

# Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training

## THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION OF 14-19 REFORM IN ENGLAND

Seminar 2: 17 May 2005, Discussion Paper 9

### Collaborative approaches to 14-19 education and training provision

**Jeremy Higham and David Yeomans, Post-14 Research Group, School of Education  
University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT**

#### **Introduction**

Collaboration and partnership increasingly underpin approaches to taking forward policy to broaden and cohere the provision of education and training (as well as other public services such as health and social care). With respect to the current 14-19 reforms, the collaborative underpinning can be seen clearly in the 14-19 Pathfinders initiative which was introduced in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Green Paper *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002) and then developed by the government in its response to the consultation: *14-19: opportunity and excellence* (DfES, 2003).

The over-riding purpose of 14-19 Pathfinders is to develop and test a variety of models of area-wide collaborative working which will help to achieve the vision and principles for 14-19 education and training by broadening provision in ways which:

- meet the entitlement of 14-16 year-olds
- widen 14-19 provision and increase choice
- smooth the transition to post-16 learning
- enable area-wide curriculum planning
- increase participation and achievement
- improve progression to employment/higher education.

This policy agenda whereby collaboration between institutions across an area is central to 14-19 education and training is supported by the recent report to government by the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform which states:

Collaboration is not a new idea and we want to build on existing good practice, such as that developed in the 14-19 Pathfinders and the Increased Flexibility Programme. However, collaboration would need to happen more systematically if all learners are to have access to a range of options, delivered in institutions with appropriate facilities and expertise.  
(DfES, 2004a, p.106)

The main justification for this focus on collaboration was stated in subsequent governmental White Paper: *14-19 Education and Skills*:

Our vision for the 14-19 phase sets out a range of opportunities that should be available to young people in every area of the country. Schools, colleges

and training providers will need to collaborate, because no single institution will be able to provide them all on its own.  
(DfES, 2005, p.78)

## The 14-19 Pathfinders Initiative

This systematic approach can be clearly seen in the government's approach to 14-19 Pathfinders:

No single school or college can offer the full range of 14-19 options on its own. The 14-19 strategy demands new forms of partnership and collaboration between schools, colleges, employers, training providers, independent schools and universities to meet collectively the needs and aspirations of all local learners. [ . . . ] We plan to encourage collaboration by [ . . . ] testing out a variety of models of collaborative working through the 14-19 Pathfinders.

(DfES: [www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19))

This £46m initiative, funded jointly by DfES and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), is designed to develop collaborative approaches to 14-19 education and training and inform national policy from 2005/06. Twenty-five partnerships began operating from January 2003 and were joined by a further 14 partnerships in September 2003. The principal objectives for the 39 partnerships were the development of collaboration within existing structures to: widen provision and increase choice; increase participation; raise achievement; improve progression to employment and higher education.

As suggested above, the importance of institutional collaboration in developing a flexible, coherent 14-19 phase has been a central feature of the reform agenda in England. Partnerships funded under this initiative are required to work closely with a wide range of local partners including local LSCs, LEAs, employers, colleges, schools, training providers, higher education institutions and careers and guidance organisations. Partnerships are also expected to show how they propose to take account of the views of young people in developing and implementing their plans.

Beyond 14-19 Pathfinders, there are a number of other governmental initiatives and programmes which have implications for the 14-19 reform agenda and with which partnerships are expected to link:

Strategic Area Reviews	Area-wide Inspections
Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds	Entry to Employment
Excellence in Cities	Diversity Pathfinders
AimHigher Programme	Success for All

Partnerships are also expected to contribute to broader local economic and social policy developments promoted by, for example, neighbourhood renewal projects and local strategic partnerships.

This paper draws on a wide body of research evidence from the intensive and on-going national evaluation of this three-year governmental intervention for educational provision for 14-19 year-olds across England, and seeks to take forward understanding of educational partnership working across a range of institutions and partners. It explores the different notions and forms of collaboration operating within the 14-19 Pathfinders initiative and considers different models of institutional collaboration, the levels at which partnerships

operate and the range of purposes and dimensions involved. A key issue discussed is how partnerships operate and can be sustained within the existing structures of the marketised and competitive environments for education and training in order to broaden the curricular provision for 14-19 year-olds in a range of geographic and socio-economic settings.

## **Evaluation of 14-19 Pathfinders**

The national evaluation of 14-19 Pathfinders, based at the University of Leeds and now in its final phase of the three years, focuses on three main aims:

- to assess the extent to which the partnerships have begun to develop best practice in creating a more coherent 14-19 phase at LEA, consortia, institutional and individual levels and to identify a number of models of 14-19 provision;
- to explore and analyse the opportunities for, and constraints on, the development of the 14-19 phase in the partnerships and elsewhere;
- to examine the potential value-added effects of the 14-19 Pathfinders and associated funding arrangements.

