

A Report by the Skills Commission

skills
Commission

ONE SYSTEM, MANY PATHWAYS

**FORGING CONSENSUS
ON 14-19 EDUCATION
AND TRAINING**

**Our ambition is
simple: to create
an environment
for education and
skills that best
serves learners,
the economy, and
society as a whole.**

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FOREWORD

In the middle of a Parliament, following a number of reports focused heavily on the further education sector, the Skills Commission turns its attention to the broader system of education and training with an inquiry looking at the 14-19 age group.

This is one of our most ambitious pieces to date, and also one of the most important. We chose this project as a result of changes occurring across education and training that seemed to be happening at some level removed from further education and skills. Whilst we welcomed the renewed political focus on quality and rigour in vocational and technical qualifications and training, these reforms, alongside changes to funding, and the raising of the participation age, have had a big impact on the system as a whole.

Significantly, these reforms have blurred the boundaries between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ training, and between providers with new players on the scene – the much-championed University Technical Colleges alongside Free Schools and Academies – and Further Education Colleges now able to recruit learners at 14. This institutional diversity, with the new approach to the funding of education and skills – funding following the learner rather than the qualification – makes the notion of a ‘systems’ approach to the 14-19 age group so much more important. We felt the need to take a pause, reconvene, and assess where we are right now against where we want to get to.

One of our major concerns has been that reform has distracted from the true beneficiaries of education and training: the learners themselves. From a Skills Commission perspective, there has not been adequate promotion and analysis of the variety of pathways needed to create an enriched environment of education and training to reflect the vibrant UK economy. It is not the focus on academic rigour that concerns us, it is the focus on the academic pathway at the expense of other pathways to employment, further training, and higher education.

That is not to say that we ignore the academic pathway through to higher education, nor do we question the need for world-class research in our universities. Our ambition is simple: to create an environment for education and skills that best serves learners, the economy and society as a whole. That means the right pathways for each and every learner, whether that be academic or vocational, leading to employment, higher education, or further study.

During the final stages of this inquiry, the OECD produced a damning report on literacy and numeracy skills in the United Kingdom, which made all of us in the education and skills field sit up and take notice. It also made a system-wide analysis more important than ever. We must all pull in the same direction, and we hope that this report will give focus to that pull.

We would like to thank Ian Ferguson and Mike Tomlinson for co-chairing this inquiry, and our colleagues on the Skills Commission for their time and expertise. This report is offered as a think piece for the future, a blueprint for how to analyse and critique education and skills policy in a way that brings us together, rather than creates discord.



Barry Sheerman MP



Dame Ruth Silver

INQUIRY CO-CHAIRS' FOREWORD

The Skills Commission charged us with examining the system of education and training with a focus on the 14-19 age group. Whilst a full '14-19 Review' of the sort undertaken previously was not possible over the four months we took evidence, we have produced a system-wide analysis. We spoke to learning providers, schools, colleges, young people, regulators, awarding bodies, civil servants, academics and Government advisors. It has been broad-reaching, as befits our terms of reference.

We co-chaired this inquiry with one overarching aim – to place the learners at the heart of our analysis, and make recommendations on the basis of 'what is right' for each and every one of them. Our vision for learners is of one, encompassing, coherent system of education and training that is characterised by a diversity of pathways, with clear routes of progression to employment, further training, or higher education – whatever is right for each learner.

We consistently asked ourselves, and our contributors: is this policy, programme, qualification, institution contributing positively towards creating a system that is in the best interests of all learners from the ages of 14 to 19? It was striking how much agreement came back to us. In fact, we found this to be a very useful way of analysing education and training policies: assessing them against a clear and concise framework that you are confident all stakeholders agree with.

It is why we have written this report to reflect that methodology. We have developed a 'Values Consensus' framework: five principles that the Skills Commission firmly believes are shared by all those engaged in the education and training landscape of this country. It is these values that should guide future education and skills policy, and should be used to assess what is already in place.

We understand that reforms take time to embed, and that the system is still settling down after a period of extensive change. However, in assessing what has been enacted since 2010, and in some cases what has been the case for many years before then, we do make recommendations where we see the need for change. Some of these recommendations require immediate action. For example, the crisis in information, advice, and guidance across our education and training landscape cannot be ignored. The time has also arrived for the Department for Education to make more frequent and explicit statements of belief in the value to employers and higher education of high quality vocational education when underpinned by strong academic rigour. Employers tell us they are concerned about the time allocated to technical and vocational provision between the ages of 14 and 16, and we call on the Department for Education to look again at this significant piece of reform.

Following on from a consistent refrain heard throughout our evidence sessions, we respond to calls for a new kind of debate about quality. Our concept of 'dynamic quality' takes into account a more complex approach to measuring outcomes, with greater focus on the quality of the learner's experience. It is our hope that Ofsted and the Department for Education take serious note of recommendations in this area, as an unsubtle understanding of quality across different kinds of provision has hampered our system of education and training for too long. We also make recommendations about the need to urgently expand the provision of apprenticeships available at 16, and add our voices to the call for much greater focus on the functional component of GCSE Mathematics and English, qualifications that have not, for some time, adequately pointed to a learner's numeracy and literacy skills.

Our vision for learners is of one, encompassing, coherent system of education and training that is characterised by a diversity of pathways, with clear routes of progression to employment, further training, or higher education – whatever is right for each learner.

We would like to thank the Skills Commission for asking us to chair this important piece of work. We hope this report will be useful for all. Particularly, we hope it will be useful for politicians of all parties to use as a guide for how to assess and form policy, knowing that if it adheres to our Values Consensus, it is likely to be well-received. With a General Election looming large on the horizon, it couldn't be more timely. We now call upon the Government, politicians of all parties, campaign groups and practitioners to sign up to our Values Consensus in the interests of young people.



Ian Ferguson CBE



Sir Mike Tomlinson

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Department for Education should recognise a '14-19 system' of education and training in England.

Recommendation 2

The Department for Education should examine how to spark a cultural change in education and training in England towards greater acceptance of learners repeating a learning year.

Recommendation 3

The Department for Education must immediately acknowledge the crisis in information, advice, and guidance, and undertake a full review of provision. A range of sources must be available to all learners before the age of 14, their parents, carers and guardians, alongside access to trained advisors.

Recommendation 4

Employers and employer bodies should make a commitment to placing engagement in education and training at the top of their organisational agendas. The Department for Education should consider how to incentivise schools to engage with employers more systematically and work with the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, and sector bodies to introduce 'associate governors' to support greater employer engagement in the education and training sector. They should also consider more programmes of 'two-way work experience'.

Recommendation 5

All compensatory support mechanisms should be available to all institutions providing 14-19 education and training, and should follow the learner across the system. Ofsted should prioritise publishing analysis of the use of compensatory support, to ensure that it is targeted effectively.

Recommendation 6

All institutions providing vocational and technical provision should be required to become accredited and licensed by 2016. The Skills Funding Agency should consider how this could be implemented.

Recommendation 7

All those teaching in institutions receiving Government funding across the 14-19 system should be appropriately qualified. We suggest this is achieved within two years.

Recommendation 8

The Department for Education should coordinate discussions with the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills and the Department for Communities and Local Government on how to empower local partnerships to monitor competition between providers at a local level and drive collaboration. Where appropriate, this could include the Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Recommendation 9

Ofsted should develop new collective and collaborative performance measures, and consider whether providers should only be judged 'outstanding' if they have supported improvement in other providers, or at a system level. League tables should give priority to destination data of progress, including employment and value added. They should also allow for the sharing of an individual's destination score between institutions if both can measure their contribution to a learner's success.

Recommendation 10

The expected standard of reaching a ‘pass’ at GCSE Mathematics and English should be contingent upon passing a core functional component of the examination. The Department for Education should also seriously consider splitting GCSE Mathematics into “Functional Mathematics” and “Pure Mathematics”. The Association of Colleges, the 157 Group, and the Institute for Learning should undertake a review of the teaching of mathematics in colleges.

Recommendation 11

The Department for Education should provide schools with greater freedoms to allocate time 14-16 year olds can spend on technical and vocational qualifications and training.

Recommendation 12

The Department for Education must give greater public support to the importance and value of quality vocational education and its routes to employment, higher education, and a prosperous economy.

Recommendation 13

The Department for Education, working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, should look, within the overall context of the recent Apprenticeship Implementation Plan, at specific measures to ensure focus on, and expansion of, apprenticeships at ages 16-18. The DfE should also reintroduce the Young Apprenticeship programme.

1: THE VALUES CONSENSUS

It is vital that between the ages of 14 and 19, our young people are prepared and developed for their future life and work. This requires us to recognise the diversity of talent and aspiration in our young people and that they require a diversity of suitable, challenging learning programmes alongside innovative providers to help them fulfil their potential.

To achieve this, future education and skills policy should be ambitious and forward-thinking. It should reconnect employers to learners, encouraging colleges and training providers to be enterprising, innovative local hubs of excellence.

