

Department for Education and Skills Research Conference 2003

*Learning by Comparison:
International Experiences in Education and Training*

A Selection of Papers

DfES Research Conference 2003

The Department for Education and Skills held its third research conference on 5th December 2003 at the Institution of Civil Engineers, London.

Richard Bartholomew, Chief Research Officer at the DfES, introduced the day and the theme of the conference - international comparisons. The two keynote speakers showed how important this area is, with Andreas Schleicher, from the OECD, describing work to benchmark the performance of education systems and Clyde Hertzman, from the University of British Columbia, describing research in Canada on early child development.

The main part of the day was spent in a series of 10 seminars which covered a wide range of topics, each looking at the theme from a different angle, and covering all of the main DfES policy areas from early years to lifelong learning.

The conference was attended by 250 delegates from universities and colleges, research bodies, local authorities, the LSC and other government departments. The conference was an ideal opportunity for policy makers, practitioners and researchers to share ideas, knowledge and views to provide government with the information it needs.

Contents

The effects of selective education in Northern Ireland.....	4
A 'culture of evaluation' for French education	32
The Swedish school system and recent trends in Swedish educational policy	37
Approaches to VET: apprenticeship, college or integrated options	47
Three ideas of higher education: implications for policy and practice	57
Gender equity in Commonwealth higher education: emerging themes	70
APEL in Europe: Radical challenges to the idea of a university.....	85
Trans-national, private and for-profit education.....	95
The employability of graduates: cross-country comparisons	107
Building school efficacy	124
Keynote Speakers	137
Abstracts: Workshops	140

The effects of selective education in Northern Ireland

Tony Gallagher, Queen's University Belfast

Abstract

Northern Ireland has retained a selective system of post-primary education in which students are divided into grammar and secondary schools on the basis of tests taken at the end of their primary education. Between 1998 and 2000, a major research project was carried out into the effects of the selective arrangements. Following publication, a review body was established, and its report a year later recommended the abolition of selection at age 11. Following a consultation report on the review body's recommendations, published in October 2002, a group of educationalists were asked to consider specific options for the future. This body was due to report in November 2003.

This paper outlines the results of research into the effects of the selective system, the rationale behind the review body's recommendations, the consultation strategy adopted by the Department of Education, and the main findings. The research had highlighted the divisive impact of the selective system, a pattern that was evident also in the responses to the consultation. The paper also observes the lack of any clear consensus on the way forward.

Introduction

When universal, free post-primary education was established in the UK after the Second World War, the model adopted in most areas involved a selective system of grammar and secondary schools. The rationale for this was provided by a series of official reports from the 1920s onward (Hadow Report, 1926; Spens Report, 1938; Norwood Report, 1943; White Paper on Educational Reconstruction, 1943). Entry to the academic curriculum provided by grammar schools was based on a transfer procedure, normally involving performance on attainment and/or intelligence tests (McClelland 1942). In the 1960s, England and Wales began to shift towards a system of comprehensive schools.

The shift was based on a range of factors, including questions about the appropriateness of selection tests generally, and intelligence tests in particular (Gordon 1980; Salter and Tapper 1981; Vernon 1958, 1960). The extent to which the selective system provided equality of opportunity and participation was also questioned (Floud, Halsey and Martin 1956; Douglas 1964). Moreover, the Labour party was committed to a comprehensive system on the grounds that it was fairer for all pupils (Reynolds and Sullivan 1987; Barber 1996).

Primary education in Northern Ireland covers pupils aged 5–11 in seven year groups (Years 1–7). The compulsory period of post-primary education runs from Years 8 to 12, and some schools offer two years of post-compulsory study. It should be noted also that education in Northern Ireland is denominationally divided: with a local authority school system taking mainly Protestant pupils; a separate system of Catholic-managed primary, secondary and grammar schools; and a small sector (5% of the total pupil population) of religiously integrated primary and secondary schools. Although about 90% of pupils are directly affected by the selective arrangements, there is a small area in which delayed selection at age 14 years operates, and a small number of all-ability comprehensive schools.

Selection in Northern Ireland

Unlike the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland retained the selective system of grammar and secondary schools. Various changes were made to aspects of the system over time (ACE 1955, 1960), and research evidence was available on the workings of the system (Wrigley 1953; Cave 1967; Wilson 1969, 1982, 1985, 1987). Following a report by the Northern Ireland Advisory Council on Education (Burgess 1973), the then Labour government began to move towards a non-selective system, until 1979 and the election of a Conservative government.

In the mid-1980s, a major research project on the selective system in Northern Ireland was undertaken by the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research. Reports were published on:

- the impact of selection on the educational system (Wilson 1986)
- the views of principals and teachers in primary schools (Sutherland and Gallagher 1986)
- the consequences of selection for pupils awarded the middle-band on the transfer tests (Sutherland and Gallagher 1987)
- the predictive efficiency of the transfer tests and procedure (Gallagher 1988)
- curriculum differences between primary schools in selective and non-selective areas (Teare and Sutherland 1988).

Throughout this period, pupils awarded the top grade on the transfer tests were entitled to non-fee-paying places in grammar schools. In years when there was a middle-band grade, pupils who obtained that grade were entitled to a non-fee-paying place in a grammar school if they found a school willing to accept them. Other pupils could obtain grammar school places only as fee-payers, although there was a notional cap on the proportion of fee-payers. Over-all, quotas were placed on the permitted intakes of grammar schools. Research evidence on this point highlighted the mediating effect of social background on pupils' transfer grade and location in the selective system, the impact of the transfer tests on the primary curriculum and the relatively limited impact of fee-paying in schools under Catholic management. In addition, the practice of treating girls and boys as separate populations for the assignment of transfer grades was discontinued at the end of the 1980s, following a court case brought on equal opportunities grounds (Gallagher 1989).

Selection and education reforms

The Education Reform Order (1989) established a statutory curriculum, devolved financial and managerial responsibility to schools, provided the basis for parental choice and changed school funding to a per capita basis. There were changes also to the selective arrangements. Attainment tests in English, mathematics and science replaced verbal reasoning tests for the assignment of transfer grades. The top 20% of the cohort were given A grades for test performance, the next 10% Bs, the next 10% Cs, and the rest Ds. Later, the B and C grades were subdivided into B1, B2, C1 and C2 grades, each comprising 5% of the cohort.

The award of any transfer grade did not guarantee a grammar school place, but only grammar schools were entitled to use transfer grades for selection, and they had to take higher-grade pupils in preference to lower-grade pupils. Intake quotas for grammar schools were removed in favour of open enrolment, where all schools are obliged to accept pupils up to their physical

capacity. The option of fee-paying was removed, but it was possible to circumvent the main entry system to grammar schools by seeking entry to a boarding department, or by seeking entry after Year 8.

Further evidence on the operation of the system emerged at this time. Sutherland, Johnston and Gardner (1996) noted the transfer test's effects on the primary curriculum, including time spent on the tests rather than teaching, a neglect of continuous writing (not assessed by the tests), less able pupils rushed through the entire primary curriculum, and the omission or limitation of practical work in mathematics and science. This theme has been identified also in the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) School Improvement Programme (1998). Evidence from the DENI Research and Statistics Branch highlighted the growing link between performance on transfer tests and social background (DENI 1996a, 1996b).

Some consequences of open enrolment have been identified by McKeown et al. (1997). Although the size of the pupil cohort in post-primary schools had been increasing during the 1990s, the proportion of the cohort in secondary schools had declined. Further, the proportion entering grammar schools had increased from a little over a quarter in the 1980s to about a third in the 1990s, so that some grammar schools had been obliged to accept pupils from a wider ability range than in the past. About 6% of Year 8 admissions to grammar schools since 1991 have been pupils who obtained only transfer grades C or D. This trend has meant that, in some areas, secondary schools that traditionally had attracted a proportion of more 'qualified' pupils have found it increasingly hard to do so, skewing their intake profile towards the lower ability range (Gallagher, Shuttleworth and Gray 1997, 1998).

Secondary schools also reported that increasing numbers of pupils unable to cope with an 'academic' approach were being 'counselled out' of grammar schools at the end of Key Stage 3 (McKeown et al. 1997). These were thought to be pupils who had been either coached heavily for the transfer test, or admitted to grammar schools in Year 8 with low transfer grades. In more general terms, it appeared that academic selection had exacerbated the potentially negative effects of open enrolment, combined with formula funding, on less popular secondary schools. Some small secondary schools, severely under capacity and with declining enrolment, appeared to be struggling to make ends meet.

In the run-up to the 1997 general election, the debate on selection and the structure of post-primary education picked up. From 1996 onward, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation Forum on Selection provided an opportunity for dispassionate and considered discussion on aspects of selection and alternatives to the current system. The acknowledged priority for higher standards generally led to a more open and wide-ranging debate on the structure of education throughout the UK, including advocacy of new forms of academic selection (Hutton 1995, 1997; Walden 1996).

Following the election of the Labour government and installation of the new Direct Rule Minister with responsibility for education, the School Improvement Programme (DENI 1998) addressed themes related to the impact of selection on the education system in Northern Ireland. Some non-grammar schools sought permission to select part of their intake on academic grounds, and research has been undertaken on the effects of the delayed selection system operated in the Craigavon area (Alexander et al. 1998). There was widespread speculation that the government might abolish selection, but the Minister decided instead to commission research on the effects of the selective arrangements to inform future debate.

Research on the effects of selection

The research into the effects of the selective system was to examine those effects of the arrangements in the light of open enrolment. The research strategy involved three main elements: analysis of systemic change in schools since 1989; evidence on the impact of selection on primary and post-primary schools, and comparison with policy and practice in other jurisdictions. The strand on systemic change in schools focused on analysis of:

- change in statistical patterns across the school system since the 1989 Education Reform Order
- patterns of transfer grade profiles of entrants to grammar and secondary schools
- change in enrolment patterns in post-primary schools and an examination of any relationship between transfer grade outcomes and enrolments in primary schools
- performance patterns across schools.

The second main strand studied the impact of selection on:

- grammar and secondary schools
- pupil motivation and attitudes
- teachers' perception and expectations of pupils and perception of its impact on their professional role as teachers

It also attempted to quantify the extent to which parents used out-of-school paid-for coaching, and the extent to which public attitudes and perceptions of education and educational outcomes were mediated by the existence of the selective arrangements.

The comparative strand, added some months after the project had begun, included:

- a comparative case study of the relationships between schools and the consequences for teachers and pupils in an area in Northern Ireland and an area in Scotland
- comparative analysis of performance profiles of schools in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland
- a series of review papers on policy and practice in a range of other jurisdictions.

Sampling and data

In addition to analysis of DENI datasets, data were collected from samples of primary and post-primary schools. The work on post-primary schools was based on a series of in-depth case studies using two approaches. The first comprised a sample of grammar and secondary schools from across Northern Ireland: the Main Study schools. Grammar schools were selected on the basis of the transfer grade profile of entrants and gender patterns, and secondary schools based on the number of entrants and gender patterns. The second comprised a set of grammar and secondary schools within a designated geographical area: the Area Study schools.

Eight grammar and 17 secondary schools were in the Main Study; four grammar and five secondary schools were in the Area Study. In the Main Study, three of the grammar schools and nine of the secondary schools operate under Catholic management, and there was one grant-maintained integrated school. There were two single-sex boys' schools and two single-sex girls'

schools. The remaining 21 schools were co-educational, with the proportion of girls ranging from 29% to 62%. In the Area Study, two of the grammar schools and one secondary school operate under Catholic management, and there was one grant maintained integrated school. There were two single-sex boys' schools and two single-sex girls' schools.

A wide range of data were collected from all the case study schools. Quantitative data included GCSE results and post-16 destinations for the Year 12 cohort in 1998/99. Questionnaires including social and demographic data were administered to all Year 8 and Year 12 pupils in the schools. The Year 12 questionnaire also included an 'attitudes to school' questionnaire from the Australian Council for Educational Research. Thereafter, a range of qualitative data was collected focusing on aspects of school processes.

Our interest here lay in policy and practice in the schools and at department level; the impact of selection on the perceptions of teachers and pupils; and how schools had responded to the changes since 1989. In each case study, interviews were held with the principal and senior managers; heads of department of Maths, English and Science; teachers with special responsibility for Year 8 pupils; and classroom teachers. Group interviews were held with Year 8 pupils and with Year 12 pupils. Where possible, the interviews were taped and transcribed for analysis.

The research on pupil motivation and attitudes was based on an existing project funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission. For the selection project, additional data were gathered on pupil motivation and self-esteem, and their transfer grade outcomes.

The research on teachers involved focus groups and semi-structured interviews with teachers from primary, secondary and grammar schools. A balance was kept between Catholic, other voluntary, controlled and integrated schools, urban/rural contexts, geographical location and socio-economic backgrounds. Fifty teachers, including principals and Year 6 and 7 teachers from 18 primary schools in three geographical areas were interviewed. In addition, three focus group sessions for 15 Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were held in each area. The interviews with the primary teachers sought information on:

- each teacher's biography, including their own experiences of the transfer tests and (if appropriate) choices they had made for their own children
- the impact of the transfer tests on curriculum planning and delivery
- strategies for working with pupils opting in/out of the transfer tests
- views on coaching for the transfer tests
- the nature of teacher contact with parents pre and post transfer tests
- preparation for, and nature of, the transition to post-primary school.

To gain further insight into the 'annual cycle', each Year 6 and Year 7 teacher completed a one-page 'grid', recording the perceived impact of the transfer tests at various stages of the school year in terms of curriculum planning and delivery, the degree and nature of parental contact, the effects on pupils and provision for non-test pupils. The main objectives of this strand were to assess teachers' views on their self-motivation and performance, and their perceptions and expectations of pupils. Clearly it was important to examine the extent to which these were mediated by the teacher's position in the selective system.

The research on preparation for the transfer tests and external coaching sought to identify the extent and nature of preparation within school and out-of-school coaching; the reasons parents were prepared to pay for out-of-school coaching; and the impact of out-of-school coaching on schools.

Selection may impact not only on pupils in schools, but on society at large. Evidence was gathered from key constituencies, and issues included general parental attitudes to education and why some opted not to enter their children for the transfer tests. Information was also sought on how employers and tertiary education and training providers viewed the education system and individuals who had come through the schools. In particular, there was interest in exploring whether a transfer label stayed with individuals after compulsory education. Data were collected through questionnaires, secondary analysis of existing data, interviews and consultations, and focus groups.

Fieldwork for the project was carried out during 1998/99. Data on GCSE results and post-16 destinations for Year 12 pupils were requested from the 30 case study schools; 25 supplied GCSE data and 21 supplied data on post-16 destinations. With the additional time for the comparative work, the reports from the project were published in September 2000.

Other research contributing to the evidence base included: Gardner and Cowan (2000) on technical aspects of the transfer tests, such as the reliability and fairness of the tests and grade allocations; Leonard (2001) on the views and experiences of a sample of children going through the transfer procedure; Lundy's (2001) legal analysis of schools' admissions criteria; evidence on testing and ability grouping in schools (Gallagher 2001); and Gallagher and Smith (2002) on views on selection based on the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey.

Research evidence

Impact on primary schools

Preparation for the transfer tests has a backwash effect on the Key Stage 2 curriculum with a narrowing of the curriculum as attention is focused on test preparation and memorising information. In consequence, pupils are not receiving the broad and balanced experience envisaged. In addition, test preparation encourages teachers to adopt a teaching and learning style that is not to the benefit of all pupils.

Nearly all primary schools devote specific time to preparing pupils for the transfer tests, and most begin in Year 6. Out-of-school coaching is widespread and parents pay up to £15 per hour for this support. The main reason given by parents is to enhance their child's chance of achieving a higher grade and hence a place in a grammar school. While primary principals feel that in-school preparation is of value, they believe that out-of-school coaching does not provide an educational benefit and may exacerbate the transfer procedure's social unfairness.

In recent years, parents of about a third of pupils have opted their children out of the transfer tests, mainly in the belief that their children will not achieve a grade that will gain entry to a grammar school. Many parents say that the decision to opt out is informed by advice from teachers. However, in a significant minority of primary schools, few pupils opt out of the tests, though a high proportion receive grade D. There is no evidence to suggest a simple link between the enrolment levels of primary schools and the transfer grade profile of their pupils.

Impact on post-primary schools

The most important factor governing entry to grammar schools is achievement of a high transfer test grade. However, due to the link between test performance and social back-ground (Tables 1 and 2), grammar school intake is predominantly composed of pupils from non-manual backgrounds, while the intake of secondary schools is largely composed of pupils from manual backgrounds (Tables 3, 4 and 5).

