

THE NUFFIELD REVIEW OF

14-19

EDUCATION & TRAINING

ANNUAL REPORT

2005-06

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

The Nuffield Reviewⁱ has completed its first three years. 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. In particular, it has:

- focused upon aims and values
- mapped the wider 14-19 policy landscape
- critically appraised system performance
- explored progression within and beyond this phase
- analysed key features of curriculum, assessment and qualifications, and
- examined governance, institutional and labour market arrangements.

There is general agreement that 14-19 constitutes a distinct phase in both countries. Young people make key decisions at the age of 14 that affect their future. There is continuity between those decisions and the pathways they follow into higher education, vocational preparation, apprenticeships and employment. Recent policy has emphasised the relationship between education and the workplace, reflected in work-based training and partnerships between schools, colleges and employers. Within the policy framework, but also despite it, developments in schools and colleges have helped to increase participation, improve retention, motivate disengaged young people, and facilitate progression into higher education, further training and employment.

So extensive are the changes at every level of planning and decision making, and such is the often poor evidence base for many of these decisions, that an independent and comprehensive review of the evidence and of the issues was thought essential.

Overview 2003-06

During this period, England and Wales have seen rapid changes in their respective secondary education policies and provision, with greater emphasis on vocational learning and on the relationship between schools, colleges, training providers and employers. Government policy initiatives for the 14-19 phase, in England certainly, have been, and continue to be, many.

The reasons for government concern, reflected in the continuing output of documents, is the importance which both governments have attached to:

- **inclusion** of all young people in some form of education and training
- **raising levels of achievement** in education and training
- **meeting economic needs** through improved outcomes of education and training.

In pursuing these aims, the respective governments have achieved a great deal:

- *Building Schools for the Future* (England). This is investing over £2 billion in the first phase, to improve the infrastructure of schools and colleges. Further investment will be made in the second and third waves of the programme. Where this has been linked to 14-19 developments, there have been exciting innovations.
- *Developing partnerships*. Collaboration between schools, colleges, universities, private training providers, voluntary bodies, higher education and employers has begun to improve learner choice at 14 and to support a broader curriculum and learner progression.
- *Practical learning*. The partnerships between schools and colleges, and the involvement of private training providers and initiatives, such as the Increased Flexibility Programme, have shown the impact which more practical and experiential forms of learning can have upon young people.
- *Learning Pathways*. Wales has pioneered the idea of 'learning pathways' which integrate different achievements, draw upon the resources of the wider community and offer young people a broader range of options and support, with the intention that learner attainment will eventually be accredited through the new Welsh Baccalaureate.
- *14-19 Entitlement*. 14-19 year-olds in England have been given, for the first time, a statutory entitlement to a broader curriculum including more applied and practical learning.
- *National Qualifications Framework*. In recognition of the many different kinds and levels of achievement, the DfES has supported a unit- and credit-based qualifications framework which aims to be comprehensive and to show the equivalences between qualifications, thereby supporting different learning pathways.
- *Links to higher education*. The transition to higher education has been opened up to many young people through specific relationships between schools, colleges and higher education institutions and through the development of foundation degrees.

However, the Nuffield Review, whilst recognising these achievements, has also highlighted the persistence of deep-seated problems concerning the structure of the system, its performance and the conduct of the policy process. These themes, in particular, form the core of an ongoing debate between practitioners, policy makers and researchers about the most effective way of tackling the reform of 14-19 education and training in England and Wales. In the light of the evidence it has received over the past three years, the Nuffield Review has concluded that government departments and agencies tend to address symptoms of these deep-seated problems rather than tackling their underlying causes. Moreover, in responding to symptomatic problems, a whole range of policies have been implemented at a very fast pace – what the Nuffield Review has termed 'policy busyness'. While, as we have indicated above, many of these reforms will bring about improvements in some areas, the Nuffield Review is not convinced that the main 'policy drivers' (e.g. the reformed qualifications framework, the creation of specialised Diplomas, increased access to higher education, national target setting) will result in the step change in 14-19 system performance which policy makers desire and the system requires. The Nuffield Review has, therefore, been committed to a deep, historical and comprehensive analysis of all major dimensions of 14-19 education and training, including the philosophical values and purposes upon which it is founded.