For this reason, the Skills Commission chose to examine the 14-19 system of education and training through the lens of quality and choice for learners. We believed that despite highly-publicised disagreements about the ambitions for England's schools and colleges, we would find consensus if we placed learners at the forefront of our analysis. We hoped that we could resurrect the idea of a consensus around education and skills, and use this review as a way of drawing the sector together to ensure that we are all pulling in the most sensible direction in the interests of learners.

We firmly believe that there is an opportunity to create an education and training environment in England that is truly in the best interests of learners, the economy, and society. This opportunity is provided by something which was at one time rare in education and skills policy – consensus – which we found does indeed exist, across political parties, across employers, across providers, across practitioners. The consensus in 2013 is a powerfully-held and shared belief in the values that should define our system.

Across the evidence we heard, there was very little disagreement about what the stated aims of education and skills policy should be: we all agree on what success looks like, and believe that we are, broadly, on the right track. However, there were some unintended consequences of legislation enacted before and after the

2010 election that have acted as significant obstacles to fulfilling the needs of the economy, and the ambitions and potential of young people.

In this report, we frame the argument within a 'Values Consensus', assessing policy against this, rather than other indicators of success. It is our hope that the 'Values Consensus' becomes a tool for all policymakers, MPs and Ministers to use in analysing policy. In chapter 3, we show how useful this can be by assessing post-2010 policy through this lens.

Our 'Values Consensus' can be summarised by five guiding principles.

- 1. Focusing always on 'what is right' for each and every learner**
- 2. Ensuring 'dynamic quality' across the whole of the 14-19 system of education and training**
- 3. Achieving fairness across the whole of the 14-19 system of education and training**
- 4. Enabling transfer between pathways within the 14-19 system of education and training**
- 5. Creating real choice for all learners through effective information, advice, and guidance**

We urge policymakers to use these five principles to guide education and training policy, always questioning if the system as a whole lives up to them. That way, it will begin to resurrect consensus-driven education and skills policy in England.

Our recommendations set out what the evidence tells us are the most likely routes to achieving the kind of education and training system that learners, their teachers, their parents, universities, and future

employers deserve. There is also substantially more consensus across political parties than might be thought by simply monitoring the debate of the last three years, but the levers to pull (and in some cases the levers that have already been pulled by the Coalition Government since 2010) are not yet fully agreed upon.

Additionally, there are some reforms that have been enacted in the spirit of our 'Values Consensus' that have not yet had enough time to embed and reap success. In this case, we reflect concerns from employers and providers where they exist, but do not suggest radical U-turns when the results of policies are not yet clear.

Nevertheless, we do see urgency in getting the system right, and the real need for change. The facts speak for themselves.

- One in five young people are not in education, employment, or training, and this is set to cost the economy £28bn in state expenditure and lost productivity by 2022.¹
- Our literacy and numeracy levels lag well behind competitor economies.²
- It appears that the 'rebalancing' project – is beginning to bear fruit.³ However, there is concern that the rebalancing of skills is not happening quickly enough to support the kind of productive export-driven economy that we are aiming towards.⁴

- Despite the fact that jobs are being created in the economy⁵, as the UKCES explain: *"there remain structural barriers in the labour market that have been compounded by the recession, and young people now have fewer opportunities than ever to find jobs and gain experience."*⁶

Of course, the problem is societal as much as it is economic. The figures quoted above translate into increased risk of mental health problems, social inequality and unrest.⁷

1. UKCES (March 2013), available at: <http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications/scaling-the-youth-employment-challenge>

2. OECD (October 2013), available at <http://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/>

3. The Telegraph (August 2013), available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/10232999/Rebalancing-hopes-helped-by-strongest-exports-on-record.html>

4. Evidence to the inquiry presented by the Baker Dearing Trust

5. ONS (October 2013), available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/october-2013/index.html>

6. UKCES (March 2013), available at <http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/scaling-the-youth-employment-challenge-report.pdf>

7. *ibid.*

In too many cases, the system of education and training as it exists is not functioning in the best interests of learners. Unintended consequences of policy change are skewing behaviours within institutions. Often, schools and colleges are behaving entirely rationally within the system as developed by policy change over previous decades. As it currently sits, the system operates almost like a faulty market: when a market doesn't work properly, perversities in the system drive up prices and can hamper innovation. In education and skills, the unintended consequences of some reforms means we have a system with a series of flaws that need ironing out, so that it 'works better' for the users of the system, from learners themselves, to universities, colleges and employers. In reading this report, we encourage Government and its agencies to come out in agreement with our guiding principles for a system of education and training, and join us in using the Values Consensus to analyse policy change in the future.

1. Focusing always on 'what is right' for each and every learner

This may seem like common sense, but too often in our system one route or style of education and training has been the dominant. A young person should be helped to know where their talents lie and understand how this might translate into a fruitful and vibrant career. Unfortunately, this is not always a process institutions go through; not all young people are given enough opportunity to assess 'what is right' for them, or look at their potential. Most discussion continues to focus on their projected attainment (which is then used as part of a measure of institutional performance). The system isn't designed in such a way as to make 'what is right' easily accessible to all the different kinds of young people arriving at age 14 and being asked to make choices.

As the 157 Group states on its website, "*broad-based vocational education is valuable in its own right and 'right' for many people in a way that traditional 'academic' education may not be*"⁸. There remain significant barriers to overcome in ensuring that vocational and occupational (or applied) education is available to all those for whom it is 'right'. For many, the academic route will continue to be appropriate, and the system we design must also serve those learners and end-users just as well. We must ensure that universities receive candidates who are suitably qualified, prepared for the rigour of a university education, with qualifications that are a trustworthy indicator of achievement.

2. Ensuring 'dynamic quality' across the 14-19 system of education and training

One of the greatest barriers to reaching and reflecting consensus has been a battle over the political ownership of the quality agenda. In discussing quality, we hope to move the debate away from simply 'who owns quality' and make a distinction between the quality of provision, and quality outcomes that are not purely static and quantitative. We bring this together under the bracket of 'dynamic quality'.

Something that has 'quality' is, in terms of education and skills policy, something that is 'fit for purpose'. An education and training system that is 'fit for purpose' must be producing young adults who make strong contributions to society and the economy, and will continue to do so throughout their lives. The wonderful vibrancy and dynamism of the economy and society must therefore be reflected in how we conceptualise quality in education and training. It is these kind of lifelong outcomes, lifelong societal and economic contributions, that we should use to measure institutional and system performance.

We have become too focused on the wrong kinds of outcomes for the 14-19 group, and this has skewed our understanding of quality. Our understanding is too static; it is often bound-up in the achievements of all

institutions' learners in just one or two qualifications, at a certain point in time. Quality for a 14-19 phase must be as much about destination and progression as it is about attainment. Moreover, destination is not simply where you move at the age of 19, it is how you move into adult life. There is a purpose to education and training that is all about longevity, and this must be reflected in how we measure and publicise what is of 'quality'.

We would like to see Government talking of 'dynamic quality': quality looking forwards, as well as backwards, involving employability and personal development, not simply one indicator of achievement at one arbitrary moment. For too long, 'quality' has been a static measure, an approach enhanced by the current Government's refocus on end-of-course assessment. There has also been an unhelpful conflation of institutional indicators and measures of learner achievement. We would like to see this conflation disappear.

The debate must move towards measures of quality that are as much about process – teaching and learning, and the deep and ever-developing expertise of our teachers as educators, and 'what it is like' in the classroom, the laboratory, the workshop, or the workplace – as they are about outcomes. Importantly, when outcomes are used, they shouldn't be used as a static snapshot of one kind of quality.

Quality is dynamic, but it is also diverse. When speaking of 'quality' in the 14-19 system, we must always be aware of quality across different styles of provision, across different institutions, and across different qualifications, for different learners. We recognise that this is a more challenging approach for Government, and for its agencies assessing quality in providers. This is particularly true in austere times. However, we believe that a 'one size fits all' approach to quality in education and training is hampering our societal and economic progress.

3. Achieving fairness across the whole of the 14-19 system of education and training

We believe in aiming for a system where all learners and providers are treated fairly, with equity across the system: by law, by Government, by employers, and by agencies.

This is not a question of applying the same regulatory conditions to all institutions, or seeing learners as identical. Rather, it is the opposite. We would like analysis and interpretation of a pluralist and dynamic system of education and training, as opposed to aiming at individual institutions in isolation, or adopting a limited understanding of the diversity of learners' strengths and ambitions. In the current environment, across providers of 14-19 education and training, there are many examples of where some courses, particularly vocational courses, are regarded as second class. It is a question of credibility of courses, and recognising true value when and where it exists.

