knowledge required to fulfil these aims

There are two major points that I want to emphasise:

- There is a need to distinguish between practical and propositional knowledge; between knowing how to do things and knowing that something is the case. Very often we consider a person intelligent, or a successful learner, because he or she has acted wisely or appropriately or skilfully. The clever politician finds solutions to problems that the lay person would be unable to achieve. The car mechanic quickly detects a fault which baffles the scientist. The small scale businessman succeeds where the learned economist would go bust. There is a practical intelligence which can be acquired through learning from others, from the constant critical scrutiny of others, from exposure to experience, from being apprenticed to experts in that activity. That practical knowledge, although enlightened by accounts of it and by theoretical reflection upon it, is nonetheless not reducible to those accounts and to that theory.

  Part of the liberal tradition has been a neglect, if not disdain, for the practical knowledge and therefore it has too often been neglected also in the curriculum and in the assessment of students' achievements. One very important feature of prevocational developments has been to assert the importance of the practical knowledge and understanding, not just for the less able but for all, since practical know-how is a distinctive form of knowledge essential in any preparation for the future.

- Subjects themselves have very often reflected a division of propositional knowledge, which represents the logically different forms of knowledge, and have therefore been seen as an initiation into the fundamentally different ways in which one experiences and makes sense of the world. Consequently, the curriculum has tended not to reflect an organisation of learning arising from the practical and motivating concerns of the learner. And yet such an organisation of learning is possible. The logical structure of knowledge need not entail the psychological organisation of it for the purposes of learning. What is learned must respect that logical structure (not any answer counts as a correct one in mathematics), but the sequence of learning need not be determined by it. The various prevocational developments provided many examples of how the cur-

riculum might be organised differently around practical assignments or around subjects, such as business studies, which had vocational interest but which at the same time developed the capacity to think, to reflect and to appreciate – an education through training, not instead of it.

The accountability of schools to the wider community

There is a firm belief among many who are professionally engaged in education that educational expertise resides mainly with them. If one were to seek a justification of that belief, it would be along the following lines. Education is concerned with the perfection of the intellect in its various forms. To educate therefore requires a profound knowledge and love of one's subject and the knowledge of how it might be put across to pupils at the appropriate level in an intellectually respectable way. The only real educational experts therefore are those immersed in the subject-matter to be taught and experienced in the task of teaching it. Education in this sense is disconnected from the rest of life. And, thus, David Eccles, when Secretary of State in the 1960s, was able to talk of 'the secret garden of the curriculum', and the Schools Council was established as a professional body of teachers to deliberate about the curriculum and to make recommendations. The ultimate control of the curriculum lay with the classroom teachers themselves.

There are two reasons for challenging this view, both implicit in the prevocational courses:

- How we educate the next generation is a matter of importance not only for the individuals concerned, but also for the rest of society. The connection between education and society's values – economic, political, cultural and social – is direct and of public concern. Therefore, the aims of education are not to be decided within a purely intellectual and educational tradition.
- Relevant expertise was often found in the business community, amongst engineers and craftsmen, with the elderly, or with members of various professions. Indeed, one of the most striking achievements of the TVEI

curriculum was the way in which it integrated this much wider community into the task of deciding what should be learned, how most effectively it might be learned, and how it might be assessed.

These observations concerning the aims, organisation and accountability of the curriculum are important because it is too easy to focus narrowly on the very practical achievements without recognising their wider philosophical implications for a theory of values, of knowledge and of social responsibility.

Conclusion

The prevocational developments that I have outlined in this paper were a response to a particular set of problems – or at least to many people's perceptions of those problems. These might be summarised as the lack of economic relevance in much that young people had to learn and in the lack of personal relevance, particularly for those who attained so little in their schooling. In so responding, these prevocational developments raised questions about the aims of education, the organisation of learning and the accountability of schools, colleges and teachers to a much wider economic and social community.

The impact of many of these courses was such that they did transform many teachers' thinking about the curriculum and how students should be assessed. They introduced new content; in many cases they affected teaching and learning styles; they made the curriculum more oriented to the community, particularly one that contained employers; they legitimated practices which many teachers believed in but which were obstructed by very traditional conceptions of what should be learned.

This is worth reflecting upon. The focus was upon what was worth learning and how young people learn. This contrasts so dramatically with the current concentration upon assessment and assessment models, which has given rise to so much bureaucracy totally disconnected from any analysis of young people's motivations and different learning styles. Furthermore, the many achievements of the prevocational developments were made possible because the teachers were taken seriously as agents for

curriculum change. In the absence of an assessment-led curriculum and curriculum change, the teachers were able to take seriously how young people learn and what is worth learning, given the difficult and unpredictable world they were entering into. There was, in other words, a recognition of the *process* – not only of learning but also of curriculum change.

However, despite the popularity and success of many of these courses and qualifications, they had little influence on the devising of the National Curriculum, although they might have done so in the development of GCSE as that incorporated more practical work and assignment-led learning. Otherwise it was as though all these developments, led by teachers (though in partnership with industry and commerce and the wider community), had never happened.

The second major lesson which needs to be drawn from the failure to learn from the achievements of the 1980s is possibly the lack of any corporate memory in the institutions which now determine what is learned and how that learning is to take place. It is as though those who have assumed responsibility – in the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the Further Education Funding Agency, the Office for Standards in Education, and the Department for Education and Employment – have suffered from collective amnesia. Driven by a different model of innovation, captivated by an impoverished conception of learning, focused upon limited objectives, mesmerised by an assessment-led and competency-based model of innovation, they have simply cut themselves off from the thinking and the practice of a previous decade. How this is possible, it is difficult to conceive. Certainly the 1987 White Paper on the National Curriculum issued by the Department of Education and Science did not benefit at all from the achievements of the 1980s despite the billions of pounds spent on them (albeit largely funded by the Department of Employment). This is difficult to fathom and requires closer examination. But the implications are far reaching on the governance of education and training.

Nonetheless, the prevocational developments represent a philosophical grasp of the organisation of learning which is relatively new and which will remain a challenge to the old dichotomies between the academic and the vocational, the theoretical and the practical and the intrinsically worth-

while and the useful. They could, of course, be seen both as a precursor of, and as a justification for, the growing interest in the General National Vocational Qualification: the middle track between the academic and the vocational. But that would be a mistake as the prevocational tradition is not about a specific track or a specific set of students. Rather it is saying something very important about the nature of learning and the aims of education which are relevant to all students.

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The employment perspective

Chapter

Stakeholders, skills and star-gazing: the problematic relationship between education, training and the labour market

Prue Huddleston and Lorna Unwin

Introduction

This chapter will explore the relationship between post-16 education and training and the world of work and seek to define a research agenda within which issues related to that relationship can be raised and examined. Within post-16 education and training, further education colleges have always had a working relationship with industry and commerce and have their origins in the need for formal technical and vocational education at local and national levels. In other respects, however, significant elements of college life have become distanced from the world of work as these institutions have sought to gain academic respectability and, more recently, develop partnerships with higher education. A key question for all providers of post-16 education and training, and for this chapter, concerns the issue of balance of stakeholder interests. Can the current model of so-called employer-led post-16 education and training which is being promoted in the UK meet the needs of individuals as well as employers, and can employers themselves be supported by one vision of post-16 education and training given their diversity of scope, size and aspirations?

This chapter examines the extent to which post-16 education and training policies and practices are shaped by, reflect and adapt to the changing needs of the workplace and labour markets, and whether the concept of

tripartism can usefully be employed to aid such an analysis. In writing this chapter, we have sought to take a multi-disciplinary approach drawing on our own work in the field of labour market studies, the employment–education interface, workplace training, and education and training policy-making. We draw too on the research of economists and studies of the changing workplace. The research which informs the development of post-16 education and training and, in particular, vocational education and training (VET) comes from a range of disciplines which often do not have the language or inclination to speak to each other. For example, curriculum issues and qualifications' structures tend to be considered by educationalists in isolation from, say, economists' analyses of the labour market and business strategy. Hence we find that qualifications for both education and work are judged within an education paradigm and thus arguments about parity of esteem and the academic/vocational divide are based on the premise that vocational qualifications must prove themselves against an academic yardstick rather than being properly valued in their own right. Given the historic and continuing divisions which characterise post-16 education and training in England and Wales, it is important that research from the worlds of education, training and employment becomes more widely shared and assimilated.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse of post-16 education and training has been dominated by a recurring theme: the nation needs 'a highly skilled, flexible and motivated workforce' in order to cope with the 'impact of rapidly developing technologies, increasing international competition and industrial change (DfEE, 1997). Under this rhetorical banner, a series of vocational education and training initiatives have been launched, the most recent of which, the Modern Apprenticeship, evokes the mythical workplace of an industrial golden age while at the same time claiming to provide a model of work-based post-16 education and training which is appropriate for the changing workplace of the future. Such interventions in the relationship between post-16 education and training and the world of work serve to strengthen and test that relationship whose many and diverse stakeholders have complex needs and goals.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

- Section One examines the relevance of traditional categories used to divide and separate members of the workforce in the light of the changing nature of the workplace itself and employment patterns at local, regional, national and international levels.
- Section Two examines the infrastructure of post-16 education and training and assesses the extent to which it is capable of responding to the needs of employment and, indeed, whether it is capable of helping to shape the world of work rather than simply acting in a passive provider role.
- Section Three discusses the ways in which both post-16 education and training and the world of work might develop their relationship given the pressures exerted on them from policy-makers and the world in general.

Tripartism, skills and the labour market

A significant indication that tripartism may be an appropriate form of categorisation when describing the world of work is the concern surrounding this country's supposedly poor performance in terms of 'intermediate skills', a term which embraces 'craft' as well as 'technician' skills. While accepting such definitions are necessarily imprecise at the boundaries, Ryan (1992) describes intermediate skills as 'those above routine skills but below professional ones' and sees them as being characterised by three distinctive attributes:

> *Firstly, such skills are costly to develop, which marks them off from routine skills. Secondly, they are – or could readily become – highly transferable across employers which marks them off from employer-specific skills, however costly. Thirdly, in Britain they have traditionally been developed predominantly through workplace-based training programmes such as apprenticeship which marks them off from professional skills.*
>
> *(Ibid, pp 2–3)*

Several research studies in the 1980s and early 1990s highlighted Britain's historic failure to develop adequate supplies of intermediate skills in comparison with its economic competitors, notably France and Germany (in particular, Prais, 1981, Finegold and Soskice, 1988, Steedman, 1988, Steedman, *et al* 1991). The identification of a problem at the level of intermediate skills presupposes that the labour market and employer demand for certain types of labour are stratified along tripartite lines: *unskilled*; *skilled* (craft/technician); *professional*. Just as the British education system was structured to reflect Plato's tripartite division of society (see Chapter 1 of this volume), so the workplace could be said to divide itself into three categories of employee. The failure by employers to expand and develop the workforce's middle tier (those using intermediate skills), which itself divides into skilled and semi-skilled, was mirrored by the failure of successive governments to develop an adequate system of technical education and, until very recently, in the low numbers of young people participating in education beyond the age of 16 compared to most other industrialised nations.

Historically, Britain's 'skilled' workforce was developed through the apprenticeship system which, through the central role of trade unions, imposed job demarcations in industry and limited training opportunities for non-apprenticed workers (Keep and Mayhew, 1994). In manufacturing industry, three categories of employee – *unskilled*, *semi-skilled* and *skilled* – formed the basis on which wage rates were determined for hourly paid workers (blue-collar) as opposed to salaried staff (white-collar) (see Ainley, 1993). Yet, as Ainley (ibid), and Bailey and Gleeson (in this volume) remind us, tripartism in the education system and in the workplace may have more to do with concepts of social class than they have with clear definitions of what constitutes the nature and content of different skills. Ainley quotes Gallie who noted that there is:

> *. . . little consensus between analysts about what constitutes skill or how it can be measured. The very complexity of the task of defining skill makes it implausible that skill classifications in industry reflect in an unproblematic way some objective hierarchy. Rather, they are likely to be the product of a continuous negotiation between employers and employees, in which both relative power resources and prevalent cultural beliefs will influence the grading structure.*
>
> *(Gallie, 1988, pp 7–8)*

Here Gallie is referring to occupational skills, that is those skills which constitute particular job-specific tasks but to these we must also add the even more vaguely defined *social skills* (also referred to as *generic*, *personal*, *transferable*, *core* and, since the 1996 Dearing Review, *key* skills) which are thought to underpin all workplace activity (as well as that outside the workplace). Green (1996) draws our attention to emerging literature which suggests that 'much of what goes under the name of training is not just to raise the technical skills of the workforce but also to improve their "social skills"' (p 22). These social skills include 'qualities and behavioural norms that arise in response to the conflictual relation between boss and worker, and which are valued by employers' (ibid). Getting to know and understand how to behave in the workplace, to imbibe specific workplace cultures and to be socialised sufficiently to ensure one's face fits are stages through which every employee has to pass. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, such stages and their accompanying skills came to be gradually defined in curriculum terms and incorporated into the emerging youth training schemes devised by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). The underlying objective of what became known as the 'new vocationalism' was to try and make young people (and to some extent unemployed adults) more acceptable to employers whom, it was said, could not fill their vacancies because they could not find enough people with the right skills and attitudes (Finn, 1987). As Wellington (1993) and others have shown, however, in addition to the fact that employers do not form a unitary category in themselves, their demands should not be allowed to dominate national systems of education and training for the following reasons:

- the needs of employers may not coincide with the needs of the nation
- employers may be unaware that their professed needs are not actually in the interest of their own organisations
- concepts such as *qualities and attributes* may be confused with specific skills
- recruitment and selection practices do not always relate to the skills and attributes employers say they require.