**Table 1: Percentage of pupils with transfer test Grade A
(from DENI data)**

Free School Meals band	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
less than 11%	40	41	38
11–20%	28	28	27
20–30%	26	25	23
30–40%	21	21	20
40–50%	17	20	20
greater than 50%	12	11	11
Total	26	26	25

**Table 2: Percentage of pupils with transfer test Grade D or Not Entered
(calculated from DENI data)**

Free School Meals band	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
less than 11%	34	34	36
11–20%	50	51	51
20–30%	51	52	56
30–40%	57	59	57
40–50%	63	60	62
greater than 50%	71	72	71
Total	53	52	52

**Table 3: Percentage of pupils by fathers' occupation category
(case study school data)**

Social background	Year 8		Year 12	
	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar
Non-manual	28	72	33	68
Manual	72	28	67	32
All	100	100	100	100
Number	1,198	989	1,052	927

**Table 4: Percentage of pupils by mothers' occupation category
(case study school data)**

Social background	Year 8		Year 12	
	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar
Non-manual	28	69	33	69
Manual	45	17	38	14
Economically inactive	27	14	30	18
All	100	100	100	100
Number	1,256	1,000	1,052	927

Table 5: Percentage of pupils by fathers' Standard Occupational Classification categories (case study school data)

SOC categories (father)	Year 8		Year 12	
	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar
Manager/administration	9	15	17	19
Professional	6	38	11	41
Ass. professional & technical	2	3	3	2
Clerical & related	5	8	5	11
Craft & related	37	20	29	15
Personal & protective services	6	7	4	4
Sales occupations	5	3	3	3
Plant & machine operatives	13	4	13	3
Other occupations	5	1	4	2
Unemployed	12	2	12	2
All	100	100	100	100
Number	1,198	989	1,107	918

Since 1990, the proportion of pupils who enter grammar schools has increased from about 27% to about 34%. This figure is set to rise further due to a downturn in the number of pupils overall. The previous increase was caused by the impact of open enrolment in combination with demographic trends, and the opening of two new Catholic grammar schools in the 1990s. Essentially, grammar schools took entrants up to their physical capacity, including pupils with transfer grades that would not normally have provided entry. There are two main reasons for this: under per capita funding arrangements, each pupil adds to a school's income. Also, while there is a procedure to decline to accept a pupil, the school has to demonstrate that the pupil would not benefit from a grammar school education, the decision is open to appeal, and the procedure can be time-consuming and costly. Secondary schools that are still over-subscribed say that the ability profile of their intake has changed.

Secondary teachers believe open enrolment has created instability in the size and quality of intakes. They say that many pupils arrive with a sense of failure. In consequence, the schools set a high priority on providing a supportive environment and work to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of their pupils. By contrast, grammar school teachers say that their pupils arrive with a sense of success, and most pupils can be motivated to work towards the high academic standards expected.

Interviews with post-primary teachers indicate that there is limited curriculum continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3. This is attributed to the impact of transfer test preparation on Key Stage 2, and contrasts with the situation found in the comparative study in Scotland.

Despite the increased proportion of pupils going to grammar schools, there is limited evidence that the schools have altered their curriculum or ethos to take account of this change. There is more evidence of innovation and change in secondary schools. In particular, a minority of secondary schools have developed innovative whole-school measures geared towards enhancing academic standards.

In grammar schools, performance of pupils at age 16 is closely linked to the academic quality of the schools' intake: that is, the higher the proportion of entrants at age 11 with a grade A on the transfer tests, the higher the performance at age 16. In secondary schools, performance at age 16 is more closely linked with (although not wholly explained by) social disadvantage, particularly for non-Catholic schools. Across all school types, girls achieve higher attainment than boys.

Overall, grammar schools show particularly high levels of academic achievement. However, there is a long tail of low-achieving secondary schools. This may be an inevitable consequence of a selective system: evidence from PISA (the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment) suggests that early institutional differentiation leads to higher variability in student outcomes. Table 6 illustrates the same pattern.

Table 6: Percentage of schools by GCSE band and area
(calculated from DENI, Department of Education Scotland, and DfEE data)

5+ GCSE grades A–C or equivalent	Northern Ireland schools (N=227 grammar & secondary schools)	England/Wales schools (N=156 comprehensive)	Scotland schools (N=416 comprehensive)
0–20% of pupils	17	11	3
21–40% of pupils	37	43	12
41–60% of pupils	13	31	38
61–80% of pupils	3	13	34
81–100% of pupils	31	3	14
Total	100	100	100

Note: The data for England and Wales cover comprehensive schools drawn from a DfEE sample deemed to be representative of the system as a whole for the purpose of a value-added study. The full sample comprised 200 schools and included grammar, secondary and special schools, as well as comprehensive schools. The data used in the present paper deal with the 156 comprehensive schools in the DfEE sample. The Scottish data are derived from published School Performance Tables, and the distribution of schools in these grade categories was calculated by the Department of Education in Scotland for this report. The equivalent attainment level is the proportion of pupils achieving five or more SCE Standard Grades at grades 1 to 3.

Table 6 shows a bipolar distribution for school performance in Northern Ireland schools. The pattern for England and Wales is skewed towards the lower end of the performance profile, and the profile for the Scottish schools is skewed towards the upper end. These data imply that variability in Northern Ireland is greatest between schools, while in Scotland it is greatest within schools. This also implies that it matters less which school an individual pupil goes to in the Scottish comprehensive system, in comparison with the Northern Ireland selective system.

There has been considerable debate in Northern Ireland over the implications of these different patterns. A widely held belief is that, despite the high variability in performance in Northern Ireland schools, the average performance of pupils is higher compared with schools in the rest of the UK. The main bases for this claim are the annual GCSE results, in which Northern Ireland students consistently achieve a higher proportion of passes. School leavers' statistics also suggest higher average GCSE and A-level performance by Northern Ireland students. However, these rather simple comparisons tend to ignore patterns showing that, overall, GCSE performance in Scotland is at least equal to that in Northern Ireland, and a higher proportion of students in Scotland achieve high performance in maths, English, science or a modern language.

The comparative claims between Northern Ireland and England also fail to take into account the slightly different trajectories followed by students in both systems. Table 7 compares the average GCSE scores achieved by pupils in England and Northern Ireland. The average GCSE points score is, in fact, higher in England, and the performance gap has widened over the five years for which data were available.

Table 7: GCSE point scores comparison (DENI)

Year	Northern Ireland			England		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
1997/98	31.7	38.6	35.1	34.5	39.7	37.0
1998/99	32.8	39.9	36.3	35.5	40.9	38.1
1999/00	32.9	41.0	36.9	36.2	41.6	38.9
2000/01	33.2	40.9	36.9	36.6	42.1	39.3
2001/02	34.1	41.6	37.7	37.4	42.9	40.1

Another claim is that there is a higher rate of participation in higher education in Northern Ireland, and that a higher proportion of entrants to higher education come from working-class backgrounds. UCAS data on entrants to higher education in 2001 show that 28% of entrants from Northern Ireland were from working-class backgrounds, as compared with 23% in Scotland, 23% in Wales and 24% in England. However, it is questionable whether this is attributable to the continuation of the selective arrangements.

Only 55% of Northern Ireland entrants to higher education come from grammar schools. The rest come from institutes of further and higher education, comprehensive schools, secondary schools and other sources. Furthermore, 70% of the entrants from grammar schools come from middle-class backgrounds, as compared with 52% from institutes of further and higher education, 54% from comprehensive schools and 43% from secondary schools. In other words, while Northern Ireland has a slightly higher proportion of entrants to higher education from working-class backgrounds, this is in spite of – not because of – the grammar schools.

This can be looked at in another way, using data collected for the Dearing Review of Higher Education. In 1950, 19% of middle-class young people entered higher education, as compared with 3% of working-class young people. By 1970, the middle-class participation rate had increased to 32%, but the working-class rate was only 5%. By 1995, the middle-class rate had increased to 45%, while the working-class rate had increased to 15%.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this pattern of change over time. First, when the predominant mode of entry to higher education in the UK was through grammar schools, then the vast majority of entrants were from middle-class backgrounds. Indeed, the failure of selection at age 11 to deliver social mobility was one reason for its abandonment. Second, the main period of growth in working-class participation, in the early 1990s, coincided with the main period of growth in higher education generally in the UK, but as a result of a specific government decision; it had nothing to do with the structure of the school system. Third, the previous period of growth in higher education participation, following the Robbins Review in the 1960s, was due to a break with the old-fashioned notion that only a small proportion of the population were capable of dealing with academic concerns. This break was, of course, the logic behind the switch from the selective to the comprehensive arrangements in schools.

In other words, the high rate of participation in higher education in Northern Ireland is nothing to do with the selective system, but resulted from the rejection of the assumptions behind selective arrangements in Britain.

The impact on teachers

Due in part to parental pressure for 'good' results, primary teachers say that the final years of primary school are organised around the demands of the transfer tests. Pupils are often categorised on the basis of their likely test performance, and teachers often have modest expectations of pupils who are not entered for the tests. There was some evidence to suggest that less consistent attention is devoted to the education needs of these pupils.

Teachers say that they have faced considerable pressure from the wave of reforms and initiatives during the past 15 years. Secondary teachers say that this is exacerbated by the lower status accorded to their schools, the instability in their intakes, and the diverse needs of their pupils. Furthermore, secondary teachers feel that, despite the diversity of their pupils, their schools are largely judged on their academic performance. By contrast, grammar teachers say their primary focus is on achieving high academic standards. While some expressed sympathy for the task facing secondary teachers and concern about the unfairness of the transfer tests, others were more concerned about whether they could cope if there was a move towards non-selective arrangements.

The impact on pupils

The most important factor for a pupil in achieving a high GCSE score is gaining a place in a grammar school. All other things being equal, being in a grammar school will add almost 16 GCSE points, equivalent to three GCSEs at grade C, to a pupil's attainment at age 16. Grammar school pupils are most likely to take A-levels after GCSEs and work towards higher education. Secondary pupils follow a much wider range of routes, most commonly further education. These patterns have important consequences for the debate on selection. Although the available

evidence would challenge the claim that the selective system produces higher average performance, there is little doubt that a grammar school place virtually guarantees high performance at ages 16 and 18 and entry to higher education. Parents may be more concerned with the apparent certainties offered by a place in a grammar school than with the aggregate statistical outcomes under different arrangements, however positive they might appear.

There are few differences in attitudes to school between grammar and secondary pupils, and between pupils in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Overall, pupils view their own school in positive terms and focus on it rather than comparing it with others. Interviews with Year 8 and Year 12 pupils showed that they were aware of differences between the school types, and often of the higher public esteem and status in which grammar schools are held. Many pupils lose contact with primary school friends who take a different route through post-primary education. However, only among the secondary pupils was there any sense of resentment that former friends at grammar schools now saw themselves as somehow better than the secondary pupils.

Society

Views on selection and the education system more generally appear to be related to individual experience. Those who passed the transfer test or who went to grammar schools tend to hold more positive views of the current system than those who either 'failed' the tests or went to secondary schools. Despite this, most people have positive memories of their post-primary school.

The high academic standards achieved by grammar schools are held in high regard throughout society. However, many people also worry about the potential unfairness of the system and, more particularly, the existing low level of achievement. Employers and others are adamant that their views of individuals are not affected by transfer status. They say they are more interested in subsequent achievements and qualifications.

Models for the organisation of schools

The comparative research identified five main models for the future organisation of schools in Northern Ireland:

- delayed selection, as currently operated in the Craigavon area of Northern Ireland
- all-through comprehensive schools, as in Scotland
- common primary and lower secondary schools, followed by differentiated upper secondary schools, as in a number of European countries, including France and Italy
- a system of differentiated post-primary schools with distinctive academic and vocational/technical routes
- the status quo, that is, selection at age 11 and a system of both grammar and secondary schools.

Research into the delayed selection arrangements operated in a small area of Northern Ireland (Alexander et al. 1998) concluded that the system was popular in that area, perhaps because a high proportion of pupils achieved grammar school places. The primary schools in the system had been relieved of the constraints imposed by the transfer tests. However, the evidence suggested that pupils not selected at age 14 were less well served by the system.

The main strength of all-though comprehensive systems, or systems that operate common lower secondary schools, lies in the flexibility they offer, as they maintain opportunities and choices for a longer period in a pupil's educational career. A further strength is their diverse pupil bodies, from which some social benefits may be derived. The systems' main weaknesses are that they appear to limit the achievements of pupils of the highest ability. If they practice rigid streaming among pupils on the basis of academic ability, the potential social benefits of diversity are reduced; and, if enrolment is based on catchment areas, the social composition will reflect the social status of residential areas, leading to significant social divisions, particularly in large urban areas.

Some countries, including Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, use systems with different types of post-primary schools. These systems have important differences from arrangements in Northern Ireland. Their main strength is that they provide distinctive technical/vocational routes for pupils, with different curricula, qualifications and post-school destinations. This appears to enhance pupils' employability. Most incorporate a higher degree of flexibility and pupil movement between all school types than is found in Northern Ireland. Parental choice plays a significant role in post-primary allocations, implying that the different routes may have equal status. However, there are significant social differences between pupils following each route, and different school types are accorded varying levels of status.

Research conclusions

Perhaps the most significant strength of the selective system of secondary and grammar schools lies in the high academic standards achieved by many grammar schools. A minority of post-primary teachers feel that the teaching of science at Key Stage 2 and its placement on the transfer tests has enhanced the teaching of the subject. In addition, a minority of primary teachers welcome the challenge provided by transfer test preparation.

A weakness in the selective system lies in the backwash effect on the primary school curriculum. The importance attached to 'passing' the test means many parents feel obliged to pay for out-of-school coaching, but not all parents can afford this. There are weaknesses in the links between Key Stages 2 and 3. Many complain that the transfer tests are unfair and place undue pressure on young children, a concern shared by teachers, employers and society more generally. Secondary schools are accorded lesser status than grammar schools in the eyes of most people. Teachers in secondary schools are aware of this difference in status, and many believe this judgement is unfair and inappropriate. In addition, a selective system appears to produce a longer tail of low-achieving schools.

Teachers in grammar schools define their role mainly as the achievement of high academic standards. By contrast, teachers in secondary schools are required to meet a wide range of objectives simultaneously, but believe they are judged by society largely on academic criteria that cast grammar schools in a more positive light. One consequence is that grammar and secondary teachers often discuss the priorities of teaching and learning quite differently. Another is that some secondary schools place undue emphasis on academic objectives in order to be seen to compete with grammar schools. More generally, it exacerbates the problem of relative status for secondary schools in the eyes of the public. Nevertheless, for an individual pupil, achieving a grammar school place matters in academic terms and does lead to measurable gains in qualifications.

There has been a gradual shift towards more comprehensive systems across the OECD. In the past, this shift was partly motivated by a perceived need to enhance educational equality. In fact, only limited gains in this direction have been made, as all systems seem to involve some element of social differentiation between schools. The only system that avoids this problem is the allocation of pupils to post-primary school on the basis of a lottery or random assignment. More recently, across OECD countries, debates have focused less on educational structures and more on raising standards, and there is evidence of greater convergence between the different models of school organisation. All systems potentially face problems due to the transition from one school type to another. In addition, all systems require some procedure for selecting pupils when some post-primary schools have more pupils seeking entry than there are places available.

The research concluded that high academic standards are important and schools are encouraged to raise the performance of their pupils, not least because qualifications open the way to further educational opportunities and enhanced employment prospects. However, it also suggested that the desirable objectives for an education system encompass a wider range of social, educational and economic outcomes. Further, it is important to recognise the ways in which children develop and learn and to create conditions that allow all pupils to maximise their potential. A debate that simply revolves around school structures may unduly narrow the terms of the discussion, encourage the inaccurate view that significant problems are easily solved, and lose sight of the broader purposes of education. On that basis, the research suggested that the starting point for discussion ought to be the social, educational and economic objectives young people should achieve from their educational experience. Then the education structure that seems best placed to provide these ends can be determined.

Post-primary review

By the time the research was published, a devolved Assembly had been established in Northern Ireland, and the Education Minister announced the establishment of the Post Primary Review Body, to be chaired by former Ombudsman Gerry Burns. The Review Body was asked to:

- consider the research evidence on the effects of selection on pupils, parents, teachers, the economy and society
- carry out a widespread consultation among the public in Northern Ireland in order to identify the public's views on the key issues in relation to selective education
- assess the extent to which the current arrangements meet the needs and aspirations of parents and their children, and the requirements of the economy and society.

During the review process, over 2,000 written submissions were sent to the Review Body, over 2,500 people attended public meetings, meetings were held with 68 key interest groups, and members of the Review Body visited 25 schools and carried out study visits to other countries to see their systems operating at first-hand. Their report (Post Primary Review Body 2001) offered the following main recommendations:

- end the use of academic selection when pupils transfer from primary to post-primary schools at age 11, and replace it with a procedure giving priority to parental preference
- replace the 11+ transfer tests with a new Pupil Profile providing detailed and holistic information on pupil progress for parents, teachers and schools

- establish collaborative networks of post-primary schools, called Collegiates, based on complementarity rather than competition, and interdependence rather than isolation, while maintaining a high degree of diversity and choice for all pupils.

The Review Body did not feel that a comprehensive system of common schools would be appropriate for the Northern Ireland context for two main reasons. First, comprehensive education faces problems in cities due to social segregation in residential patterns and hence significant social differences in the entry profiles of schools. Second, in Northern Ireland, where denominational divisions play a significant role in schooling, it was likely that only a minority of schools would be big enough to provide the full range of curricular options required in a truly comprehensive arrangement.

The Collegiate networks were intended to encourage positive interdependency between schools, while providing a basis for institutional diversity. Inter alia it was felt that this approach might also foster porous boundaries between Protestant and Catholic schools, given that expansion of the integrated education sector was likely to be slow.