The methodology has four main elements. Firstly, documentary analysis covers all successful pathfinder proposals, additional proposals for further funding and planned exit strategies as well as a wide range of pathfinder-level documentation for the case study partnerships, including mission and strategy papers, working group reports, relevant area-wide inspection reports, and termly and annual progress reports to the DfES. Secondly, selective literature reviews of academic and official literature addressing concepts such as curricular coherence and progression; institutional collaboration; curriculum change approaches as well as specific aspects of the 14-19 reform agenda were carried out. Thirdly, annual surveys of all pathfinder coordinators are being undertaken to provide coverage of all pathfinders and supply additional detail on aspects of implementation which could not be obtained through documentary analysis. While the surveys are designed to produce some quantitative information, they comprise largely open questions which gives pathfinder coordinators opportunities to describe in some detail work in their pathfinders, with a response rate to date of over 90%. Finally, and most significantly in terms of data collection relating to this paper, in-depth case studies of a sample of 15 partnerships (including 2 unfunded partnerships) are being undertaken. The case studies were selected to reflect: different approaches to providing a coherent 14-19 phase; a geographical spread of pathfinders; pathfinders operating in different socio-economic circumstances; pathfinders operating in areas with differing mixes of schools, colleges and training providers; pathfinders with differing histories of collaboration. In addition to the documentary analysis outlined above, each case study has involved at least five days of fieldwork during which in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted and visits were made to a range of institutions. Interviews were typically conducted with: the pathfinder or partnership co-ordinator; headteachers and college principals; employers; managers from work-based training providers; curriculum managers in schools and colleges; focus groups of young people approaching key decision points; higher education representatives; careers and guidance staff. In several case studies it was also possible to observe meetings of pathfinder management groups and other working groups.

## **Emerging findings**

Regarding the findings to date, the development of institutional collaboration has emerged as a significant area of advancement from the most recent survey, with 97% of responding partnerships reporting as expected or better than expected progress. The great majority of co-ordinators mentioned collaboration as being a key pathfinder effect and, while collaboration varied considerably across partnerships in relation to the extent of institutional

involvement and in scale and scope, these positive responses confirmed the pattern reported in our first two surveys in April and September 2003 (Higham et al., 2004).

Having underlined the importance attached to collaboration in a general sense both in policy and practice we will now discuss how collaboration is actually working out in the pathfinders. While most participants agree that collaboration is a 'good thing', it is important to understand the levers and drivers which promote collaboration, the contextual factors which may either enable or constrain it, the different forms which it might take and the sorts of outcomes which may result. The latter element is particularly important since collaboration is a means to a variety of ends, of which the most fundamentally important are student participation, retention, achievement and progression.

### **National and local policy drivers**

There were a number of factors which encouraged and facilitated collaboration within the pathfinders. The national policy context was clearly important and the pathfinder prospectuses made clear that collaboration would need to be at the heart of proposals both in terms of the partners to be involved and in providing a suitably wide range of curricular options for students. In the context of these national policies, some participants looked back to earlier 14-19 initiatives, especially the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) of the 1980s, and asserted that their long-term impact had been limited. However, they also made a distinction between these earlier initiatives, which they perceived as being one-off or stand-alone projects, and the current national policy drive which was seen as both long-term and coherent in relation to the 14-19 phase and the role of collaboration within it. As noted above the work of the Tomlinson group has paralleled much of the pathfinder development and there was much support for the approach taken by the group and recognition that the proposals, with their emphasis on breadth, flexibility and choice, which would require high degrees of collaboration, were likely to point the way to continuing long-term reform.

At the same time some respondents pointed to some aspects of national policy which they saw as less consistent with the overall 14-19 policy thrust. One aspect which was picked out was the encouragement for the opening of new school sixth forms and sixth form colleges in the DfES *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES, 2004b). This development and the continued growth of the academies programme were seen as potentially militating against increased collaboration (see also Pring, 2005). Beyond this, several coordinators asserted that the continuation of institutional performance measures sometimes inhibited collaboration.

Inspection processes and follow-up activities were also important in promoting collaboration. The *Ofsted Handbook for 14-19 area inspections* makes clear that the presence or absence of effective collaboration will affect inspection grades and findings and the onus is placed upon local LSCs and LEAs to support effective and continuing collaboration.

This policy focus on collaboration was further reinforced in both *Success for All* and in the guidance issued to local LSCs on the conduct of Strategic Area Reviews (StARs) where it was stated that proposals must 'strengthen collaboration and progression in the 14-19 phase' and where the 'active promotion of collaboration and co-operation between providers and localities in meeting learner, employment and community needs' was recognised as one of the 'core values' which must inform the StARs.

Local LSCs and LEAs also emphasised the importance which they attached to institutional collaboration in their strategic and development plans. There were then a powerful set of local and national policies which were emphasising the importance of collaboration.

These policies were also backed up with funding. Various funding streams were available to support collaborative activities. These included not only 14-19 Pathfinder funding but funding

for Diversity and Enterprise Pathfinders, the Increased Flexibility programme and Area-Wide Inspection Action Plan funding. The European Union Social Fund was another source of potential funding. Local LSCs also had other sources of discretionary funding, e.g. local innovation funds, which might also be accessed. Taken together these funding streams provided substantial incentives to collaborate. The case studies reveal that some local areas had proved particularly adept at accessing a wide range of funding (some areas also benefited through being able to access funding which was restricted to areas of social and economic disadvantage).

Collaboration was also powerfully driven by institutional priorities and interests. Colleges, for example, often made the calculation that collaborating with schools in the provision of courses for 14-16 year-olds could help them to recruit students onto full-time post-16 courses. Some schools saw post-16 collaboration as a means of protecting vulnerable small sixth forms. For private training providers collaborative arrangements provided access to local decision-making networks from which they had often felt excluded. These are just a few examples among many, but serve to show the synergy which existed between national policies and imperatives and institutional priorities and interests.

Finally, in this brief review of the sorts of factors which encouraged collaboration it is important to stress that it was often driven as much by educational aims and values as by instrumental institutional concerns or policy imperatives. Partners recognised that collaboration benefited learners and the notion of putting learner interests before institutional interests did appear in many pathfinders to be more than a rhetorical flourish. Collaboration was also acknowledged as potentially fruitful and professionally rewarding by staff and came as a relief after what was seen in some areas as a period of intense competition between institutions during which collaborative activity was severely curtailed.