While it is clear that employers differ enormously in terms of their human resource requirements and that each organisation reflects what Fevre (1992) refers to as 'industrial values' in terms of the way in which employer and employee relate to and treat each other, it is also clear that employers do have a justifiable right to expect the education system to provide people with enough basic skills (literacy and numeracy in particular) on which they can build. Unfortunately, a key problem for the British economy has been and continues to be a tendency by significant numbers of large and small employers to expect the education system to provide all the education and training enabling them to absorb all the benefits without having to share any of the costs (Keep and Mayhew, 1994).

We now wish to return to the point made earlier that employers have a right to expect that potential employees will have achieved a general level of basic education. Given the changing nature of most workplaces and the increase in jobs which require multiple skills, gaining access to much of the job market (and certainly the legitimate job market as opposed to informal, unregulated areas) means a more competitive environment in which qualification credentialism is rampant. For young people, and particularly those who choose to leave compulsory schooling at the earliest opportunity, trying to enter today's labour market will seem a particularly demanding and daunting prospect.

The youth labour market, as Ashton (1993) reminds us, has some distinctive features but it is subject to 'the forces of change which operate on adult labour markets' and so in order to understand how the youth labour market might be evolving we need to understand the forces of change affecting its adult counterpart. Ashton identifies the key features which are affecting labour markets throughout the industrialised world and which we summarise as follows:

- the growth of multi-national corporations and the decline in the control which national governments can have over their economies
- the emergence of transnational and regionalised trading blocs which create new ways of integrating capital and labour

- changes in the method of organising production within companies which are increasing the importance of internal labour markets and stressing the need for flatter organisational structures in which employees are required to work flexibly
- the chosen role of the business elite – such elites can operate autonomously from governments and choose to buck the trends in organisational change referred to above, hence they might choose to operate their businesses with a predominantly low-skilled workforce and use new technology to de-skill tasks
- the chosen role of the national political elite – some governments, such as Singapore and Taiwan, are pursuing an industrial strategy based on high skills and have developed their education and training systems accordingly whereas the UK and the USA have concentrated on removing barriers to market forces and let education continue to reflect the *status quo*.

In Britain, industrial strategy (and the absence of it) has been characterised by the craft apprenticeships which operated completely separately from government and state-sponsored youth training. From the late 1970s until the launch of the Modern Apprenticeship in 1994, government sponsored training concentrated on the development of low skills (Levels 1 and 2) from which only half the number of trainees who participate emerge with a vocational qualification. Under Ashton's analysis, young people in the Pacific Rim will find that the 'main demand for their labour will be in jobs which demand a high level of conceptual and social skills as well as technical knowledge and which offer the prospect of continuous learning' whereas in Britain, young people may find 'their future employment prospects confined to the external labour market in low paid, semi-skilled jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment' (ibid, p 21).

Increasing industrial and commercial globalisation, the impact of new technologies, the growth of the personal services sector, and the decline of mass manufacturing have clearly affected patterns of working, recruitment and training in industry and commerce (Llewellyn, 1996). Gilbert (1996) notes that recent empirical work on the introduction of new technology challenges the deterministic analysis of what he calls the 'old industrial

sociology' that employers will tend to use technology to de-skill and control employees (Ashton above) but stresses that employers need to learn how to create and use new organisational techniques. The 1995 Annual Employment Survey revealed that 75% of employees are now in the service sector and 18% in manufacturing (Roberts *et al*, 1996) and it is forecast that any increase in jobs in manufacturing and related industries will be of a professional, managerial or technical nature (DfEE, 1997). While such star-gazing may prove to be accurate, the reality of many workplaces still presents a different picture and one in which the production lines, hierarchical structures and culture which characterised the so-called Fordist manufacturing companies are still in place. Moves to a post-Fordist world of work across the board would seem to be exaggerated (Keep and Mayhew, 1994). Although there are sectors of the economy which are dependent upon high level skills and investment in new technologies, Britain occupies a particular niche in the international division of labour, whereby some of its major industrial sectors are based on low value-added mass production processes, producing relatively low quality goods (Marginson, 1994). In addition, youth unemployment remains high so the numbers of disaffected young people grow posing problems for education and training systems which seek to provide opportunities beyond compulsory schooling (Istance *et al*, 1994). Added to this, the traditional patterns of recruitment which define the internal and external labour market continue to operate.

Employment variations between regions and localities should not be overlooked in this chapter and support the view that education and training providers must be responsive to and aware of the nature and scope of the communities they seek to serve. For example, comparative research by Cockrill, Scott and Fitz (1996) on multi-skilling in Britain and Germany describes the very localised nature of the South Wales labour market as follows: recruitment tends to be restricted to the local area; some employers look to past employees as their first source of new recruits; people want to work where they live and so have little incentive to restrict their skills to one occupation; and people work wherever positions are available locally and in whichever firm offers the best conditions. Cockrill, *et al* state that:

For many workers, it does not seem to matter much whether they work as a machine operator, supermarket shelver or as a skilled engineer, as long as it is local and the pay is not too bad.

(Cockrill, et al, 1996, p 4)

Inequalities of access to and provision of employment and training based on class, gender and ethnicity can be clearly seen in labour market statistics and challenge the positive view of flexibility as envisaged in *flexible specialisation*, *flexible firms* and the *flexible labour market*. (For critiques of the concept of flexible specialisation, see Pollert, 1988, and Fielder, 1992.) And, nationally, those statistics show that where there has been a growth in employment, it has been in part-time, temporary employment. Figures show that 27.5% of employees in 1995 were in part-time work [LMT, November, 1996]. The government estimates that, between 1983 and 1994, some 1.9 million part-time jobs were created, a significant number of which were taken by women (DTI *et al*, 1996). A recent IES report (Atkinson, et al, 1995) confirms this trend pointing to the growth in part-time employment across all sectors. Of those employers interviewed for the report, 40% stated that their main reason for employing temporary staff was 'to match staff levels to peaks in demand'. It is also known that such employees have less access to training than permanent employees and that employers saw the need to train temporary workers as a particular disadvantage, possibly one which they would seek to avoid.

Part-time jobs are also, of course, taken by young people who are officially registered as being in full-time education. In their research, Atkinson, *et al (1996)* revealed that the highest proportion of temporary workers (18%) was in the 16–19 age group. Recent work by Unwin (1995) showed that significant numbers of full-time students between 16 and 18 in Cheshire were working an average of 15 hours per week: at weekends, in the evening, and in their free periods. (National data from the Youth Cohort Study shows that 47% of students work between 5 and 10 hours, 28% between 10 and 20 hours, and 5% over 20 hours.) The extension of Sunday trading and increase in temporary work have created more jobs for students. Hourly payment of, in some cases, up to £4 per hour, means that young people can earn twice the weekly youth training allowance (£29.50 for a 16-year-old) by working two shifts in a supermarket. In the Cheshire

sample, college students described how the concentration of assignments on GNVQ courses into two or three weeks in a term, meant they could work very hard in short bursts and then use their free study days to sign up for temporary work in local factories. Despite being classed as full-time students, these young people were working as many hours in paid employment as they were spending in an educational institution. The challenge this poses to curriculum planners and to the qualifications system is how can this part-time activity be integrated into a more holistic approach to post-16 education and training and, if possible, how can it be accredited? It may be that young people are acquiring Dearing's so-called *key skills* as well as occupational skills in their part-time working life.

Given the complex and changing realities of the labour market and the workplace, tripartite categorisations are evidently far too simplistic, for not only do they impose clarity on an unclear world but they also imply a rigidity which negates the fluidity of skills and the ability of people to move position within and across organisations. Yet the shadow of tripartism is still cast across policy documents which classify occupational sectors and jobs and education and training policies which separate people into the unskilled, skilled and professional.

Merson (1996) draws our attention to the emphasis in current Government policy in relation to the labour market on the need to promote flexibility of conditions for immediate economic gain. He suggests that less attention is given to longer-term investment in the development of skills. The current rhetoric rarely addresses the social implications of flexibility of conditions and the attendant uncertainties of short-term contracts, temporary employment and financial insecurity. While it is generally recognised that many people in the future will have a number of job/career changes and may have to re-train several times, there will be others who will move in and out of casual employment or who will spend some of their working life in the informal economy.

The structure of post-16 education and training

The history of voluntarism which has allowed employers in the UK to opt in or out of investing in workforce training, as and when they choose, has been well-documented (Finegold and Soskice, 1988, *inter alia*). Despite this knowledge, however, the Government and its related agencies proclaim that vocational education and training is now *employer-led*. Such rhetoric gives succour to the belief that the following have been created by and are being further developed with the active involvement of employers:

- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)
- Education-business partnerships (EBPs).

That employers have singularly failed to show enthusiasm for NVQs (Robinson, 1996), regard TECs at best as potential sources of funding and at worst as interfering bureaucracies (Unwin, 1994), and have a varied response to EBPs whose performance is patchy (IES, 1995), betrays the shallowness of the concept of an *employer-led* vocational education and training system. We need to separate the reality of the relationship between education, training and the world of work from what Coffield has referred to as the 'farrago of hurrah words' in which discourse innumerable White Papers and so-called *consultative* documents have been written in the last twenty or so years (Coffield, 1990). Employers are involved in post-16 education and training in many and different ways. At local level, some employers act as governors of colleges, directors of TEC boards and members of Chambers of Commerce. At national level, they might represent their sector's interests on the boards of Industrial Training Organisations (ITOs) or the Lead Bodies which define standards of competence. But most employers interact with the post-16 education and training system as consumers and providers and know little of the way in which its policies and practices are formulated. If evidence from Raper, *et al* (1997), which suggests that more and more companies are satisfying their training needs in-house and recognising the workplace as a site for learning, is indicative of a growing trend then the relationship between employers and the post-16 education and training system may become even more tenuous, perhaps only really active at the recruitment stage or through involvement with state-sponsored schemes.

Given the constant intervention by Government in the youth labour market since the late 1970s, it is difficult to assess the extent to which employers can be said to be still in a leading role. Employers could be said to have acquiesced in the creation of a publicly funded and state-constructed youth labour market which has provided training (sometimes of a dubious nature) but not lasting employment for young people. (For a critique of youth training schemes see, in particular, Ainley and Corney, 1990, and Coles, 1995.) Clearly employers have a leading role in that they can choose to offer or withhold jobs and training places but once the Government chose to subsidise youth training and, subsequently, to guarantee all school leavers a training place (removing at the same time the right of 16 to 19-year-olds to claim unemployment benefit) they caused a subtle shift in the employer's role. In order to meet what became known as the 'youth training guarantee' and to counteract market failure in terms of youth employment by intervening directly in the youth labour market, the government charged its locally-based agencies, (now the Training and Enterprise Councils) with signing up employers to the national youth project. Without the subsidies and the inducements to play a part in helping the nation meet its national education and training targets, the youth labour market might have a very different appearance. The following questions are, therefore, pertinent:

1 How many of the 263,500 young people currently on Youth Training (Roberts *et al*, 1996) have employed status and a real chance of their employment continuing beyond the point when the YT funding ends?

2 How many of the 60,000 people on Modern Apprenticeship (LMT, March 1995) are in placements converted from YT rather than on apprenticeships newly created by the employers themselves?

3. How many of the estimated 90,000 young people not officially recorded as being in full-time education or on a government-sponsored training scheme are working in the informal labour market?

TECs, like their educational neighbours, are chasing young people in order to meet the difficult targets they are set each year by the Government Regional Offices working on behalf of the DfEE. This competitive market impels TECs to manipulate the labour market. Through-puts are more

important than attention to local and regional planning related to skills shortages and future skill needs, hence newspaper headlines about the thousands of hairdressers being trained at the public's expense. Large companies also benefit, however, from the TECs' need to meet their YT and Modern Apprenticeship targets and one wonders how far the UK's car industry is currently benefiting from the Treasury's decision to turn a blind eye to the issue of *deadweight training* funding, that is the payment of subsidies for training which employers would normally fund themselves.

The poor image of YT has seen recruitment to that scheme fall consistently during the 1990s, while, at the same time, the contraction of the youth labour market, introduction of GNVQs and a concerted campaign by schools and colleges to persuade young people to remain in full-time education (71% nationally now stay on) have created a sea-change in post-16 destination patterns. Here again, however, one needs to stress the distorting effect of competitive funding regimes. Despite the celebration of that much improved staying on figure, we know that between 30 and 40% of young people do not complete their post-16 courses (Audit Commission, 1993). Research has shown that some young people are persuaded, contrary to their own wishes, to remain in full-time education by their teachers, that some drift into staying-on because it feels safe and as a result of peer pressure, and that some have no choice due to poor labour market opportunities. Work currently being undertaken by Huddleston in West Midlands' colleges has highlighted a new cohort of young people, those pursuing one year GNVQ Intermediate programmes. These young people are proving difficult to teach since they are using college as a 'parking place' because of the lack of jobs. Their chosen programme of study often bears little relationship to their future employment plans, or indeed to any plans at all. Research on destination patterns in Derbyshire between 1990 and 1993 also showed that significant numbers of young people had drifted into staying on in full-time education rather than making a definite decision to do so (Fergusson and Unwin, 1996). Regional differences should also be noted here, both in terms of the nature and extent of post-16 participation and achievement rates. Current figures for the percentage of young people gaining a qualification (or units

towards a full NVQ) at the end of their YT programme, for example, show that on Merseyside as few as 36% achieve this compared to 74% in Suffolk (Roberts *et al*, 1996).

In January 1997, the figure for employees receiving any kind of training at work (both on and off-the-job) was just over 14% (LMT, January 1997) a figure that has hardly changed since 1989. Government training statistics (DfEE, 1996) indicate that the majority of employer-based training is delivered to meet statutory requirements, (for example, *Health and Safety* regulations) rather than for more broadly-based developmental reasons. In addition, those who already hold qualifications are more likely to gain access to further qualifications and those in professional and managerial occupations are more likely to receive training than those in lower level occupations.