Consultation on the post-primary review recommendations

Sources of evidence

A few months after the Review Body reported, the Minister of Education announced a formal consultation process to run until June 2002. The strands of evidence, included:

- a detailed response booklet sent to schools, higher and further education institutions, training organisations, and community and voluntary groups
- a response form sent to every household in Northern Ireland, so that as many adults as wished to could submit their views
- questions on the recommendations included in the annual Northern Ireland Omnibus survey
- a specific research study on the views of a sample of young people.

Groups and individuals were also encouraged to send written submissions to the Department.

The main written submissions can be found at: www.deni.gov.uk/pprb/mr/index_doc.htm. The Department's report on the consultation as a whole can be found at: www.deni.gov.uk/pprb/finalreport/analysis/index.htm. In addition to the report, the Department of Education issued a detailed list of statistical tables at: www.deni.gov.uk/pprb/finalreport/statistical_tables.pdf.

Patterns of participation

There was overall a 40% response rate among all schools; grammar (82%) and secondary (62%) schools provided higher response rates than primary (37%) and special (14%) schools. Among the other groups that were sent the detailed response booklet, there were returns from 59% of the institutes of higher and further education, 15% of training organisations and 4% of community groups.

The household response form was returned by about 16% of the adult population in Northern Ireland, of whom 56% were women and 44% men, 81% were parents and 42% had children of school age. Of those with a present or past link to post-primary schools, 35% had children attending, or recently attending, grammar schools while 25% had children attending, or recently attending, secondary schools.

There were 2,232 respondents in the achieved sample for the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, hereafter referred to as the 'opinion survey'. This sample comprised 58% women and 43% men {they are the data provided in the Department's report – I assume that it totals to 101% simply due to a rounding error} 61% were parents and 29% had children of school age. Of those with children at or recently at post primary schools, 24% were linked with grammar schools and 27% to secondary schools. While those connected with grammar schools are still over-represented, the imbalance is less marked than the self-selected respondents to the household response form.

Research into the views of young people was carried out through the Youth Forum in ten focus groups, with a total of 116 young people aged 14–19. Of these participants, 48% were young women and 52% were young men; 36% were, or had been, in grammar schools while 64% were or had been in secondary schools

Several hundred written submissions were sent to the Department of Education. These included 166 from schools, 39 from public or voluntary organisations, 30 from educational interests, 18 submissions from politicians or political parties and 10 from business interests. In addition, the Minister of Education and his officials held 28 meetings with educational and other interests to discuss their views on the recommendations of the Burns Report.

Areas of agreement

The three main areas on which there was widespread agreement concerned the future of the 11+ transfer tests; the idea of a new form of assessment through a pupil profile; and some of the proposed admissions criteria.

A majority agreed that the current 11+ transfer tests should be abolished, that a Pupil Profile should be developed to provide more information to help parents make choices for their children, and that all schools should be required to use the same admissions criteria to admit pupils (Table 8).

Table 8: Views on the 11+, pupil profiles and admissions criteria (Department of Education)

	Household response form	Opinion survey	Detailed response form
	% agreeing		
Should the current transfer test (11+) be abolished?	57	54	87
Should Pupil Profiles be developed to help parents express a preference for an appropriate post primary school for their child?	77	76	91
Should all schools be required to use the same admissions criteria to admit pupils?	57	69	73

There was a high level of agreement on the use of three suggested admissions criteria in the event a post primary school was over-subscribed: parental preference, siblings already in attendance at the school and compelling individual circumstances (Table 9).

Table 9: Views on specific admissions criteria (Department of Education)

	Household response form	Opinion survey	Detailed response for
	% agreeing		
Should the following admissions criteria be used to decide who should be admitted to post-primary schools?			
(i) Parental preference	77	73	63
(ii) Brother or sister already attending or eldest child	68	66	86
(iv) Compelling individual circumstances	57	69	68

The detailed response form for schools and other organisations contained additional questions. Areas on which there was a high level of agreement included: the value of wider assessment information through a Pupil Profile; that 11 years should continue as the age of transfer from primary to post-primary school; and that the 11+ transfer tests should cease to be used to select pupils at the earliest possible opportunity (Table 10).

Table 10: Views on pupil profiles, age of transfer and transfer tests by school type (Department of Education)

	All schools	Grammar schools	Secondary schools	Primary schools	Other groups
	Strongly agree or agree %				
A Pupil Profile should be developed for use throughout Key Stages 2 and 3 and beyond, to provide a broader picture of each child's attributes, aptitudes, progress and developmental needs	91	98	100	87	91
Transfer to post-primary school should continue to take place at age 11	86	95	95	83	68
The transfer test should cease to be used to select pupils for post-primary education at the earliest possible opportunity	86	64	98	86	89

Areas of disagreement

There were four main areas of disagreement in the consultation evidence: some of the proposed admissions criteria (Table 11); the proposed Collegiates of collaborating schools (Table 12); the procedures to be followed at the point of transfer from primary to post primary school; and academic selection.

Table 11: Views on admissions criteria (Department of Education)

	Household survey	Opinion survey	Detailed response form (schools)
Should the following admissions criteria be used to decide who should be admitted to post-primary schools?	% agreeing		
(iii) Parent working at the school	24	24	59
(v) Distance of the school from the child's home	52	67	50

Parents, teachers and all respondents on the household and opinion surveys disagreed with giving preference to the children of parents working in the school. This pattern held true when broken down by gender, age or social background. By contrast, all schools agreed with the use of the criterion, especially grammar and secondary schools.

There was disagreement concerning the use of distance from school to child’s home as a tie-breaker. In the household survey, parents agreed with the criterion, especially those who had attended secondary school or who had children at secondary school. A narrow majority of teachers, parents of grammar pupils, parents who attended grammar school and parents of primary pupils agreed with the criterion. Respondents in the most socially disadvantaged areas were in favour of this criterion by a factor of 2 to1, but opinion was split evenly among those in the most socially advantaged areas.

The pattern of responses from the opinion survey was more straightforward: there was general agreement with use of the distance criterion, including among those who had attended grammar school. On the detailed response form, a majority of schools (53%) disagreed with the distance criterion, including 82% of grammar and 57% of primary schools. By contrast, 72% of secondary schools and 73% of the other groups agreed with this criterion.

In a related area, the detailed response form asked if the proposed admissions criteria should be used in the order presented in the Burns Report. A majority of the grammar schools, primary schools and other groups said that they should not, while a majority of the secondary schools said that they should be used in this order.

Views on Collegiates

The recommendations that post-primary schools should be grouped into collaborative networks of Collegiates received a varied response. As can be seen on Table 12, most schools (58%) disagreed with the collegiate idea, including 96% of grammar schools and 55% of primary schools. The secondary schools were evenly split on the issue, but a majority (68%) of the other groups agreed with collegiate idea.

Table 12: Views on collegiates (Department of Education)

	Yes	No	Undecided
	Percentages		
Household response form	34	44	22
Opinion survey	62	18	20
	Strongly agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree	
Detailed response form	45	55	

Respondents on the household survey had a very mixed pattern of responses, including a high level of ‘undecided’. This mixed pattern held across gender and age groups, across parents and parents of primary pupils. Parents of secondary pupils narrowly agreed with the collegiate idea, but a majority of parents of grammar pupils disagreed. Respondents who had themselves been at secondary school were evenly split on the idea, but a majority of those who had been at grammar schools disagreed. Again, attitudes are mediated by social background: respondents from the most disadvantaged areas agreed with collegiate idea by 2 to 1, while those from the most advantaged areas disagreed by 2 to 1.

Views on the opinion survey were much more clear cut. A clear majority agreed with the collegiate idea. This was true for parents, for men and women, for those who attended secondary school (64% v. 17%) and those who attended grammar school (56% v. 25%).

Additional questions were included in the detailed response form for schools and other organisations. Table 13 identifies four issues on which there was no agreement across these groups. All relate to the issue of academic selection at age 11. While an overall majority of respondents agree with all four propositions, the majority of grammar schools hold a different view. Thus, while a majority of secondary and primary schools and other organisations feel that there should be no academic selection at age 11; that the pupil profile should not be used as an alternative selective instrument; and that parental choice should be given statutory priority; grammar schools disagree on the basis that some form of academic selection at age 11 should still occur. However, just over a third of grammar schools are prepared to endorse parental choice as the primary mechanism for allocation to post primary schools.

Table 13: Views on admissions criteria, academic selection and parental choice by school type (Department of Education)

	All schools	Grammar schools	Secondary schools	Primary schools	Other groups
	Strongly agree or agree (%)				
All post-primary schools should be required to use the same criteria to decide which pupils to admit if they have more applications than places	71	20	87	75	82
The Pupil Profile should not be used by post-primary schools to decide which pupils should be admitted	63	7	93	63	62
Post-primary schools should not select pupils for transfer from primary education on the basis of academic ability, i.e. by external testing or teacher evaluation	62	9	93	60	71
Parental choice should have statutory priority and all schools should be required to admit pupils in strict order of parental preferences	62	35	84	60	65

A majority of schools and other organisations also agree that academic selection should not occur when pupils transfer from primary to post-primary school, but a majority of grammar schools do feel that academic selection should occur at this stage. The detailed response form also asked organisations a more general question on whether they felt that academic selection should be abolished. This question was the only one on this issue asked on the household response form and the opinion survey. Whereas a majority of the schools agreed with the abolition of academic selection, a majority of the individuals responding on the two surveys did not agree with the abolition of academic selection (Table 14).

Table 14: Should academic selection be abolished? (Department of Education)

	Yes	No	Undecided
		Percentages	
Household response form	30	64	7
Opinion survey	32	54	14
	Strongly Agree/ Agree		Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
Detailed response form	63	37	

On the household response form, the majority were against end of academic selection; this was so also for parents and teachers, and when the data were disaggregated by age or gender. A clear majority of parents of grammar pupils (78%) disagreed with the abolition of academic selection, as did a majority of parents of primary pupils (58%). The parents of secondary pupils were more evenly divided: 45% agreed and 47% disagreed. General opposition to the abolition of academic selection was found among those who had attended grammar schools (73%) and those who attended secondary school (57%). Views on this issue were, however, mediated by social background. (This is considered below.)

The patterns of responses were a little more clear-cut on the opinion survey. A majority of respondents, including parents, were against the abolition of academic selection (54%). Those who had attended grammar school were against the abolition of academic selection (66%), as were those who attended secondary school (50%).

While there is evidence that public opinion opposes the abolition of academic selection, there are marked differences between schools and other organisations on the more specific question of abolishing academic selection by external testing or teacher evaluation at age 11.

Those who opposed the ending of academic selection included the Governing Bodies Association of voluntary grammar schools and the Secondary Heads Association, a third of schools, a majority of the 16 training organisations that responded, the Institute of Directors, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the four district councils that responded, and rural interest groups.

A number of groups identified conditions when they felt that academic selection would no longer be necessary, including the Northern Catholic Bishops, the Confederation of British Industry, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the Catholic Heads Association.

Primary and post-primary pupils were evenly split on ending or keeping academic selection, while the Equality Commission decided not to offer a view on this issue.

Social background

Figures 1–3 look at the views of respondents on the household response form against social background (measured by the advantaged/disadvantaged status of their home ward; the most disadvantaged wards are indicated by low ward numbers, the most advantaged by high ward numbers). Figure 1 shows the proportion who agreed that the 11+ transfer tests and academic selection should be abolished. There is a direct correlation between opinion on these issues and social background, as measured by the status of the ward of residence.

Figure 2: Views on selection by social background

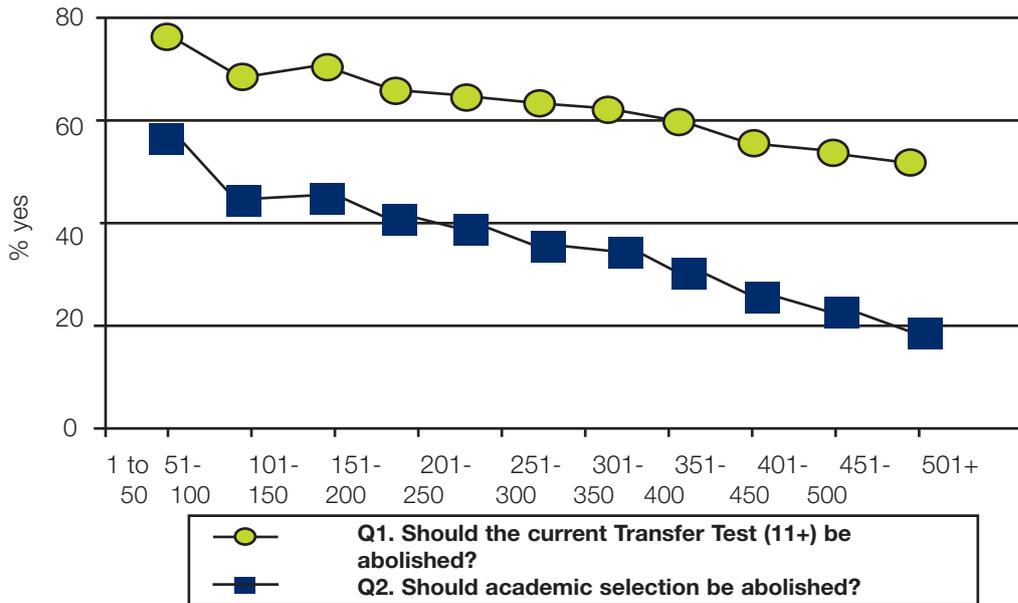


Figure 2 shows the proportions who agreed that all schools should use the same admissions criteria to admit pupils, and that the distance from home criterion should be used. Again, there is a correlation between expressed attitude and social background.

Figure 3: Views on admissions criteria by social background

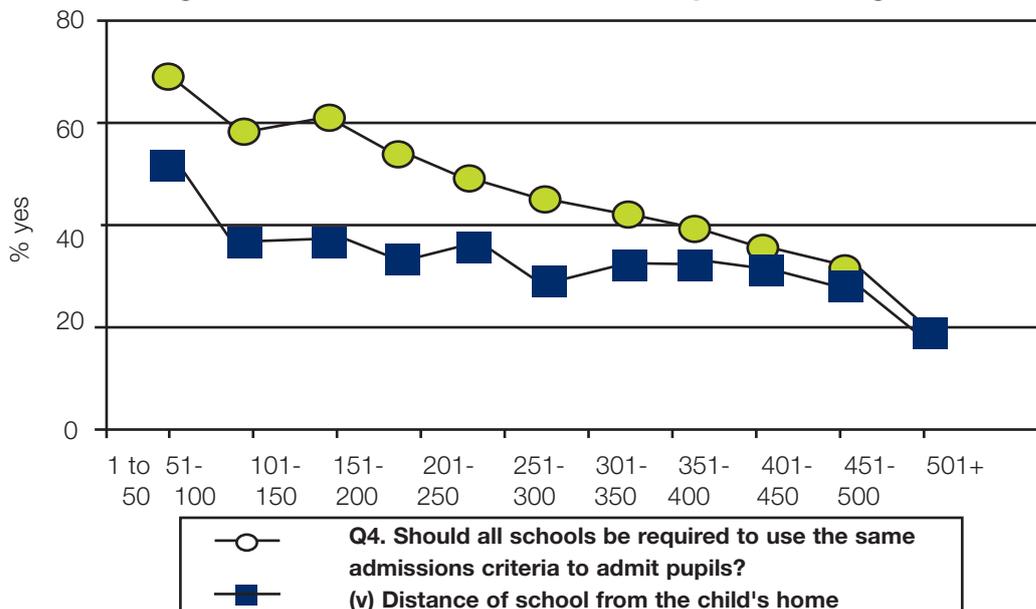
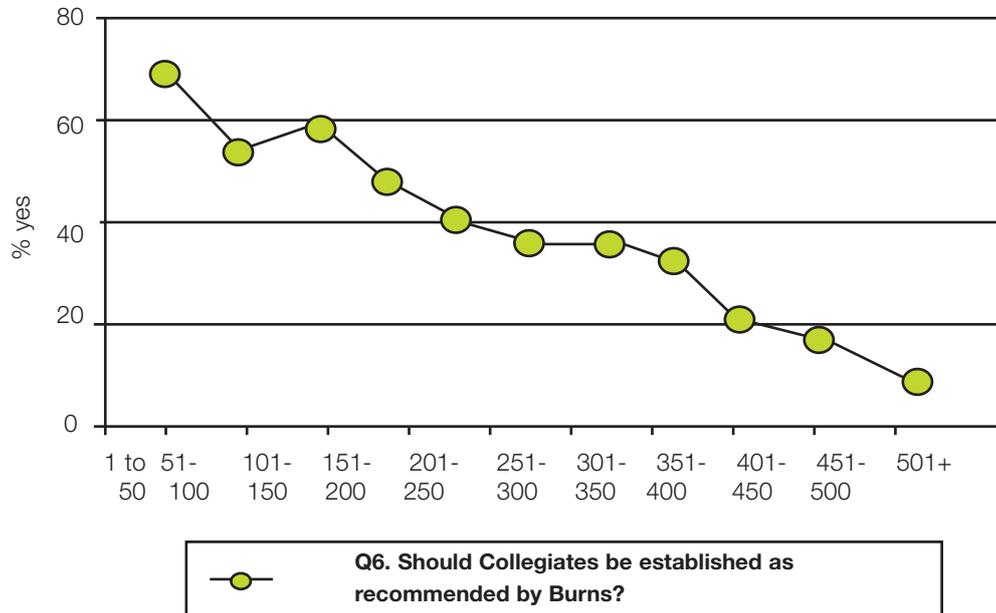


Figure 3 shows the proportion who agreed that collegiates, as proposed in the Burns Report, should be established. Once again there is a close correspondence between expressed views and social background.

