

OXFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS RELEASE: Nuffield Review 2006/Education

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The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training questions an 'unprecedented amount of policy initiatives', but little real change.

The Annual Report of the Nuffield Review of the education and training of 14-19 year olds found that there is too much 'policy busyness', and that the unprecedented amount of policy initiatives (national targets, new qualifications, short-term funding and new regulations) is unlikely to produce significant improvements to the education and training system as a whole. A full assessment of the impact, cost, and the problems associated with introducing such a large number of initiatives should be carried out.

This year's Annual Report of the Review, whose lead director is Professor Richard Pring from the University of Oxford, was launched at the Royal Society of Arts in London (Friday 20 October). It has addressed all aspects of 14-19 education and training in England and Wales through its review of relevant research and through its engagement with teachers, lecturers, employers, training providers, voluntary bodies and policy makers and learners.

The Report said, although partnerships between schools and colleges have improved vocational and applied learning opportunities, there was still too much competition rather than collaboration between institutions. It said: 'The system in England could still be described as weakly collaborative with weak governance at the local level.' The Review advocates a wider range of partners including youth service, voluntary bodies and independent training providers, and the development of strongly collaborative local learning systems.

A priority, highlighted by the Report, was the need for more opportunities for young people outside of education and training. It found that the jobs market for 16 and 17 year olds was mainly in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs, without training opportunities. It also described as a 'major problem' the failure of many young people to engage in education. It said: 'that failure is partly due to inappropriate targets, learning experiences and forms of assessment.' Suggested reforms include reducing the burden of assessment, ensuring more practical modes of learning for all young people and raising the status of vocational qualifications through linking them to licence to practice. The Report said: 'There has been some, though only partial, success in widening access. But progression to higher education can be problematic for those with vocational qualifications, and there is a need for these qualifications to be viewed and utilised more positively.'

The Report suggested that the current drive to ensure young people achieve the examination results needed to progress into higher education may have detracted from the quality of learning for 14-19 year olds, and such an approach may be turning some students away from education.

The Report recognised the government's achievements and highlighted its *Building Schools for the Future* programme, which has invested £2 billion in its first phase of the improvement of the infrastructure of schools and colleges. Other achievements include: the development of partnerships between schools, colleges, higher education and employers; the importance placed on the progression from school into higher education, training and employment; the recognition of many different kinds and levels of achievement in the *National Qualifications Framework*; and opening more doors to higher education. Wales has pioneered the idea of 'learning pathways' 14-19 which integrates different achievements, draws upon the resources of the wider community and offers young people a broader range of options and support, which should eventually lead to new Welsh Baccalaureate.

The Review has highlighted 'the persistence of deep-seated problems concerning the structure of the system, its performance and the policy process'. It concluded that: 'the government tends to address symptoms of these deep-seated problems rather than tackling their underlying causes.'

Professor Richard Pring, the Lead Director from Oxford University, said: 'There is clearly a need, in the light of the changing economic, social and global conditions, for constant reappraisal of the aims of education at every level of decision-making.'

For more information, please contact the Press Office on 01865 280534 or email press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk

Notes for Editors:

*For a full copy of the Annual Report 2005-06, please go to www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

*The Nuffield Review was established in 2003, by the Nuffield Foundation, to provide an independent review of every aspect of 14-19 education and training in England and Wales.

*It is directed by Professor Richard Pring (Lead Director, University of Oxford). Dr Geoff Hayward (University of Oxford), Dr Ann Hodgson (Institute of Education, University of London), Mrs Jill Johnson (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), Professor Ewart Keep (Cardiff University), and Dr Ken Spours (Institute of Education, University of London). That Directorate is being joined by Professor Gareth Rees (Cardiff University).

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