Comments from a Training Agency survey of company attitudes to trainer training noted how this antipathy to investment in training has been translated into lack of status for the trainers themselves:

> *Many of the companies participating in this survey reported that there were difficulties in providing a satisfactory career structure for specialist 'career trainers' because of the small size of the training departments involved . . . More generally, companies seeking to make use of 'non-career trainers', while on secondment, also need to ensure that the training department is not perceived by potential recruits as a 'dead end' which removes other career options.*
>
> *(Training Agency, 1990a, p 41)*

As Bennett and McCoshan (1993) note, management training in Britain is also poor in comparison to other countries and, significantly, training does not generally figure when companies develop their business plans. An Industrial Society survey of 500 companies in 1991 showed that only 16% built training into their business plans.

This British ambivalence towards training has deep roots. As Ainley and Corney (1990) and Vlaeminke (1990) have indicated, Britain managed a sustained industrial revolution without any formal training policy or pro-

vision, so it is perhaps not surprising that repeated warnings about a potential skills' deficit in Britain have never been treated with the seriousness they deserve.

Qualifications and the labour market

If tripartism has been found to be too simplistic as a concept for describing the world of work (and the way in which people divide as learners, as shown in other chapters in this volume), it does appear more plausible when applied to the current structure of qualifications on offer to learners in the post-16 education and training phase. At first glance, the qualifications framework divides into two: the academic (GCSEs, A-levels, degrees) and the vocational (GNVQs, NVQs, and vocational awards which lie outside the NVQ framework). The vocational pathway, however, could now be said to split as GNVQs, which have provided access to higher education, straddle the academic–vocational divide thus forming a middle band and creating a tripartite structure. Wolf examines qualifications in detail in her chapter in this volume but it is worth noting here that, according to recent research by Robinson (1997), the old academic–vocational dualism appears still to apply in the labour market even if in colleges and schools the post-16 education and training curriculum presents a tripartite image. Robinson presents the post-16 education and training qualifications structure as a straightforward dualism and states:

> *There can be no parity of esteem in education and training between academic and vocational qualifications because there is no parity of esteem in the labour market where academic qualifications tend to offer access to more highly paid occupations and often pay a higher wage within those occupations than their notionally equivalent vocational counterparts. This is true at all levels of the national qualifications framework.*
>
> *(ibid, p 3)*

Robinson's analysis, which is set against the five-level framework used in the National Education and Training Targets, suggests that people with academic qualifications at one level earn about the same as people with voca-

tional qualifications set at one level higher. This means, for example, that people with A-levels (Level 3) earn the same as those with vocational qualifications at Level 4 and those with five or more GCSEs at Grades A–C (Level 2) earn the same as those with Level 3 vocational qualifications. While qualifications are not designed with pay in mind, the differential levels of reward in terms of pay, status, and promotional prospects give out powerful signals to those pursuing different qualifications. Employers may also have fixed views about the most desirable qualifications for recruits, even to the extent that recruits may well be over-qualified for the jobs to which they have been recruited. As well as implying a fundamental flaw in the levels set for the qualifications framework, Robinson's analysis also challenges Dearing's assertion that his proposed national framework of awards will have 'the important purpose of making plain that academic, applied and vocational qualifications are of equal value'. (Dearing,1996, p 14)

Research by Unwin and Wellington (1995) into the reasons why young people were attracted to the pilot year of Modern Apprenticeship showed that although they had chosen a work-based route as opposed to remaining in full-time education, these new apprentices still had academic qualifications in their sights. Significant numbers spoke of their desire to gain a university degree at some point and saw the apprenticeship as a route to such a qualification hopefully sponsored by their employer. Others hoped to gain extra GCSEs alongside their vocational qualifications, particularly in subjects such as foreign languages or mathematics which might be useful in the workplace. It is a testament to the lack of vision that has bedevilled youth training schemes that little attempt has been made to create programmes which combine the opportunity to learn job-specific skills, to which many young people are attracted, as well as continuing with an academic education (see Evans *et al* 1997). Some of the occupational sectors associated with the Modern Apprenticeship, notably in engineering, chemicals and the steel industry, are showing that employers, working together with colleges, want to develop a sufficiently broad-based training experience that embraces the academic as well as the vocational. (This is discussed in more detail below.)

In his analysis of the performance of NVQs, Robinson (1996) found that they have been largely concentrated in the personal service, clerical and sales sectors as opposed to the manufacturing and business and financial services sectors. He also found NVQs to be under-represented in the higher managerial, professional and technical occupations and that, overall, there was no evidence to suggest that the introduction of NVQs had increased the amount of training available to individuals. NVQs, of course, were designed to be specifically related to the world of work rather than of education but the first three NVQ levels reflect the perception of the traditional workplace (operatives, technicians/supervisors, managers) held by the world of education. This in turn enshrines the notion of hierarchical and fixed competencies which may conflict with the flat structures of the changing modern workplace. The now extensive critique of NVQs points to their many flaws but for this chapter, two in particular stand out:

1 NVQs at Levels 1 and 2 offer a very limited and basic VET menu for young people in comparison to VET programmes in other countries, and even at Level 3, providers have to find ways of covering the necessary underpinning knowledge by turning to other qualifications, notably BTEC National and GNVQ units.

2 NVQs fail to meet employers' needs, either because they are inflexible or because they are not specific enough – whichever way, NVQs are decidedly not employer-led.

Whether it is deemed to be dualistic or tripartite, how appropriate then is the current post-16 education and training qualifications framework, to the world of work? The inappropriateness of its divisions and rigidity is perhaps well-illustrated in the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) where young people can often be found studying for a range of qualifications as none alone appears to be quite right. The MA is based on training frameworks which are developed by Industrial Training Organisations (ITOs) in conjunction with TECs. It is open to young people between the ages of 16 and 24. Funding is tied to TEC outcomes and hence the MA is tied to NVQs. Apprentices have to work towards a minimum NVQ Level 3, but this is supplemented by GNVQ Key Skill units and other GNVQ units to provide underpinning knowledge. Some employers have also insisted that their

apprentices study for the traditional BTEC National qualification which now lies outside the NVQ framework, and some include GCSEs in Modern Languages.

While some MA schemes are highly selective (requiring four or more GCSEs at Grades A–C), many are not. Apprentices can begin their training with the Level 2 NVQ and progress to the Level 3 but this will not improve their standard of general education (gaining, for example, Maths and English at GCSE) which provides the all-important measure of ability most employers would expect when recruiting people they want to train for the future. Young people on the Youth Training Scheme are funded to NVQ Level 2 and statistics show that only half of YT trainees actually complete their qualification.

Adults are particularly ill-served by the current qualifications structure. They will find it difficult to access GCSE and A-level classes other than in the evening and in some parts of the country such provision will either be at a very high cost or not exist at all. They may gain access to NVQs and other vocational qualifications in the workplace, but, according to research from the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), the majority of adults gaining qualifications will be in full-time rather than part-time work, will be in the higher social class bands and will have stayed in full-time education until the age of 18 (NIACE, 1994). The unemployed may access NVQs if they participate in a government-sponsored scheme such as Training for Work but achievement levels are similar to those found on youth training in that they hover at just under 50% annually. In terms of studying for both academic and vocational qualifications, NIACE found that the majority of adults were doing so for labour market reasons and, regardless of whether they were in work, the majority had had to find the funding themselves.

The problems adults face are particularly ironic in the light of the Government's current preoccupation with lifelong learning. Individuals are being exhorted to become lifelong learners, to develop skills of flexibility and to enhance their personal skills but these may be exactly the luxuries for which employers do not wish to pay. If 'learning pays' who is going to fund the initial investment? For many, the answer is the individual must pay unless he or she is lucky enough to have found employment with an

employer willing to make such an investment. Small and medium-sized enterprises may lack both the means and the inclination to be so forward-looking (Huddleston, 1996).

In terms of the National Education and Training Targets, those employers who do want to recruit people with an adequate level of general education on which to build substantive occupational or multi-skilled training have cause to be concerned. Nationally, just under two thirds of young people gain five GCSEs at grades A–C but only one quarter gain such grades in Maths and English. At local level, the figures differ enormously. In Sheffield, for example, the figures for five GCSEs grades A–C drop to 42% and, in some schools, can be as low as 1%. Given the inadequacies of NVQs, how will the National Target of 85% of 19 to 21-year-olds achieving the Level 2 threshold by the year 2,000 (whether at GCSE, GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ) be reached? And even if it is reached, will the fact that some young people will have only got there by virtue of NVQs be a cause for celebration?

The way forward

How best then is the post-16 education and training system to serve the needs of such a future workforce, and, as importantly, future citizens? This chapter has tried to show how difficult it is to predict with certainty the ways in which work patterns, labour market demand and the economic climate in general will evolve over time. It does seem certain, however, that tripartite notions of how workplaces divide in terms of tasks and employee capability are far too simplistic. Although employers have been shown to send out very confused messages when discussing the types of skills they need from their current and future workforce, they do reveal in their recruitment and human resource management behaviour that they value academic qualifications as highly, and in some cases more highly than vocational ones. In order to meet the challenges of running a business in the late 1990s, most employers will expect their workforce to have an adequate level of general education on which they can build through specific job-related training.

Given that employers will tend to train for their immediate needs and have a preference for skills which are only specific to their organisations (Huddleston and Rainbird, 1996), the post-16 education and training system has to find ways to meet both the employers' needs and those of the individual. For young people, the balance is particularly important. Gleeson (1996) warns against using 'economic rationalism' to drive education and the managerialist paradigm within which teachers and learners are being forced to live:

> *Here, preoccupation with improved participation, qualification and skills, though ostensibly to do with improved productivity and employment, has little to do with enabling young people to think critically about themselves, their community and society.*
>
> *(Gleeson, 1996, p 97)*

It may be the case that creative application of and greater equity of access to the new technologies will revolutionise working life and leisure though, as Aronowitz and DiFazio (1994) stress, naivete is highly dangerous in this respect. What is needed is a re-examination of the relationship between work, society and people's lives. Education and employment have a great deal to learn about each other's purposes, structures, cultures and developing patterns of behaviour. The concept of *training*, as opposed to *education*, deserves fresh attention for it seems to us that it has got lost in the murky waters of Government-sponsored schemes of social engineering and has become too narrowly defined through the introduction of competence-based models of skill acquisition. One way forward would be to develop what might be termed a *pedagogy of work* in which research about how people learn in both the academic and vocational spheres can be harnessed (Fuller and Unwin, 1996).

The current education-based qualification paradigm is linked closely to the professions and higher education, but misses the general world of work. In the middle (the general world of work), at the heart of the post-16 education and training system, sit FE colleges which need to assert their ability to provide education and training for the majority of workplaces, albeit

with the expertise to offer professional qualifications as well. But FE needs to reclaim the vocational and technical curriculum and have the authority to respond to the needs of local, regional and national employers.

Two barriers exist which prevent FE colleges from responding adequately to this general world of work. Firstly, the FEFC funding methodology does not provide any particular incentive for this as it simply requires colleges to increase student numbers. The easiest way to do this is to offer popular courses. One example here is the current popularity of GNVQ Leisure and Tourism programmes which attract students, and hence funding, but which do not, necessarily, lead to jobs. Secondly, to respond adequately and plan to meet labour market need, colleges require sophisticated labour market information. TECs have a remit to collect such information but they differ in terms of their capability to do so, as do local authority research units. Since FE sector incorporation in 1993, colleges have been released from local authority control and are in competition with TECs (who have set targets to reach for their YT and Modern Apprenticeship places) for young people. Bringing these different stakeholders together (colleges, TECs and local authorities) is time-consuming and often relies on the determined efforts of enthusiastic individuals. As such, it is no wonder that labour market planning lacks coherence and a substantive research base at local and regional level.

Without that underpinning labour market knowledge and understanding, there is a potential mismatch between the qualifications offered by FE and the opportunities in the labour market. Perhaps even more worryingly, at national level, the relationship between Government-sponsored training schemes and labour market needs is at best on nodding acquaintance. The DfEE has recently commissioned a research study to investigate the potential coverage by the Modern Apprenticeship of all occupational sectors which themselves are covered by NVQs up to Level 3. In its specification for the research, the DfEE listed a number of databases which could be interrogated to try and construct a meaningful picture of the youth labour market while, at the same time, admitting that these databases were seriously flawed.

A similar problem exists in attempting to assess the take-up and coverage of NVQs (Huddleston, et al, 1996). The major problem still remains the lack of reliable quantitative data concerning the take-up of NVQs by sector, level, candidate profile and geographical distribution. The differing methods of data collection used by the different awarding bodies, providers and government agencies make true comparisons impossible.

FE colleges are in an ideal position to act as a bridge between education and work but are also under pressure to worship before the academic altar and compete for students with schools, sixth form colleges and higher education institutions. By working with their industrial and business partners and other post-16 education and training providers, colleges could develop research-led learning and skills maps of their communities and of specialist industries with which they already work. This could form part of a sub-regional/local economic development strategy and FE Competitiveness Fund bids might usefully be focused along these lines. TECs are charged with the responsibility for collecting labour market and other relevant information to measure progress towards NTETs. Although, admittedly, some of this is patchy, it is potentially valuable for colleges in developing their own strategic plans (CEI, 1997). Such research would, in turn, help us learn more about when, how and if people divide along tripartite, dualistic or other lines and whether such divisions are worth maintaining as a basis on which to construct a system of education and training.