This is not about a 'one size fits all' approach, to either learners or institutions. We recognise the importance of allowing diverse providers of diverse education and training to have a degree of institution-specific regulatory or monitoring tools. However, this should not, as is currently the case, encourage disadvantage and create a non-level playing field. A recent report by the Higher Education Commission looking at the regulation of institutions of HE, argued for a regulatory environment characterised as an 'equal rather than a level playing field' to capture the diverse range of providers, without applying the same rules and standards to Oxbridge as they would to a small private college.⁹ We would recommend that a similar approach is taken to the 14-19 system – equity across providers, schools, and colleges, so that unevenness and disadvantages for learners are ironed out. We do not wish to treat every institution or learner the same, rather we believe the system should treat each provider, and each learner, equally and appropriately.

9. <http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/hec/research/new-report-regulating-higher-education>

4. Enabling transfer between pathways within the 14-19 system of education and training

We must aim for educational pathways that can reflect and cater for the true diversity of learners. In the words of Kenneth Baker, we must move from “*two routes to many pathways*”¹⁰. The routes through the 14-19 system must contain clear lines of sight to employment or further training including, of course, higher education and, significantly, must be conceived of as pathways not railroads. Inter-path permeability and standardisation are essential.

A system built on pathways is characterised by ease of transfer. We must aim for a system where learners can move between pathways without being penalised, and must be able to move from one institution to another that is more suitable, without either institution losing out. Additionally, horizontal transfer must not be penalised. For example, neither institutions nor learners should be unnecessarily reprimanded for a pathway shift that might require an additional year remaining at level 2, but will in time see a learner reach level 4 and a worthwhile, productive career.

5. Creating real choice for all learners through effective information, advice, and guidance

The ideal system of education and training is one that is responsive to the needs of the economy and employers, but also one that has learners at its heart, enabling them to make informed choices about themselves, their capabilities, and their aspirations. Government at all levels has an obligation to empower learners and their guardians through information. However, there is no adequate strategy to ensure students and families can make informed decisions about education and training, not just at 14, but across this transition phase. The supposed benefits that come from empowered learners able to make choices about their education (innovation, improvement through competition) aren't yet a reality as the consumers – parents and learners – are not informed.

Ease of transfer between pathways, as described above, no matter how much structural change takes place, will not be achieved unless learners and their parents can make informed choices about qualifications and institutions, with a clear and honest understanding about likely opportunities for progression into further study or employment. This empowerment can come through a variety of sources, but must include employers and institutions working in partnership both nationally and locally.

10. Career College Trust (2013), available at <http://careercolleges.org.uk/>

2: LEARNERS IN A TRANSITION SYSTEM

In this chapter, we turn to the learners themselves. We argue that understanding the diversity of learners within a complex system is the most fruitful way of creating an environment of education and training that can provide ‘what is right’ for each and every learner. This focus has been the overriding theme of this inquiry, as the changes to structure and content in the 14-19 phase have left the learners somewhat overlooked in the face of reform.

We show how explicit and implicit choices between pathways are currently made, and that there is a strong precedent for choices to occur even before 14. Policy should make sure that choices are made by knowledgeable learners, families and guardians, with clear understanding of progression through this ‘transition phase’ to further training, higher education, or employment.

Why 14-19?

Our approach has been to look at how to best develop learners to become effective employees and effective human beings who can flourish in society. Long has there been debate over how the education system should be bracketed to help achieve this, and in our evidence sessions, we asked contributors their opinions of ‘14-19’.

The ‘14-19’ phase does exist in law, yet the Department for Education told this inquiry that the current Government was not thinking in terms of a 14-19 age group, and preferred the 14-16 / 16-18 division as championed by the Wolf Report.¹¹ The Commission sees benefits of division between Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. However, given the connections between the two phases and their interdependence, many contributors believed that 14-19 was more appropriate to ensure learners are well-served. This view is also strengthened by the raising of the education participation age (see chapter 3).

We conceptualise the 14-19 age group as a ‘transition system’, marking the transition from compulsory education to further optional study or the labour market (with some element of study). Thinking of a linear 14-19 system is not enough; it must be considered as a dynamic system with interplay between diverse providers and learners. The diversity of institutional provision for education and training at 14 – schools (including local authority controlled, free schools and academies), FE colleges, UTCs, Studio Schools, Career Colleges – is enough in itself to demand a rethinking of the system as a whole, ensuring that it is operating cohesively in the best interests of learners.

The Wolf Report concluded that the age of 14 was too young to make serious decisions on an academic or vocational learning pathway. However, Professor Wolf

11. Inquiry evidence, DfE

does concede that there remains 'little appetite' from the sector or employers for a uniform 14-16 education curriculum (a view she repeated to us when giving evidence to this inquiry).¹² If a diverse 14-16 curriculum is desired by the destination users of the system (i.e. employers), then this must evolve through an amount of choice by learners at 14.

Indeed, many employers told us that the age of 16 is too late to start on a vocational pathway. We firmly agree that there needs to be a strong core of academic subject focus between ages 14-16, but the development of vocational skills, through subject choice, needs to be a greater part of the 14-16 mix, not least to cater for the diversity of learners entering this transition phase. Crucially, high quality vocational provision between 14 and 19 must not cut-off routes to higher education. Importantly, the best provision of an 'academic route' of GCSEs, A Levels and University, whilst better understood across society, is not that dissimilar to the best of the 'vocational route', often with similar outcomes.

A large concern of the Skills Commission is the lack of focus on the range of learners. A huge amount of time and policy is focused on those going to higher education and the 8.2% of 16-18 year olds who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs).¹³ There is not adequate support for the learners who occupy the crowded middle – those hovering above and below a 'C' average GCSE score. A 'system' approach to the 14-19 phase would benefit learners through its flexibility and variety – ensuring that the right signposts are in place for all learners.

This flexibility will become most beneficial to all when 'all' are placed on an equal footing. This report does not go into detail on the impact of socio-economic inequality

of learners upon the functioning of the 14-19 phase as a whole, but we do welcome new support for the most disadvantaged learners, including the pupil premium. In gathering evidence, we heard how some institutions are using this support innovatively, such as through employing a school counsellor. The pupil premium can, when used effectively, contribute positively towards opening up the full options across the 14-19 phase to all. In chapter 4, we raise concerns around the use of the pupil premium, and recommend that it be available to all institutions (and therefore all learners) across this phase.

Implicit and explicit choices

At the age of 14, learners are already making choices that will have an impact on the rest of their education, and their careers. This has always been the case, yet these choices have not, historically, been clearly linked to post-16 pathways. Choices have been made in an information vacuum. It could be argued that the current Government has continued in this vein with the introduction of the Ebacc, a performance measure to counter the rise in number of non-academic qualifications taken at age 16 (which is estimated to have jumped from 15,000 in 2004 to about 575,000 in 2010¹⁴). Learners will choose which subjects to take within and around the Ebacc, yet not in a way that is adequately linked to progression post-16, or with adequate information.

It is not only the employers of those with vocational skills who suggest the choices made at 14 are crucial. The Russell Group have issued guidance on what subjects students should be choosing at GCSE if they plan to attend one of their universities.¹⁵ By openly acknowledging that choices start at 14, and that these choices cast a shadow far past the age of 16, young people will be better prepared and more knowledgeable about the options that are on offer to them.

12. DfE (May 2011), 'Wolf Review of Vocational Education', available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wolf-review-of-vocational-education-government-response>, p.108

13. DfE (May 2013), available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/201104/Quarterly_Brief_NEET_Q1_2013_pdf.pdf

14. DfE, available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/englishbac/a0075975/the-english-baccalaureate>

15. Russell Group (2011), 'Informed Choices: A Russell Group guide to making decisions about post-16 education', p. 17.

The Nuffield Review has researched when young people actually start making choices about different pathways.¹⁶ This found that many young people had already decided whether they were going to continue at school past 16 (the then end of compulsory schooling) by the age of 14, and those who chose academic routes chose earlier than those who chose vocational routes. This research also looked at gender (with girls being found to make decisions earlier) and socio-economic background (which had little impact on the timing of decision making). Choices are being made by learners both explicitly and implicitly at the age of 14, and before. Understanding and embracing this reality is the best way to place learners at the heart of any system; ignoring it risks learners continuing down an unsuitable pathway, or missing out on opportunities and choices available to them.

A challenging time

There are many kinds of transitions happening between the ages of 14 and 19. Not only are learners starting to develop strengths and preferences in education at 14, but they are also developing as human beings. Adolescence is a notoriously difficult time for all. By making choices at 14, adolescent learners, battling for newly-found freedoms across their lives, are able to exercise some control over their education and training. This is not only welcome by young people who, after eight years of prescribed subjects, enjoy having a say over their learning, but is also believed to help improve engagement in education more generally.

Hilary Steadman produced research in 2003 that found 20% of 14-16 year-olds were 'disengaged' with education.¹⁷ We argue that learners who make real, informed choices about their education and training at 14 are better engaged with their progress through this transition system. Indeed, data shows that the highest

rates of unauthorised absenteeism and exclusion are at KS4, and it is typically regarded that it is at this age when many students become disengaged with the education system.¹⁸ Empowering learners through real choice is one route to countering this trend.