Figure 4: Views on Collegiates by social background



Conclusion to the consultation

The analysis of the consultation results identifies issues on which there is continuing disagreement, areas on which there is agreement and some issues that could form the basis for future discussion.

There is clearly disagreement on whether some of the proposed admissions criteria should be used; in particular, the use of distance from school to home as a tie-break criterion, and giving preference to children whose parents work in a school. It should be noted that most schools use these criteria, or variants of them, at present. There remain significant differences in views on academic selection, and whether or not selective procedures should play a role in the transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary school. There is disagreement also on whether the pupil profile should be used as a selective instrument.

Finally, it should be noted that there are two bases for the disagreement found in the evidence: a division between those associated with grammar schools and the rest of the education system; and the way social background appears to mediate views on some of the core issues. Of course, given the differences in the social profile of entrants to grammar and secondary schools, these two factors are not independent.

There is widespread agreement that pupils should transfer from primary to post-primary school at age 11; that use of the 11+ transfer test should cease as soon as possible; and that new assessment arrangements should be put in place to provide wider information on pupils' progress to teachers, parents and pupils. There is agreement also on the use of some of the proposed admissions criteria, including parental choice, giving preference to eldest children or those who have siblings at a school, and the need for a criterion on compelling individual circumstances. Although the Collegiate model proposed in the Burns Report was considered by educational interests to be unworkable or unwieldy, there appears to be widespread agreement that post-primary schools should collaborate and co-operate to a greater extent than in the past.

The current state of the debate

Shortly after publication of the report on the consultation, the Minister of Education announced that the 11+ transfer tests would cease to be used after 2005, but indicated no preference as to alternative arrangements. Shortly after, the Northern Ireland Assembly went into suspension and had not been restored by the time new elections were held in November 2003. In the absence of devolved authority, the responsibility for education has returned to one of the Direct Rule Ministers. After confirming the decision that the 11+ tests would cease to be used as soon as practical, the Direct Rule Minister established a working group comprising representatives of educational interests, chaired by businessman Stephen Costello, to consider the results of the consultation and come forward with options for the future. However, it was unclear when the Costello group's report would be issued for public discussion, whether or not there would be any further consultation, and when any decisions would be taken.

Where does this leave the discussions?

In my view, the first point of note is that the evidence of the consultation process seems to lead logically to the decision to end the use of the 11+ tests. In the interim, and given the technical weaknesses of the current tests, DENI and CCEA should give serious consideration to removing the absurdity of the narrow grade boundaries currently used.

There is clearly a widespread feeling that differentiation is a necessary or appropriate feature of any future education system. It is unfortunate that the consultation did not ask more detailed questions on the issue of academic selection, as evidence from the NI Life and Times survey suggests that, while most people want to retain some form of selection, most think it is more appropriate to take this decision at age 14 or 16, rather than age 11.

Given this support for differentiation, there remain three open questions: the age at which differentiation should occur; the degree of flexibility after the differentiation decision and the extent of difference that should exist between available routes; and the procedure to be used in allocating students, or allowing them to choose, between the alternative routes or options.

There is a widespread feeling that any changes in the educational system should enhance educational standards in Northern Ireland. However, while this issue is normally debated in terms of overall academic standards, many parents appear to view this in relation to the opportunities available to their own child. To that extent, the significant difference in views between those associated with grammar and secondary schools, and between the socially advantaged and socially disadvantaged, may arise in part from a perception that change will put at risk educational outcomes for a minority that appear to be virtually guaranteed under the present arrangements. This highlights a political problem in proposing change, since it is the affluent and articulate minority that gains most from the present arrangements,

There is a further political dimension, however. The two main unionist parties in Northern Ireland have taken a position against significant change in the system, while the two main nationalist parties have taken a position in favour of radical change. It is not entirely clear why this issue has provoked such a sectarian split, since the unionist and nationalist blocs are socially heterogeneous. Nevertheless, this split does exist, and featured in the electoral appeals of the parties at the November Assembly election.

The challenge to the educational community is to take this body of information and opinion, and to come forward with ideas for new arrangements that will use the interdependence between schools in positive ways, through more co-operation, in order to reduce the extraordinarily wide range of educational experience received by young people at present. An educational system within which perceptions of risk and fear play a significant role is, in my view, not a system fit for the 21st century.

One of the main conclusions of the research on the effects of selection published in 2000 was that the current arrangements divide schools, pupils and parents. The results of the consultation on the Burns Report show that these divisions remain as profound as ever.

Tony Gallagher, Professor of Education Queen's University

The research into the effects of the selective system of secondary education was carried out by a consortium involving academics from Queen's University, the University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College, St Mary's University College and the private sector company BDO Stoy Hayward. The project team was co-directed by Tony Gallagher, Queen's University, and Alan Smith, University of Ulster.

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A 'culture of evaluation' for French education

Gérard Bonnet, Ministère de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche, and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education

Abstract

The French education ministry has developed a purpose-built evaluation system that provides a recognised contribution to specific areas of educational science. In particular, it has pioneered work on assessment, evaluation and indicators for the French education system. In so doing, it has evolved a characteristic theory of evaluation.

Besides its use for monitoring the system, evaluation is seen as a tool for change. The idea is that by looking at evaluation results as in a mirror, education practitioners at all levels will be encouraged to make relevant changes in their professional practices. The aim is a change in attitudes. Two examples are analysed.

The first is the implementation of procedures using standardised tests as educational tools to encourage change and to promote a culture of evaluation. This is conducted in such a way as to involve teachers and schools and is devised as a diagnostic assessment. The second is the introduction of school evaluation indicators to provide information on schools to the public and to the schools, themselves, to help them improve their processes and performance. This approach is underpinned by the idea that the evaluation of schools is also an educational tool.

Beyond the implementation of the schemes referred to above, the real question in France now is to assess the impact of those procedures on the professional practices of those they are supposed to help. There are reasons to believe that much work remains to be done before a proper culture of evaluation is established.

Introduction

For various historical reasons, and unlike the experience of most developed countries, French educational science in general is not as strong an academic subject as might be expected. Specialists in this area are relatively few and the literature – mostly in French – is not widely known abroad. At the same time, the education ministry has developed over the years a purpose-built evaluation system that provides a recognised contribution to specific areas of educational science. In particular, it has pioneered work on assessment, evaluation, and indicators for the French education system.

In so doing, the system evolved a theory of evaluation. The theory posits that evaluation should be seen as a tool for change, in addition to its use for monitoring the system. By looking at evaluation results as in a mirror, education practitioners at all levels will be encouraged to make relevant changes in their professional practices.

The aim is a change in attitudes. This approach is quite specific to France, and can be illustrated by looking at how two fairly standard types of evaluation methods – pupil assessment and school indicators – are approached differently in France.

Pupil assessment with a difference

Internationally, most people are familiar with how the assessment of samples of pupils is used to monitor progress at either system or school level. While such assessment exists in France for monitoring purposes at system level, there is also a more original procedure using standardised tests as educational tools to encourage change and to promote a culture of evaluation. This is conducted in such a way as to involve teachers and schools and is devised as a diagnostic assessment.

Mass national testing is used to enable teachers to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils. Since 1989, this has been organised at the beginning of each academic year for all pupils aged 8 (grade 3) and 11 (grade 6) in French language and mathematics. The whole of the age group – around 800,000 pupils at each level – are tested in this way every year.

Testing is primarily intended for diagnostic use by teachers and parents within the school. However, a representative sample of the test results at each level is analysed centrally by the education ministry to obtain a statistically valid national picture of pupil achievement for the skills measured.

The tests are different every year, as they are intended to reflect skills that need to be assessed with reference to changes in the curriculum or policies. They cannot therefore be compared (in the psychometric sense) from one year to another, so they are not indicators of evolution within the education system.

The tests are implemented through either multiple-choice questions or open responses, according to what is being tested. They are organised in a number of 'skills' (e.g. spoken comprehension, written expression, and so forth), for which specific items make it possible to assess achievement or otherwise. They are based on what is expected of pupils given the objectives and standards set by the curriculum. The tests are administered by the form teachers at the beginning of the school year, because the aim is to provide information on pupils' achievements so that work can be organised accordingly. In this way, compulsory testing is better accepted by teachers: pupils' achievements on the test can in no way be regarded as a reflection on the teachers' work but merely as a teaching aid.

Since the assessment measures the extent to which the objectives for each subject have been attained by pupils, test outcomes enable teachers to define what shortcomings in pupils' attainments have to be overcome before effective teaching can be delivered. Each school is responsible for analysing its own results, using dedicated computer software provided for the purpose; the school is also responsible for drawing up a 'success chart' for each pupil and each form. The school can compare its performance with the national standard, by accessing the computed results of the national sample of schools through the internet. Schools are provided with the main results together with a pedagogical commentary.

The intention is that the findings of assessment will be taken into account by inspectors and trainers in their recommendations to teachers, and in the course of in-service training programmes.

School indicators as a tool for improvement

Contrary to popular belief, there has never been a formal and systematic school evaluation procedure in France. One reason is that, historically, ideological considerations about equality tended to impose the view that all schools should function in the same way, so as to be strictly

identical in terms of outcomes. This situation has changed over the past 20 or 25 years, and the idea that schools can be different, but may not always offer the same type or quality of service is now more widely accepted.

In addition, France has no inspection procedures on the scale found in some other countries, though they do exist. Inspections traditionally do not deal with schools from a global perspective, but rather concentrate on individual teachers. They do not carry out the kind of overall national assessment of schools that is necessary to monitor the system and provide information to parents.

As a result, the education ministry was prompted to develop an original system to provide information on schools to the public and to schools, themselves, to help them improve their processes and performance. This approach is underpinned by the idea that, like the assessment of pupils, the evaluation of schools is an educational tool. This is, therefore, radically different from the rationale of school inspection in France. At the same time, it departs from the idea that value added can be measured through monitoring individual pupils' achievements at various key stages.

The action taken by the ministry was in response to the press, which had been publishing yearly league tables for upper secondary schools (age 16–18+) based on raw results at the school-leaving examination (baccalauréat). No information was provided concerning lower secondary schools.

From around 1995 onwards, a set of standard indicators worked out nationally was made available to secondary schools, together with the necessary computer software, by the education ministry's division for evaluation. Most of the indicators offered by this system take the form of a feedback of information to the schools. Schools are required to provide data for the national information and management systems, and these data are then automatically returned as 'personalised' indicators that are ready for use and accompanied by references (national, regional or district averages), allowing schools to situate themselves in comparison with others.

These standard indicators constitute the background against which schools can measure themselves. The standard indicators are deliberately kept down to a manageable number of around 20. Their object is to provide an accurate description of how the schools function, and to allow each school to compare its practices with those of similar schools nationally or in the region (académie). The indicators fall into four categories:

- input indicators (characteristics of pupils);
- output indicators (school results in examinations, admission of pupils to higher forms or institutions);
- indicators relating to resources;
- indicators on school management and environment.

It is intended that analysis of the information provided by the indicators will lead schools to revise their policy, among other things in terms of pupil admission procedures, selection and opportunities for repeating years.

This will naturally take time, as the whole of the school community will have to be made aware and convinced that some changes may be necessary in their professional practices. An equally important part of the programme is to encourage schools to devise their own specific indicators

based on local characteristics and needs, to help them set up and assess their own school development plan.

Three of the output indicators (commonly referred to as 'performance indicators') are used in combination to estimate the effectiveness of upper secondary schools (lycées), in order to provide some measure of 'value added'. They are also meant to combat the negative effect of the publication of 'league tables'. The three indicators are:

- Success rate at the baccalauréat. This is the most traditional approach, but does not reflect the effectiveness of all aspects of a lycée.
- Rate of access to the baccalauréat. This indicator assesses the probability that a given pupil entering the lycée will obtain the baccalauréat after a learning career completed within the lycée, however many years are necessary. Unlike the above indicator, this one covers an entire learning career within the same lycée.
- Proportion of baccalauréat holders among leavers. Of the pupils leaving the school, for whatever reason, this indicator shows the proportion who left having obtained the baccalauréat. Like the second indicator, it therefore reflects the entire learning career within the same school. A lycée that selects its pupils and rarely or never allows repeated years will have a lower value under this indicator than a lycée that allows pupils several chances of success.

These indicators give a very different account of the school's performance than simply looking at the single raw indicator of examination success, since several aspects of school policy are brought to light. By measuring the value calculated for each of the three indicators for a particular school and against nationally calculated expected readings for that school (given its specific educational and sociological make-up), and against those of comparable schools in the region and in the country (i.e. schools with pupils of the same ages and from the same socio-economic background), the value-added for that particular school becomes apparent.

Thus, a very selective school that retains only the better pupils through the various stages will be seen to have no great difficulty in leading the great majority of them to success. However, it will also be seen to have a lesser value-added than a school that struggles on with children of mixed abilities, but which nevertheless manages to bring a significant number up to the required standard.

The three performance indicators calculated each year for each upper secondary school are available to the general public on the internet.

To complement this system of upper secondary school indicators, another system was set up for primary education, starting in 1998. One of its aims is to facilitate a working relationship between primary schools and lower secondary schools to foster smoother continuity between the two educational levels. The indicators are currently organised around three thematic domains:

- local characteristics;
- functioning;
- pupils' characteristics.

These are applied to three geographical entities:

- the primary school;
- the relevant lower secondary school's catchment area;
- the educational zone where the primary school is situated.

How successful is this conception of evaluation as a tool for change?

Beyond the implementation of the schemes referred to above, the real question in France now is that of the real impact of those procedures on the professional practices of those they are supposed to help and, at the other end of the spectrum, on policy decisions.

Diagnostic pupil assessment is well accepted by parents and teachers at the primary level. Indeed, welcome shifts in the way the maths curriculum is taught have been spontaneously implemented by teachers as a result of publication of test results. Inspectors responsible for in-service teacher training take them into account.

Unfortunately things are less rosy at the lower secondary level, where teachers' attitudes to diagnostic assessment are far more cautious. An attempt to introduce it at upper secondary level was discontinued after a few years, because teachers simply did not make any use of it. At the same time, curriculum developers tend to ignore test results when revising curricula, and policy-makers are not inclined to make use of them in their deliberations.

Likewise, the use of school indicators is still insufficient to improve the schools, largely due to the fact that most head teachers are uncomfortable with such indicators and cannot see how to make the best use of them – assuming that they are prepared to use the indicators in the first place.

There is no statutory procedure to implement findings emerging from school evaluation. It has been suggested by the National Council for School Evaluation that such a procedure should, on the basis of the existing tools and others to be developed, include among other things the intervention of a team from outside the school and result in a publicly available report and in a compulsory remedial action plan. Again, national policy-makers seem reluctant to act on this advice.

In the light of this, there is reason to believe that much work remains to be done before a proper culture of evaluation is established at all levels of the system.

G rard Bonnet, Direction de l' valuation et de la prospective, Minist re de la jeunesse, de l' ducation nationale et de la recherche, France and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London

The Swedish school system and recent trends in Swedish educational policy

Sten Söderberg and Eva Wirén, The National Agency for Education (Skolverket), Sweden

Introduction

The paper gives an overview of the Swedish school system (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education), with a special emphasis on three features that distinguish this system from that of many other countries:

- its comprehensiveness – including the upper secondary school reform of the mid-1990s;
- the self-governance of Sweden's local municipalities;
- the relative absence of examinations, grading and national testing.

The paper also touches on Sweden's position in international comparative assessment studies and some of the ongoing debates within the Swedish educational discourse over the past 15 years, such as the continuing debate on Mathematics. It addresses the most recent features of Swedish educational policy, in terms of an enhanced state control and the introduction of market forces. To illustrate, the paper addresses in particular four current trends in educational policy in Sweden:

- the use of national tests for monitoring rather than supportive purposes;
- the splitting of the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) into two agencies, one tasked with quality control and a separate National Agency for School Improvement and Development;
- the introduction of 'league tables' (the 'SIRIS' system);
- Sweden's school choice reform, which has recently been evaluated.

The Swedish school system: a brief overview

The Swedish public school system is made up of compulsory and non-compulsory schooling. Compulsory schooling includes nine-year regular compulsory schools and special schools (ages 7-15 in both cases). Non-compulsory schooling includes pre-school (ages 0-6), a three-year upper secondary school (ages 16-19), and municipal adult education. At all levels, there are also special schools or programmes for pupils with learning disabilities.

The Swedish parliament and government lay down the national curriculum, national objectives and guidelines for the public education system. The federal budget provides municipalities with funds to carry out the various municipal activities, including schooling. Within the objectives and framework established by government and parliament, each municipality is, in principle, free to determine how its schools are to be run.