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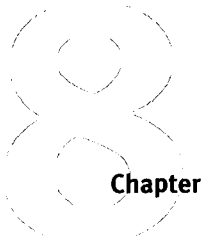

Chapter

The international perspective

Learning from international comparisons

David Parkes

Introduction

This chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of education and training systems among a number of European Union countries, particularly France, Germany and the Netherlands. It also briefly examines reconstruction and reform in Albania. The three EU countries have been selected because they have different traditions but are often cited as having relatively successful education and training systems. Albania has been introduced as a case study because it is subject to reconstruction programmes which follow Western agendas and preoccupations (differentiated, according to the donor country). This process provides a useful means of tracing Western perceptions, particularly in terms of the general criteria suggested by donor countries for developing post-compulsory provision.

The German system is examined in terms of how far the tripartite secondary school system of *Hauptschulen* (secondary modern for less academic children), *Realschulen* (technical grammar) and *Gymnasia* (grammar) acts as a foundation for the two main progression routes of university or apprenticeship training. With regard to France there is an examination of the extent to which the common label of *baccalauréat* gives equal status to students emerging from traditional *lycées*, *lycées technologiques* and *lycées professionnels*. For the Netherlands consideration is

given to how the education and training system aims at parity of esteem among general, vocational and technical provision. The chapter considers how bridges and connections are established between and among the divisions and sub-systems in each country and how far such bridges and connections reflect a breaking up of traditional divisions. It also explores the extent to which building on existing social and historical roots rather than radical reconstruction of a system ensures social acceptance and comprehensibility to its various users. In doing so it identifies and exposes three contexts in which such processes may be enacted: systems being *reformed* (UK); *renewed* (France and Germany) or *reconstructed* (Albania).

The chapter draws mainly on the work of the European Institute of Educational and Social Policy (EIESP) which is based in Paris and has a portfolio of project responsibilities whose range can be action- or analysis-oriented. In general, EIESP work tends to be policy driven and informed by research commissioned for particular structural reform, much of which is published in the *European Journal of Education*.

The general context

What is the basis of education and social divisions and the relation of these to economic restructuring and educational reorganisation? One way into this question is to put forward the following hypotheses:

1 Educational categories, qualification routes and pathways are defined by social context and indeed by social class in the different countries explored.

2 Policy reform measures intended to produce greater equality or equality of opportunity have not been notably successful.

3 Social and economic structures significantly influence educational structures and their reform. Policy and change in the former are a necessary condition of change in the latter.

4 The shifts now occurring in social and economic structures may make the traditional definitions and classifications that have characterised European upper secondary education redundant.

Michael Young (1993), examining reforms in upper secondary education in the Nordic countries, comments as follows:

> *Academic/vocational divisions are inescapably embedded in other social divisions, though the extent to which this is true varies from country to country. Because it is the largely academic (general) routes which provide progression into higher education and thus the jobs with high status and prestige, academic/vocational divisions represent a social or status hierarchy. Inequality . . . is therefore primarily a contextual question which cannot be resolved by innovations in curricula, methods of assessment or qualification systems alone . . .*
>
> *If one accepts the argument of many researchers that the combined pressures of new technology and global competition will force industrial economies to abandon forms of work organisation based upon mental/manual divisions because they can no longer be a basis for a country to compete in a global economy, then overcoming academic/vocational divisions becomes an economic necessity. Whether they are overcome depends on the balance of power in a country between the forces for change associated with progressive modernisers and the others.*

The ineffectiveness of purely educational policy in overcoming social and class divisions is also argued by Da Cunha (1993). Looking at Portuguese reforms (post 1974) he states that the democratisation of education led people to believe that the primary function of secondary schools was to become institutions of social change. Public expectation was such that schools were obliged to become agents of progress and to help transform the community. He writes:

> *The purpose of unifying and integrating the technical and academic secondary educational systems was to eliminate the social difference and prestige that had developed between the two preceding types of secondary education, classic and technical, and to prevent 'routing' students to intellectual or manual occupations according to their socio-economic origin. Whatever the intention, this system remained*

routed and socially differentiated, so perpetuating a major problem of the élitist school system of the past.

Both Young and Da Cunha concentrate on divisions which are largely binary, between general and vocational education, in one case, and between general and technical education, in the other.

A tripartite division of post-16 education and training sometimes occurs when an attempt is made to accommodate young people who occupy the lower end of the spectrum of attainment. Vocational education then provides both for craft/technician training, and for people who need to improve their basic skills in order to improve their chances of employment. Such initiatives in vocational education do not necessarily succeed. This view is advanced in an article on early leavers from full-time education in Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom by Hannan *et al* (1995). They take as their base that the problem of early leavers is a conspicuous element across all three countries and that vocational education policy initiatives place the emphasis on the need for improvements in full-time 16–19 provision rather than accepting the need for continuing education and training for employees. They write:

In favour of such policies they [educational policy makers] appear to recognise the socially entrenched nature of educational deficit and seek more radical educational solutions than had been tried previously. ***But, precisely because they are educational (however meritorious) they are unlikely to offer any lasting solutions to the economic and labour aspects of the problem.*** *[my emphasis] Even as current issues are being addressed, employers may be changing their requirements and pushing other, larger groups into the zone of risk [of failing to gain employment]. It is evident that no policy initiatives in the three countries have as yet directly addressed the institutional factors in the labour market which influence early leavers.*

To be set alongside the main point of these authors – that education systems are determined by and reflect economic structures – is this realisation that economic restructuring may offer opportunities to advance education priorities of a progressive, equity-orientated kind. In this way

Jarl Bengtsson (1993) of OECD echoes Michael Young in asserting that our definitions and classifications in education (whether binary or tripartite) may be becoming redundant:

> *Changes on the demand side are much more rapid and congruent across enterprises and nations than those on the supply side. A new model of integrated new technology, working organisations and skill formation, and with particular emphasis on flexibility and human resources, seems to be gradually replacing a Tayloristic principle of organising the enterprise and the workplace.*

It may be naive to suppose that the information revolution will float away the sharp definitions and classifications which are well-entrenched in European education and training systems, but what is apparent is that many European countries are attempting to fill the gaps between education and work on the one hand or general education, technical education and vocational training on the other. The alternative terminology to filling gaps is making connections and building bridges. For Bengtsson (1993) such bridge-building is a strategy of coaxing, consensus-building, collaboration and partnerships, and is not a neat process since the varying power of key interest groups ensures that strategies for change may be neither unitary nor coherent. This process leads Wolf (1993) to comment:

> *Governments find it nearly impossible to develop a coherent long-term policy – in large part because they are trying to achieve a number of quite separate objectives. They are attempting to compress into a single national system programmes which imply very different sorts of education and training, to reconcile individuals' interests and ambitions with wider social concerns and to do so in a situation of inherent uncertainty about the future.*

Progression routes

The renewal of vocational education and training: Germany, France and the Netherlands

One way of tackling the problem of incoherence is to create or improve progression routes within and among different education sub-systems, and this has been a major concern of policy-makers in recent years. Moreover, stimulus for such action comes from both the demand as well as the supply side. On the demand side, changes in technology and work organisation have induced profound changes in job content which seem to require changes to traditional classifications within education and training systems. On the supply side, upper secondary systems have considerably enlarged and diversified course provision to cater for the needs of the growing student population unable to find jobs in the labour market or seeking higher education. As an analytical tool 'progression' also serves to illustrate the strains and tensions within strongly classified systems which require the building of bridges and connections.

Progression and the German dual system

In Germany, the dual system of apprenticeship (post-school plus three years: two-thirds of time in an enterprise; one-third in vocational school) has been the backbone of the VET system. It remains highly valued by students, employers, unions and society at large and is the standard route to a skilled worker qualification. The relative economic security possessed by skilled workers over the last 40 years has given a symbolic value to the dual system. Nevertheless, (academic) general education retains a higher status and provides better life chances. Because of this, one response to the growing economic uncertainty of recent years has been academic drift in the tripartite schooling arrangement that underpins progression in the German system.

This has resulted in pressure from students, who would formerly have been happy to enroll at *Realschule,* to gain entry to *Gymnasia* and pressure to open up the work-based dual system to entrants who would formerly have been insufficiently qualified for it. Traditionally, the standard way to enter

an apprenticeship was to gain a *Hauptschule* or a *Realschule* certificate, which could be obtained after nine or ten years of general education. This is still the most common route but new options are increasingly used by students. Since the 1980s an alternative for low achievers has been enrolling in a one-year, full-time course, the *berufsgrundbildungsjahr*. It is essentially a year of vocational preparation which provides a transition period between general education and the dual system proper.

Meanwhile at the other end of the school achievement scale, increasing numbers of *Abitur* holders from the *Gymnasia* with 13 years of general education have switched routes and entered the dual system either on leaving school, or after the acquisition of a university degree, in order to increase their chances of getting a job. So, in times of economic change, individuals may gain general, technical or vocational qualifications at different stages or phases in their development rather than at a given age.

One element of stability here is that being a 'skilled worker' in Germany still secures a social position as well as important financial and negotiating benefits, albeit at different levels across occupational sectors, a situation in strong contrast to the UK. Even in Germany, however, this stability is at risk as global economics threaten traditional labour cost structures, and as the cost of absorption of the new *Länder* (where effectively the West has colonised the East) has forced a reappraisal of some aspects of the Dual System – in particular its slow response to change. One example of this is the eight years of negotiation it took for a new training directive to be agreed for bank employees (Horras, 1995).

Progression and the baccalauréat in France

In France, full-time school-based VET is by far the dominant mode of acquiring vocational skills. While in VET the options include preparing for the skilled worker qualification that the French have introduced progressively over the last twenty years along with the possibility of progression into a *baccalauréat* (and on to higher education). The system offers a number of different tracks: the general bac, the technological bac and the

vocational or professional bac. Depending on the type of course followed this can offer a certificate of general education preparing for university education or a vocationally-orientated diploma leading to the labour market.

Currently, the total number of students sitting the bac has reached an overall high of 60% of the appropriate age cohort. Formally, the baccalaureate label had the same status for all and a high level of social acceptability. However this parity has come under strain. For example, the professional bac was intended to lead to the labour market but with the right of access to higher education; in reality, bac pro holders may have too weak a theoretical grasp (particularly of mathematics) to follow more than a two-year diploma course in higher education. successfully.

Nevertheless the French have taken the tripartite division of vocational, technical and general education certificates and given them a common bac label which is hoped will be accepted and valued by the public at large. Over twenty years they have also adopted a step-by-step approach to development and investment which has increased the status of the middle (technical/technological) stream.

Without actually abolishing tripartite distinctions within their education structure, the French have endeavoured with some success to give common status and progression rights across traditional divides. However, as in Germany where classification remains strong, social and intellectual 'sorting' processes have remained in place since educational provision acts, at least in part, to ration or allocate life chances.

Pragression via a dual-track appraach in the Netherlands

Reforms in the Netherlands have been towards a dual-track VET system, one for general and one for vocational education despite long-running efforts to integrate general and vocational education into one school community:

> *Despite its dual-track nature there exist (at least in theory) opportunities to switch between general and vocational education at each level. Nationally valid leaving examinations give every successful pupil the right to enter the next level of general or vocational edu-*

cation, limited only by his or her subject specialisation. General education is used increasingly for upward mobility within the Dutch educational system while vocational education improves direct labour market entry. The choice between general and vocational education at senior and college level is influenced by parents' social class (occupation, education) after allowing for other relevant factors such as scholastic achievements. What must be emphasised, however, are the large (but statistically unclear) drop-out rates in the systems.

(Joap Dronkers, 1993)

In the Netherlands vocational education gives better or equal access to the youth labour market compared to general (or academic) education. This however, does not mean that the life chances given are equal: life chances given by general education are greater on the whole. What the Dutch have done is to concentrate on strengthening VET options for the middle group of attainers and create a backbone for an open system of education and training. This means that VET has become increasingly distinct from the upper general secondary school curriculum, a trend of differentiation welcomed by Dutch VET specialists as a way to upgrade students' and parents' perception of VET vis-à-vis general education. It is also a way to deal with the great majority of learners who are neither academic nor low achievers. For this middle group there is also a switch away from more technical subjects in VET to more economic, social and behavioural subjects because there is a tendency among parents and pupils to believe that this keeps the largest number of labour market options open as long as possible in a situation of economic uncertainty.

Progression and social acceptance

In the three countries considered above there is a steady trend whereby VET qualifications at any level have become increasingly important as a pre-condition for entering the labour market. The key issue for young people is when to opt for VET with some evidence of an international movement toward later specialisation. Young people may opt to acquire as much general education as possible before opting for VET because it leaves room for choice which a narrowly-focused VET route does not. As a

result, they may stay longer in the education/training system with increasing numbers opting for mixed curricula at a given level of qualification. It has also been made easier, in varying degrees, to progress to higher education via the VET system. In each case the response to economic and labour market change has been for the government to make the adaptation and renewal, rather than reform, of previously well-established and well-accepted parts of the system a priority: the Dual System in Germany; the *lycées* in France; and the *Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs* (MBO) colleges in the Netherlands.

Dualisation

The term *dualisation* can be defined as training which combines both courses run in schools, colleges or training centres with training in the workplace. Though the term brings to mind the type of structure existing in Germany and outlined above (the Dual System of apprenticeship) it is used here as an overarching concept which includes apprenticeship and the various work-study schemes and programmes established in the different countries.

As we have seen, in Germany the Dual System continues to enjoy great stability. It absorbs a high proportion of the age group and remains the major route to a skilled worker's qualifications in the public and private sectors. This perceived strength is further illustrated by the number of *Abitur* holders who choose to take a Dual System qualification after attending *Gymnasium* instead of going on to higher education. And yet the Dual system may be becoming a victim of its own success as the broadening range of young people looking for places puts this form of provision under strain. At one end of the scale 17% of apprentices have obtained the *Abitur* before entering training, and at the other end there are applicants who do not even have the *Hauptschulabschluss* (secondary school-leaving certificate). One response is an increasing tendency for firms in different occupational sectors to operate selection based on school diplomas. For example:

- in order to train in an administrative and service sector occupation the *Abitur* is virtually essential

- the *Realschulabschluss* is frequently sought for a training place in the industrial/technical sectors
- for craft occupations the *Hauptschulabschluss* or no qualification is sufficient.