### **Contextual factors impacting on collaboration**

While there are a number of factors tending to promote collaboration, its extent and the forms which it took were affected by a wide range of contextual factors. Some of these were permanent or durable features of localities and therefore partners needed to work within the parameters set by these features of their local context. Other contextual features were more evanescent and susceptible to manipulation.

Among the permanent features are geography and demography. Such factors typically came into play in rural pathfinders and have obvious impacts upon costs and learning time where students have to travel to learn at other sites. They might encourage partners to look at other forms of collaboration such as distance e-learning or staff or facilities being transported to where the students are rather than vice versa.

The numbers and mobility of students could also be significant in the promotion of collaboration since this affected the financial viability of the range of curricular options which could be provided. The establishment of one virtual sixth-form was prompted by the ease with which post-16 students could attend a college in a neighbouring city, thus leaving fewer post-16 students studying in their home town thereby creating a 'vicious circle' in which the range of provision which could be offered was narrowed.

History is another crucial contextual factor. The success of two partnerships owed much to the stores of trust and shared practices which had been built up over many years of collaborative activities. Long experience here had shown that collaboration could produce results both in terms of student achievement and organisational effectiveness. History, however, was not always a benign influence. Examples of previous collaborative arrangements which had subsequently withered could be a source of caution, or cynicism. Past competitive relationships could also put a brake upon collaboration, as could 'mythical' institutional reputations, especially where these raised parental concerns.

Culture could also be significant and might operate at various levels. In one case study, despite strong institutional partnerships and good transport links, students from one area within the pathfinder were reluctant to travel to institutions in another area because they feared they would be victims of violence, abuse and racism. These fears were reciprocated by students who had opportunities to travel in the opposite direction. This was one example among several where students were described as insular or timid and as being reluctant to travel. Institutional cultural similarities or differences could also be important in enabling or constraining collaboration and many pathfinders engaged in the careful and explicit development of protocols through which such differences could be managed.

Strong local identities were often important in generating support for collaborative approaches, especially where these coincided closely with pathfinder or consortia boundaries. Sometimes, this committed localism had been forged through socio-economic and educational disadvantage, which the 14-19 Pathfinder was seen as helping to address. This strong sense of local commitment and identity should not be under-estimated as a driver of collaboration. It sometimes linked to broader programmes of socio-economic regeneration which further helped to develop a sense of local empowerment.

The institutional structures of 14-19 provision exerted considerable influence upon collaboration. Generally speaking collaboration between schools and colleges was easier where schools did not have sixth forms and thus were not in competition with colleges for post-16 students. However, there could be excellent collaboration even where there were school sixth forms. In some pathfinders the sheer complexity of the institutional structures was striking. In one instance, there were 11-16 schools, 11-18 schools, a further education college, two recently opened city academies and a city technology college. Voluntary-aided faith schools also often had their own networks of partnerships which sometimes only partially over-lapped with pathfinder boundaries. There were also structural variations in Connexions partnerships since some were direct providers while others sub-contracted the service. An absence of structural relationships among training providers could also inhibit their participation in collaborative activities. In some localities training providers tended to be small, isolated and to have no common voice, all factors which made participation in collaborative networks more difficult.

Transport resources inevitably impacted on collaborative approaches. This was a particular factor in rural pathfinders where the absence of viable public transport meant that if students were to travel between institutions either school minibuses would have to be used or commercial operators employed. The latter were expensive and not always reliable, the former imposed significant capacity limitations. Some roads could also be particularly hazardous. Transport could also be problematic in urban and suburban areas since bus routes tended to run into town and city centres rather than between suburbs. Thus although distances between partner institutions might not be great it could take some time to travel between them using public transport.

The identification of significant local skills gaps and labour market needs could act as a spur to collaboration. In one urban pathfinder, skill shortages in local health and social services had brought about a major collaboration between the national health service, local social service departments, schools and a college. In another city, the pathfinder was closely linked to the urban regeneration agenda in ways which had helped to promote broad-based collaboration with a range of employers and training providers. In other pathfinders where skills gaps were not clearly defined and where there was a preponderance of small and medium-sized employers collaboration between the education and employment sectors was often more difficult to achieve.

We noted above the imperatives driving institutional collaboration, but there were also contextual pressures which might inhibit collaboration. These included competition between institutions and/or cultural differences. There were also instances where some institutions

were reluctant to allow their students to be taught in other institutions because they were not convinced that they would be as well taught as if they stayed at 'home'. This was particularly likely to be the case where 'high stakes' examination subjects were being taught collaboratively.

More generally, individual institutions enjoy high levels of autonomy and, despite all the drivers towards collaboration identified above, it was still open to individual schools and colleges to resist or selectively engage with collaborative arrangements. We noted some tendency for this to occur where schools were large and perceived as being successful in terms of recruitment and exam results and where the institutional incentives to collaborate were thus seen as being somewhat limited.

Local leadership capacity was another important contextual factor influencing collaboration. In most pathfinders leadership was exercised by LEAs and some were outstandingly successful in providing effective leadership, although other agencies were also effective in other pathfinders, for example, local LSCs or consortia of schools and colleges. What was evident, however, was that strong strategic leadership needed to be provided. In the complex policy and funding environment described above it was important to retain a sense of the 'big picture' and a vision of how disparate initiatives and funding streams could be integrated.