In pursuing its assessment of the evidence, the Nuffield Review has achieved the following:

- examined the many data sets to give an historical and comprehensive account of participation, retention and progression, and shown where there are gaps in the data upon which policy is based (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- paid particular attention, following the analysis of the participation, retention and progression within the system, to those who fall outside it – the characteristics of this mixed group of young people and the reasons why they leave (Annual Report 2005-06)
- explored the organisational arrangements for 14-19 education and training, developing the new concept of ‘strongly collaborative 14-19 local learning systems’ (Annual Reports 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- provided a detailed account of policy initiatives and the mechanisms employed for implementing policy, including the debates around the Working Group on 14-19 Reform proposals, the DfES 14-19 White Paper and the current development of the specialised Diplomas (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- addressed the different manner in which Wales is tackling the Learning Pathways 14-19, and lessons which England might learn (Annual Report 2005-06)
- reviewed the evidence on transition from school and college to higher education (Annual Report 2005-06)
- raised issues about the role of employers and the youth labour market in the education and training system and their effect on the framing of 14-19 policy and the system performance (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- raised questions about the educational aims and values which permeate the changes, and which have implications for the nature, organisation and provision of learning (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)
- pioneered an innovative approach to reviewing evidence through the ongoing involvement of policy makers, practitioners and researchers, each providing their own particular perspective on policy, practice and performance (Annual Reports 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06).

What follows is a detailed summary of the main findings and recommendations of the Annual Report 2005-06. The details and the evidence supporting these conclusions and recommendations are in the full report, available at www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

ANNUAL REPORT 2005-06:

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

14-19 policy and organisational developments in England

Policy 'busyness'

There has been an unprecedented amount of policy initiatives affecting 14-19 education and training through, for example, the setting of national targets, the creation of new qualifications, specific and short-term funding, and new regulations. The impact of so much policy and the cost and problems of implementation are rarely appraised.

Implementation phase

The current implementation phase, together with the 14-19 infrastructure being put in place (secured by a number of incentives or regulatory frameworks, such as 14-19 Entitlement, Diploma Gateway, and area prospectuses), focuses primarily on vocational and applied learning and leaves the general track largely untouched.

Collaborative partnerships

Partnerships have enabled the establishment of vocational and applied learning opportunities, particularly for 14-16 year-olds. But the 'drivers' for institutional collaboration are not as strong as the 'drivers' for institutional competition, such that the system in England could still be described as 'weakly collaborative' with weak governance at the local level. The swift pace of reform may make implementation more difficult.

Alternative proposals

Proposals for strongly collaborative learning systems, capable of meeting the needs of all 14-19 year-olds in an efficient way, whilst also addressing historical divisions, are put forward.

Effect of the partial nature of reform

Partial reforms, together with the weaknesses of organisational arrangements, may be unable to address pressing issues of social division and inefficiencies in 14-19 provision.

14-19 institutional developments in Wales

Divergence and similarities

While the aims of 14-19 policies in England and Wales are very similar, as are their underlying problems, there is divergence in terms of policy strategy (e.g. the Welsh Bac and Learning Pathways 14-19), mode of governance and accountability.

Policy

The 14-19 reforms in Wales cover both general and vocational education, the Welsh education system is more locally determined, and national policy levers play a less divisive role than in England. This has resulted in a higher degree of policy consensus in Wales around Learning Pathways 14-19 than is found in England in relation to the 14-19 White Paper.

14-19 practice

Practice at the local level in Wales, as in England, is still at an early stage, despite the differences highlighted above. There is, therefore, a role for the Nuffield Review to bring practitioners, policy makers and researchers from both countries together to discuss issues of mutual interest in order to engage in practitioner and policy learning.

Interdependence

Despite democratic devolution since 1999 and a desire by the Welsh Assembly Government to forge its own path in education policy, 14-19 developments in Wales continue to be tied to those in England, because of the two countries' common qualifications and higher education systems, and the UK-wide labour market.