It has been found that more options and vocational pathways can help motivate disengaged learners. Kenneth Baker points to research by Sig Prais, which found that good vocational education gave incentives to the more practically-inclined to grasp core academic curriculum. His research looked at German students on pre-16 vocational courses; Prais found that they were more mathematically-able than English pupils of a similar age on academic courses.¹⁹

We have been told throughout this inquiry that giving learners choices empowers them to become more invested in their education, and can re-engage those who may have been previously disengaged. Learners need a system that is flexible, equal and allows them to flourish, whatever their background, strengths, and ambitions. We want to see a system that allows a degree of choice at 14, but maintains enough of the academic curriculum to allow those who wish to change pathway at 16 to do so, with minimal impact. From the evidence presented to us by the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, this appears to work in the curriculum design of University Technical Colleges. We also believe it is important to highlight the advantage available to learners in University Technical Colleges – almost an extra year of teaching time compared to those in maintained state schools because of longer school days.²⁰

16 Wright S, 'Young people's decision-making in 14-19 education and training: a review of the literature' The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, Briefing Paper 4 (November 2005), p. 35.

17 Tomlinson M, (October 2004), '14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform', p. 93.

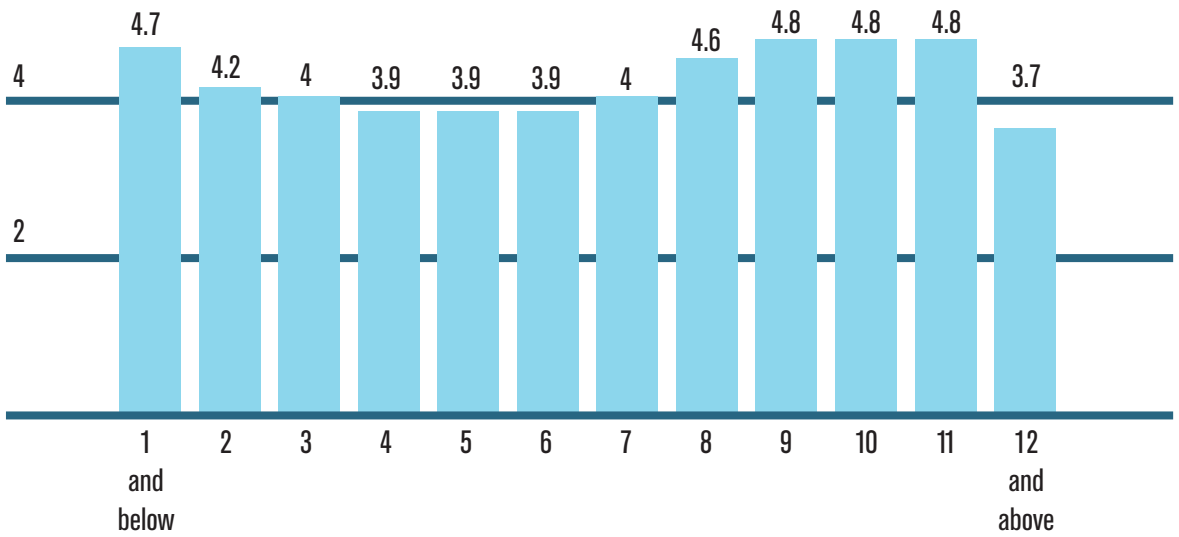
18 Chalabi M, (15 October 2013), 'Pupil absence on the rise', The Guardian. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/oct/15/pupil-absence-on-the-rise>.

19 Baker K et al, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), '14-18 a new vision for secondary education', p. 60.

20. Inquiry Evidence, Baker Dearing Trust

Pupil unauthorised absence rates

By school year group



Source: DfE

CASE STUDY: THE PRINCE'S TRUST

The Prince's Trust was established in 1976 by The Prince of Wales to help disadvantaged young people in the UK. In 2012, the Trust supported 55,801 young people through a variety of programmes designed to help them out of difficult circumstances and into further education, training or employment. The Prince's Trust works with a huge variety of young people coming from all walks of life, who need extra support. Primarily, the groups they work with are: unemployed young people, young people underachieving in education, those leaving care, and young offenders and ex-offenders.

The Trust offers a series of tailored support programmes. These range from 'xl clubs' which work with schools and community centres on practical projects designed to boost confidence, to the more intensive 'Fairbridge programme', which starts with a five day residential stay with a variety of follow-on programmes for more disengaged individuals.

The Skills Commission met with co-ordinators at the Prince's Trust and young people who have graduated from the Trust's programmes to discuss their experiences in the education system and where improvements could be made. The Commission's overwhelming impression from the session was the diversity of people that the Trust encounters. We spoke with young people who had been in care, had issues with addiction, were forced into marriages, and who came from abusive families, each with a different story to tell and with a unique set of needs.

Many of the young people had multiple challenges, such as coming from an abusive family and having undiagnosed special education needs. These young people struggled to keep-up in the class room, and did not have support from family, which other students might have. This led to disengagement and many felt as if they were labelled as 'trouble-makers' or 'lazy'.

What was clear from our session was that the lack of stability in their lives meant that for an education system to work for them it had to be flexible, allowing for exit and re-entry at different points. The current incentives that are in place at schools, such as league tables and funding, make it tough to accept students who are at a lower level than they should be.

They said they often felt let down by teachers who failed to understand their situations and that they felt what they were learning in school was not of practical use in everyday life. Some of their suggestions for improving the 14-19 education system included:

- More flexibility from providers
- Mentors for students with multiple needs
- Clear links from education to employment
- More training for teachers to manage young people with difficulties
- More lifeskills work in the classroom
- Earlier intervention in the case of suspected abuse

From 'age' to 'stage'

Currently, points of transfer are prescribed according to a learner's age. This is contrary to many other countries, where students only progress through to corresponding Key Stages when they have reached a certain level of attainment and are 'ready'. In these countries, repeating a learning year is commonplace. In England, the inclination is very much against this approach, too concerned, perhaps, by the brand of failure.

The Skills Commission believe that this deserves some rethinking. If we really want to ensure that the system is fit for its learners, we cannot expect that all learners achieve at the same rate. Indeed, there has been a plethora written about the disadvantages of 'summer babies' who statistically achieve lower marks than their peers, some of whom could be more than 11 months older.²¹ Different rates of development have an impact and those who take slightly longer to grasp concepts are often discouraged by lower grades, which cause significant damage to confidence and disengagement from the system.

Allowing students to progress at different paces (indeed also acknowledging the possibility of students overachieving and moving up levels to provide more challenging, appropriate curricula) is putting the learners' needs first. The Skills Commission would like to see some of these possibilities explored further, and suggests that the experiences of other nations are drawn upon.

21. Institute for Fiscal Studies (October 2009), 'The impact of month of birth on the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills throughout childhood'

3: A MID-TERM REVIEW OF REFORMS

In this chapter, we look at six key reforms to the 14-19 system that have been enacted since 2010, and measure them against our 'Values Consensus' framework outlined in chapter 1. This way, we look at reforms through the lens of a strong consensus, hoping to build on what has gone before, pointing out concerns where they exist, and praising where reforms are on target.

Over the first three and a half years of the Coalition, the education and training system has undergone significant reform. Some of this has been a continuation or expansion of what was there before – a movement towards greater freedoms for schools and mass-academicisation, for example.

However, much is brand new: new programmes of study, new funding formulae, curriculum reform, welfare reform bringing employers much closer to the education and training environment, new institutions such as University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools. Grouped together, these represent a substantial re-alignment of the educational and training landscape towards a world with greater freedoms, but with less tolerance of underachievement.

Throughout this inquiry, we were told that the Government is not on the right course to achieve the kind of 14-19 system outlined in chapter 1, to cater for the diverse range of learners described in chapter 2. Whilst successive governments have devolved more powers to the teaching profession, releasing providers of education and training from layers of control and bureaucracy (from the incorporation of colleges in 1993 to the Academies Programme and Free Schools) we have found that parts of central government continue to make the equivalent of clinical decisions in education policy, disengaged from the true nature of learners, society, and the economy.

In this chapter, we take reforms in turn, providing a brief overview, and outlining the concerns expressed to us by learners and employers. Some of these reforms are specific to one portion of the 14-19 system, or may impact both before and after this transition period. We recognise that in many cases these reforms are only just, or not even yet, embedded into the system.

It is clear that colleges, schools, training providers and employers do not want, or need, further widespread institutional or system reform. In the best interests of learners, all players in the system require stability. Keeping this in mind, we assess these reforms against our framework, asking:

- is each and every learner able to do what is right for them?
- do they achieve equity and fairness?
- do they ensure quality?
- do they enable transfer?
- do they create real choice?

A word on quality and rigour...

Despite all of the reform across the 14-19 system, the Coalition Government does not have an explicit 14-19 strategy. It does, however, frame its reforms within a drive for quality, particularly quality vocational qualifications, and academic rigour founded on a core knowledge.