In the absence of such leadership pathfinders could make some progress on the basis of broad, general commitment to collaboration based on collective goodwill, but this tended to break down in the absence of full-time coordination and leadership. Leadership and facilitation resources were also required for the development of specific facets of pathfinder development. As one coordinator put it having "bodies on the ground who could move things forward" was important, a contention which is confirmed by studies of collaboration in action (Powell and Exworthy, 2002). Of course, pathfinder funding could be used to generate leadership and support but this only occurred when institutions, such as an LEA, had the capacity and will to seize the opportunity.

## **Dimensions of collaboration**

Having described the policies and practices driving collaboration and the contextual features which influence the forms which that collaboration might take, we turn now to describe in greater detail the sorts of collaboration which was taking place under the auspices of 14-19 Pathfinders. As implied above in our account of contextual features this varied considerably across the pathfinders, not only because the local contexts were different but because national policies were mediated in different ways by local agencies and individual institutions and were filtered through the educational aims and values of the participants. To put it rather more baldly, forms of collaboration were not only different because the localities were different but because different pathfinders aimed to do different things.

Collaboration can be understood in terms of four main dimensions:

- Inclusivity:* the extent to which to which the collaboration involves a wide range of partners and participants
- Levels:* levels at which collaboration takes place and which reflects the *intensity* with which different partners engage with collaborative activities
- Focus:* topic areas or elements of the pathfinder agenda which are addressed
- Scope:* numbers of institutions, staff and students involved and the size of the geographical area covered.

While for analytical purposes these dimensions are addressed separately in what follows, in practice in the pathfinders the four dimensions interacted to give each partnership its distinctive character.

*Inclusivity*

In our questionnaire survey coordinators were asked to assess the extent of involvement of a range of six potential partner groups (special schools, independent schools, employers, training providers, higher education institutions, young people). Pathfinder coordinators were asked to judge the extent of involvement on a four point scale – very extensive, extensive, limited, none. In order to assess the overall institutional inclusivity of pathfinder collaboration we combined the ‘none’ and ‘limited’ categories and the ‘extensive’ and ‘very extensive’ categories. We then labelled these combined categories ‘weak’ and ‘strong’. For each of the pathfinders we then calculated their responses which are represented on the following table:

<b>Weak/Strong collaboration with identified groups</b>	<b>6 weak 0 strong</b>	<b>5 weak 1 strong</b>	<b>4 weak 2 strong</b>	<b>3 weak 3 strong</b>	<b>2 weak 4 strong</b>	<b>1 weak 5 strong</b>	<b>0 weak 6 strong</b>
<b>Number of pathfinders</b>	5	7	4	12	4	1	0

Those case study pathfinders which reported none or weak collaboration with all or five of the six groups were strongly school and college focused and less concerned, or able, to promote collaboration with a wider range of partners. The analysis also suggests that it may be difficult to promote strong collaboration with more than three of the identified groups, since only five pathfinders reported having achieved this. The extent of institutional inclusivity reflects particular local circumstances, but the overall pattern is perhaps also indicative of the capacity for collaborative activity within the resources and time offered by pathfinder. Among the case studies there were two pathfinders which reported the greatest degree of inclusivity (weak collaboration with two groups, strong collaboration with four groups). Here it was significant that collaboration between schools and colleges had been strongly established for a long period of time. 14-19 Pathfinders built on this collaboration, enabled new partners to be brought in and collaboration extended into other areas. This highlights findings from the wider literature that time and money, both to develop and sustain collaboration, are an enormously important resource (Audit Commission, 1998).

We now comment briefly on the involvement of each of the six groups of partners. The responses reveal extensive or very extensive involvement by **employers** and **training providers** in over half of the pathfinders. In both cases there was a slight tendency for involvement to be less in rural pathfinders but this was by no means clear-cut. There were rural pathfinders which reported extensive or very extensive involvement of employers or training providers and urban pathfinders which reported none or limited involvement. Explanations for these varying levels of involvement are highly complex and depended both upon the character and aims of the pathfinder and the characteristics of the local employers and training providers.

The involvement of **higher education institutions** was slightly weaker than that of employers or training providers and this was reflected in a number of coordinators reporting that their pathfinders were not addressing post-19 progression. It may also reflect the finding from the first year of the evaluation that across the pathfinder initiative as a whole a high proportion of targeted students tended to be those who were disengaged or disaffected 14-16 year-olds and that therefore pathfinders focused upon encouraging them to stay in school

and then progress to post-16 education and training. However, many pathfinders had developed effective collaboration with higher education.

The involvement of **special schools** was very mixed, although three-quarters of coordinators reported no stronger than limited involvement in collaboration. It was difficult to account for the variations in involvement and no clear patterns emerged from the survey data. From the case studies variations seemed to relate to the extent to which special schools had historically been integrated into local developments and also to the focus of the pathfinders.

There was very limited involvement of **independent schools** in pathfinders, despite partnerships with the independent sector being among the radical options offered in the 2003/4 Pathfinder Prospectus. No pathfinder decided to take up this option as part of its proposal. A small number of pathfinders indicated in their survey responses that they had attempted to make links with local independent schools only to be met with indifference, but in most cases it was apparent that collaborating with the independent sector was not a priority for pathfinders.