The future of 14-19 reform

It could be argued, therefore, that future reform in Wales is intimately tied to developments in England and that both countries would benefit from a more unified and radical approach to 14-19 curriculum and qualifications reform.

Young people outside education and training

Modest increase in participation

Recent initiatives have involved high transaction costs, but have achieved at best only modest increases in participation rates.

Retention and attainment

There is over-emphasis on participation rates and a lack of appropriate attention to retention, attainment and progression.

The 'NEET' group (not in education, employment or training)

The heterogeneous group classified as 'NEET' is a policy priority, but the diverse needs of the very different kinds of young people who are included in this group have not been fully recognised.

Young people in work at 16/17

The labour market continues to provide a range of job opportunities for 16 and 17 year-olds. Most of these are low-skilled, poorly paid and without training. Tackling this issue should become a policy priority.

Excessive focus on supply-side initiatives

Intended changes in the system, including qualification reform, will fail unless their value is recognised by employers and young people. To achieve this requires attention to be focussed onto the demand side so that vocational qualifications become more linked to licences to practice, thereby raising their status.

Policy formation

Those who form policy need to acknowledge the value of outcomes which cannot always be expressed in quantitative terms (for example, the provision of careers advice and guidance).

Holistic planning

Education and training should be recognised as just one constituent within a wider system that includes different demands from the labour market, socio-economic change, regional variations, healthcare issues and demographic changes.

Future of the labour market

The demographic changes in the 14-19 cohort and labour market projections of the structure of job growth could have a serious deleterious effect on post-compulsory participation rates.

Appropriate provision for young people with diverse backgrounds and requirements

There is a need for case-specific provision and information and guidance sensitive to the diverse requirements of individual young people. Policy expectations and targets need to be more finely tuned to the perceived needs of young people.

Data collection

A more robust, systematic and long-term perspective on the collection of data, which goes beyond immediate concerns with the latest policy initiative, is needed. Such data collection should be placed in the hands of an independent body to avoid the need for continual tendering of data collection and the consequent disruption in the quality of time series data.

Articulation between 14-19 and higher education

Transition

For many the process of articulation between the 14-19 phase and higher education is relatively smooth. Higher education is currently also attractive to large numbers of young people, and participation has increased. There has been some, though only partial, success in widening access.

Obstacles

Individual, familial, local, institutional, economic, political and societal barriers interact to make progression more difficult for some young people than for others. Supply-side policy interventions cannot in themselves counteract the various barriers that limit the opportunities for some groups to progress to higher education.

Adaptation of higher education

To overcome these obstacles, higher education may need to adapt to some of the changes taking place in 14-19, just as there may be adaptation in 14-19 to meet the needs of higher education.

Quality of learning

The focus on progression into higher education with particular attention to examination performance may have detracted from the quality of learning for 14-19 year-olds, and what is required for effective engagement in higher education.

Clearer pathways needed for those with Level 3 vocational qualifications

Some pathways from 14-19 to higher education are relatively clear, whereas others are more complex. Progression to higher education can be problematic for those with vocational qualifications. There is a need for these qualifications to be utilised more positively in progression to higher education.

Increasing participation and changes in the rate of return to a degree

Labour market outcomes and rates of return for engaging in higher education study are changing with the increased participation. The traditional argument of a degree allowing access to more satisfying and better paid employment may be less strong as a greater proportion of the cohort enters higher education.

Policy tensions and unpredictable outcomes

The introduction of variable fees could militate against increasing and widening participation. They increase financial cost, opportunity costs and the perceived risk of failure involved in participating. The outcomes of current policy are unpredictable, but these tensions could lead to consequences other than those intended.

The education of 14-19 year-olds

Central to the work of the Nuffield Review has been the questioning of the **educational** aims and values which underpin the changes taking place or envisaged. To do that, the Nuffield Review posed the question “What counts as an educated 19 year-old in this day and age?” The deliberations which have surrounded the discussion of that question have led to a range of critical debates and recommendations for the future. In the light of the evidence received the Nuffield Review draws the following conclusions:

Values

- The development of education and training requires moral deliberation at every level of decision making, especially the school. Teachers, the custodians of educational values, must be central to that deliberation.
- The values which underpin such deliberations should arise from a respect for all young people irrespective of social, ethnic, religious or intellectual background. That respect means a place for their voice in education – the experiences, concerns and views which they bring into school and college, but refined through discussion and critical examination.
- The system of education, therefore – targets, assessment, qualifications, and curriculum – needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to such deliberations at local as well as national levels.