However, this type of differentiation is largely non-formal. The German trade unions are not in favour of formalising selection procedures (for example between floristry and electronics) since they fear it will rapidly lead to the creation of an unskilled worker status in collective agreements. At present all holders of Dual System awards are classified as skilled workers in terms of working conditions and salaries.

In France the *baccalauréat professionnel,* introduced in 1985, has been a success story for school-based *alternance* (learning programmes comprising on-and-off-the-job components). The growth-rate from 1985 to 1992 was 3,000 to 114,000. It inaugurated a new approach to the design of qualifications, using profiles based upon professional competences, and created a viable progression route for vocational training , providing in its curriculum 16 weeks in a firm over the two-year course. With the label and status of the baccalaureate access to higher education is ensured.

In the Netherlands the government (following the Rauwenhoff Committee in 1990) recommended the dualisation of all VET in the Netherlands within three major parameters:

- all discussions about learning design should take place at occupational sector level
- dualisation must imply more than work placement
- the employer must take on significant responsibility for the practical component in training.

The dual concept in vocational training emphasises the relation between education and work and facilitates post-school entry into work. The Dual System, the *lycée professionnel* and the Dutch MBO deal with the large proportion of those who are neither high nor low achievers, although there has been a substantial emphasis in the past decade on low achievers, particularly as participation rates post-16 have increased. As in the UK and

elsewhere the curriculum and assessment response has been to develop methods of certification to help meet the aspirations of an enlarged cohort of learners.

Parity of esteem

Given attempts by governments in different countries to create parity of esteem between general education and VET provision, and given the lack of psychological justification for a tripartite routing system as argued by Dockerell in this volume, why do traditional systems stick in place?

> *Most studies demonstrate that educational systems act de facto as mechanisms for social engineering, whether by class or scholastic achievement. The main route to better life and career chances is through (academic) general education; the attempt to remedy this has been largely unsuccessful.*
>
> *(Parkes, 1993)*

So it is that the three-track system in France of *lycées*, *lycées technologiques* and *lycées professionnels* (with associate sub-level qualifications) remains an overt sorting process notwithstanding attempts to broaden the appeal and widen the scope of the baccalaureate. With regard to the Netherlands, Dronkers (1993) points out that the choice between general and vocational education at senior and college level is significantly influenced by parents' social class (as evidenced through occupation and education). Young people with middle-class backgrounds tend to choose general education more often than those with working-class backgrounds, although scholastic achievement remains the single most important factor influencing such choices. And despite the traditional preference of lower social groups for the more immediate clear-cut labour market opportunities provided by vocational training, there is nevertheless a tendency among parents and pupils in the Netherlands to keep the largest number of options open as long as possible because of growing economic uncertainty impacting on careers and labour market choices. Indeed, the trend in voca-

tional training away from craft occupations towards services may become as pronounced an issue during the next decade as the debate between vocational and academic awards has been hitherto.

In Germany there is a desire to keep a stable and apparently transparent system (while absorbing the new Länder). The reason students and parents accept the tripartite division of *Gymansia*, *Realschulen* and *Hauptschulen* is its clear correspondence to opportunities in the youth labour market, although in recent years this stability has seemed threatened. By contrast there is in France and the Netherlands a desire for the opening up of routes and opportunities together with increased flexibility and quality of provision. Employers are broadly happy with the proposed structural changes on the supply side as the complement to changing patterns of employment and organisation on the demand side. But they are happy only as long as someone else pays the main part of the costs. This is in contrast to Germany where employers traditionally have accepted a greater funding responsibility in return for greater control over the supply of skilled labour and low youth wages.

An Albanian case study

The reconstruction of VET

As a means of identifying the preoccupations of Western governments about VET design, it is interesting to plot the reconstruction, under their guidance, of provision of those countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe which were formerly socialist countries mostly under Soviet influence.

As an example, I take a current European Institute of Education and Social Policy (EIESP) project in Albania, which provides technical assistance from a team of experts from five different European countries. The brief was to enable the Ministry of Education to restructure what is known as 'the middle school sector' in the Albanian system (14–18 including both general education and VET) attempting to apply contemporary Western criteria to the reconstruction of the education system required by national

economic transformation. It is an interesting case study because it provides criteria which avoid classification by route, whether binary or tertiary. The intention was to provide:

- a clearer strategic policy at national and local level
- a coherent curriculum framework incorporating general, vocational and technical components
- a workable set of relations with other relevant ministries and providers such as the Ministry of Labour
- an institutional framework for identifying and responding co-operatively to market and community needs at local level
- the beginning of mechanisms to identify occupational sector skill/training needs and translate them into curricular programmes.

Idealised criteria for upper secondary provision

Following the review of the curriculum framework carried out by the EIESP team, the Albanian Ministry of Education has adopted a series of recommendations concerning the key characteristics which should be the outcomes of future restructuring of the system. The points below summarise what five external (English, Dutch, German, Norwegian, Portuguese) and five Albanian experts agreed on as necessary system characteristics for an upper secondary system in the twenty-first century. It should be:

- attractive and offer opportunities for progression to higher-level provision
- responsive to labour market needs at national, regional and preferably local level
- broad-based, and so able to pass on occupation-specific skills while at the same time laying the foundation for continuing training and preparing young people for active citizenship
- flexible as regards delivery, assessment and certification processes
- effective in bringing the maximum number of young people up to the highest levels of qualifications standards

- a collaborative effort insofar as it is based on active partnership involving all relevant parties – training authorities, social partners, parents, and so on
- an integrated part of the overall education system with each stage preparing for the next and allowing horizontal and vertical movement throughout the system
- cost-effective, making optimal use of resources and equipment to provide training at all levels
- simple in its organisational structure and division of responsibilities.

It is notable that these criteria emphasise bridges, connections, collaboration and flexibility, rather than categories and divisions.

Conclusion

Tripartite divisions exist in the countries analysed in the main section of this chapter. They are there for similar historic reasons to those found in England and Wales, acting as a sorting process among class divisions and for occupational opportunities. In all three systems examined in detail there are clear strains and tensions which cause governments to respond by building bridges and making connections between what were traditionally separate routes and easing progression and movement between and among the various sub-sectors of provision. The sections in the chapter on progression and dualisation identify some of these pressures and some of the resulting policies to alleviate the strains.

As discussed in the opening section economic and social reform tends to precede adjustments in educational systems; in other words, the demand side determines the nature of the supply side, usually with a very long lag in response. The big question is whether globalisation and the reorganisation of the nature of work will herald a general breakdown of traditional divides among educational sectors, whether binary or tripartite. There is a good deal of debate but no clear consensus as to whether and how the traditional splits among general, technical and vocational provision could break down, and certainly not on what time scale.

One feature of this chapter has been to examine different change processes with the labels of: reform in England and Wales; renewal in France, in the Netherlands and Germany; reconstruction in Eastern and Central European countries.

Changes have tended to take the form of the 'renewal' of existing and wel-accepted structures. For instance,

- apprenticeship in Germany has widened its range of entrants, with some who enter with the *Abitur* and move back into university education later on
- in France, the common label of *baccalauréat* has been applied to general, technical and vocational qualifications in the *lycée général*, *technologique* and *professionnel*
- a respected VET middle core has developed in the Dutch system (separate from general education).

As the French case demonstrates, it is also possible to move the goalposts over a period of time; thus investment in the *baccalauréat professionnel* has given a relatively higher profile to a vocational route. Most educational reform redistributes costs. Establishing parity of esteem for vocational education has a cost which the Dutch government (quite overtly) wishes to transfer to local level and to enterprises.

For a system under reconstruction such as the Albanian, it is interesting to note the nature of what might be called quality criteria, acceptable to a team drawn from a number of different countries.

The scale, nature and speed of change in England and Wales with respect not only to post-16 qualifications but also their delivery systems justifies the use of the term 'reform.' Such reform requires a level of justification and examination of fundamental principles perhaps not yet required in the other three EU countries, since their systems continue to be based on implicit but unchanged values.

One overall conclusion applicable to all the countries examined is that the actors within a system of post-16 education and training system are increasingly required to live with complexity and to manage ambiguity rather than have imposed an artificial simplicity.

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Overview: developing qualifications for the future

Chapter

Geoff Stanton

Introduction

This synoptic chapter draws upon the specialist papers which form the earlier part of this book, plus the seminar discussions held on them, in order to examine the structure of post-16 education and training from first principles, and to identify implications arising from this for practical policy making.

- Section One contains the analysis, from which it can be concluded that no hard and fast divisions can be justified from any of the perspectives taken, and that assumed divisions can be seriously dysfunctional.
- Section Two argues that presenting post-16 education and training in an undifferentiated way is equally dangerous, not least because it will still be informally categorised, on even weaker grounds than is presently the case.
- Section Three suggests that a way out of this dilemma is to be much more precise about what is being categorised, and for what purposes. This precision requires the consistent use of some technical terms which are introduced and explained. This enables a critique of the Dearing review of 16–19 qualifications to be developed.
- Section Four identifies the implications of what is being suggested for the planning and management of post-16 education and training at both national and local level.

Current divisions post-16 from a number of perspectives

Key points from the specialist chapters

Lessons from the market

One of the implications of some of the chapters in this book is that it might not be necessary to categorise qualifications into types at all. Wolf's paper on the consumer perspective, for instance, argues that there is a legitimate need for a wide variety of kinds and levels of qualification, and that if they existed in a genuinely open market-place, supply and demand would determine which would flourish. This would certainly avoid the present situation with regard to NVQs and GNVQs where some variants have been created (at some expense) in order to complete a predetermined framework, but have not been taken up in any number by candidates.

On the other hand, history shows that lack of planning or control can produce what has frequently been described as a 'jungle' of qualifications. It has been argued that the impenetrability of this 'jungle' reduces participation, and makes it difficult for users of qualifications (employers, admission tutors or customers of people with such qualifications) to understand all that they represent.

This brings us to another issue raised by Wolf's paper. Those who are using a qualification as evidence of *specialist* expertise will almost certainly be aware of what the relevant qualifications represent – indeed, as specialists they may themselves have contributed to their design. (It may still be the case, of course, that candidates are bewildered by the choice facing them.) The problem for employers and others arises when it is necessary to use the qualification as evidence of a *general* level of achievement. Wolf refers to this as the use of qualifications for selection (or sorting) as opposed to skill development. She points out that much of the significance of qualifications in our modern society is that they form the only openly acceptable form of selection.

If only a few qualifications are understood to represent a given amount and level of *general* ability, and/or potential, then they will be preferred by anyone who is more interested in progression than in simply having their current competence and knowledge accredited. Almost all 16 to 19-year-olds are interested in progression. Therefore, to offer them alternative qualifications on the grounds that they are more appropriate to their interests and styles as learners, but without sorting out their currency in terms of progression, is akin to intellectual dishonesty. This is because this currency is determined by our attitudes and behaviour, rather than theirs.

Lessons from abroad

The effects of this are exacerbated by the fact, as brought out in Parkes' paper on international comparisons, that the qualifications which are thought to represent the gold standard of general ability in the UK context – namely A-levels – are extremely specialised by international standards. In many other countries the discussion is not so much in terms of the distinction between academic and vocational qualifications, as that between general education and vocational education and training (VET), where general education lives up to its name.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between individual subject qualifications and the programmes of which they form a part. For instance, the majority of A-level students in England and Wales take a programme consisting of three subjects, though in a significant minority of cases students may only take or pass two. Attempts to broaden this *programme* are often misinterpreted as a threat to the integrity of the subjects of which they form a part, and the intellectual standards they demand. Similarly, the much more recent GNVQs were designed with a focus on what was special about each vocational area. They do incorporate Key Skills, but no other country would be satisfied with this as a continuation of general education. Other nationalities consider that intellectual distinction is represented by someone who achieves excellence in philosophy alongside their physics, or in a foreign language alongside their engineering.

Lessons from sociology

In his chapter on sociology, Gleeson explores in more detail why our culture assumes that the demonstration of a high level of academic achievement on a narrow front signifies membership of an élite, from which most socially significant and well-rewarded roles will be filled. It is not so much that high status qualifications actually test the wide range of abilities required to be successful in adult life, it is that their possession is thought to identify a *definable* group of people with the greatest potential. This group is also thought to be *confined* in the sense of having a fixed number of members. As Gleeson says, this assumption runs head on into a conflicting notion, often held by the same people, that by a number of devices, including the setting of targets, it will be possible to raise the overall level of achievement of the whole population. (Thus, it is assumed that if the national training targets are achieved by more people obtaining more A-levels, standards must have slipped, and if they are achieved by people obtaining GNVQ3s, then this cannot really be equivalent.) Currently, the pressure for this comes from the need for the nation to be internationally competitive, rather than from the intrinsic value of such learning for individuals.

Meeting the needs of the economy

It is this same imperative which has produced a stream of initiatives intended to enable the needs of British industry and commerce to impact upon what post-16 education and training provides and how it provides it. In this context it is important to consider the arguments in the Huddleston/Unwin chapter (on education, training and the labour market) about the ineffectiveness/inadequacy of many of these initiatives. A key reason for inadequacy may be the inevitable difficulty a nationally-designed system has in being flexible enough to match needs which vary both between localities and within occupations. A second, and related, reason may have been the tendency for employment needs to be voiced via 'representation' on various agencies and committees, rather than identified as a result of in-depth research. This has meant that the special needs and difficulties of small companies have been under-represented, and also that

the structure of occupations as reflected in the new qualifications has been presented in a simplistic and backward-looking manner (although the language used has been very complex). It has also been the case that, whatever the rhetoric, it has been employer rather than employment (and longer-term) needs that have been given priority. (The alliance can exist between the state, the unions and that the employed in other countries may defend the medium-term interests of employees for additional breadth and flexibility, but it has implications for who funds what.)