The National Agency for Education (NAE) is an independent agency under the Ministry of Education. The agency was re-organised in March 2003. Its main task is now to evaluate and supervise the public school system in Sweden. Every three years, the NAE presents a current overview of the school system to government and parliament. This forms the basis of the Ministry

of Education's national development plan for schools. The NAE's supervisory role is to ensure that the provisions of the Education Act are complied with and the rights of individual students are respected. This supervision takes the form of educational inspection, now the agency's priority task, comprising about half of the agency's organisation; this will increase substantially in volume over the next few years. A separate National Agency for School Improvement and Development has also been established.

At least three features distinguish the Swedish school system from that of many other countries:

- the comprehensiveness of the school system;
- the far-reaching self-governance of Swedish local municipalities;
- the relative absence of examinations, grades and national testing compared with many other countries.

Comprehensiveness of the school system

For much of the 20th century, the Swedish education system moved increasingly towards uniformity, integration and centralisation. As in other countries, this meant a reduction in the influence and responsibilities of institutions such as the church, the municipality, the trade guilds, the professions – and the family. For reasons of equality and equal opportunities, which were heavily maintained by the Social Democrats in government, the state was predominant, deciding on the local organisation of education, its goals, content, leadership, professional staff etc. The strategy to guarantee equality was uniformity and central regulation.

As a consequence, there has been a long tradition of 'comprehensiveness' in the Swedish school system, manifested in reforms towards a more comprehensive and inclusive system. In the mid-1960s, nine-year compulsory schooling was introduced. At the beginning of the 1970s, all forms of upper secondary education (three-year academic and two-year vocational) were amalgamated, with a common national curriculum. In 1994, all upper secondary programmes (academic and vocational) were transformed into three-year programmes with a common core of 'academic' school subjects such as Swedish, Mathematics, English, Civics etc. In practice, this means a twelve-year education programme for all young people, with all upper secondary study programmes giving general access to higher education.

This trend towards comprehensiveness also tends to include higher education. There is a political objective that 50% of young people shall start a university education before the age of 25. Currently, around 17% of all students go on directly after finishing upper secondary to higher education. Another 23% enter university study one year later.

All this has not happened without political debate. An overall ambition of the political parties in parliament (Riksdag) concerning education has been to find solutions by compromise. At the risk of over-simplifying, one might say that the differences between the parties to the left and the right espouse more or less integration within a national framework, more or fewer public municipal schools or independent schools, and more or less responsibility for individuals.

The far-reaching self-governance of local municipalities

Radical reforms implemented in 1990–91 transferred the main responsibility for the management and governance of the school system to the local authorities (municipalities). A guiding principle for these reforms was ‘management by objectives and control of the results’. This emphasises, at all levels, clear goals and objectives as well as evaluation and assessment.

An overall principle in the reforms of the 1990s is a shared responsibility between national and local levels, and between politicians and professionals for the development of quality in education. The local level is responsible for its own development, according to local needs and conditions, but also according to the national ambitions and explicit goals and objectives, as pronounced in national curricula and syllabi. While the political sphere is responsible for providing sufficient resources to guarantee the quality aimed at, the professional sphere is responsible for implementing education in accordance with goals and objectives. The national goals and objectives – as expressed in the national curricula and syllabi, the Education Act etc – define what constitutes good quality.

In other words, for the great majority of schools in Sweden there are dual government and administrative systems for managing, monitoring and supervising education – the national and the local. To this complexity is added the fact that the political majority may differ between national and local levels. Although restricted by national goals and demands of equality, a municipality may have ambitions somewhat different from those of the national government. For instance, some municipalities encourage a growing number of independent schools or more independence in the municipal schools via special school boards, while others try to maintain municipal unity.

As for funding, the municipality pays for all costs of schooling, regardless of whether it is a municipal or an independent school. The state contributes by an ‘equalisation grant’, intended to compensate for differences in municipal infrastructure, taxation and economy. The state grant is not directed specifically at schools and education; it is meant to support all municipal activities, such as elderly care, social security etc. The state grant is meant to supplement municipalities’ own income from taxation, which pays for the greater part of the costs of pre-school and school activities.

The municipality, or the independent school, directly employs all staff including teachers. A restriction is that every municipality is obliged by the Education Act to employ teachers with a college or university degree appropriate to their teaching role. Swedish teachers have individual salaries since 1996. The negotiation of salaries is normally done at municipal and local/school level, which means that teacher salaries can vary substantially between municipalities. This order is not the result of state legislation, but rather an agreement between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the teacher unions.

The relative absence of examinations, grades and national testing

Compared with most other countries, there is a relative absence of examinations, certificates or grades in Swedish schools. The centralised and formal upper secondary examination (‘studenten’) was abolished in the late 1960s, in conjunction with the reform of upper secondary schools. In compulsory school, annual grades were successively abolished, and since the introduction of the 1980 national curriculum, grades are only given in years 8 and 9. Since the 1994 national curriculum, grades have been awarded in each subject, on a three-grade scale,

from the eighth year of schooling onwards. These grades – ‘Pass’, ‘Pass with Distinction’ and ‘Pass with Special Distinction’ – are ‘goal-oriented’, meaning that they are meant to relate the pupil’s achievements to the national objectives stated in the syllabus for the subject.

Instead of grades, throughout compulsory schooling, pupils and their parents are given regular ‘progress reports’ and take part in meetings with the responsible teacher to discuss progress.

In parallel with changes in the marking system, there is a well-established tradition of assessment in Sweden. The national tests, administered by the NAE, have principally been intended to support teachers in assessing learning and to ‘guarantee’ that marking is done in an equivalent way for all pupils. The national test system should also measure the extent to which pupils have achieved nationally determined objectives. The tests should not be regarded as an examination, but more as one part of the overall process of assessment.

Sweden and international comparisons

Sweden has a long tradition of interest and participation in international comparative studies. In fact, the Swedish professor Torsten Husén was one of the initiators, in the late 1950s, of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Despite managerial, funding and technical problems, IEA succeeded and its results informed policy formulation in nearly all of the education systems involved. Torsten Husén was chairman of this group from 1962 to 1978, during which time the IEA’s activities expanded from a feasibility study in 12 countries, to seven large-scale studies in more than 20 countries.

There is still a general high regard in the Swedish government for the findings from the IEA studies, from PISA (the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment) and from other international comparative studies. The findings from PISA 2000, for instance, are frequently used or referred to, in government analyses and reports, and not least in the preparation of a national analysis and follow-up of the common education goals within the European Union.

However, within the Swedish educational community as a whole, the debate on the results of these international studies could rather be described as a non-debate – with one notable exception: the more-or-less constant debate on Swedish pupils’ poor skills and performance in mathematics. The first IEA study on mathematics (FIMS) in the mid-1960s was debated both in Sweden and in the USA, as both countries had low average test results. In the second IEA study on mathematics and natural sciences (SIMSS), in the mid-1980s, Swedish 13-year-olds were positioned not far from the absolute bottom of the list, alongside Swaziland and Nigeria. This had profound effects on political educational activities, visible mostly in various attempts at further teacher training in these areas. In the third study (TIMSS) in the mid-1990s, Swedish students performed at average level in mathematics, an improvement on the results in earlier studies.

Sweden participated in both PISA and TIMSS 2003; results are expected in December 2004. The first international results from PISA 2000 were presented on the same date as the Swedish national report. The initial results were received with moderate media and public interest – in fact, the Swedish results were received with much more interest in Germany. However, when findings were presented on discipline in Norwegian schools, Swedish newspapers wrote numerous articles about the lack of discipline in Swedish schools. Worried citizens sent letters and e-mails to the NAE.

In the international rankings, Sweden performed above the OECD average in all three aspects, ranking fourth in Reading Literacy and with more average results in Mathematical and Scientific Literacy. However, discipline problems and the excellent Finnish results occupied media's attention above all else. The media discussion on the lack of discipline sparked a political debate on values in education – just in time for the 2001 parliamentary election. Schools and teachers learned about the results primarily via the media and the NAE website. There is no real indication on whether, or how, PISA has influenced what actually goes on in Swedish schools. Interestingly, at national level, there was a negative correlation between 'discipline' and achievement in PISA 2000, but the NAE in Sweden had severe difficulties in getting this kind of message through in the debate.

Recent features of Swedish educational policy

Enhanced state control

In the mid-1990s, a new tone emerged in the debate on schools in Sweden. The principle of attempting to steer the sector by goals and results began to be questioned, as was the capacity of the municipalities to take responsibility for implementation – i.e. the fundamental ideas behind the decentralisation reforms of 1990–91. Various actors in the debate (the National Audit Office, parliamentary auditors, political parties, teaching unions, political scientists, columnists and others) proposed various solutions to schools' problems: a return to earmarked state funding; increased national requirements on the municipalities; additional state control measures; and so forth.

These new elements were also noticeable in the government's approach from 1996 onward. The national development plan of 1997 took up a number of new state initiatives in this area, by putting greater emphasis on control and quality assurance.

The national follow-up system ('SIRIS', see below) revealed shortcomings in pupils' skills and knowledge. The variation in results between different municipalities, and especially between different schools, was a source of concern and given prominence in the debate. The state's response to this was increased state control and quality assurance. Among other things, municipalities and individual schools were obliged (Ordinance 1997:702) to submit an annual written quality report as part of the continuous follow-up and evaluation of their own activities. The rationale for this requirement was that the 'reports should function as aids to develop and improve the school's work by making visible the school's results and its work on fulfilling goals'.

According to the ordinance, reports should also contain an assessment of the extent to which educational goals have been achieved, and the measures needed to increase goal fulfilment. The reports are thus clearly linked to goals, and results steer the school and the dialogue with the state. However, municipalities and schools have found it very difficult to manage this state requirement. Only 228 of the country's 289 municipalities provided quality reports for 2001. Of the reports submitted, only 70% met the requirements of the ordinance. The proportion of schools that submitted reports was even lower.

A further aspect of greater state control is that, from 1996–97 onwards, the state has successively increased the proportion of earmarked state grants for different measures in school education, e.g. grants reserved for recruiting and hiring more teachers.

Introduction of educational inspection

A new governmental national development plan, in May 2002, emphasised the need for even more state control measures, by a clear division between the state's controlling role and stimulating/supporting role. As a consequence, the old NAE has been split in two. One agency (still called the NAE) has educational inspection as its main task. (Its other functions are mainly educational statistics, national evaluation, revision of national syllabi and other steering documents, and the approval of independent schools.) The second agency, the National Agency for School Improvement (NASI) is responsible for general support to schools within national priorities. It also:

- supports local development of work quality and improvement of learning environments;
- stimulates the development of professional competence among educators;
- is responsible for the national programme for school leader education;
- supports the wider use of ITC in education;
- disseminates knowledge, experience and research among professional educators;
- participates in national and international networks that stimulate school improvement.

NAE's main task is now 'educational inspection'. Its role is to clarify whether and how well an educational institution is functioning in relation to regulations in the Education Act, statutory regulations, and national curricula. This involves inspection and evaluation at local authority and school levels, taking into account quality and legal aspects at the institutions under inspection. The Educational Inspectorate, a high-priority operation within the reorganised NAE, also aims to provide a basis for quality development in pre-schools, care of school children, and the education system as a whole. One of the most important tasks of the Educational Inspectorate is to observe whether everyone actually gets access to the high standard of childcare, schooling, and adult education to which they are entitled.

During the next six years (2004–09), all local municipalities and independent schools, including institutes of adult education, will be subject to inspection. Inspections of pre-schooling and care of schoolchildren will focus on how the relevant local authorities take responsibility for these activities. The inspections are to look thoroughly into all activities of the various educational institutions, produce data and provide a picture of the situation in a local authority or school. The next stage will be to present concrete requirements or suggestions for action that a local authority must or may decide to take based on the inspection results.

Use of national tests for monitoring rather than support

In August 2003, the Ministry of Education assigned the NAE to investigate the functioning of the national test system in the Swedish schools. Although the assignment was formulated in just a few sentences, it presented a task of considerable complexity. The discussions that followed related back to basic concerns regarding the purposes of the tests and related issues, for whom and for what they are carried out. The assignment's focus, emphasising follow-up of results and monitoring, is in line with current trends in the educational arena in Sweden. It reverses what has, up to now, been seen as the main purpose of the tests, to support teachers' needs. The assignment also put forward the question of enlarging the national test system to encompass more subjects and include other age groups.

In Sweden, at present, national tests are introduced at a relatively late stage in compulsory schooling. Tests are first mandatory in grade 9, for pupils aged 15, and in Swedish, English and Mathematics – often referred to as the ‘core subjects’. National tests in these three subjects are also available, but optional, for grade 5 (age 11). In addition, there are national diagnostic materials for optional use, covering the same subjects. One set of materials covers pre-school up to grade 5 (including Swedish and Mathematics, but not English), and the other covers grades 6–9 (and all three subjects).

A recent report from the Swedish Centre for Business and Policy Studies (an independent network of leading decision-makers from the private and public sectors) argues the need for national tests as early as grade 1 (age 7). Another current Ministry assignment concerns the collection of grade 5 test results at a national level. An underlying question relates to the possibility of making these tests mandatory. A recent study on the effects of national tests in compulsory school indicates that, even though the tests are not mandatory at national level, almost every municipality has in fact made the grade 5 tests mandatory at local level. The voluntary nature of some of the national tests, as well as the absence of grading in lower years, is a politically controversial issue in Sweden.

The system of national tests is more complex in upper secondary school. Tests are mandatory in the first course of study in the ‘core subjects’ (Swedish, English, and Mathematics), which all students undertake, regardless of study programme. For students who choose to continue with any of these subjects, national tests are also mandatory in the final course of the subject. Optional national tests are also provided courses in Swedish for Immigrants (Sfi). In addition, teachers have access to optional supplementary test material from a resource bank, including tests at different levels in subjects such as French, Physics and Biology, as well as vocational subjects or programmes currently being developed.

The resource bank can be seen as one answer to the government’s desire to widen the national tests to other subjects. Following the general trend, the discussion is now on how to make this system, and these tests, useable for follow-up and monitoring, again shifting from the supportive purpose.

As stated earlier, the NAE is responsible for and administers the national test activities, but the tests are all constructed at university institutions, assigned by the Agency. The tests are generally judged to be of high standard, measuring up to the various technical and scientific demands involved in the construction of tests. In schools, the teachers within each of the three subjects administer the tests, and score, evaluate and report on the results. Even though teachers generally complain about the high costs in terms of their work effort, the general feeling is that the tests are well worth this effort. Various studies indicate that the tests are indeed highly valued by teachers.

From a system perspective, the tests have multiple – and conflicting – purposes. On the one hand, tests are meant to support the principle of justice and equity in grading; on the other hand, they are meant to serve as indicators of goal attainment. There are also other expectations and other side effects. Given the ‘goal and criteria’-related grading system introduced in Swedish schools in 1994, the tests are also expected to concretise course goals, to exemplify criteria for grading, and to contribute to identifying and diagnosing pupils’ strengths and weaknesses.

Side effects of the tests are more or less desirable, depending on one's perspective. One effect is 'teaching to the test': the tests can be seen as governing the content taught. Another is that the tests are sometimes regarded more as examinations, contrary to their original purpose as one part of an overall assessment. Current trends on more testing, and testing for purposes of follow-up and monitoring, also underline the importance of the test results as more than part of an overall teacher-based assessment.

The national test system at large functions and interacts as part of the wider educational system. The current trends of using national tests for monitoring rather than for supportive purposes, clearly creates tensions in a system largely defined as self-governing at the local level. More generally, this can be seen as an existing contradiction between on the one hand the pedagogical, supportive and developmental ambition of testing, and, on the other hand, the controlling and governing ambition, which depends on reliable data, possible to aggregate at different levels.

Introduction of market forces

Another important trend throughout the 1990s was the successive introduction of what might be called 'market forces'. Terms like 'transparency' and 'accountability' were widely and increasingly used, and reforms were implemented to increase the rights of parents and pupils to choose the school and the kind of education they wanted. As a result, the number of independent schools increased rapidly, as well as the proportion of pupils who attend independent schools. This was a radical shift from the uniformity that was for a long time a distinguishing feature of Swedish educational policy.

The 'SIRIS' system

The reforms in national management in the early 1990s included the introduction of an extensive national monitoring (follow-up) system in Sweden. The NAE regularly collects data from municipalities on childcare and schools. Each year Statistics Sweden collects data describing how schools are organised, how much they cost and what results have been achieved. This follow-up information is intended to provide a basis for comparisons, identifying issues and stimulating public and political debate. As a part of the follow-up, a national survey on the attitudes to education of the public, parents, pupils, and teachers is carried out every three years. All follow-up information is made public, and the attitude surveys, in particular, have attracted great attention in the national media.

The NAE regards the principle of 'open and public reporting of results' as fundamental, a democratic foundation of the system, and a tool for ensuring municipal political responsibility. Against this background, and with the introduction of the Internet, the NAE developed an internet-based result and quality information system, 'SIRIS'. This was made publicly accessible in September 2001. The system has brought about a radical increase in access to follow-up information, and has quickly become widely used. There has been surprisingly little public debate over the introduction of the system. It can be used for creating 'league tables', and has been so used mostly by certain media, although this was never an important motive for introducing the system.