Special needs

- The education of those with learning difficulties and disabilities requires special attention since too many are ill served by an inflexible and narrow definition of standards and by inappropriate provision.
- The failure of many to engage in education, a disproportionate number of whom have learning difficulties and disabilities, is a major problem and needs closer analysis. That failure is partly due to inappropriate targets, learning experiences and forms of assessment.

Learning

- The value of learning through practice, discussion and experience needs to be rediscovered, appropriately assessed and built into the education for all young people. This will require considerable extension of the programmes commenced through school/college partnerships.
- The development of the wider key skills should draw upon the research and experience of previous developments, reflected, for instance, in the Bullock Report, which now too often seem forgotten.
- The present commitment of government to guidance and counselling through the increasingly complicated system of choices needs even greater commitment and resources, especially in the expertise of professional counsellors and the teachers.

Assessment

- The burdensome system of assessment needs a complete overhaul, ensuring assessment for learning rather than assessment for accountability, appropriate assessment for practical and experiential learning, differentiation of students where necessary for progression, and diversity of standards for different kinds of learning.
- Greater clarity is required of the regulatory responsibilities of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, of the relation of those to its curriculum development and of the continuing role of the awarding bodies in relation to that curriculum development.

Teaching

- The professional role of teachers in the moral deliberations referred to and in the consequent development of the curriculum needs to be forcefully reaffirmed, together with the need for the continuing professional development that enables them to take on this professional responsibility.
- The staffing of the more vocational courses (e.g. the specialised Diplomas) requires urgent consideration, especially the training or retraining of teachers and the promotion of teaching assistants with relevant expertise and experience.

Partnership

- To achieve all this, the policy on partnership between providers needs, first, to include a wider range of partners (including the youth service, voluntary bodies and private training providers), and, second, to see the school or college more as a centre for organising and monitoring learning, much of which will not take place within the confines of the school.

The future

The Nuffield Review has been extended for a further three years. The main aims of this new phase of the Review will be:

1. to argue, in the light of the evidence accumulated by the Review, for a high quality and inclusive education and training system fit for the twenty-first century;
2. to continue monitoring the changing world of 14-19 as outlined above, with a view to informing policy and practice at every level;
3. to help schools, colleges, higher education institutions, employers and the wider community to make sense of the many changes within 14-19 policy and provision, and of their implications for the education and training system as a whole;
4. to ensure that the Review has greater impact upon policy makers, professionals, employers and the general public and to continue its dissemination through regional and national conferences, through its engagement with the many networks it has established, and through targeted briefing papers.

The questions shaping the Review, therefore, will be:

- What educational principles and practices should characterise the system which prepares all young people for the future?
- What is needed to improve the current education and training system in order to reflect these principles and practices and to support the development of all young people?
- What policy developments are being, or should be, initiated to ensure high quality education and training for all 14-19 year-olds and a coherent and inclusive 14-19 system?

The Nuffield Review, therefore, will continue to argue for a vision of education and training which is soundly based on evidence, including how other countries envisage the future of their education and training systems.

ⁱ 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 Richard Pring (Lead Director, University of Oxford), Geoff Hayward (University of Oxford), Ann Hodgson (Institute of Education, University of London), Jill Johnson (UCAS), Ewart Keep (SKOPE, University of Cardiff) and Ken Spours (Institute of Education, University of London). That Directorate is being joined by Gareth Rees (University of Cardiff) for the next three years. Researchers serving the Nuffield Review are: Alis Oancea, Stephanie Wilde and Susannah Wright. The Administrator is Joanne Hazell.

A core group of nearly a hundred people drawn from schools, colleges, universities, government departments and agencies, voluntary bodies, employers, examination boards and private training providers has helped the Review with submission of evidence and with critical examination of findings at a range of seminars.

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The Annual Report and Executive Summary are available electronically at the website address below.

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