It is easy to see that this might result in qualifications and assessment regimes which may suit a large company with a clear, fairly stable and conventional division of labour, but which fail to meet either the needs of a company in which staff are expected to work flexibly across a range of traditional skill areas, or of someone who is self-employed.

Gleeson notes that post-16 education and training qualifications appear to embody assumptions about the organisation of work which are 'Fordist' in that they reflect the (horizontal) division of labour typical of an assembly line. This draws attention to a fundamental issue. Insofar as post-16 education and training should be employment-led, what is the model of the world of employment which is being assumed, and is post-16 education and training intended to respond to change or to promote it? Do our post-16 education and training structures allow for a world in which the number and workforce of large firms is declining, in which batch production may become more common than mass-production, and where an increasing number of people are self-employed as sub-contractors? At an international level, will the possession of an inadequate post-16 education and training system mean that a whole country might be reduced to dependence on sub-contracting from elsewhere rather than being involved in the strategic development of the core business, and the related R&D? The answers to these questions not only influence what people need to learn, they also have implications for how such learning needs to be accessed and funded.

Lessons from History

Bailey's chapter on the historical perspective reminds us that although tripartite divisions have been a design feature of our education system for generations, they have not always been justified by reference to economic considerations. Initially they were based overtly on distinctions of social class, and later on assumptions about different 'types of mind'. Until 1938 and the Spens Report there was no attempt to suggest that the different forms of provision should have parity of esteem, and even after that date it was accepted that there was, in fact, a hierarchy of schools, selection for which was by mental testing. A specific recommendation of Spens was that all three types of secondary school, grammar, technical and modern, should share a common curriculum until the students were 13. At first sight this looks remarkably similar to the situation developing again now, where despite the initial ambitions held for it, the National Curriculum may only be the same for all children until the end of Key Stage 3.

This is only 'at first sight', since there are some crucial differences. The first is that we are now talking in terms of classifying qualifications rather than institutions, which opens up the possibility that a single tertiary college can be involved, by itself or in partnership with others, in offering post-16 programmes leading to all types of qualification. Secondly, the Framework endorsed by Sir Ron Dearing indicates that each of the three types of qualification which are now being proposed should be offered at each of at least three levels. Sometimes, as in the case of Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs and GCSEs/A-levels the equivalence in terms of level of demand was part of the intention at the design stage. The NVQ levels, on the other hand, already existed and were defined against different criteria, though it remains possible that the validity of the *asserted* equivalence could be consolidated as the qualifications continue to evolve.

In previous generations similar divisions have represented *intended* disparity. This, together with the existence of the enduring and dominant cultural assumptions which Gleeson calls 'classical humanism', makes the establishment of what Dearing calls 'equal value' something which will not occur easily or cheaply. There is already evidence that the average level of attainment at entry is significantly lower for students enrolling on GNVQ3

programmes as opposed to A-level (Wolf 1995), and that existing vocational qualifications do not give access to the same financial rewards as their academic counterparts (Robinson, 1997).

Bailey also draws attention to the gap that has frequently existed between what was officially recommended or described, and what actually happened. Of the three kinds of secondary school proposed after 1945, few of the Secondary Technical Schools were actually set up, and the same applied to the county colleges which were intended to provide continuing general education for those post-war school leavers not going on to Technical Colleges or the sixth form. There is a parallel today, in that of the more than 16,000 qualifications which are available to 16 to 19-year-olds (Dearing, 1996), the majority fall outside all three of the types which Dearing spent most of his time analysing. (Admittedly, some of these are specialist exams in first aid, coaching, etc.) Dearing's pragmatic proposal to categorise all qualifications as academic, applied or vocational also seems to echo Norwood in 1943 who talked in terms of 'three rough groupings of pupils which whatever may be their ground, have in fact established themselves in general educational experience'.

The importance of the historical precedents is that however pragmatic the various forms of tripartism may have appeared at the time, they so often failed to work as intended. Generalising from a number of instances, Bailey suggests that over time what began as selection by exclusion, at a given age, becomes selection by differentiation, as the level of participation at that age increases. Sometimes, as with the three types of secondary school, the selection is overt. In other cases, such as with the creation of GNVQs, it may be the reality, whatever was intended. He goes on to suggest that once parallel provision has co-existed for some time, inevitable questions are asked about why people are not getting an equal deal, and the original differentiation begins to break down.

All examples of tripartism he quoted have involved the use of similar labels, despite the fact that they had rationales which varied from the existence of different types of mind, through the nature of economic needs, to the current favourite, the need for consumer choice, and the role of this in

improving quality. (Although it is also being said by government that ensuring the quality of qualifications may require a *reduction* in choice of A-level syllabuses, for instance.)

Lessons from psychology

The first and last of the rationales described in the last paragraph relate to assumed psychological differences between learners. Dockrell's chapter recognises that there are indeed differences, but makes some crucial caveats:

- We may be talking in terms of differences of general ability, specific ability or of motivation – and it is often not clear which.
- All the evidence is that these differences range over a spectrum, as does the height of people, for instance, rather than representing distinct categories. Some human characteristics can be helpfully allocated into categories – most people are either right- or left-handed, for instance – but such things as aptitude for academic, applied or vocational learning, were they to exist, tend to fall on a normal distribution curve.
- There is room for considerable debate about whether the psychological differences that do exist are part of the hardware or the software, to use a computer analogy. It would be most helpful to explore the *extent* to which they have to be accepted as a physical constant, or can be enhanced by the process of learning. Given that the process of learning can influence all the three factors of general ability, specific ability and motivation, then we need to be clear whether those who are already relatively high attainers in this area, or to operate on the converse principle on the grounds that low achievers need more help.

Curriculum principles

Pring's chapter on the curriculum perspective explores the values behind the planning and delivery of provision, and also reminds us of the centrality of the learning process and the secondary importance of qualifications. He describes a different sort of pragmatism: one in which approaches to curriculum design which have been found to work in practice are built upon, extended and validated by incorporation into official policy.

The state will understandably wish to preserve the integrity of certain academic disciplines, for cultural and intellectual reasons, and will also wish to ensure that people have the skills and knowledge necessary for the health of the economy. Pring also reminds us that, although it is currently unfashionable to mention it, a healthy society requires some learning in support of citizenship and leisure. He argues that these various needs can be balanced, and need not conflict. The key to achieving this is to realise that the logical structure of knowledge (or of an occupational role, for that matter) need not determine the pedagogical organisation of it for the purposes of learning. (For instance, the fact that two subjects are based on different methodologies and concepts does not mean that they always have to be timetabled separately: they could be learned through integrated assignments.)

From the point of view of those responsible for the implementation of learning programmes, the constraining influence of qualifications and associated assessment procedures on their necessary freedom for manoeuvre has lately been neglected. Certainly, the pendulum has swung right away from the position where the purpose of qualifications was thought to be the assessment of learning programmes, with the content of the latter taking priority. Nevertheless, the connection between qualifications and the way learning programmes are implemented need not be as tight as is often assumed. To take an example, the fact that GCSE is assessed via a series of subject-based examinations does not require that there should be a corresponding set of lessons on the timetable. It is technically feasible for the learning programme to be run on an integrated basis, possibly using a number of multi-disciplinary assignments, but for students still to sit and pass the separate examinations. (Ironically, the more the examinations themselves become assignment-based, the more difficult an integrated approach becomes.)

Another link which can usefully be loosened is that between the structure of (say) occupational roles and the structure of qualifications. For instance, while it may make sense to group competencies in a certain way for the purpose of role analysis, it may be that they need to be regrouped for

assessment purposes, depending upon whether they are of a kind which requires access to the workplace for their demonstration or can be validly assessed off-site.

It follows from this that it is important not just to review which and how many categories it makes sense to use, but also to examine what there should be categories of. It is my contention that a better understanding of this can help resolve some of the dilemmas facing us, and can make remaining issues clearer. The next section will expand on this.

The need for a clear developmental model

However, before moving on to explore some ways forward, there is a further matter arising from the specialist chapters to which I wish to draw attention. Pring identifies the way in which TVEI operated not just as an approach to curriculum design, but as a model for curriculum development and the management of change. Parkes classifies developments elsewhere in Europe according to whether they are best described as renewal (France and Germany); reform (England and Wales) or reconstruction (much of eastern Europe). He also describes the way in which some other countries consciously take account of current public assumptions and attitudes when managing change, and emphasises that establishing parity of esteem requires considerable financial investment. Wolf argues that tripartite systems have no natural existence, but arise from the desire of government to present things more tidily than reality allows (or the market supports). Bailey concludes that we have had a succession of initiatives, which reflected the particular short-term pressures of the time, and where usually the reality has not matched the rhetoric. Unwin and Huddleston offer some current examples, where the rhetoric associated with the employment-led nature of initiatives could be seriously misleading. They also point out the need for development which is based on research rather than anecdote, and Gleeson describes how a failure to be explicit about the cultural norms and values you are adopting or working to change can result in an inability to address certain possibilities at all. Dockrell makes the crucial point that human beings have a number of kinds of intelligence and that for each kind, our abilities occur across a spectrum, rather than in

the clear categories often assumed by planners and administrators. Pring draws attention to the remarkably short-term nature of our collective and official memory, when it comes to learning from and building on past developments.

All this argues for the need to state any assumptions being made when initiating change, and to have an explicit developmental model and a mechanism for managing change which are clearly understood. The explicitness needs to extend to the statement of aims, so that mechanisms can be designed and evaluated in terms of their fitness for their intended purpose.

This is not to suggest that there could ever be a masterplan which gets implemented as originally conceived, but it is possible to allow in the developmental model for feedback loops and review periods when the original plan is consciously modified, in the light of further research and evaluation. It is also possible to create a management structure for the changes which identifies the roles of different agencies, and identifies the implications of change in one area for the well-being of another. The fact that, in my view, the Scots get closer to this ideal than the English is not so much a matter of their smaller size, but arises from the preference of the English for opportunism and pragmatism, and a reluctance to identify 'abstract' things such as underlying values and assumptions.

The justification for opportunism and pragmatism should be that they work, and bring about a more effective system than existed before. We have lots of recent evidence that the English way of doing things produces unmanageable developments which only start working after substantial modification, after time and money have been wasted, and after current participants in the system have had their welfare put at risk. We need to reflect on how to make change itself a positive and learning experience, rather than a risky and destructive one.

Why categorisation is important

It is tempting to conclude from the last section that since no form of categorisation, tripartite or otherwise, has a clear justification from any of the perspectives being offered, then all forms should be avoided or, where they already exist, abolished. It is certainly the case that where categories become divisions, with boundaries that are difficult to cross, people become trapped on programmes that no longer suit them or their aspirations, as both develop. As a result, both participation and achievement are hindered. However, in this section I argue that undifferentiated provision is just as problematic as operating with false divisions, for reasons to do with culture, comprehensibility and adequacy.

Cultural Influences

The fact that no categories are officially recognised does not mean that none will be used. Classification is a natural and very human activity, but, as Gleeson argues, if done unthinkingly is likely to embody existing prejudices, and reflect past perspectives and experience rather than future needs. Indeed, much of the current problem with post-16 education and training comes from a predominant cultural assumption – perhaps more English than Scottish or Welsh – which attempts to classify post-16 provision as either academic or vocational, and equates the former with high intellectual demands and broad personal development, and the latter with narrow, unenlightened training in simple techniques. Coming from this context, many will not immediately understand the potential of Pring's suggestion that there can be education *through* training rather than instead of it, or the significance of Gleeson's question about the position of the practical in general education.

A thread running through much of the discussion has been the difficulty we appear to have in recognising the importance of the applied, as opposed to the theoretical or the practical. This is paradoxical, in that most of us earn the salaries we do because of our performance in what Dearing calls the 'applied' category. Academics who can apply their theoretical understanding to real-life problems are much more marketable than those who

can only theorise, and craftspeople who understand the theoretical underpinning of the skills and materials they use have a similar 'added value'. Whether the 'applied' is a distinct route with special characteristics, or whether we have difficulties with it because we regard it as a mongrel mixture of the theoretical and the occupationally specific, is a moot point. Either way, Bailey points out that the history of English education teaches us that it would need special attention if it is to survive, let alone thrive.

The importance of the 'applied' is not just economic. Pring argues that many teachers have shown that it can be used as a vehicle for the achievement of learning outcomes from a range of disciplines, and with learners who are neither motivated by academic subjects *per se*, nor are ready to commit themselves to a specific job. Unfortunately, the fact that this success has often been achieved with those who are otherwise underachieving or alienated all too often prevents us from realising its potential for everyone else.

Parkes points out that in other countries the issue is not so much one of whether to travel by the academic or vocational route, but one of when to add the vocational to the general, or how much general education should form part of VET. In this context, the specialist academic education we offer might be seen as a vocational option for those who wish to make their career in academia.

Understanding what is on offer

It has already been mentioned that Dearing's report on 16–19 qualifications (1996) reckoned that there are more than 16,000 qualifications available to 16 to 19-year-olds. Any store stocking this number of lines would group them into departments in order that customers could choose more easily, and so that the staff responsible for serving them could specialise. It would also be the case that different products would have different quality criteria to meet: freshness would apply to some, electrical safety to others.

Whether it is helpful or accurate to allocate such a wide range of qualifications into just three categories is another matter. It is certainly risky to decide on the categories first (whatever the number chosen) and only afterwards look at how well the qualifications, already in use and popular, can be made to fit them. It is positively dangerous to create a legal situation, as the 1997 Education Act does, which would enable government effectively to abolish those qualifications which did not meet the criteria for membership of one of these categories, by preventing the use of public money on courses leading to them. As Wolf's chapter makes clear, a bureaucratic desire to be neat and tidy can cause many problems: some qualifications are created for which there is no demand, and others are left out of account despite their popularity.