The current Government's conceptual framework for educational and training reform has two strands – this one of rigour and excellence (owned by the DfE) and one of economic growth (owned by BIS). The Skills Commission praises this focus on rigour and excellence, but warns that an unsubtle understanding of excellence and rigour across a diverse and dynamic system of education and training risks placing the 14-19 system at odds with the growth agenda. This makes it vital that the DfE and BIS work even more closely together, and with employers. Rigour and excellence look very different between vocational and academic education, and the mechanisms for assessment and monitoring more different still.

We agree that a vocational course without an academic underpinning is unacceptable. A vocational course should be of high enough quality so that it doesn't close down further options, perhaps to A levels and Higher Education. A Higher Apprenticeship in Engineering, for example, could be the end result of a 14-19 pathway that began with quality vocational courses – as part of a mix from 14-16 – followed by A levels.

Reform 1: Funding

Much of the funding changes to the 14-19 system are focused on that portion handled by FE Colleges. The stability of funding for schools has, historically, placed them at a significant institutional advantage, but has created colleges that gain strength from adapting to changes over their history – the so called ‘Adaptive Layer’. The Commission hopes to see no further alterations or complications to the funding formulae for FE in the coming years.

Professor Wolf summarised that the (previous) funding mechanism for 16-19 education:

“...gives institutions strong incentives to steer students into courses they can pass easily. In addition, since most vocational courses are entirely teacher-assessed, pressures to reduce standards apply directly to a very high proportion of post-16 provision.”²⁴

We agree that the previous system of funding for 16-19 education – based on qualifications passed – may have discouraged institutions from developing and investing in ambitious vocational qualifications and work-based learning. Significantly, it is these more challenging qualifications – apprenticeships with a high degree of practical and work-based learning – that are most closely aligned to the Government’s growth and rebalancing agenda.

We questioned whether these funding reforms are enacted on the basis of fairness, equity, and their being in the interests of learners.

On the face of it, the Wolf Reforms to funding do not present explicit additional costs for Government. However, expanding the facilities and expertise at

colleges in order that they might provide more industry-standard facilities needed for high quality vocational courses, will require additional investment.²⁵ In a time of austerity, colleges cannot expect to increase enrolment on high-value courses such as engineering without greater investment in facilities, coming from Government and/or from industry partnerships. In short: realigning the focus towards high quality courses will not come simply through altering the funding formulae.

Any attempt to simplify, rationalise and level the funding mechanisms across the 14-19 system should be welcomed – simplicity and ease of use are crucial in aiming for a strong system. In her ‘Dynamic Nucleus’ report, Baroness Sharp speaks of “a funding and regulatory regime of immense complexity” and characterises Government reforms as an attempt to rationalise, liberalise, and simplify.²⁶ The differing funding mechanisms for schools and colleges have long been an anomaly in the post-16 system that the Skills Commission has sought to alter.

The movement towards funding learners will almost certainly simplify the system. However, the Skills Commission notes the introduction of new kinds of qualifications that are not being implemented in the spirit of simplicity, and are consequently adding bureaucratic burden to institutions.

For example, traineeships are a joint BIS-DfE training programme “with work experience, providing 16 to 23 year olds with skills and vital experience that employers are looking for. Employers are at the heart of traineeships, running the programme or offering high quality work experience in partnership with a training provider.”²⁷ We believe that traineeships are

24. DfE (May 2011), “Wolf Review of Vocational Education”, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wolf-review-of-vocational-education-government-response>,

25. Inquiry evidence, Association of Colleges

26. Baroness Sharp of Guildford (November 2011), ‘A Dynamic Nucleus: Colleges at the heart of local communities’

27. DfE (October 2013), available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funding-for-traineeship-scheme-announced>

indicative of an approach to policymaking that doesn't adequately take into account the nature of the 14-19 system, and the need to create fairness. It is likely that traineeships will be provided, in most cases, by Work Based Learning (WBL) Providers. However, many colleges will wish to engage, and the system needs to allow for this diversity of provision. Traineeships will be funded differently from 16-18 and from 19-23, creating a separate pot to which providers must apply. The Association of Colleges (AoC) is concerned that this system is not sustainable. In his article in *The Guardian*, Assistant Chief Executive of the AoC, Julian Gravatt, described how:

"There is genuine puzzlement about how traineeships add up and although there's a pragmatic college approach to get them started, this situation isn't sustainable. In the skills funding world, traineeships will be financed via a new reserved budget which takes us back to the past. In 2010 ministers merged budgets and allowed colleges flexibility to respond to demand and manage the cuts. Three years on we're in a world of multiple pots again: apprenticeships, traineeships, adult skills, employer ownership and loans."²⁸

We recommend that BIS and DfE work more closely together to ensure that complications around the funding of new programmes doesn't detract from other funding reforms that are moving away from the complexity that has dogged vocational training for decades.

There is significant risk that the new learner-based rather than qualification-based funding formula will create further disparities between pre- and post-16 and beyond, a significant barrier to a 14-19 system with equity and ease of transfer. The new formulae assume that £4,000 a year is sufficient for a full-time learner with core GCSE attainment. The AoC expressed concern that there had been no "independent assessment [as to] whether £4,000 is enough for a high quality full-time programme". Significantly, there is also a growing funding gap between pre-16 and post-16 education. Funding per full-time 16-18 year olds averages £4,645 in 2012-13. This compares to an estimated £5,620 per secondary school pupil aged 11-16.

CASE STUDY: LONDON COLLEGE OF BEAUTY THERAPY²⁹

The London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT) was established in 1995, and provides a variety of courses in beauty therapy, health and fitness, teacher training, and employability training. It also offers apprenticeships.

The delivery model was designed in consultation with learner needs and employer demand. The College is open all year round, six days a week, plus evenings. They have monthly, and sometimes weekly enrolment on all programmes, with flexible dates and times to suit learners. There are no term breaks, which leads to faster completion and fast entry into employment. Their average rate of progression into further training or employment stands at 90%.

This flexible delivery model came about as a direct result of employer demand, but is not without its challenges, challenges that have been compounded by recent funding changes. It is an example of the kind of employer-led delivery of skills training, much championed by Government, yet has been made significantly more complex. There are many 'unintended consequences' to these funding changes:

- Funding guidance is now based on an academic year of study, which does not reflect the kinds of delivery models at LCBT.
- There is a greatly reduced ability for learners across the 14-19 phase to choose short course provision; short courses around employability skills were much valued by LCBT learners, and employers.
- LCBT is unable to offer summer taster programmes to learners at age 16 before 1st August of each year, as the learner's funding allocation remains within the schools budget.
- An NVQ level 1, 2, and 3 in an FE College would take three academic years to complete, but at LCBT it only takes 15 months. A waiver to the limit of funding per learner has been removed, delaying progression.
- As a 'hybrid college', LCBT is placed on the 'profile' payment scheme, much more suited to apprenticeship delivery rather than the short course accelerated programmes at LCBT.

In short, the College is concerned that changes will limit choice for learners, and flexibility to engage in a wider breadth of programmes that LCBT could otherwise offer, to suit individual learners.

Reform 2: Raising the participation age

Since September 2013, all young people aged 17 have been required to be in some kind of education and training. The participation age will be raised again to 18 in 2015. On its website, the DfE makes clear that:

“This does not necessarily mean staying in school; young people have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through:

- *full-time study in a school, college or with a training provider*
- *full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time education or training*
- *an apprenticeship*³⁰

In their analysis, the DfE immediately point learners away from the schools sector, towards the diversity of options available to them post-16. However, we continually heard how the system itself makes those other options at 16 (besides staying in school and studying A levels) a more complex and less intuitive route. This move – to raise the participation age – strengthens the argument for a more holistic and ‘system’ approach to a 14-19 phase, rather than retaining the 14-16 and 16-19 split that pervades so much policy (and the approach of the DfE³¹). This remains true regardless of whether a learner makes a choice to shift institution at 14 or 16 – the stated aim must be for clear lines of sight from whatever age, with the understanding that other users of the system (either additional training, higher education, or employment) will receive a cohort of diverse individuals at 19.

Local Authorities are key players in this, mandated by statute (the 2008 Education and Skills Act) to provide targeted support to ‘vulnerable’ young people to ensure that they continue to be engaged in worthwhile training post 16.³² It was argued to us, however, that 16 may

be too late for some vulnerable learners to secure the right kind of training that is most likely to connect to worthwhile future training or employment.

There is no doubt that the loss of the Connexions Service means that the quality of Local Authority tracking of young people who have dropped out, or are in danger of doing so, is highly variable. While all providers – schools, colleges, and WBL providers – are involved in helping to identify and advise these young people, there is only a limited structure of positive action to ensure that non-participating young people are ‘found’ and encouraged to re-engage. While the Government’s commitment to this policy is laudable, more work needs to be done to ensure its implementation is successful and uniform across the country.