The pathfinder prospectuses stated that “Partnerships will be expected to show how they propose to take account of the views of **young people** in developing and implementing the pathfinder”. It was further suggested that young people and parents should be involved in the oversight of pathfinders. These aspects of involvement, however, were rather weakly developed in most pathfinders. It was argued by some coordinators that the short timescales for developing pathfinder submissions made the involvement of young people at that stage difficult and there was some evidence that involvement was increasing, usually as part of wider consultation on the development of the 14-19 phase, as pathfinders became more established.

#### *Levels of collaboration*

The levels at which collaboration takes place are crucial in influencing the forms which it takes and, more importantly, the outcomes which result. Our literature review suggested that this was important not just in education but across social policy fields (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002). These levels range from the relatively abstract policy and strategic planning level to classroom, workshop or workplace levels. Intermediate levels representing different depths of collaboration might include pathfinder steering groups; the joint institutional planning of course provision; the development of common course information; the provision of co-ordinated courses; joint course provision; shared facilities and formal, joint governance. To put it another way, the *depth* of collaboration was a significant variation and was likely to be different for different partners within individual pathfinders.

For example, employer involvement took place at a variety of levels across the pathfinders. All had employer representation at strategic levels (although this might be in wider 14-19 strategic groups rather than in groups specifically steering the pathfinder) but in some pathfinders employer involvement was largely limited to the strategic level (where the intensity of their involvement might also vary). However, in some pathfinders employer involvement went much deeper. Teachers, lecturers and training provider staff were also involved in different ways. They might be drawn in mainly as ‘deliverers’ of courses which were introduced as a result of decisions taken at strategic levels, e.g. in response to skills gaps analyses. This approach might involve staff development activities to support teachers in taking on new courses or groups of students. Alternatively, they might be involved in shaping the pathfinder through curriculum development activities, piloting new pedagogical approaches and developing new approaches to assessment. From the surveys, it was clear that pathfinders are making increasing efforts in staff development as they move from initial planning and setting up into detailed planning and implementation. Coordinators gave examples of a very wide range of types of collaborative staff development which evidenced

the growing depth and intensity of collaboration within the pathfinders. We argue later in this paper that depth of collaboration may be an important factor in sustaining collaboration.

Rather more speculatively in terms of the *levels* and *intensity* of collaboration within pathfinders we have tentatively begun to identify different *orientations* to collaboration. Those identified are:

- i. Technical
- ii. Instrumental
- iii. Committed

*Technical collaboration* is primarily contractual in nature and operates largely at strategic levels where agreement is reached at high levels of generality which tends not to be translated into effective implementation. *Instrumental collaboration* is often generated by the need to satisfy external imperatives or take advantage of external funding streams. It results in some implementation although this may be limited and fragile. *Committed collaboration*, while it will also have contractual and instrumental elements, may be generated by external policies and encouraged by funding streams, involves internal commitment by partners who are likely to wish to shape external policies and funding according to their own values, educational aims and circumstances. Committed collaboration is likely to be sustained, whereas technical and instrumental collaboration may collapse once contractual responsibilities lapse or funding ends. Participants in several pathfinders recalled such disintegration of collaboration following earlier 14-19 initiatives.

However, we suggest that technical and instrumental collaboration may lead to committed collaboration given sufficient time and support. This may occur when there is growing understanding and trust between partners and when mutual (although not identical) benefits for partners begin to emerge (Principal Learning, 2003). Examples of long-lasting collaboration suggest that where there is commitment, trust and credibility collaboration is more likely to be sustained (Harris, 2003; Hudson and Hardy, 2002). Hudson and Hardy also suggest that it is not necessary to start with a well-worked shared vision but that this can be generated through practical collaborative working as long as the costs do not outweigh the benefits.

In the final section of this paper we address the issue of sustainability which was a prominent concern in many pathfinders. This had many facets, but in terms of collaboration we suggest that the *orientation* to collaboration which has been developed within individual pathfinders may be highly significant in sustaining collaboration.

The concept of *levels* of collaboration is also useful in understanding some of the obstacles to its achievement. While there were examples of schools and colleges holding themselves aloof from collaboration these were comparatively rare. There was widespread welcome for the general notion of collaboration. However, in many cases of collaboration the devil lay in the detail. This emerged particularly in relation to 14-16 timetabling which was identified by several coordinators as a significant obstacle to collaboration. Several pathfinders had made determined attempts to tackle this issue and had gone some way towards introducing elements of common timetabling at 14-16. However, full synchronisation of 14-16 timetables, which would allow a substantial expansion of the options open to students, was very difficult to achieve. This was because such synchronisation would involve changes in the timing of school days, introduce rigidities into timetables and have knock-on effects on the 11-14 and 16-19 phases. These timetabling issues, in turn, had potential implications for sustainable funding, since schools could only save on staff costs and therefore, they argued, sustain the cost of off-site learning if such learning was built into timetables. These examples serve to illustrate the point that strategic agreement to collaborate, even when reached in good faith, was not always easy to implement in practice at different levels.