Analytical support and help in interpreting data (which is visible and accessible), enables users to obtain a deeper understanding of the information provided, both quantitative and qualitative. The school-level information in SIRIS consists of:

- national statistics, e.g. final marks from compulsory and upper secondary school, results from year 9 national tests (collected on a sample basis), and national tests in the upper secondary school (also a sample);
- national quality inspections carried out by national educational inspectors;
- quality reports provided by the municipalities and schools;
- information on state grants for additional personnel;
- a tool for analysing local interrelationships ('SALSA'), which can be regarded as 'value-added' information about schools. It is a statistical model where the final grades for year 9 are analysed with respect to certain socio-cultural factors (educational background of parents, gender, foreign background).

The school choice reform

The expression 'school choice' has been used with different meanings at different times. The traditional two main political forces in Swedish politics, the Social Democrats (Labour) and the Moderates (Conservative), both view school choice favourably although views diverge when it comes to interpretation and application. The Moderates consider it desirable that all schools be transformed to 'independent' and 'free' schools, while the Social Democrats maintain that there must be a balance between local authority and independent schools if one is to be able to talk about school choice at all.

The Moderates' strategy as an opposition party, i.e. before 1991, amounted to striving for the conditions necessary for school choice – legislative and financial equivalence between local authority and independent schools. In power from 1991 to 1994, the Moderates introduced the so-called 'choice reform' in 1992. This is a school capitation allowance system that, in principle, puts the two types of school on an equal footing. For the Social Democrats, ideas on school choice had been incorporated in educational policy from the end of the 1980s onwards. Initially, school choice meant choice within the school, but from the beginning of the 1990s, this perception was expanded. Parents/pupils were, in addition, given the opportunity to choose schools within the local authority school system in the geographical area where they lived.

When the Social Democrats returned to power in 1994, the Moderates' definition of school choice was, generally speaking, accepted – with some important exceptions: the level of school capitation allowances was reduced, and later the capitation allowance system itself was abolished. On the whole, however, the choice reform of 1992 can be said to have opened a 'flood of demand' which has since not been possible to stop. The number of independent schools in Sweden has increased rapidly since 1992.

'Choice Reform' has recently been evaluated by the NAE (2003). The main findings, including those from a nationally representative survey of parents, show that an overwhelming majority of parents (more than 90%) agree that parents and children should be able to choose which school the children are to attend. Just over a third consider that having more independent schools is a good thing. On the other hand, the study indicates that school choice reforms are exploited by

the highly educated, which affects homogeneity at school level. A significant proportion of senior administrators in Swedish cities, suburban local authorities and large towns consider that school choice has had segregating effects, particularly in the matter of ethnic composition. The case studies carried out as a part of the evaluation study, also confirmed the assessment that school choice has reinforced segregation.

Issues for discussion

The headline of the December 2003 research conference was 'Learning by Comparison: International Experiences in Education and Training'. This report calls for doing just that: learning by comparison and interchanging experiences.

- What, for instance, are other countries' experiences or reflections as regards to the Swedish National Agency for Education's new task of inspection?
- What are the main purposes and uses of national testing systems in other countries? Is there a debate on 'assessment for learning' v. 'assessment of learning'?
- Are some of the current trends towards more accountability and monitoring and so on, clearly visible in Sweden, recognised in other countries as well, or are their respective trends going in the opposite direction? What is the debate on these issues?

In short, what can we learn by sharing our experiences on these matters in the educational field?

Sten Söderberg, Psychologist, Director of Education, National Agency for Education, SE-10620 Stockholm. e-mail: sten.soderberg@skolverket.se

Eva Wirén, Ph.D., Director of Education, National Agency for Education, SE-10620 Stockholm. e-mail: eva.wiren@skolverket.se

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Approaches to VET: apprenticeship, college or integrated options

John West - Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester

This paper illustrates how international comparisons can inform policy in Britain, using as subject matter the organisation of vocational education and training (VET) in the secondary phase. The concern here is not so much to give full accounts of systems in a wide range of countries, as to show how selective use of foreign experience can be deployed to influential effect in England. Such an approach is not without dangers, but used with a sensible methodology it can be both valid and instructive. Looking at 'real-life' systems exemplifying characteristics that attract us brings them to life in a way that statements of principles or theoretical designs cannot. It also helps to point to unintended consequences and corollaries of those systems that have been worked through in the countries concerned.

Many emphasise the difficulties in making instructive comparisons, still more the dangers of straightforward 'borrowing'. It is held that systems and practices abroad are the product of very different combinations of culture, context and history. We can, however, deploy a methodology that focuses on points that may be useful.

I would suggest five precepts for such a methodology, which this paper will attempt to illustrate:

- First, start with an appreciation of where we are. Without this, one can stray down interesting byways, but bring back answers to questions we are not asking.
- Second, make use of typologies, even at the price of some inaccuracy. What is so often instructive is not precisely what happens in a particular country, but rather the general configuration and the mindset it exemplifies.
- Third, look at combinations: which structures sit comfortably alongside others, and which are rarely found together? In the latter case, it might well be brave to propose an untried combination; the combination may be rare because it doesn't work.
- Fourth, note trends, of both pressures on the systems and the direction of reform, in the countries concerned. It might be foolish to import aspects of a system that a country is in the process of moving away from.
- Finally, note what doesn't work. Another country may aspire to some of the same things as us, but may have stumbled in attempting to implement them. This is well worth knowing!

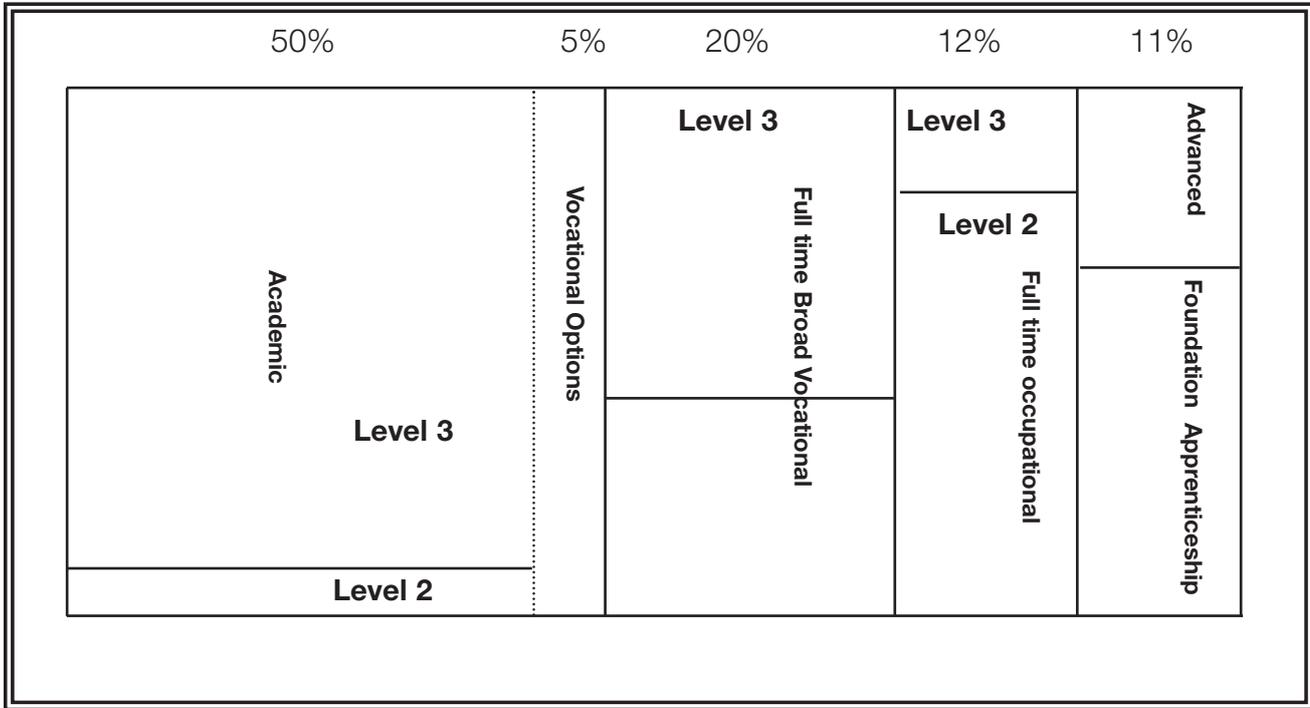
Let us now use these headings to suggest pointers for learning from abroad.

What follows is not exhaustively referenced. Descriptions of other systems are derived from the 2000 OECD study *From Initial Education to Working Life: making transitions work*, including background reports and reviewers notes on each country, and from the country descriptions on the Eurydice database.

Where we are now

Figure 1 depicts the segmentation of current upper secondary education and training in England:

Figure 1: Segmentation of upper secondary education and training in England



Note: The percentages and the approximate proportions of the areas in the diagram are of all 16 and 17-year-olds undertaking full-time education or apprenticeships (2001/2 provisional figures: DfES SFR 16/2002). Those not in education or training are omitted from both the numerator and the denominator for each percentage as are those in part-time education or fully funded by employers. Estimates of those taking BTEC First and National Diploma programmes have been included in the 'Broad Vocational' strand with those taking AVCE double awards and intermediate/foundation GNVQs. 'Vocational Options' constitute those taking AVCE single awards combined with academic subjects.

Certain questions immediately spring to mind:

- Are vocational segments in England larger or smaller than elsewhere? Which of the four modes of vocational instruction depicted is better?
- Is it reasonable to have apprenticeship and full-time occupational, or even broad vocational pathways?
- Could more people undertake level 3 vocational programmes?
- Is it right to have pathways at all? Would it not be better to expand the small 'Vocational Options' segment in order to promote flexibility and perhaps parity between the vocational and the academic?

Questions like these give us clues as to how to interrogate foreign practice.

Typologies of VET systems

There seem to be three major types of approach to VET during the secondary phase: apprenticeship, vocational courses set as a series of options alongside general courses, and dedicated full-time vocational education outside apprenticeship. Some of these can co-exist, but usually each country has an emphasis on one approach.

Apprenticeship

Under an apprenticeship system, the final phase of education takes place while young people are in employment, with specific duties for employers to release them for formal education and training, and to abide by collective, rather than firm-specific, training standards. Vocational education under this system is typically organised on a day-release or block-release basis, and focuses on relevant theory underlying individual trades. Most apprenticeship systems also include provision for continuing general education. Thus young people are simultaneously absorbed into the labour market with specific skills and vocational knowledge, while receiving – on a part-time basis – a final ‘top up’ of education in general subjects.

Apprenticeship is a substantial feature in some parts of Europe, notably the German-speaking countries, Denmark and the Netherlands, where between one-third and two-thirds of young people participate, compared with just over a fifth in the UK. France also has an apprenticeship system, though it is smaller than Britain’s. But in the USA and Sweden apprenticeship is virtually unknown for young people.

Apprenticeship brings a major advantage in facilitating a close mesh between education and the labour market. Youth unemployment in apprenticeship countries is comparatively lower than elsewhere. On the other hand:

- Apprenticeship systems are vulnerable to the economic cycle, because they rely on employers for places. In the late 1990s, Germany had considerable difficulty in maintaining the supply of places.
- They tend not to offer very sizeable avenues into higher education. Though some German apprentices do enter higher education, they do so largely by virtue of having previously attained the academic Abitur examination.
- They demand a firm occupational commitment on entry. Germany has over 350 designated apprenticeship occupations, and Denmark around 200. Though by no means all apprentices remain in the occupation in which they have trained, it is not clear whether this represents commendable flexibility or a price for early selection.

Vocational courses as options for all

Under this system, vocational education courses are presented as options within an elective secondary (or upper secondary) system. The idea is that not only will young people enjoy a choice between vocational and general topics, but this choice can be exercised in different mixes by different people and at different times – there is no ‘all or nothing’ decision point. Under such a system, vocational courses are discrete and specific; there is little point in their involving general education, since young people take this in their other options. Vocational options count towards an overall student profile on leaving secondary school.

The USA is probably the most prominent example of such a system, which also applies in Canada. The Scottish Higher Still initiative points in the same direction, though it is too early to be sure of the changes that will result from it.

The advantages of such a system are those of continuing flexibility of choice, custom-isation of programmes to individual needs, ease of transition between vocational and general topics, and (in principle) parity of regard, since vocational options are formally 'counted' on the same scale as academic credits. However, the problems seem to include:

- poor take-up of substantial vocational programmes: While many American students take a single option of a vocational nature, only around a quarter focus vocationally (three or more vocational credits);
- a sense of aimlessness for those not bound for university: Many of these students combine a range of general courses at a comparatively low level with the occasional vocational topic, often of a hobby nature;
- hidden tracking: Despite apparent even-handedness between courses which all count in apparently the same manner, there are distinct patterns of participation in the different areas, which hinge on ability, class or race, and are well known to all concerned;
- suggestions of 'academic drift', where vocational topics adopt the characteristics of their academic cousins, particularly in order to count as equivalent for entry to higher education. This may include 'artificial' academic content and assessment systems more geared to the reliability needed to support a fine grading structure than to validity in labour market terms. Thus certain vocational topics have effectively entered the academic stream in the Danish HHX and HTX streams and the German Fachgymnasien specialising in business and engineering. These count in the same way as academic subjects, but are accompanied by larger and distinct programmes that give rights to practise occupationally.

Vocational education tracks

The third major model is to organise vocational education as a limited series of distinct programmes, running parallel to academic tracks. Under this system, a young person enters a vocational programme that is seen as entire in itself, but – unlike apprenticeship – does not involve an enduring relationship with a single employer. It is institutionally based, with facilities to build practical skills, though generally without claiming that full working competence will be developed. Because such programmes are envisaged as having both educational and work-related aims, they have a balance of activities to fulfil both purposes so far as reasonably possible. Such programmes cover a broad vocational area, allowing some progressive specialisation as students make their way through them.

This is a common pattern in Continental Europe. Sweden, Finland, France and the Netherlands operate substantial vocational programmes of this nature. It exists in a rather different form in Denmark, and in Germany it operates instead of apprenticeship for some occupations (for example health), though on a much smaller scale.

The advantages include clear signals to young people and parents about routeways, and to employers about what can be expected from the formal education system. Because programmes are large, a deliberate balance can be struck between general education, vocational knowledge and practical skill within an overall design. (For example, general topics account for about 30% of curriculum time in Swedish vocational programmes and around 15% in Finland.) Links with vocational courses in higher education are possible, since they tend to be organised in a similar fashion.

However, there are disadvantages:

- Student choice is constrained. Although these programmes allow for specialised options, these are not limitless. Sweden has 14 vocational 'lines' with a total of 30 specialised branches within them. France and Finland have around 50 possible options for their advanced-level programmes. And once a student has started on a programme, it becomes progressively more difficult to change without penalty.
- Compared with apprenticeship, there is less exposure to workplace practice, though both Sweden and Finland have introduced substantial periods of work experience to try to compensate for this. Students do not necessarily 'glide' into employment in the way that apprentices tend to do.
- There is an obvious divide between the vocational and academic tracks. Without links with higher education, this can result in very low status.
- Particularly in manufacturing, construction and agricultural occupations, specialist facilities are expensive and cannot be offered in every location in a cost-effective manner.

Combinations

Linkages between the particular VET system and training in the labour market, higher education and continuing general education are all important dimensions to running a vocational education system. These throw up different challenges for our three models.

Links with training in the labour market

Obviously VET at secondary level needs to relate to the labour market: indeed this is the main point of it. This means that not only must it be relevant to labour market needs, but it should connect into established structures of recruitment and training.

Clearly this is not a great problem in systems founded on the apprenticeship principle. Vocational education is meshed in with workplace training, deliberately covering ground that cannot be readily be learned on the job. We may note, however, the Danish practice where for many a vocational programme starts off in college, enabling some occupational sampling and initial theory and skill, before migrating to a position with an employer where the apprenticeship is completed. This model is used to a degree in Germany, too, for students who are not judged ready for an apprenticeship, or when there is a shortage of places.

It is a little hard to see how a system of vocational options in the secondary phase can easily intermesh with methodical training in the labour market. Neither the USA nor Canada have significant numbers of 'youth apprentices' (apprenticeship tends to involve people in their mid to

late 20s in a limited range of trades). Vocational options taken at school or college can of course act as ‘tasters’ for the various trades, but systematically building credit towards apprenticeship would imply that a group of such options need to be taken. In such cases students would, in effect, have opted for a vocational pathway and have marked themselves out from their peers. A close interrelationship, going beyond ‘vocational sampling’, is likely therefore to involve a ‘tacit pathway’ inside an ostensibly open system. Some indication of this type of development may be detected in the emergence in the USA of career academies, effectively vocational schools within general high schools.