Reform 3: Content and qualifications

Qualifications often become a Government’s focus of reform in education and training. The Coalition Government is no exception. It is essential that we ensure that the qualifications offered are aligned to the needs of further and higher education providers, and employers, covering the varying skills and ambitions of young people. However, developing the correct suite of qualifications won’t fully overcome other major barriers to adequate skills provision in England, such as enough employers engaged in training, or lack of ‘employability’ skills in young people entering the labour market (something that remains very difficult to adequately assess through qualifications, and has historically been heavily biased towards family and educational privilege).

When the qualification itself is seen as more credible for the end user (a dynamic quality; more ‘fit for purpose’, as we discuss in chapter 1), vocational education will be seen as an equally valuable route for those learners for whom it is most suited. The ‘user’ in this case is not only the learner, but their destination – employment or further study in either further or higher education.

30. <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/rpa>

31. Inquiry evidence, DfE

32. DfE (March 2013), available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/rpa/g00222993/stat-guide-young-people-edu-employ-train>

The risk with the Wolf approach to qualifications reform – incentivising young people to take the most ‘valuable’ of vocational qualifications – is that variety in skills training may become stripped out of the qualifications system. However, the qualifications system need not be the only mechanism for introducing adequate skills provision into schools and training providers; employer engagement could be a much stronger mechanism.

Much of the Wolf Report aims for a 14-19 system that corresponds to our values outlined in chapter 1. However, Professor Wolf does not see the age of 14 as the most suitable point of choice, as we have argued in chapter 2. She says:

“The recommendations here are designed to deliver the most important skills which every young person needs for progression, and to make them central to every vocational programme. That means that 14-16 year olds all need to follow a broad education and avoid premature specialisation. It means that any young people who reach the end of Key Stage 4 with weak mathematics and English should continue with them.”³³

Professor Wolf reasserted this belief in giving evidence to this inquiry. Whilst we support the DfE’s decision to require all students under the age of 19 who do not have a GCSE A* - C in Mathematics to be required to undertake further study, we challenge the assertion that the age of 14 is a ‘premature specialisation’. We cite the 14-19 UTC and Studio School models as evidence that the Government, too, sees value in a degree of choice at 14 (see chapter 2). The UTC and Studio School models are beginning to prove that different kinds of pedagogies and a more practical vocational focus at 14 can enhance the attainment in core academic subjects, rather than detract from them. A strong practical component of learning is a great enabler of academic success for many learners from 14-16.

Many contributors to this inquiry told us that the time allocated to vocational and technical provision at Key Stage 4 is too limited. While we understand the Government’s desire to ensure all young people undertake a core curriculum, we believe more space should be allocated to a broader range of pedagogical styles. Importantly, evidence submitted to this inquiry has expressed the concern that young people who decide to pursue Tech-levels post-16 will not have undergone sufficient education and training in relevant courses at Key Stage 4.

Reform 4: Information, Advice, and Guidance, and work experience

Before the 2010 Election, the Skills Commission published a report into Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG), and concluded that “IAG is not accessible and it is often not of a high quality” and “by making maximum use of new technologies, IAG services can link people considering careers with those that have experience of them”.³⁴ We also recommended that the Government should place a statutory duty upon learning providers to ensure IAG support for all learners to 18.

This recommendation was accepted and in September 2013, Ofsted completed a review of Information, Advice, and Guidance provision. The subsequent report, the first since schools were given the legal responsibility to provide such services themselves for 14-16 year olds, concluded that:

“Three quarters of the schools visited for the survey were not implementing their duty to provide impartial careers advice effectively. The survey also finds that guidance for schools on careers advice is not explicit, the National Careers Service is not promoted well enough and there is a lack of employer engagement in schools... Very few of the schools visited knew how to provide a

33. DfE (May 2011), Wolf Review of Vocational Education, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wolf-review-of-vocational-education-government-response>, p.141

34. Skills Commission (2008), available at <http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/fckimages/Inspiration%20and%20Aspiration.pdf>

service effectively or had the skills and expertise needed to provide a comprehensive service... The report findings show schools were not working well enough with employers to provide students with direct experience of the world of work in order to help broaden their minds about realistic employment opportunities in their local area... Vocational training and apprenticeships were rarely promoted effectively, especially in schools with sixth forms. Instead, the A Level route remained the 'gold-standard' for young people, their parents and teachers."³⁵

Linked to IAG, work experience provision is a further cause of concern for the Commission. There are pockets of strong employer engagement in the 14-19 system, across providers (not simply where they are able to shape the curriculum, such as at UTCs). However, this is happening in spite of, not because of a system designed with this in mind. Enabling real choice, and making sure that learners see clear paths of progression to employment, would come through careers advice and work experience, with engagement from employers.

This is cause for serious concern, and reflects views expressed during this inquiry (most of which was carried out before the Ofsted report was published). Whilst the Skills Commission believe that learning providers should have the duty, in law, to provide IAG services, we also envisage Government as having a crucial role and responsibility in ensuring quality of provision, access to trained and independent advisors, and other models of delivery if appropriate. We are in a situation where the IAG for adults is more comprehensive than it has ever been (the National Careers Service received high praise in our evidence sessions), yet the provision for young people in the 14-19 system remains inadequate. There is clear evidence that strong IAG is a critical part of enabling real choice for learners. This requires urgent attention by Government, and we make recommendations to that effect in chapter 4.

CASE STUDY: INTERSERVE³⁶

Interserve provides support and construction services for companies operating in the public and private sectors in the UK and internationally. They offer advice, design, construction, equipment and facilities management services for society's infrastructure. Interserve is based in the UK and is in the FTSE 250 index. It has revenue of £2.3 billion and a workforce of nearly 50,000 people worldwide.

Concerned about mounting environmental issues, social challenges, and economic pressures that are impacting on businesses, Interserve launched a SustainAbilities programme to manage risks and promote growth and opportunities in a responsible manner. Part of their plan to ensure growth is to provide skills and opportunities to young people. By 2014 they plan to provide 1,000 school placements annually, and by 2018 they aim to double the number of apprenticeships, traineeships and graduate training opportunities.

An example of their work engaging young people, Interserve recently held a programme of events at Kingsbury School and Sports College in Erdington. Here, they worked to forge closer links between education and employment by cancelling the normal school timetable for a day to participate in a range of employability and citizenship skills activities.

This included some students visiting a local Jaguar Land Rover's new Engine Manufacturing Centre at the i54 South Staffordshire business park near Wolverhampton, currently being built by Interserve, where they toured the site and heard about the diverse range of jobs available on such a project. Other students learnt business skills through participating in a trading game based on the BP oil business. By mimicking oil trading, they learnt the basics of shares trading and how world events and news can impact prices.

Head teacher of Kingsbury School and Sports College in Erdington, Catherine O'Driscoll said: *"The event provided a range of fantastic opportunities for Kingsbury students to learn about industry, business and the world of work. It is only through the commitment of companies such as Interserve that schools are able to provide the breadth of careers advice and experience to students while at school. By meeting people 'on the job' and discussing pathways through industry, students see the wide variety of opportunities open to them as future employees."*

Reform 5: Institutional Diversity – reforms inside and outside DfE

The Commission welcomes institutional diversity in the 14-19 landscape through Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges (and soon Career Colleges). The ability of ‘outstanding’ FE Colleges to recruit at 14 will also help to provide the widest range of options to learners. However, the interplay between these new institutions and current provision – how they fit into a system – will be what dictates their success or failure. Learners must be able to move across institutions into what is ‘right’ for them, without affecting the quality of provision, or the financial sustainability of either institution.

Partly due to funding, we have heard instances of schools ‘holding on’ to learners, strongly reluctant to encourage alternative provision, even if moving institution were clearly in the best interests of the learner. This is worrying; a perverse incentive that is proving difficult to eradicate from the system.

Essentially, this is a kind of ‘unregulated competition’ between providers. Over 3,000 schools have now become ‘converter academies’, free of local authority control. A significant majority of these are secondary schools. Competition is inevitable, and ultimately desirable if it drives up standards. However, competition needs to be regulated, and regulated locally in partnership with employers. Collaboration must be the guiding principle of these schools, not isolationism, and local partnerships should be encouraged, with a variety of stakeholders. We are interested in the potential of Local Enterprise Partnerships to design and drive a fruitful dialogue between providers through their local economic plans, but the makeup of these bodies,

their strength, power, and quality, remains unknown. We note the reestablishment of 14-19 teams in many local authorities and believe this reflects the growing importance of localities in setting local educational strategies.

Reform 6: Apprenticeships³⁷

In October 2013, the Government published its implementation plan for apprenticeships, outlining how it is “*freeing the price of training from public control and having it delivered between employers and providers [to] help prioritise learning that delivers the most value*”.³⁸

From a Skills Commission perspective, the most important aspect of apprenticeships is their relative absence from the English 14-19 system. Apprentices at ages 16 to 18 are currently only 8% of the cohort and this is not expanding at the expected rate.³⁹

There remains too much variation in the quality of apprenticeship provision across the cohort, an issue raised by Professor Wolf, amongst others. However, many employers are already providing high quality apprenticeships, and don’t wish to see existing provision – that is truly employer-led – unable to operate in a post-Richards world. The focus should be on improving current frameworks and streamlining assessment, not simply wiping away all that was there before (and de-valuing a lot of high-quality provision that produces exceptional apprentices).