#### *Focus of Collaboration*

This dimension of collaboration concerns the topics or content of collaboration, that is, what it is that the pathfinders collaborate about. In order to analyse this we have drawn upon a set of themes which were developed in order to describe the pathfinder initiative as a whole. These themes were derived from the pathfinder prospectuses and the wider 14-19 reform agenda. They give an indication of the potential breadth of the reform agenda and of the role of the 14-19 Pathfinders within it:

	<b>Number of pathfinders addressing this theme</b>
<b>Curriculum Themes</b>	
Broader curriculum	31
Work-related learning	29
Work-based learning	18
Innovative approaches to vocational learning	29
Enterprise learning	13
Variations in the pace of learning	12
Progression 14-19	28
Progression post-19	18
<b>Student Experience and Support Themes</b>	
Targeting a range of learners	30
Advice and guidance	25
Individual Learning Plans	27

It is clear that across the pathfinders there was a consistent collaborative focus on the elements of student experience and support, with only a small minority of pathfinders not addressing these issues. The focus on curriculum issues, however, was more varied. Most pathfinders focused on developing broader curricula, work-related learning, innovative approaches to vocational learning and progression 14-19. However, over a third of pathfinders reported that they were not addressing work-based learning or post-19 progression and only a minority of pathfinders were tackling variations in the pace of learning and enterprise learning. Thus there were significant variations in the breadth of curriculum focus across the pathfinders. These variations both reflected and affected the inclusivity and levels of collaboration. For example, where a pathfinder was not focusing upon work-based learning this restricted the opportunities and incentives for training providers to participate. Where training providers did participate in such pathfinders the depth of their collaborative involvement was quite shallow e.g. they might be represented on pathfinder steering groups but not be involved in curriculum development or teaching. Similarly where a pathfinder was not addressing post-19 progression the role of higher education institutions was more peripheral than in pathfinders where this issue had a higher profile.

It should be noted, however, that most pathfinders were focusing on at least eight of the eleven themes and thus although the focus might be different from pathfinder to pathfinder it was invariably broad.

*Scope of collaboration*

There were wide variations here. One dimension of scope concerned the number of institutions involved. Some pathfinders covered large geographical areas. One extended over several LEAs and was working with over 50 schools (in contrast to its wide scope this pathfinder had a tight focus on modern foreign languages). The geographical and institutional scope of other pathfinders was more limited, for example one urban pathfinder covered eleven mainstream secondary schools and one college within a tight geographical area.

Two rural pathfinders provide an instructive comparison in scope. In one, the pathfinder covered the whole LEA and thus potentially involved all schools, colleges and training providers providing 14-19 education and training. In the other, it was decided that the pathfinder would be concentrated in two areas of the county. These decisions about scope had important consequences for the form of collaboration especially in relation to inclusivity and focus, since this was partly dependent upon an analysis of which aspects of the pathfinder agenda needed to be tackled in the two areas which were selected. In both examples, however, the pathfinder operated through federations or consortia. This raised issues about the relationship of the consortia to the overall aims of the pathfinder, how collaboration was managed in individual consortia and how cross-consortia collaboration was promoted.

## **Sustainability**

Collaboration is not, fundamentally, an end in itself but a means by which various desirable outcomes can be achieved. While outcomes which have been achieved in relation to curricular provision and student experience and support are crucial, arguably the most significant outcomes are those relating to student participation, retention, progression and achievement. However, it is still too early in the pathfinder programme to draw any conclusions about these outcomes. This is not only because no students have yet completed a full 14-16 or 16-19 cycle, let alone a complete 14-19 phase under the pathfinder initiative, but because virtually all research evidence on collaboration in education and other social policy fields emphasises the time which is needed to establish strong and effective collaboration. This suggests that in relation to its specific life cycle the most important short-term outcome from the pathfinder initiative may well be the initial establishment or strengthening of collaborative infrastructures in 39 localities.

As 14-19 Pathfinder funding will end in 2005, sustainability takes on ever greater significance. It was an issue which was raised by many pathfinder participants. Unsurprisingly most were primarily concerned with the financial sustainability of the pathfinder developments. This is clearly an important matter which will require detailed specification of the costs of the collaborative activities, the additional curriculum provision and the enhanced support and guidance which have been brought about. This task is being undertaken as part of the third year of the national evaluation. However, it is also important to place the issue of financial sustainability in a broader context. We suggest that financial underpinning is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for overall sustainability.

We focus here on three dimensions of sustainability. The first of these is *collaboration*. 14-19 Pathfinders have been extremely successful in promoting collaboration and while Hodgson, Spours and Wright (2005) may be correct in characterising the current 14-19 picture across England as being strongly competitive/weakly collaborative, the balance is rather different within the 14-19 Pathfinders. (It should also be recognised that partners may collaborate in order to compete more effectively with external competitors, see Adnett and Davies (2003).) Thus, if the pathfinder benefits are to be maintained, it will be necessary to sustain collaboration. One way in which this may be achieved is by translating technical and instrumental commitment to collaboration into committed collaboration. Such commitment, by definition, must spring from the collaborators themselves on the basis of educational aims and values and understanding of mutual benefits. We suggest this is more likely to be fostered where the levels of collaboration are deep rather than shallow. However, while

committed collaboration needs to be largely internally generated it can be constrained or enabled by national and local policy drivers such as funding, inspection regimes, accountability mechanisms, pay and conditions in different sectors and staff development programmes. If policy-makers see collaboration as a key element in achieving the aims set out in the February 2005 Education White Paper (DfES, 2005), it will be important to ensure that the appropriate policy drivers are set in place to encourage it.

The second element of sustainability to be considered is *provision*. The 14-19 Pathfinder initiative, together with the Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds programme, has helped to establish broader and more flexible provision for the 14-19 phase for many students, especially at 14-16. Students have opportunities to learn in more than one location. Opportunities to learn in colleges, training providers and workplaces have broadened choice and experience substantially. Sustaining this breadth raises key issues of funding and capacity.