Wolf and Bailey also suggest that 'alternative' pathways may have been created in order to legitimise the restriction of access to the pathway reserved for the élite. Whatever the validity of this claim, it is exactly the sort of danger that a real free market is meant to counteract in other areas of our lives. It is ironic, therefore, to see politicians of all parties getting so close to espousing a command economy with regard to qualifications.

The relevant part of the Dearing Report (Section 3) is certainly open to the accusation that the three categories he is proposing, namely, Academic, Applied and Vocational, are to be imposed on the situation, rather than being derived from it. This is partly because he equates GNVQs with Applied and NVQs with Vocational, without recognising that more candidates take other kinds of qualifications within each of these categories. His brief prevented him from asking whether academic education was well-represented by typical A-level programmes, but at least A-levels do represent the majority of 'academic' provision at what Dearing calls 'advanced level', the only competitor in England and Wales being the International Baccalaureate.

Dearing was keen that the framework of qualifications he was proposing should be 'intelligible to students, parents, employers and employees'. I am also arguing the importance of this. In order to achieve it, he argued that 'we need to make explicit the essential purposes and characteristics of each of the three main qualifications pathways'. I have questioned whether the 'main pathways' represent a *pre*scription or a *de*scription. Later I shall

raise other questions about the way Dearing addresses the issue of purposes and characteristics, in order to suggest that there is confusion here, but confusion which arises from real difficulties and which can be explored with advantage.

Ensuring adequate provision

Ensuring adequate provision of post-16 education and training is the responsibility of the FE Funding Councils, who fund it in conjunction with LEAs and TECs. Its definition is a matter of interpretation and case law, and in practice delivers little in the way of an entitlement to individual learners and potential learners. However, once a National Framework is proposed, it becomes possible to argue that each of its elements needs to be accessible within a reasonable 'travel to study' distance for the requirement to be met. (What happens within a category is more debatable. For instance, while it might be said that A-levels in general must be available within a 'travel to study' distance for 16 to 19-year-olds, it may not follow that this means providing alternative syllabuses or uncommon subjects, however low the demand.)

Nevertheless, the implications of categorising qualifications within a framework is apparent. The framework provides a 'template' against which the range and type of provision in a locality can be judged. Without this, the only test becomes evidence of unmet demand, which may never be generated if no-one knows what is possible.

The more sophisticated the categorisation, the more specific the entitlement. If it extended to mode and place of learning, for instance, and if – as seems very likely – it is possible to achieve similar units of achievement in (say) Administration on routes which are either largely college-based or largely work-based, then someone who would learn better as a worker than as a student could argue that local provision was not adequate unless it provided this choice of location for learning.

A critique of Dearing and an alternative

Categories of what, and for what purpose?

The framework proposed by Dearing (1996) takes the form of a matrix, of three pathways by four levels.

Levels

Dearing's framework does take full account of GCSEs, A-levels and GNVQs, but only brings in NVQs insofar as they are appropriate to 16 to 19-year-olds. At least two further levels would need to be added to cover learning up to degree level and beyond, and NVQ levels 4 and 5. Also, Dearing proposed that an 'entry-level' be created for those not yet able to reach the lower grades of GCSE, GNVQ Foundation level or NVQ Level 1. Even so, there is a question as to whether the number of levels is sufficient. Dearing himself proposed a 'reformulated AS level', whose level of achievement is that to be expected halfway through a two year A-level programme (paragraph 11.22). It would seem to make sense to give this level formal status, and to create an equivalent of it within the other tracks. Apart from anything else, this would provide a means of avoiding a very real danger.

Inspection evidence is that the standard of work of students who are successful on Advanced GNVQs is equivalent to A-level. However, research also shows that the average level of prior GCSE achievement of GNVQ students is lower than for those who enrol on A-level courses. This is not surprising, given the established status of A-levels. It does mean, however, that the average GNVQ student has to make more progress in order to succeed. This challenge is increased by the fact that, being unit-based, the GNVQ requires participants to achieve the required standard by the end of the first unit – that is, after a term or so, rather than by the end of a two year programme. To make things more difficult, the funding regime for colleges where most GNVQ students are to be found penalises them when

students do not achieve their 'qualification aims' in the expected time. An unintended consequence of this may be that learners may choose or be encouraged to take an A/AS programme instead of GNVQ, since this provides a 'safety net' in that if they fall short of 'Level 3' they can still benefit from certificated achievement in an AS examination at what might be called 'Level 2.5'.

In addition to agreeing that there may be a 'missing rung' in the ladder of attainment between GCSE and A-level, Dearing also suggested (paragraph 12.85) that 'special papers' of various types should exist in order to stretch the most able 16 to 19-year-olds beyond the level represented by the highest grades of A-level. All this suggests that he is finding difficulty in limiting himself to the number of levels which his framework offers.

There is also the question of whether a student can achieve different levels in separate parts of a programme. Thus, a student following an 'academic' programme can, typically, take up to six subjects, at either A or AS level, with five grades (A to E) being offered at each level. A special paper might also be taken in one of these subjects. By contrast, for the GNVQ student, achievement is not reported at the levels represented by AS or the special paper (Level 2.5 and Level 3.5), and only three grades are offered within Level 3: pass, credit and distinction. What is more, these grades are offered for the qualification as a whole, which may occupy the whole of a student's programme, and not for the individual units of which it is composed. Unit grading is, however, likely to be introduced for GNVQs following piloting in 1997–99.

There would seem to be no clear reason for the different ways in which the 'level' dimension of the framework is applied to the academic and applied pathways. This difference becomes important when the use to which the qualifications may be put is considered. Several of the earlier chapters emphasise that for 16 to 19-year-olds it is evidence of general ability and potential that is required, since they have progression in mind. It is the A/AS route that *appears* to provide this, with its emphasis on finely differentiated levels of achievement, rather than GNVQs. The GNVQ specification does offer a more detailed definition of what the learner knows, understands and can do, but not in a form which helps with shortlisting.

Any attempts to apply similar criteria for levels across all the 'pathways' also identifies the possible need for an equivalent to the 'special papers' on the applied route. This might involve the creation of special additional units, based perhaps on Further Mathematics A-levels or language qualifications which require a working fluency. This would doubtless imply very good GCSE grades at entry. Even if this meant fewer people gaining access to this form of GNVQ, it would serve to establish the potential value of the GNVQ and the quality of its graduates in terms of intellectual achievement, in much the same way as some Modern Apprenticeships aim to do with regard to work-based learning.

Levels are also attributed to whole NVQs rather than to individual units, but no grades are used at all. The rationale for this *has* been made clear: it is that accreditation has to attest to someone either being occupationally competent or not. There is the further implication that assessment must take place in the workplace if at all possible.

An analogy often quoted is that of the driving test, after which the examiners have to make up their minds as to whether candidates are safe to drive unsupervised on public roads. There is room for debate about this approach, with some arguing that it remains possible and useful to indicate both an absolute threshold for a given qualification, and areas in which an individual may have exceeded it (without having addressed the competences required for the next level). What can be said is that the pass or fail approach is much more appropriate for providing evidence that someone can fulfil the requirements of a given job than it would be for facilitating their progression, either to a higher level job or into higher education.

To sum up: most people would agree that there is value in applying a common system of levels to most post-16 qualifications. There is room for endless argument about what exactly is meant by 'level', but this does not mean that it is not useful to indicate when one form of provision is at the same general level as another, or above or below it – as long as undue precision is not claimed. Allocation to levels already takes place with regard to university degrees and GCSEs, across very different areas of study. What does not take place with regard to degrees or GCSEs is categorisation of qualifications into different *types* at the *same* level.

'Pathways' and types of qualifications

Dearing proposes allocating subjects to just one of the pathways he has identified. A close examination of this immediately shows the problems that arise, particularly with regard to the criteria he proposes to use, and the level of generality at which he wishes to work. Dearing suggests that the distinguishing characteristics appropriate to each pathway should reflect the underlying primary purposes outlined below (paragraph 3.24):

- *A-levels and GCSE*: to develop knowledge, understanding and skills associated with a subject or discipline
- *Applied Education (GNVQ)*: to develop knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to broad areas of employment
- *Vocational Training (NVQ)*: to develop and recognise mastery of a trade or profession at the appropriate level.

There is considerable conceptual confusion here, which shows up in difficulties with the words used. All qualifications *recognise* achievement, not just NVQs. The *development* of that achievement comes from the learning opportunities offered in the associated learning programme, not from the qualification, and although the qualification influences the learning programme, it does not determine it. Whatever the 'purpose' of a pathway, the purpose of those taking it may vary. For instance, A-level students may be studying for the purpose of obtaining employment, and GNVQ students may be aiming for university.

Dearing also states that GNVQs are distinct from A-levels in other ways, mainly to do with learning styles. Some of these differences, such as the suggestion that GNVQs are distinctive in offering opportunities for working with others and planning independent study (paragraph 3.25), reflect an outmoded view of A-level teaching. There are other differences which are more objective and which he does not mention within these defining characteristics, such as different assessment regimes and the fact that GNVQ units, unlike the A-level subjects which make up a typical academic programme, are designed to make up an integrated whole. NVQs, which Dearing does not mention in this context, are further distinguished by the requirement for workplace assessment, and by the fact that the qualification is ungraded.

Dearing argues that the style of learning and assessment will naturally differ between A-levels and GNVQs. Since these 'associated courses of study' have different purposes, the methods should 'derive from and serve the purpose of the course' (paragraph 3.22). There is evidence, however, that methods may be linked to content for reasons of tradition rather than logic. For instance, although integrated programmes made up of related components are, in the UK, an approach typical of applied and vocational routes, in other countries the same approach is applied to academic programmes. Similarly, whether assessment through assignments as opposed to formal examinations is appropriate should be linked to the nature of the outcomes *within* an area of study, rather than to the tradition of type of qualification as a whole.

As far as learning styles is concerned, it is not the case that there are three learning styles, each associated with only one type of qualification. Learning activities and programme structures have to be chosen so as to get the learner most efficiently to the level and type of achievement required. The choice is *influenced* by the nature of the outcome required, but not uniquely so. The personality, motivation and previous experience of the learner also matter. There is plenty of evidence that learners make much better progress, and become more effective as learners, if a variety of styles is promoted – whatever the 'pathway' (Mitchell, C *Learning styles*).

Dearing proposes to establish the distinct categories he seeks by setting up machinery for officially allocating subject areas to pathways. But surely whether economics or physics are academic or applied will depend on the approach adopted, rather than the subject label?

It may also depend on which part of the subject is being examined. Mathematics courses and qualifications often contain both pure and applied units. Dearing himself recognises that units within some academic subjects might be replicated within GNVQs, and that this could happen more often if taken account of at the design stage.

Despite these serious reservations, I recognise that Dearing *is* describing a real difference. The trouble is that the difference is not between whole 'pathways' or subjects, but refers to the *source* of the 'knowledge, under-

standing and skills' which goes to make up coherent parts of the routes. For ease of discussion I shall use the term *standards* for the former, and *units* for the latter (in both cases adopting NCVQ usage).

It is important to accept that the source of some unit standards is what Dearing calls the 'tradition and canon' (paragraph 3.20) of some disciplines. Equally, the knowledge, understanding and skills which are assessed in other units are selected according to different criteria, namely their relevance to activities within a vocational sector. Yet other unit standards are determined by what is required for competence to workplace standards. Given that we do need to protect the integrity of these sources, to suggest that the *sources* of standards may be categorised in this tripartite way may not be far off the mark. However, it does not follow that *qualifications* do or must consist of units from only one source (or at only one level, for that matter). Qualifications will fall on a spectrum rather than into three distinct types, depending upon the proportions of units of each type which they contain.

An alternative analysis

A number of variables need to be defined before learners and others are in a position to make informed choices. They go beyond the type of the qualification, to include the following:

- The *primary aim* of the learner: for instance, whether this is to prepare for university entrance; achieve occupational competence; or to keep both options open.
- The *standards* to be achieved (meaning required learning outcomes), and whether these derive from: the traditions of an academic subject; the requirements for competent performance in the workplace; or relevance to the study of a vocational area.
- The way these units are grouped into *units* for assessment purposes: A-level examination papers and their subdivisions, (G)NVQ units and their elements; whether there is a synoptic unit, testing the candidate's ability to draw upon several other units in order to address a problem.

- The *level of achievement*, intellectual and otherwise, represented by these units.
- The *mode of assessment*: the use of written papers, multiple choice, practical tests, performance, portfolios, assignments, and so on. The balance between ongoing assessment and end-tests.
- The way the units of assessment relate to *learning modules*. There are many possibilities. For example: a single module could prepare candidates for all or part of several units, or there could be a one-to-one relationship; some unit outcomes could be reached either via a module based on subject teaching or via one in the form of an assignment; modules may vary in size, and may be run consecutively or in parallel, with assessment either after each one or reserved until all have been completed.
- The balance of *learning and teaching methods* used: lectures; seminars; projects; practical assignments; coaching.
- The *location of the learning*: school; college; the workplace; the community; the home; or some combination.

Using the modest, but crucial, amount of jargon thus introduced, it becomes possible to make a number of propositions.

- There are three major sources of standards, or learning outcomes – the requirements of an occupation, the traditions of an academic discipline, or that combination of these which is relevant to a greater understanding of a given vocational area or field of study. Some units of achievement will contain outcomes from only one source, some will contain a mixture. All 16–19 qualifications, and many designed for older candidates, will and should contain units of more than one type. Therefore, it is *units* that can usefully be labelled according to the source of their standards. It can be helpful to indicate the proportion of units from each source that occur within any qualification.