37. At the time of writing, we await the Government’s decision on the funding of apprenticeships, a key part of their successful implementation. Whilst funding through the PAYE system appears most likely, we have registered significant opposition to this from employers of all sizes. Understanding the behaviours of employers is crucial – however complex the system ‘back of house’ needs to be, the interface for employers must be totally intuitive, and designed (if possible) with as broad a contingent of employer types and sizes as possible.

38. DfE / BIS (November 2013), ‘Richards Review of apprenticeships’ available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-richard-review-of-apprenticeships>

39. http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/Statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current/ (via FE Week)

There is a danger that such widespread reform will focus on all age apprenticeships at the expense of the necessary focus on apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds, apprentices, who are still in the most formative years of their education and training development. The crucial success measure around apprenticeships will be greater pull (from employers) as well as push (from learners) in the system. Making employers (of all sizes) understand that investing in their current and future workforce is an essential expenditure. Wiping away previously successful frameworks may not help this.

The Skills Commission also believes that the true nature, quality and value of Higher Apprenticeships is not yet understood by some important players in the system, including Government. A pathway to a Higher Apprenticeship in engineering (more akin to a sandwich degree or sponsored undergraduate placement than a 16-18 apprenticeship) is not yet fully embedded in the system from 14, and should be better understood as a destination comparable to higher education. Moreover, the Higher Apprenticeship is an excellent example of the kind of HE programme of study that should come at the end of a 14-19 pathway containing both academic and vocational provision.

4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

System-wide, structural education reform is not wanted by the sector. However, we do see significant barriers to achieving the system for 14 to 19 year olds as required by society and the economy, and deserved by learners.

Many of the recommendations contained in this chapter require immediate attention such as around information, advice, and guidance. Others, however, require a long-term realignment of attitudes, or approaches.

Comparing the 'Values Consensus' to a number of the current practices in the 14-19 system, we have found a number of gaps and suggest below how these can be overcome to ensure that future policy meets the values.

Recommendation 1

The Department for Education should recognise a '14-19 system' of education and training in England.

Recommendation 2

The Department for Education should examine how to spark a cultural change in education and training in England towards greater acceptance of learners repeating a learning year.

The 14-19 system should instil in learners a love of learning that stays with them through life. This is about nurturing success, which comes through young people completing programmes to which they are suited, within institutions of quality.

Having researched an inquiry on the system for those aged between 14 and 19, our conclusions no longer tally with the idea of 'age brackets', but rather 'stages of education and training'. This 'upper secondary' stage is where transitions happen, and is utterly crucial in shaping learners' future attitudes to work, education, and other human beings. Therefore, if a learner at 14 would benefit from waiting a year before entering into this phase, this should be identified and encouraged.

We would like to see the debate shift from 'age' to 'stage'. The current system for 14-19 education sees learners' progress year on year, regardless of their levels of attainment. We recommend a loosening up of these entrenched attitudes allowing learners to repeat learning years, progressing when they are ready, as individuals, to do so.

Recommendation 3

The Department for Education must immediately acknowledge the crisis in information, advice, and guidance, and undertake a full review of provision. A range of sources must be available to all learners before the age of 14, their parents, carers and guardians, alongside access to trained advisors.

Real choice for all learners is firstly about creating the range of options within the system to cater for the diversity of learners. However, these options are irrelevant if young people and those who guide them are not given adequate information about the options available, or not advised on what is right for each learner.

Teachers are not trained to offer employment advice, and cannot be expected to understand what all careers entail, or even recognise how a particular aptitude might translate into a perfect career option. However, since April 2012, schools have been required to provide information, advice, and guidance on future careers. As the recent Ofsted report made clear, this is not yet working, and Government must intervene before more learners leave this transition phase with scant clear knowledge from their educational provider about how their skills might translate into worthwhile employment.

Recommendation 4

Employers and employer bodies should make a commitment to placing engagement in education and training at the top of their organisational agendas. The Department for Education should consider how to incentivise schools to engage with employers more systematically and work with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and sector bodies to introduce ‘associate governors’ to support greater employer engagement in the education and training sector. They should also consider more programmes of ‘two-way work experience’.

There are some very strong examples of best practice in the way in which employers engage in this part of our system. From providing worthwhile work experience placements, to engaging directly with schools on curriculum content or special projects, many employers are once again at the heart of our education and training system. However, we are a long way from this being the norm or, looking one stage further, from all employers seeing the responsibility they share in training our workforce.

We understand that the Education and Training Foundation is currently developing a programme of two-way work experience between employers and teachers. We heard of further examples of this during our inquiry and see it as one of the best ways to shrink the knowledge gap between teachers and the world of work. One such example was the idea of ‘associate governors’ of both colleges and schools, where a long-term, formal relationship between providers and employers is established at the level of the governing body. We hope to see the Department for Education, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, and representative bodies for colleges encourage this model in future.

Employers and employer bodies such as trade associations are keen to become more engaged with the education and training sector and their learners – but many find it difficult to do so. It is vital that schools and colleges accept the need for employer engagement and accept their responsibility for helping make it happen.

Recommendation 5

All compensatory support mechanisms should be available to all institutions providing 14-19 education and training, and should follow the learner across the system. Ofsted should prioritise publishing analysis of the use of compensatory support, to ensure that it is targeted effectively.

The Commission welcomes the provision of free school meals for disadvantaged learners in institutions of further education. This has been a long-standing inequality in the system and we applaud the Association of Colleges and others for their successful campaign. There remain compensatory support packages, such as the pupil premium, that are not available to all institutions, and we recommend these inequities be ironed out. We also heard anecdotal evidence of compensatory support simply adding to an institution's overall financial health, rather than being targeted specifically to those learners for whom it is allocated. We understand that Ofsted is monitoring this practice, and we request that their analysis be published as soon as possible.

The Commission is interested in the ways in which other institutions, such as employers, measure the 'potential' of individuals. This does not mean we believe that there is a single indicator for 'potential'; indeed, the best system would include a mentor of some kind for every learner who regularly reviews progress with the individual. This, when well done, does seek to ensure the student is on the most appropriate course, or understands possible routes to higher education, or immediately into a career. However, we do believe that a more systematic approach to analysing how aptitudes link to future careers would be useful, and we encourage such research.

Recommendation 6

All institutions providing vocational and technical provision should be required to become accredited and licensed by 2016. The Skills Funding Agency should consider how this could be implemented.

Much of our analysis focused on reaching a 'system' for 14 to 19 year olds that is fair to institutions, with unevenness ironed out, creating an equal playing field. With increased provider diversity, and with FE colleges now able to recruit at 14, it is important to get the regulatory architecture right.

Whilst we do not present a case for how this regulatory architecture should operate, we do recommend that it be founded on principles of equity and fairness.

Teaching is perhaps the most important part of achieving quality in providers. It is perhaps more important still in the vocational education sector, and we believe measures beyond Ofsted inspections and lists of worthwhile qualifications are required to ensure rigour and excellence in the vocational sector. We suggest that the DfE should examine how to accredit and license technical and vocational provision on an institutional basis. This will also, we hope, rid the sector of unskilled teachers (and institutions) offering provision for which they are not adequately trained or indeed, for which they do not have adequate and up-to-date facilities.

Recommendation 7

All those teaching in institutions receiving Government funding across the 14-19 system should be appropriately qualified. We suggest this is achieved within two years.

We also add our voice to the call for qualified teachers across all institutions receiving Government funding, but our approach to this, as above, is about diversity. It is a great challenge to establish a single teaching qualification for all across education and training that takes into account all the various kinds of people who teach in the vocational sector, and teach well. The current debate around qualified teachers appears to us ‘exclusive’.

We would like the debate to be ‘inclusive’, finding diverse routes into the profession for all who are capable and experienced, and therefore can access to the many benefits that come from a professionalised workforce in education and training.

Recommendation 8

The Department for Education should coordinate discussions with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Communities and Local Government on how to empower local partnerships to monitor competition between providers at a local level and drive collaboration. Where appropriate, this could include the Local Enterprise Partnerships.

In chapter 3, we praised institutional diversity, but warned of the risk of inter-provider competition that wasn’t in the best interests of learners. In that section we looked to Local Enterprise Partnerships – a new, untested player in the skills and training landscape – to monitor this competition. Here, we make a recommendation to the DfE, and to those bodies encouraging institutional diversity, such as the Baker Dearing Trust, to make sure that local systems are designed and steered in the best interests of all learners as well as the local economy.