The relationship with apprenticeship is an issue for systems that have vocational education tracks. Although Sweden and Finland do not have much apprenticeship, some other countries with full-time vocational tracks do. We can discern three ways of handling the interrelationship:

- Occupational segregation: It is possible for there to be vocational preparation through apprenticeship in some occupational areas and through full-time vocational education in others. Some countries (for example, the Republic of Ireland) consider that apprenticeship is right for ‘traditional’ manual trades such as engineering and construction, while, say, business administration and health occupations are better delivered through institutions. Germany does this to a degree, though many services are catered for via apprenticeship.
- Parallel vocational routes: Young people are offered either full-time or apprentice-ship preparation in many occupations. Typically those more committed to an occupation elect for apprenticeship, while those who are less committed, or who aspire to higher education, remain in teaching institutions. While this gives choice, and some flexibility when apprenticeship places are not available, it can throw out confused signals to employers and young people who need to understand two systems and who may start to treat one as preferred. Both France and the Netherlands have attempted to address this issue by introducing common qualifications for both systems; for example, French apprentices can access both the BEP and the Bac Pro, which were previously seen as college qualifications.
- ‘End on’ arrangements: Vocational preparation starts in school or college, and then progresses through an apprenticeship. This carries the advantage that employers are less burdened with release, since much theory and specific skills are taught before-hand, and the college phase also gives time for young people and employers to select each other. But the separate phasing of theory and practice may inhibit integration; such a system needs careful management to ensure the supply of employer places so as to prevent individuals leaving ‘half trained’ after college. As noted, Denmark operates in this way.

Links with higher education

Access to higher education is seen in most countries as an important feature for VET. This is particularly the case in the many countries with expanding higher education sectors, such as Finland. HE expansion means that a secondary track’s failure to lead to university or polytechnic becomes more obviously a mark of being ‘second best’. It also means that access by students in that track is important to achieving participation objectives. Otherwise, HE expansion may involve the widening, and perhaps diluting, of the academic track.

Apprenticeship systems may struggle to give access to higher education, other than in a strictly cognate vocational topic and/or through sponsorship by an employer. The problems are that the

theoretical training tends to be rather narrow, and people completing apprenticeships attain a level of wages that makes return to studentship unattractive. Nevertheless, in Denmark, 30% of vocational trainees progress to higher education (admittedly in fairly specific vocational courses). In France, access to the Bac Pro for apprentices is partly intended to open links with higher education, though this does not yet seem to be a major outcome.

Systems with vocational options grant access to a wide range of higher education fairly readily, but this can be in inverse proportion to the number of vocational options taken – another force that tends to downgrade vocational education in such systems. The USA has developed the more overtly vocational Tech Prep route expressly to give access to vocational higher education, though this obviously starts to take on the characteristics of a distinct vocational track. As we saw earlier in Denmark and Germany, and arguably also in France in the shape of the Bac Technologique, certain vocational topics have taken on an academic flavour, and are regarded as equivalent – or nearly so – to academic subjects for university entrance.

Systems with vocational education tracks can also give access to higher education, though generally to more advanced vocational courses, rather than to a wide range. Sweden, Finland and France have all recently upgraded their vocational education to level 3 in order to enhance access to higher education, lengthening the duration of the upper secondary phase and adding to the elements of general education contained within it. However, advancement into higher education is still more the exception than the rule, at least in France and Finland.

In Sweden, vocational students have an entitlement to higher education under certain conditions. But waiting lists for university entry – by no means confined to those with vocational qualifications – mean it is difficult to discern just who is and is not gaining access. At the time of the 1999 OECD study, it seemed that 15% of three-year vocational students might gain access within three years.

Links with general education

Most VET systems aspire to a coherent, gradual and fairly seamless transition from general education (and some aspire to developing two-way traffic, too). This is because the vocational phase is conceived as part of secondary education rather than as distinct from it, and also – as we have seen – in order to promote links with higher education.

In most apprenticeship systems, it is considered proper to continue a strand of general education, at least for those under 18. This is generally fairly distinct even from vocational knowledge and theory, typically involving tuition in the mother tongue, maths, social science and civics, perhaps with a foreign language, and forming a common syllabus for apprentices whatever their occupation. An alternative is to 'enrich' vocational knowledge, particularly making use of relevant physical and social science material, though the many different trades can make this logistically difficult to achieve.

Under a system of vocational options, the issue is not problematic as students naturally pursue general subjects during their overall studies. It is difficult, though, to relate such general topics to vocational options, since different students are pursuing different vocational options, and many are pursuing none.

Vocational education tracks can fairly readily include general education. As we have noted, many countries have enriched these. In principle this can be accomplished through a separate general syllabus, but is more usually organised by making general subjects relevant to vocational areas.

Combinations of systems

It is possible to combine an apprenticeship system with vocational education tracks, either as a serial arrangement (Denmark) or with different arrangements for different sectors (Germany). What seems both uneconomic and somewhat confusing, though not impossible, is to have both apprenticeship and full-time vocational education routes to the same occupational qualification (the Netherlands and France).

It does seem difficult to combine a system of vocational options with either apprenticeship or vocational education tracks. The USA does not have apprenticeship for young people, and seems resistant to developing it, despite some attempts in the early Clinton years. It seems to have had more success in growing distinct vocational tracks in the Tech Prep programmes and Careers Academies, though these are in essence a substitution of overt (and arguably more purposeful) tracking for a covert (and arguably rather directionless) version.

Continental presentations of vocational options alongside academic ones (in Germany, Denmark and, perhaps rather less obviously, in France) have tended to result in the former becoming distinctly academic in nature and less directly relevant to the labour market.

Trends

A scholarly exposition of trends is beyond the scope of this paper (see for example Green, Wolf and Leney 1999). However, it is worth noting certain trends that reflect British concerns:

- a rising age profile for entrants to apprenticeship, which we certainly see in Germany as well as in the UK
- 'double dipping' in Germany and Finland, with academic students taking vocational upper secondary qualifications after they have gained their academic qualifications (largely because the vocational qualifications are necessary for entry to the labour market)
- boosting vocational education by extending upper secondary courses, increasing the general education components of it, and arranging for level 3 offerings in a wide range of vocational areas (Finland, France and Sweden)
- attempts to revive apprenticeship in many places, with some success in protecting the large apprenticeship systems in Germany and Austria; a degree of success in France and the Republic of Ireland from a fairly low base; but little success so far in countries with weak traditions of youth apprenticeships, such as Sweden, Finland and the USA
- caution about introducing extensive vocational activities before 16. The Netherlands, one of the few countries to have an explicitly vocational stream before 16, has gradually converted the dedicated LBO vocational schools into a 'softer' pre-vocational VBO, and now often merged with general secondary schools as VMBO. In France, there have been attempts to use vocational studies and experience to handle those having difficulty at school (CLIPA, SEGPA and classes de 3ème d'insertion), though these are restricted to special cases.

What doesn't work

The list no doubt, could be very extensive, but the following do not seem to work easily, or yet, and are worth noting:

- Generic skills. Despite high-level promotion and much definition, the generic skills identified in the USA under the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) initiative and in Australia in the form of Mayer competencies, have not moved beyond acting as general principles for curriculum formation. Using them for explicit certificated assessments does not seem to have been widely attempted. Likewise, the attempt to develop Schlüsselqualifikationen (key competences) within the German dual system seems not to have gone further than acting as general precepts for design.
- Individualised programmes. Particularly in the case of countries with large full-time vocational education programmes, there have been aspirations for students to be able to depart from the 'track' and to design – under supervision – a more personal programme of equivalent educational and labour market value. While such approaches have been used for those with problems in coping with mainstream programmes, the use of this facility otherwise seems limited. In a Finnish pilot project to mix vocational and academic studies, only 2% of academic students took a vocational qualification as well.
- Equality of esteem between the vocational and the academic. While a number of countries express concern that vocational pathways are not esteemed as much as academic ones, it would be hard to point to any country that has achieved such parity, or indeed one that is making notable progress towards it. A variety of devices are used – the same schools in the USA and Sweden, a similar qualification structure in France and Sweden, similar durations of the secondary phase in very many countries – but nowhere do vocational courses in the secondary phase attract the most able young people. (The situation of course is very different in higher education, where divisions between vocational and academic are blurred and vocational courses such as medicine and the law are highly prized.)

But parity of esteem is not necessary for esteem: in many countries the vocational pathways are seen as important for a very large portion of the population, and are carefully monitored and talked about.

Conclusions

It would be hard to maintain that these observations pointed to a firm, single direction for England, but one might note the following:

- England has substantial elements of all three models, both in actuality and in policy discourse. Politicians stress apprenticeship as the archetypal vocational route, educationalists are much attracted to integrated vocational options, but the largest component in actuality (and the one that has evidently grown in the past 15 years) is the vocational education track.
- To have two of these systems operating side by side would not be exceptional and might well be healthy. France, Denmark, Netherlands and even Germany all combine apprenticeship with vocational education in different proportions. But it would be hard to point to a system with all three as major features.

- Substantial vocational offerings at advanced level and with the possibility (though not the probability) of progression to higher education are seen by many countries to be the cornerstone of an esteemed vocational system.
- It would be hard to point to a respected system, whether consisting of vocational options, apprenticeship or vocational education, that did not also contain continuing general education in some shape. This is absent from substantial portions of the UK VET system.
- In most Continental systems (but not in the USA), measures for those who are struggling with general education in the lower secondary phase, while often containing some vocational elements, are fairly sharply delineated from the main vocational tracks.
- Mixing vocational options in an undifferentiated fashion with academic subjects seems hard to pull off. It carries the dangers of either degenerating into covert tracking or academic drift with a loss of connection to the labour market. The latter might be desirable in its own right, but it is not a recipe for a whole VET system.
- Parity of esteem may be an unattainable goal, moreover one that can entail dangers to VET if pursued too zealously.

**John West - Wyndham Cottage, St Mary's Road, Dinton, Nr Salisbury SP3 5HH.
j.west@dial.pipex.com**

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Three ideas of higher education: implications for policy and practice

Ronald Barnett, Institute of Education, University of London

Summary

Ideas of higher education, on the one hand, may influence the shaping of higher education policies; on the other hand, they colour responses to policies – as may be seen in the practices of the academic community. The presence of such ideas, however, is often not recognised even by those who espouse them or those who – as policy framers – receive them in the form of resistance to policy proposals.

We can see different sets of large ideas of higher education at work in England, in continental Europe and in the USA. The continental, and especially the German, idea of higher education lies essentially in a valuing of the intellect. The English idea is a somewhat larger one of the development of the student as a person, while the American idea lies in service to society and the formation of ‘citizenship’. The American idea can be seen to lie behind the formation of an educational market, modular systems and a keen responsiveness to student evaluation. The German idea, in placing responsibility for intellectual maturity on each student, may be seen to be in part responsible for slow progression rates and low completion rates. In contrast, the English idea of higher education gives rise to a close pedagogical relationship, which in turn sponsors a system-wide orientation towards high completion rates; in this idea, there is a concern for each student as a person.

A policy intended to drive up ‘transferable skills’ (voiced, for example, in the 1997 Dearing Report) is met in England with wide endorsement; given the English idea of higher education, it can naturally be alleged by academics that each course already offers the kinds of human development that transferable skills encourage. Nor is it surprising that two recent policy drives have met with mixed success. The expansion of the system and a public agenda of access and participation has generally been endorsed by the academic community; however, the establishment of arguably the most complex and judgemental system of quality evaluation in the world has been endorsed in principle, but has caused difficulties in practice. Both responses are encouraged by a dominant idea of higher education that is built upon a valuing of both students and teaching.

The formation of the new Higher Education Academy is also, understandably, drawing mixed responses. Placing a high value on teaching will lead some to demonstrate their ‘professionalism’ publicly; others may see the formation of such a body as an affront to their professionalism, implying that it needs to be demonstrated or, even worse, tested. In the English conception of higher education, after all, there is a sense that teaching is a worthwhile, if complex, activity in its own right, even while it draws on research. Correspondingly, the suggestion that there might be teaching-led universities is likely to be met with a semblance of acquiescence, provided that research can be kept in sight.

Introduction

This paper sketches out three ideas of higher education loosely based on those found in continental Europe (especially in Germany), England and the USA, and examines their possible implications – whether similar or contrasting – for policy and practice. This is a relatively impressionistic offering; there appears to be rather little in the way of a literature on this topic. This is also an interdisciplinary inquiry, drawing on philosophy, cultural studies, sociology and history, and stretching beyond the compass of a single paper (not to mention the limited resources that I personally can bring to bear on the matter).

This is, therefore, very much a sketch of a possible area of inquiry, and any suggestions that this draft may prompt would be valued.

Despite these qualifications, and others made below, I believe that it is worthwhile to begin this particular effort of comparative analysis. Such ideas of higher education, if they exist, presumably influence – if only tacitly – both practices and policy-making. Even if those ideas are more met in the breach than in their fulfilment, they can still serve as critical standards against which our contemporary policies and practices can be held to account. But, as well, a comparative exploration of this kind can help us develop ideas as to possibilities for the present and even for the future. It may be that there are more options open to us than we always recognise in the understanding and framing of our practices and policies in higher education.

A question, however, has to be posed at the outset: is it a sensible inquiry? Can we talk sensibly about ideas of higher education being characteristic of different countries or regions? After all, these days, even a single country will typically have a complex mass higher education system comprised of institutions with increasingly varying missions. There will be complex interactions developing with the wider society and the wider culture. Indeed, we need to embrace the idea of cultures (plural) both inside and outside higher education. The different disciplines may be understood as constituting separate cultures, each with its own life forms and value structures.

In this intersection of disciplines, institutions and the wider society (nationally and internationally), and in the widening activities that institutions are taking on, a fork opens up: one path leads to a view of multiple, varying and even conflicting ideas of higher education; the other path leads to a dissolution of ideas of higher education altogether as higher education simply becomes, seemingly, a set of activities undertaken with greater or lesser purposiveness. Either way, what falls away is a path that leads to ‘unity’, where all hangs together in such a way that it can be captured in talk of ‘the idea of higher education’. ‘Difference’ or ‘dissolution’: these appear to be the paths before us, so far as the idea of higher education is concerned. ‘Unity’ understood as ‘the idea of higher education’ disappears, occluded by the busy, unstable complexes that constitute higher education in different countries.

So the inquiry being posited here seems vitiated before it starts. At best, we could talk of higher education systems being strata of practices and ideas that are continually laid on top of preceding practices and ideas. The institutions that comprise higher education systems have this characteristic in their being perhaps more than other institutions: that the ideas and practices around which they have been formed are always there in their inner constitution. Universities not only have a history, but they are never free of that history. Earlier ideas and practices may be buried, but they are still there, providing foundational strata for present ideas and practices. On the other hand, if we ever could talk sensibly of ‘an idea of the university’, in the sense of a meta-narrative of the university that all institutions taking that titled shared, that idea is now lost from

view, overlain by layers of newer and more evident ideas and practices – ideas and practices that diverge even within single institutions. If there has ever been a single idea of higher education that served as a unifying discourse, it was long ago buried and has, thereby, lost its power of informing contemporary and future framings of higher education.

This line of thought – that any unifying ideas of higher education have long been buried – is legitimate and has both weight and plausibility. However, I don't want to counter it head-on. I want to try to make some headway in sketching out some possible and differing ideas of higher education across three regions, and then see if these can inform us in any way about contemporary ideas, practices and policies. Or, more accurately, I want to sketch out the outlines of such a process. If there are different meta-ideas of higher education at work in different regions, perhaps we should allow them to surface.

Three regional ideas of higher education

I speak of regions rather than countries: England, western continental Europe and the United States. By 'region' I mean here an identifiable domain in which there is a prima facie possibility of being able to identify a cluster of sentiments, ideas and presuppositions that could be said to furnish an idea of the university in that area.

It was continental Europe that saw the beginnings of the mediaeval universities, which became a kind of trans-national network, developed by wandering scholars who enjoyed – in Latin – a common language. Those universities were granted considerable freedoms by both the Church and the crowns in whose jurisdictions they fell. Academic freedom, accordingly, had its formal origins in the mediaeval development of the universities: universities were free of many of the restrictions, including certain burdens of taxation, experienced by the wider polity. The later 'Humboldtian' sense of academic freedom as residing in rights enjoyed by an academic community to pursue truth, free of state or other interference, can be seen as a formalisation of positive rights to freedom already pre-supposed in the patterns of academic life that had been developing over some centuries.

England – in Oxford and Cambridge – was part of the birth of the mediaeval universities; and, in that sense, was (to begin with) part of the movement sweeping continental Europe. Scotland witnessed an even more systematic allegiance to the flowering of universities across Europe in the late middle ages, with four universities established there. But the 19th century saw England and Scotland take definite separate paths.

Newman's *The Idea of the University* (1853) is often heralded as the epitome of the classic liberal statements on higher education, but 'liberal' (as RS Peters (1977) reminded us) is an especially ambiguous term. Newman's idea was certainly 'liberal' in that it offered a conception of university education fit for individuals freed from constraints, both social and even epistemological. Knowledge was to be 'its own end' and not framed by considerations of its social usefulness. Moreover, Newman had no truck with research, which was just emerging as a systematic form of academic activity; the characteristic mind at work in the university was one that enjoyed a 'philosophical outlook' and was not, presumably, one that should be limited by and in the disciplines of rigorous inquiry. The emerging 'democratic intellect' embedded in the Scottish universities offered a double contrast: it was both relatively open to the wider world and was to gain its legitimacy precisely by being anchored in research.