In relation to funding there is wide acceptance that vocational learning is more expensive than academic learning (although there are important questions about how much more expensive). Such provision has typically been funded through a wide variety of projects (including 14-19 Pathfinders). Project funding has been criticised by many respondents for its wasteful bureaucratic and accountability procedures and for short-termism. Several interviewees, especially from schools, argued that as schools move to three-year budgets they should be given an increase in funding which takes account of the extra costs of vocational provision and then have freedom to purchase such provision or provide it themselves. Others, including some in schools, argued against this, or at least suggested that additional funds should be ring-fenced in order to prevent the money simply being absorbed into school budgets. There are clearly important policy decisions to be taken here, although it should be noted that the only choices are not project funding *or* devolution to schools since a balance between the two might be sought.

Capacity emerged as a significant issue in sustaining and expanding provision. A number of colleges and training providers indicated that they were near to capacity, particularly in relation to courses requiring specialised facilities. Various approaches to increasing capacity were being developed, including colleges and training providers increasing their own capacity through new buildings or reconfiguring their buildings. Smaller, local skills centres were also being proposed. Some schools planned to develop their own vocational facilities and either teach the courses themselves or in collaboration with colleges. E-learning was seen as another means of increasing capacity. All of these approaches have the potential to increase capacity but will also impact upon the character and quality of the learning which takes place. We suggest it will be important that in deciding how capacity might be increased local policy-makers take account of the factors which make vocational learning attractive to students.

The third element of sustainability concerns *innovation*. The 14-19 Pathfinders have produced exciting and imaginative practice. A key question at this stage is how such innovation can be both maintained where it has been piloted and disseminated both within the pathfinders and more widely. Collaborative networks which operate at appropriate levels and thus ensure that innovations are disseminated to staff who are responsible for implementation are crucial. The forms of dissemination are also likely to be important and it may be more important to disseminate key principles rather than to expect those on the receiving end of dissemination to accept wholesale practices which have been developed elsewhere in contexts which might be quite different. Sustainability and dissemination of innovation therefore requires considerable skill and personal qualities from disseminators if it is to be effective.

## **Discussion**

In discussing the key issues emerging from the findings of the evaluation so far, we stress the initiative is not yet complete and underline the danger of perceiving a substantial degree of homogeneity across the partnerships, whereas the reality is of considerable diversity and adaptation to local aspirations and circumstances. Despite these caveats, there were several important dimensions which emerged from the evaluation which can be usefully drawn to the attention of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

The 14-19 reform agenda has placed great emphasis on the importance of collaboration and this has been reflected in the partnerships where this encouragement to collaborate has been enthusiastically embraced by most partners. In analysing these collaborative approaches it is important to take account of national, local and institutional values, aims, policies and practices which facilitate or inhibit collaboration and the ways in which these interact with each other and either enable or constrain collaboration. These collaborative processes are operationalised within distinct local contexts, which in turn influence and shape the forms and extent of collaboration which is feasible and desirable. The interaction of these two sets of factors gives rise to different local forms of collaboration with: differing degrees of institutional inclusivity; different levels of operation and with differing degrees of intensity; foci on different aspects of the pathfinder agenda; and variations in geographical and institutional scope. Furthermore, this collaboration takes place in complex local policy contexts in which schools, colleges and training providers have large degrees of institutional autonomy and which contain a variety of organisations and learning partnerships. Also important is the number and diversity of national and local programmes and initiatives relevant to the 14-19 reform agenda.

Within these complex local policy environments, the relative autonomy of schools and colleges, in particular, poses challenges to notions of collaboration and partnership since they are able to engage selectively with the reform agenda in ways which they perceive as being in their institutional interests. These collaborations also take place within more or less intense contexts of institutional competition (see Griffiths, 2000).

Adnett & Davies (2003) argue that in such circumstances competition and co-operation can co-exist, operating along different dimensions, but that the maintenance of co-operation requires careful and continuing nurturing and the use of appropriate incentives and drivers. This has important implications for the ways in which partnerships are led and continue to develop if inclusive, resilient and enduring partnerships are to be established.

This raises issues of where such leadership may be best located and what capacity exists for taking on such a role. Most partnerships are being led by LEA and local learning partnerships and some of these have provided excellent leadership. However, LEA, local LSC and learning partnership boundaries do not always coincide with 'naturally' occurring local learning areas, i.e. areas defined by the actual distribution and movements of 14-19 learners within particular localities. This might indicate the need for broader foci for strategic planning and collaboration.

It has been widely recognised that the much wider range of choice of curricula, institutions, learning styles, qualifications and progression pathways which the 14-19 reform agenda will open up for students places great premium on the provision of high quality information, advice and guidance. Greater choice may have the potential to generate increased commitment to learning among all students and thus reduce disaffection and disengagement and subsequent social exclusion. However, the capability to make choices is not equally distributed among the student population and greater choice, if not well supported, has the potential to increase disaffection and disengagement if student learning choices are not well matched to their needs and if the system is not flexible enough to accommodate changes of direction and developing learning careers and dispositions (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). Where students lack resources to make well-founded decisions there is a particular responsibility on schools, colleges, training providers,

employers and Connexions to compensate for this lack of resources. A coherent, flexible 14-19 phase may be offered by schools, colleges and providers but will only become a reality through the choices exercised and learning activities experienced by many thousands of young people. Put simply, these developments require a significant increase in the volume and quality of advice and guidance which is required since the parameters of choice are likely to be substantially increased. Effective advice and guidance within partnerships will need to take account of the lived realities of the ways in which young people take decisions, as well as being grounded in sound knowledge of the options available.