- When conveying information about the nature and location of learning opportunities, it is more accurate and therefore helpful to do this in relation to *learning modules*. All learning programmes consist of modules, whether or not they are labelled as such, and whether or not students are offered a choice of them. Different modules may emphasise and develop different learning methods, and may be offered in different

places by different providers. It would be helpful to indicate the balance of methods and locations within any programme. It is arguable that all programmes should include at least an element of workplace or school/college experience.

- It is inaccurate and extremely unhelpful to assume that either learners or institutions are uniquely linked to any one sort of unit, qualification, module or learning programme.

If we thought along these lines, we would see post-16 education and training as made up of an array of nationally agreed units of achievement, with schools, colleges, training agencies and employers offering locally designed modules of learning which prepared people to achieve these units. Some of these modules would exactly match a unit: others would prepare learners to achieve more than one unit. Some units would require the use of an academic subject as a vehicle for learning, others would require access to the workplace, yet others could be best acquired through practical assignments. Many could be reached via any of these routes, or a combination.

A national qualification would differ from a simple 'collection' in that it would consist of units which followed approved rules of combination. Employers, universities and others would legitimately wish to be involved in defining such rules. They would probably require some units to be mandatory, while others could be chosen from a range. Awarding bodies would design and administer assessment regimes appropriate to given combinations. If required, synoptic units could be designed which tested the candidates' ability to synthesise learning from several units.

Classifications which would be inappropriate and misleading when applied to whole qualifications could helpfully be applied to individual units. Rather than whole qualifications being labelled 'academic' or 'vocational', participants could be told, for instance, what *proportion* of the component units were theoretical, and which required assessment of workplace performance. If it was desired to influence the nature of the learning experience which learners received, this could be done directly by making some modules mandatory, rather than indirectly through manipulation of

qualifications and assessment. Students could opt for programmes which had the right balance of learning styles for them, rather than having to accept an artificially restricted range.

Although most vocational qualifications would contain units unique to them, many – particularly those taken by full-time 14 to 19-year-old students – would have units in common. The Scots plan to cater for all this cohort with permutations from 3,000 units covering three levels. Although a large number, this is only 20% of the number of whole qualifications currently on offer. Working at the level of units makes it much easier to combine general education and specialisation so to give the breadth of education which is the norm in competitor nations. It also makes it easier for individuals to convert one combination of units – or qualification – to another, as their needs and motivations change. Liaison with employers and universities is more straightforward when discussing the specific units of (say) mathematical achievement they require, rather than talking generally about subject grades. A unit-based approach is capable of delivering most of the benefits of categorisation, while avoiding many of the dangers and oversimplifications identified in the earlier chapters of this book.

Conclusions

The planning of post-16 education and training, and the management of change

I have drawn attention to the pragmatic, opportunist and piecemeal nature of many education and training initiatives in England and Wales. This pragmatism has not prevented many of the most recent and most major initiatives, such as the National Curriculum (especially Key Stage 4), NVQs and GNVQs, from being very difficult to manage in their first incarnations. There are also serious questions about the extent to which, as originally designed, they were capable of achieving their intended purposes.

It is suggested that the pragmatism has been accompanied by an unwillingness to identify and debate the principles and values underpinning the initiatives. This has meant that mechanisms have become fashionable ends in themselves, often detached from the purposes for which they were meant to be fit. It has also not been easy to debate whether the purposes, since they were implied rather than stated, were appropriate to current circumstances, or even coherent. Furthermore, the 'opportunism' has meant that many of the necessary organisational, staffing and resource developments were not in place in time to support the changes.

The piecemeal nature of the changes has meant that the different elements which go to make up good quality post-16 education and training, and the complementary roles of the organisations responsible for them, have not been developed in a co-ordinated fashion. In fact, the following roles and relationships can be identified:

- *Industry Lead bodies* or *Academic subject panels* propose *standards.* (In the case of Key Skills or careers education, however, the relevant standards may be defined by the State on behalf of its citizens.)
- *Awarding bodies* construct *qualifications* comprising these standards formed into approved combinations of units. They administer assessment procedures appropriate to these standards and those of the anticipated target group and location of learning.

- *Providers* design and implement *learning programmes* which meet the needs of individual learners, enabling them to move towards the nationally agreed standards. In order to ensure flexibility and accessibility, and the best use of local facilities, the assessment procedures and funding mechanisms should not constrain the providers' freedom of action any more than necessary.
- *National agencies* should manage the interfaces and feedback loops between these partners, in order to maximise quality and value for money. This is crucial since developments in one area impinge on the others.

The process by which effective change in education and training can take place needs much more attention in future. Analysis of the recent past shows that the introduction of NVQs, the National Curriculum and GNVQs all had a number of features in common. A linear process was assumed, in the course of which centrally devised schemes were passed out to practitioners for implementation (via awarding bodies in two cases). This approach may have been adopted because inertia and opposition from vested interests was expected, but experience in all walks of life shows that effective developmental processes are cyclical, with a need for evaluation and feedback in order to amend techniques that turn out to be impractical, and assumptions that turn out to be ill-founded. Because of neglecting these needs, each initiative, in addition to the initial unmanageability already mentioned, also suffered from excessive bureaucracy with little attention being paid to costings, let alone value for money.

None of this is to suggest that the policy aims were all wrong. However, several of the earlier chapters in this book demonstrate how short the collective or official memory is, and therefore how little is often learned from previous successes and failures. This is another reason for accepting the discipline of stating, and consulting on, the proposed developmental processes, as well as about the intended outcomes.

The earlier chapters in this book showed that:

- despite much talk about choice in an educational market-place, the actual nature of the 'market' in qualifications has been little understood, particularly in relation to the constraints placed on it – perhaps inevitably – by the state

- despite the frequent implication that there were previous golden ages, the perspective we have been given of our educational history is partial, and often obscures lessons we could have learned from the patterns revealed
- despite the attention we pay to our need to compete internationally, we choose to ignore the extent to which other nations give greater priority to general (as opposed to academic) education, and develop their post-16 education and training provision on the basis of consensus and carefully crafted partnerships
- despite the importance given to the needs of employers when reforming post-16 education and training, proposals are all too often based on anecdote or dated assumptions, rather than rigorous and forward-looking research
- despite the awareness of the destructive potential of inappropriate and outdated social attitudes we have developed in other areas of our civic life, we do not sufficiently examine or debate those which hinder the development of post-16 education and training
- despite technical insights gained through CPVE, TVEI and NVQs into the difference between the curriculum and qualifications, and different ways in which the two can usefully be related, we continue to use old and unhelpfully restrictive approaches to programme design and development
- despite its centrality to our concerns, we have rarely based educational policy on any clear model of how people learn.

Lessons for the organisation of post-16 education and training

We have seen that categorisation of any kind has to be used with great care, but also that real differences in the needs and the characteristics of learners must be recognised and provided for. The right balance can be struck only if we accept that people differ in more than one way, and if, in providing for them, we realise that modern approches to curriculum design do not require us to link particular learning outcomes with given subject matter or learning methods in a rigid way, just because this has been our tradition.

There are a number of specific insights which, if acted upon, could improve the way post-16 education and training is organised at both national and local levels.

- It is not possible, from any of the perspectives taken, to firmly divide people, learning programmes or whole qualifications into a few distinct categories.
- Therefore, the threefold division of qualifications proposed by Dearing may be administratively convenient, but is difficult to justify in terms of the needs of the learner.
- Differences in learning style, aptitude and motivation exist, but occur in the form of a series of normal distribution curves, rather than in clear groupings.
- Modern approaches to curriculum design can allow learners a choice of how they learn, where they learn, and how their programme is structured. These choices are not incompatible with reaching defined national standards.
- Better links need to be established between those responsible for the design and delivery of the curriculum and those responsible for qualifications. We need to learn from our past experience of educational initiatives in order to identify an efficient and ongoing developmental procedure, which takes account of national requirements, local intelligence and manageability, and affordability.
- The three-fold division proposed by Dearing is different from previous forms in that it appears to offer differentiation in terms of types of qualification, rather than level of ability. However, 16–19 qualifications are mostly used for the purposes of selection, rather than for the development of specific skills and understanding. Therefore, it is the levels of general achievement represented by a qualification's position in the framework, and its ability to rank candidates, that is most important to the various customers in the market for qualifications.
- As long as GCSEs and A-levels appear to give more precise information about levels of achievement than GNVQs and NVQs do, and to do this in a form which allows those recruiting for higher education and

employment to place applicants in rank order, then these qualifications will continue to have greater currency, and therefore to attract the more able candidates in the 16–19 age group. G/NVQ assessment chooses to give greater priority to reporting on what a candidate knows and can do. This is very valuable, but – whether we like it or not – may be more relevant to those in mid-career than to those attempting to start out on one.

- There is a distinct possibility that GNVQs are being seen as a means of preventing too many unsuitable candidates taking academic qualifications, rather than as valuable qualifications in their own right. A desire to use a parallel route as a means of protecting the highest status route from change, and preserving it as a means of identifying an élite, has been a recurrent feature of our history.
- Problems may also derive from deeply ingrained cultural attitudes, which assume that there can only be a fixed number of really able people, and that intellectual ability is linked with academic but not with practical achievement. These need to be challenged directly, since they will corrupt the qualifications system rather than be changed by it.
- As far as pre-employment courses are concerned, there is no point in letting them be influenced by what employers say they need until there is more evidence that their recruitment practices reflect what they say.
- In general, the needs of employers should be identified through research rather than by committee, in order that what is identified is accurate, up-to-date, and takes account of the needs of small firms and changing employment patterns.
- Overseas experience shows that:
  - it may be more useful to talk in terms of general rather than academic education, and to recognise that it is not so much a matter of whether an individual should follow a general rather than a vocational programme, but how and when the two should be melded
  - technical education requires higher than average levels of funding if it is to be effective and of high status.

- For learners who are in mid-career, it is often the case that the function of qualifications in validating specific achievement becomes more significant than their capacity to reflect general ability and potential. It may well be, therefore, that candidates wish to acquire specialist qualifications, or units of them, at a level lower than that achieved as part of their general education. In principle, it is dangerous to base the structure of qualifications for lifelong learning on a model developed for 16 to 19-year-olds.
- The state has a legitimate interest in what qualifications measure, and whether they report on this accurately. It has an analogous interest in the standards to which new houses are built, and the safety and environmental features built into new cars. However, just as with houses and cars, the state should not use its machinery, just because it exists, in order to control anything more than is absolutely necessary.

A way forward?

Although there is no evidence that people, jobs, or courses can be classified into three types on any rational basis, it can be argued that any learning programme contains theoretical understanding and practical techniques, in differing proportions. There is also a middle ground, where theoretical understanding is applied in practical situations, and the principles underpinning practical activity are identified. It can be useful to indicate what proportion of a scheme's components are theoretical, practical or applied.

A few thousand such components, classified into a few types and described according to a common specification, can be combined to form many more thousand schemes and qualifications – a huge diversity. It is for those recruiting to say what precise combinations of components they require to suit their purposes, though the state is free to set its own general rules, and to be more specific *if* a particular component is crucial to its interests.

This need not lead to programmes which cannot be economically provided. To explain why, it is helpful to use an industrial analogy: modern technology makes possible what has been called mass-customisation. It is no longer the case that in order to be cheap cars must come in one of three varieties, all of them black. Within the basic scheme of things, the customer

can choose from a large range of options. Some are relatively peripheral, such as type of radio and colour scheme. Others are more fundamental, such as engine size and type, and number of doors. At the same time, the state has decreed that seat belts must be fitted, and that emission standards must be met.

The state does not have to assist customer choice by insisting that all cars be classified into three or so types, such as sports, family or limousine, even if these classifications do have meaning for some purposes. Manufacturers do not have to restrict choice drastically in order to reduce unit costs. Individual consumers can influence the future development of the product by the options they request and are prepared to pay for.

The equivalent in post-16 qualifications would be to make provision at the level of Units, rather than whole qualifications. Funding should allow for this, while also specifying minimum rules of combination and procedural rules about how units are to be defined. This might make it possible to combine choice, coherence and efficiency.

Recommendations

As a result of the analysis contained in this book, it is possible to offer the following recommendations for action:

- It is the components of qualifications that should be categorised, not the qualifications themselves. It is simply not feasible or useful to classify all legitimate qualifications into three types (or even four or five types), without unnecessarily limiting the diversity which individuals and companies need. However, it is useful, and feasible, to standardise the way in which achievement – of whatever kind – is described, and to relate such achievement to common benchmarks for level of attainment and the volume of learning.
- The levels dimension of the Dearing Framework should therefore be retained, but the number and gradation of the levels should be reviewed, with particular attention to the position of the new AS in that framework, and to the desirability of attaching levels to individual G/NVQ units.

- Qualifications should be formed from agreed combinations of mandatory and optional units, which could if necessary vary in type and level within the same qualification. Some optional units could be locally designed, to cater for specific needs and possibilities.
- There needs to be a debate about the key purposes of FE colleges, and care should be taken to see that the qualifications they are required to use adequately reflect these purposes and client groups. In particular, more analysis is needed of the multifarious needs of older learners, and whether the same framework can serve their needs and those of school leavers equally well.
- With regard to any education or training initiative, the underlying assumptions, proposed developmental model, key purposes, and performance indicators should be made clear.
- All the above actions should be overtly linked to known research findings where possible, and further research should be commissioned where necessary. Where supportive research is not available or possible, the assumptions having to be made should be stated.

An overall conclusion is that without action on these recommendations and an awareness of the findings listed earlier, a sound foundation cannot be laid for the further development of post-16 education and training in the UK, and that avoidable mistakes will continue to be made.

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224

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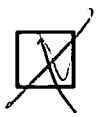

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