It remains a significant challenge, with funding following the learner, to rid the system of the incentives that encourage institutions to hold on to learners. It is our hope that a shift in focus for Ofsted (see below), alongside some kind of local monitoring of inter-provider competition at a local level will see the system move away from this kind of behaviour.

Recommendation 9

Ofsted should develop new collective and collaborative performance measures, and consider whether providers should only be judged 'outstanding' if they have supported improvement in other providers, or at a system level. League tables should give priority to destination data of progress, including employment and value added. They should also allow for the sharing of an individual's destination score between institutions if both can measure their contribution to a learner's success.

When talking of 'measurement' across a dynamic system, inevitable barriers will appear when the achievement of a young person reflects the combination of institutions they attended. League tables should be sophisticated enough to reflect this as one of the main tools for learners looking to make choices about institutions.⁴⁰

In many ways, we welcome the direction of travel by Ofsted. The Commission fully supports Ofsted's introduction of 14-19 surveys, designed to evaluate the overall educational outcomes in a locality (including trends in NEETs and wider socio-economic data). The Commission urges the Government to support this development and ensure it is rolled-out across the country. In addition, the Commission recommends that thematic reviews are incorporated into 14-19 surveys, including themes such as progression through educational pathways, mathematics teaching in colleges, and IAG.

Recommendation 10

The expected standard of reaching a 'pass' at GCSE Mathematics and English should be contingent upon passing a core functional component of the examination. The Department for Education should also seriously consider splitting GCSE Mathematics into "Functional Mathematics" and "Pure Mathematics". The Association of Colleges, the 157 Group, and the Institute for Learning should undertake a review of the teaching of mathematics in colleges.

There is clear consensus, not least amongst employers, that the skills and capability of learners should include:

- Competence in the functional skills of numeracy and literacy
- Clear evidence through qualifications of their learning ability and achievements
- Personal awareness and a positive attitude about themselves
- Good communication and relations with others

40. At the time of writing, final discussions were taking place around the reinvigoration of KS5 League Tables, and we hope to see much greater use of destination data in the final outcomes.

The current system is far too focused on ability through static measures of quality (one single qualification, as discussed), and has the wrong focus on English and mathematics, rather than on functional skills. We welcome an increased amount of functional skills in the mathematics GCSE, but would like to see much more of this in the English GCSE. In fact, we believe this skillset to be so crucial to the future health of the economy, that we believe a ‘pass’ at GCSE level in English and Mathematics should be contingent upon a pass in this area of the examination.

Furthermore, GCSE English and Mathematics have not consistently given employers an adequate indication of literacy and numeracy skills, and we remain to be convinced that reforms to these programmes will move enough in the right direction. We have also recognised a case that the new GCSE Mathematics should be split into “Functional Mathematics” and “Pure Mathematics”.

The quality of mathematics teaching in the further education sector will become, with changes to the funding formulae and the raising of the participation age, a crucial element in the system if we are to achieve success. Therefore, we encourage all players in the system to consider the teaching of mathematics to be a new strategic priority.

Recommendation 11

The Department for Education should provide schools with greater freedoms to allocate time 14-16 year olds can spend on technical and vocational qualifications and training.

Recommendation 12

The Department for Education must give greater public support to the importance and value of quality vocational education and its routes to employment, higher education, and a prosperous economy.

Recommendation 13

The Department for Education, working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, should look, within the overall context of the recent Apprenticeship Implementation Plan, at specific measures to ensure focus on, and expansion of, apprenticeships at ages 16-18. The DfE should also reintroduce the Young Apprenticeship programme.

Additionally, the Commission believes that a greater amount of technical pedagogy within schools would be of great help in achieving higher standards of functional numeracy for particular kinds of learners. This will not come about unless the Department for Education reconsiders the amount of time allocated for 14-16 year olds to spend on technical and vocational qualifications and training. This must also be accompanied by a greater recognition of the importance of high quality vocational education, underpinned by academic rigour, to our economic prosperity. We also join Dominic Raab MP and others in the call to reintroduce the Young Apprenticeship programme, a real success story in encouraging disengaged learners.

APPENDIX: WHERE ARE THE LEARNERS?

Figure one: Key statistics based on the final 2011 and provisional 2012 estimates⁴¹

| | 16 | | 17 | | 18 | | 16-18 | |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | End 2011 | End 2012 | End 2011 | End 2012 | End 2011 | End 2012 | End 2011 | End 2012 |
| Full-time Education | 83.2% | 82.8% | 72.8% | 73.5% | 50.3% | 46.0% | 68.6% | 67.2% |
| Part-time Education | 4.9% | 5.2% | 5.8% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 6.0% | 5.5% | 5.8% |
| Work-based Learning | 3.6% | 3.2% | 6.0% | 6.0% | 7.0% | 7.5% | 5.5% | 5.6% |
| Education and WBL | 91.4% | 91.0% | 84.3% | 85.2% | 62.7% | 59.1% | 79.3% | 78.2% |
| Education and Training | 93.4% | 93.1% | 87.7% | 88.6% | 69.1% | 67.3% | 83.3% | 82.8% |
| NEET | 5.5% | 5.8% | 8.5% | 7.3% | 15.3% | 15.5% | 9.8% | 9.6% |

Figure two: Participation in full-time and part-time education at age 16 by institution type⁴²

| Age 16 | Full-time Education | | | Part-time Education | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change |
| State-funded schools | 34.70% | 35.10% | 0.4 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0 |
| Independent schools | 6.30% | 6.30% | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0 |
| Sixth form colleges | 11.50% | 11.50% | 0 | 0.10% | 0.10% | 0 |
| General FE, tertiary and specialist colleges | 30.60% | 29.90% | -0.7 | 4.60% | 5.00% | 0.4 |
| Higher education institutions | 0.20% | 0.10% | 0 | 0.20% | 0.10% | -0.1 |
| Total | 83.20% | 82.80% | -0.3 | 4.90% | 5.20% | 0.3 |

41. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR__end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf42. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR__end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf

Figure three: Participation in full-time and part-time education at age 17 by institution type⁴³

| Age 17 | Full-time Education | | | Part-time Education | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change |
| State-funded schools | 27.80% | 28.70% | 0.9 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0 |
| Independent schools | 5.90% | 6.00% | 0.1 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0 |
| Sixth form colleges | 9.70% | 10.10% | 0.4 | 0.40% | 0.30% | -0.1 |
| General FE, tertiary and specialist colleges | 28.80% | 28.10% | -0.6 | 5.00% | 5.50% | 0.5% |
| Higher education institutions | 0.70% | 0.60% | -0.1 | 0.40% | 0.30% | -0.1 |
| Total | 72.80% | 73.50% | 0.7 | 5.80% | 6.00% | 0.2 |

Figure four: Participation in full-time and part-time education at age 18 by institution type⁴⁴

| Age 18 | Full-time Education | | | Part-time Education | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change | End 2011 | End 2012 (prov) | Annual change |
| State-funded schools | 3.70% | 3.90% | 0.2 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0 |
| Independent schools | 1.00% | 1.10% | 0 | 0.00% | 0.10% | 0 |
| Sixth form colleges | 1.60% | 1.80% | 0.1 | 0.20% | 0.20% | 0 |
| General FE, tertiary and specialist colleges | 16.90% | 16.10% | -0.8 | 5.00% | 5.50% | 0.4% |
| Higher education institutions | 27.10% | 23.20% | -3.9 | 0.40% | 0.30% | -0.2 |
| Total | 50.30% | 46.00% | -4.3 | 5.70% | 6.00% | 0.3 |

43. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR__end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf

44. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR__end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf

THE SKILLS COMMISSION

The Skills Commission is a group of leading experts and opinion formers from the education and skills sector that carries out research and makes recommendations for skills policy reform. Recent inquiries have explored intervention, specialisation in FE, Information, Advice, and Guidance services, apprenticeships, and teacher training in vocational education.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
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| <u>AoC</u> | <u>Association of Colleges</u> |
| <u>BIS</u> | <u>Department for Business, Innovation and Skills</u> |
| <u>DfE</u> | <u>Department for Education</u> |
| <u>EFA</u> | <u>Education Funding Agency</u> |
| <u>FE</u> | <u>Further Education</u> |
| <u>IAG</u> | <u>Information, Advice, and Guidance</u> |
| <u>LEA</u> | <u>Local Education Authority</u> |
| <u>LEPs</u> | <u>Local Enterprise Partnerships</u> |
| <u>NEET</u> | <u>Not in Employment, Education or Training</u> |
| <u>RPA</u> | <u>Raising the Participation Age</u> |
| <u>SFA</u> | <u>Skills Funding Agency</u> |
| <u>UKCES</u> | <u>UK Commission for Employment and Skills</u> |
| <u>UTCs</u> | <u>University Technical Colleges</u> |
| <u>WBL</u> | <u>Work-based Learning</u> |

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The Skills Commission is powered by Policy Connect, the think tank that works with parliamentarians, business and the public sector to help improve policy in health, education and skills, sustainability, design and manufacturing.

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