The 14-19 Pathfinder initiative combined national steering with local responsiveness by laying down broad directions and aims through the pathfinder prospectuses while allowing substantial room for local interpretations in terms of the scale and scope of the partnerships which were formed, their leadership and their focus. The pathfinders were required to set a series of targets relating to participation, provision and achievement. They were also asked to report termly and annually to the DfES, but other than through these accountability mechanisms the initiative was steered with a light touch from the centre. The 14-19 Pathfinder has also been evaluated flexibly in ways which have sought to understand local contexts and have not tried to separate artificially the pathfinder from other cognate initiatives, such as the Increased Flexibility programme.

The strength of this policy approach has been that it has allowed pathfinders to take account of the range of local contextual factors described above. Individual pathfinders have also been able to be shaped by local diagnoses of weaknesses and strengths in the 14-19 phase. This approach has produced a wide range of different approaches – although not too wide in our judgement. It has promoted a good deal of collaboration, curriculum and staff development and some exciting and innovative work. It has helped individuals to develop as ‘hybrid professionals’ with networking skills (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott, Doherty and Kinder, 2002).

However, a possible weakness of the approach to policy development embodied by the 14-19 Pathfinders initiative is that the developments it has promoted will potentially flower briefly in the 39 areas where pathfinders have been located then wither without leaving a significant legacy either in those areas or on the national system. Earlier attempts to promote aspects of the pathfinder agenda might be instructive here. The development with which the 14-19 Pathfinder was quite often compared during our case study visits was the TVEI of the 1980s. This combined a similar balance of central steering, local responsiveness, breadth of vision and scope for innovation. Many respondents however were critical (a little unfairly in our view) of what they saw as the very weak legacy of TVEI. Elsewhere, Jamieson (1993) has drawn attention to the waxing and waning of work-related learning at different periods of the preceding twenty years, and respondents in several partnerships referred to earlier school/college partnerships which had subsequently withered. The demise of particular funding streams was an important factor in the waning of some of these earlier initiatives, but were themselves indicative of shifts in national policy towards a more prescriptive and academic curriculum in the 1980s. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop these comparisons, they do emphasise the importance of sustaining, embedding and disseminating the developments which have taken place under the auspices of 14-19 Pathfinders.

However, while constancy in national policy and funding are important issues in sustainability, they are not the only factors. Sustainability also requires that collaborative approaches become embedded in the values and practices of institutions and practitioners and this implies that they penetrate more deeply into the individual institutions and inhere in relationships which are built up between teachers, lecturers, personal advisers, employers, training providers and so on, so that there is grass roots support for the collaborative development. Goodson (2003), for example, has argued that change requires personal investment from participants and engagement with personal missions as well as external pressure and support and institutional commitment. For partnerships, then, the challenge is

for thinking and practice to spread from the steering groups and become embedded in the day-to-day practices and thinking of practitioners – as has already begun to happen in many cases, especially where collaboration is long-established.

## References

- Adnett, N. and Davies, P. (2003) Schooling reforms in England: from quasi-markets to co-competition? *Journal of Education Policy*, 18 (4), 393-406.
- Atkinson, M., Wilkin, A., Stott, A., Doherty, P. and Kinder, K. (2002) *Multi-agency working: a detailed study*. Slough: NFER.
- Audit Commission (1998) *A Fruitful Partnership: effective partnership working*. London: Audit Commission.
- Balloch, S. and Taylor, M. (eds.) (2001) *Partnership Working*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (1999) *College Life: the voice of the learner*. London: FEDA.
- Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (2000) Learning Careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26 (5), 583-597.
- DfES (2002) *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards*. London: DfES.
- DfES (2003) *14-19: opportunity and excellence*. London: DfES.
- DfES (2004a) *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*. London: DfES.
- DfES (2004b) *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: putting people at the heart of public services*. London: DfES Cm 6272.
- DfES. (2005) *14-19 Education and Skills*. London: HMSO Cm 6476.
- Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K. (eds.) (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour and the governance of welfare*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Goodson, I. (2003) *Professional Knowledge, Professional Lives: studies in education and change*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Griffiths, M. (2000) Collaboration and partnership in question: knowledge, politics and practice *Journal of Education Policy*, 15 (4), 383-395.
- Harris, S. (2003) Inter-agency practice and professional collaboration: the case of drug education and prevention. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18 (3), 303-314.
- Higham, J., Haynes, G., Wragg, C. and Yeomans, D. (2004) *14-19 Pathfinders: An Evaluation of the First Year. Research Report RR504*. London: DfES.
- Hodgson, A., Spours, K. and Wright, S. (2005). *From collaborative initiatives to a coherent 14-19 phase? Institutional Dimension of 14-19 Reform Series Discussion Paper 1* [online]. At: <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/documents.shtml>.
- Hudson, B. and Hardy, B. (2002) What is a 'successful' partnership and how can it be measured? In: Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K. (eds.), *Partnerships, New Labour and the governance of welfare*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Jamieson, I. (1993) The Rise and Fall of the Work-related Curriculum. In: Wellington, J. (ed.) *The Work-Related Curriculum: Challenging the Vocational Imperative*, pp. 200-217. London: Kogan Page.
- Powell, M. and Exworthy, M. (2002) Partnerships, quasi-networks and social policy. In: Glendinning, C., Powell, M. and Rummery, K. (eds.) *Partnerships, New Labour and the governance of welfare*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Principal Learning. (2003) *Illustrations of Different Local Organisational Structures for Collaborative Delivery of Post-16 Education and Training*. London: A report prepared for the DfES and the LSC.

Pring, R. (2005) Labour government policy 14-19. *Oxford Review of Education*, 31 (1), 71-85.