The Scottish idea of higher education, accordingly, was much closer to that emerging in continental Europe. It might be crudely captured in the phrase ‘the cultivation of the mind’, whereas the Newmanesque view of the university was much more one of ‘the cultivation of the person’. What developed here, it might be said, were two versions of liberal education – the continental European idea focused on knowledge and truth and the English idea focused on persons and a breadth of outlook as a person. England, accordingly, can be considered to be a ‘region’ in that it offered an idea of higher education somewhat different from that of both continental Europe and Scotland.

Certainly, this ‘English’ idea of higher education had already been challenged even in England, notably by the establishment by the utilitarians (including Jeremy Bentham) of the ‘godless’ college of Gower Street (soon to become University College London), as well as critics such as Playfair and Huxley (not to mention Prince Albert). (Phillipson, 1983) All these voices were keen to see new forms and ideas of higher education develop that were independent of the Anglican Church and were much more oriented to the world of commerce and science.

So, even in a small ‘region’ such as England, several ideas of the university jostled with each other well over 150 years ago, even as universities were just beginning to proliferate: independence from/alignment with the established church; independence from/sensitivity to the practical claims of the world; a sense that the world could be the object of systematic inquiry and even control/a sense that education was much more a matter of a larger orientation and stance in relation to the world.

And yet, it still makes sense to hold open the idea that there is a particular set of ideas that are peculiarly English. Newman (1853), Arnold (1969) and Leavis (1969) could be said to be the embodiment of this tradition, in which we gain a sense that a university is essentially a place of culture, of cultivation, of an enlargement of the mind – but at the same time, an enlargement of the person. The encounter with knowledge was simply a vehicle for the growth and development of the student as a person. The appropriate orientation to knowledge was that knowledge was ‘its own end’: neither the advancement of knowledge as such nor the advancement of the world was at issue.

America offered yet a third idea of the university. We can best understand this idea by reflecting again on the two European models, which had as much in common as they had points on which they differed. Both were concerned with the person’s relationship with knowledge: for continental Europe, that was the be-all and end-all of the matter. Knowledge opened the way to Truth (with a capital T) and a sense that all truths somehow cohered into a single story of the universe. For the English variant, knowledge was much more a matter of knowing. Truth was much less in focus; what was in question was the knower’s knowing acts and the personal benefits that accrued from those processes.

Both ideas of the university emerged from a class society, but this was particularly so in England: here, a university education was essentially that of a free person, unencumbered by considerations of practical use. Practical matters were some way off, too, in the university idea on the continent, but they came in indirectly: the pursuit of truth opened up the prospect of the world becoming open to human control (cf. Habermas, 1978)

The American model emerged from a quite different social situation. Much less characterised by a class system, the function of universities lay much more in practical matters. Many universities had been formed as a result of the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act, ‘which specified that agriculture

and the mechanic arts would be taught in conjunction with liberal studies' (Geiger, 1991). Here, there was little in the way of the metaphysical hinterland that characterised the European outlook.

In America, again, there were quickly evident a range of ideas of the university. The liberal arts were having to be positioned against more practical concerns; the right of individuals to invest in their own university education generated a market of a size that was unknown in Europe; the professions' relatively close relationships with the universities came to produce strong professional 'schools'. In turn, the market came to generate a 'system' of more than 3,000 institutions of higher education, each determined to secure and promote its own mission and market position. But this very openness, and the way in which higher education was much less influenced by the state (as compared with Europe), and the strong position that the market occupied in America, came in turn to produce a sense of higher education that was significantly outward looking. Knowing was to be put in the service of society. Accordingly, the idea of 'civic responsibility' took hold within the American idea of higher education.

'Civic responsibility' was and is a complex set of ideas, but perhaps the key strand within it lay in the idea that higher education owed something to the wider society. The nature of that 'something' inevitably came to be a matter of some debate; but higher education was not felt to exist on its own account; it had its value and legitimacy insofar as it was put in the service of improving or advancing society in some way.

The idea of civic responsibility was followed through in two complementary ways. On the one hand, there developed a sense that higher education was an educational process intended to assist in the formation of citizens. In particular, as 'higher learning', the hope invested in higher education was that it might help to develop leaders of citizens in society. One might be forgiven for reflecting that such a sentiment was understandable: a new country such as America did not obviously possess the social capital available to (old) Europe. On the other hand, the idea of civic responsibility came also to imply that institutions of higher education had a responsibility to engage with the local community. Again, what counted as 'engagement' and what counted as the 'local' community were subject to interpretation, but the sense of local allegiance and local pride came to be a significant part of the American idea.

Given these necessarily sketchy observations on three ideas of higher education, how might we summarise their relationships and their differences? To put the matter sharply, the European, especially the German, idea was and is an austere idea of the university: it takes as its point of departure the picture of a mind seeking to understand the world. It was primarily an epistemological journey, embellished – in its highest Hegelian form – by a sense of coming into a relationship with the world-as-Spirit.

The English idea, in contrast, was primarily an ontological journey: it is a form of human becoming, in which – at its heart – lies the image of a lone individual becoming even more individual as she or he develops the personal wherewithal to live effectively in the world. It was, we might conjecture, an idea not disconnected with Empire: this was a higher education that might sustain individuals in the unpredictable situations of those in leadership positions administering a quarter of the globe.

The American idea, in yet further contrast, was primarily a journey of praxis. It was a form of higher education in which individuals came to acquire larger identities, social, local and national, and were able to find themselves at ease in living in their society and in helping to take it forward. The knowing was in the service of those wider societal aims.

To make such distinctions is, of course, doubly crude. In each case, each idea was subject both to splintering as it was taken up in different ways, and to challenge and contestation. This was inevitable, not only because each system saw the development of a mass higher education system, but because each system was intended to serve a range of functions. Difference and even conflict was inevitable, therefore, in each setting.

Nevertheless, there was also bound to develop some overlap between them. Sociologically, each idea had its location in democracies that were intent on social progress and industrialisation and came to see in their institutions of higher education prospects for social and economic advancement. Globalisation and the e-revolution have also come to influence the different settings in the direction of convergence (not least through trans-national co-operation among institutions of higher education). Conceptually, too, each setting for the three ideas endorsed the ideas of freedom and openness: universities both required freedom and were a condition of the open society. Inevitably, then, the three ideas of higher education had to become fluid, to merge, to lose any distinct identity they might once have had. Yet, for all the convergence, liquidity and mutual engagement, it is striking that these three ideas may be seen to be influencing policies and practices in the three settings, even today.

The pedagogical relationship

Different ideas of higher education help to give rise to different pedagogical relationships. If, as in the USA, higher education becomes something of a market transaction, it is hardly surprising if a modular system develops and student ratings of individual professors become significant framers of teaching. In a modular system, after all, individual professors can more easily offer their educational wares to students who, as customers, determine which modules to attend. The modular framing of the curriculum, under these circumstances, becomes a vehicle for the student market. At the same time, systematised student ratings also allow student-customers to express their evaluations of their experiences. Such a framing of teaching might, in turn, influence the pedagogical relationship. Under these circumstances, the pedagogical frame will be relatively open, as students are able to secure a relatively large degree of space in which to exert their market preferences.

This relatively open pedagogical frame, in which the professor is required to take account of the student, also works in the interests of an idea of higher education that is turned outward in the service of society. For in a relatively loose pedagogical frame in which individual students have a degree of control, their own positioning, their being as persons and their immediate 'habitus' in their extramural world will come into play. Those claims and interests will speak to the pedagogical relationship such that it is not dominated by epistemological interests, but is also oriented to its use-value in the wider world. The curriculum may find an apparently natural tendency to assist the student's becoming-in-the-world. Service to society, therefore, is a probable function of a marketised pedagogical relationship.

In contrast, the 'strong' version of the European idea of higher education – essentially the German idea – takes its point of departure from an educational task that is understood as an epistemological project. It is the task of the professor to envelop the student epistemologically. Ultimately, the task will be the student's engagement with the relevant discipline(s). The pedagogical relationship, accordingly, is rather tightly framed in that it is governed by the rules of the discipline. The student's 'space' is somewhat closed – though not entirely, for under the

Hegelian/Humboldtian conception of inquiry, students are expected to acquire the personal wherewithal to make epistemological progress by themselves. A personal zone of action opens up on this view, but only insofar as is necessary for the student to acquire the necessary mental fortitude and self-steering qualities. In the context of such a set of ideas of higher education, the framing is tight, in the sense that the professor is relatively inaccessible. The process of inquiry is a joint one: the student follows in the footsteps of the professor, at some distance.

Bildung is much picked out as a process of broad human development. The educational journey is one of personal development. Sometimes, commentators employ terms such as 'cultivation' in speaking admiringly of Bildung. But the cultivation in question, strictly speaking, flowed from the epistemological journey. This is a cultivation of the intellect rather than of the person. Through the personal struggle within a truth-oriented and collective inquiry, the individual develops intellectual qualities that are also personal qualities. The struggle to come into an authentic relationship with truth, in the critical company of others, is edifying: personal qualities of diligence, resilience, courage and persistence, as well as single-mindedness, would be fostered.

This is a process of personal development born of a pedagogy built around the loneliness of the long-distance learner, a pedagogy of the cold shower variety: personal toughness born of solitary and rigorous endeavour. Even though there are others around, in a kind of learning community, it is a community in which creative acts are personal acts. One can and even talk to others, but it remains an individualistic intellectual culture. 'See but don't touch' is the watchword of this pedagogy and its austere pedagogical relationships.

In contrast, the idea of higher education that is peculiarly English looks to a much fuller and warmer pedagogical relationship. In this Newmannesque idea, what is sought is the development of a general or even a philosophical intelligence. Both research and professional development are eschewed here. What is looked for in this idea of the university is a cultivation of the person through knowledge. For all its insistence on 'knowledge as its own end', this idea of the university has another end, which knowledge is to serve: the human being, the wider intelligence, a philosophical outlook. The idea of 'intelligence' here – seen, for example, in both Newman and Leavis (Phillipson, 1983) – is not just or even mainly a cerebral matter. It was a matter of feeling, of sentiment, of comportment in the world. It is a largeness of outlook and a capacity for distancing oneself from the here-and-now that was appropriate to those likely to be entering leadership roles in a Britain possessive of an empire and of a large sense of its place in the world.

It is hardly surprising if the pedagogical relationship that arises out of this concept of the purposes of higher education is one of some 'intimacy' (Scott, 1995). On this relationship depended the development of human beings rather than intellectual beings. Indeed, it has often been remarked that England lacked an intelligentsia. That lack is, perhaps, the other side of the coin of the perceived primary educational purposes: on the one hand, a sense that education should be 'liberal' but crucially offering a freedom from the here-and-now; on the other hand, a focus away from, if not a distaste for, the intellect. Such a set of educational dispositions is almost bound to lead to a sense that the pedagogical relationship had to be relatively intimate, for the educational task was nothing less than the cultivation of human beings.

In such a milieu, it is hardly surprising if student completion rates are high and there is a concern to ensure that students complete their programmes of study. Relatively low student:staff ratios lead naturally to relatively low non-completion rates: close, intimate pedagogical relationships are likely, all things being equal, to offer the prospect of high completion rates. Conversely, there will

also emerge what may be judged as an undue concern that students should complete their programmes: a pedagogical and a policy 'ought' arising out of a statistical 'is'. But it is more than a statistical 'is'. The expectation that students should complete their course arises out of a sense that individuals matter, that students are flesh and blood, and are individuals. Here, these are the sentiments not just of an elite system of higher education, but of an intimate pedagogical situation concerned with and for students' being.

In such a milieu, it is hardly surprising if there emerges a distrust of distance learning in general and the heavy use of information technology in particular. Such approaches to teaching and learning could be seen as the thin end of the wedge, easily presaging the end of intimacy, closeness and directness.

Academic identity

Different ideas of higher education are also likely to bequeath different senses of what it is to be an academic. For example, the idea of – and, indeed, the phrase – 'the public intellectual' have sprung out of America. It is perhaps a nice example of how ideas, positionings and practices within the academy come together.

If 'service' is a dominant idea in the American academy, and if the stance of the American university is oriented towards the wider society to a significant degree, then it is hardly surprising that 'the public intellectual' should come out of America. Here, 'service' and 'the public intellectual' should by no means be understood to be giving to the wider society what the wider society expects or wants. Public intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, Noam Chomsky and Edward Said spoke volubly to the wider public – even, it could be said, helped to form wider publics – but did so critically. They offered new visions, new ideas, new possibilities that the wider society might grasp, even against its immediate intuitions. Such public intellectuals spoke to 'power' and were not afraid to engage with it and to contend against it.

The positioning of the American university, then, naturally produces a large academic identity. It is an identity that looks outward or, at least, has a sense of a wider public arena in which the academic identity may be forged. The European positionings of the university, in contrast, do not perhaps so readily produce that kind of public intellectual in quite the same way. We need, I think, to distinguish the English from the continental European identity.

Higher education in continental Europe has certainly produced intellectuals who have adopted a high public profile: Jurgen Habermas in Germany and Pierre Bourdieu in France are recent examples; more broadly, the critical theorists in Germany, and the existentialists (such as Sartre) and then the poststructuralists (such as Derrida) in France, have had strong public profiles. It is arguable, however that insofar as there is a recognised academic identity in continental Europe that engages with the public realm, the dominant mode of engagement is at a distance. If it is right, this is explicable in terms of our earlier analysis. The European academic identity has, as its ideal, a high intellectualism springing out of a focus on inquiry, on truth and on reason. The intellectual journey was one of an engagement with ideas, even expressed as large or grand theory (even if a modern strand has been to decry 'grand narratives').

The engagement that such an outlook would offer would be more likely to be one of social deconstruction rather than, as in America, social construction or (from the more critical) reconstruction.

These different stances surely connect with the mode of the discourse of these academic identities. The public intellectuals in America would be conscious of trying to speak to an audience or audiences, and there could be a hope that academics as intellectuals would speak in such a way that their voices could be comprehended. On the other hand, in continental Europe, where intellectuals did speak out, there could be no such pre-sumption. Being concerned to understand the world, and preferably in abstract theory, these intellectuals were always liable to speak in a language that few could readily understand (even if many bought their books). Here, instead of 'truth to power', the stance was 'truth to truth'.

Academics in England were always likely to have yet another stance. The very phrase 'academic as intellectual' seems, at best, quaint and, at worst, simply without anchor in English academic life. In England, indeed, academics are not even sure that they are academics, let alone intellectuals. Quite often full-time members of 'academic' staff in universities will have difficulty in associating themselves with the appellation 'academic', especially as a noun. For many, the statement 'I am an academic' implies an identity other than that they would wish to adopt. If so, it is the even more the case with the idea of the academic as intellectual. In the English culture, the idea of the intellectual is, for many, otiose; and to claim to be one is to acquire the accoutrements of a life that has no legitimacy. In England, there is simply no social space in which the category of 'intellectual' is granted a legitimate status.

In turn, the identity and role of the academic in England is more rooted in activities that can be observed more or less on a daily basis. Academics are likely to describe themselves in terms of their research interests, their teaching activities or, these days, their administrative or managerial responsibilities. 'Academic' is here filled out in terms of categories of activities rather than an appeal to large aspirations or ideas – such as reason, truth or freedom. It is hardly surprising, therefore, if the Dearing Report's suggestion (NCIHE, 1997) that universities might see themselves as the 'critic and conscience of society' met with rather little in the way of public remark, let alone endorsement. Such a conception of the university fell somewhat outside the dominant ideas embedded in the academic community.

Such a truncated sense of the category of 'academic' may be said to be a natural concomitant of the idea of the university as a site of human cultivation. Such an idea of the university is going to focus on the here-and-now, the substance of real live human beings and their particular development, rather than being overly concerned with larger metaphysical projects. At the same time, the positioning of the English university at arm's length from the state enabled the academics to understand their own professionalism (not that they would use such a vocationally oriented term) in terms of projects within their own discipline, without any encouragement to engage with the wider society.

Policy implications

What policy implications, if any, can be drawn from these schematic remarks and observations? Clearly, at one level, rather little. Little weight can be placed upon the ideas to which we have alluded here, in at least four senses.

Firstly, the ideas outlined here are only indicative. Even if it were possible to identify, with any assuredness, an idea or cluster of ideas associated with a particular geographical setting, alongside any such ideas could be found contrasting and even contending ideas. Any attempt to pick out some ideas rather than others will be problematic. Secondly, ideas are in flux and the

durability of any idea questionable. Has it been overtaken or displaced? Thirdly, large issues remain as to the significance of ideas: do they have any significant resonance? Lastly, in a globalised world, surely there will be convergences and overlappings, if not identity, between the dominant ideas to be found in different countries. So the presumption that there might be ideas characteristic of different national or regional settings has to be questioned.

Nevertheless, it is still worthwhile to place on the table the possible implications of different ideas of higher education. The points just adduced offer only qualifications and cautions; they do not rubbish the enterprise as such. If, for instance, multiple and contending ideas are present in a polity, then we may assume that that polity is having to assimilate such contending ideas; some kind of negotiation will take place.

This section, therefore, simply asserts some propositions that, if felt to have *prima facie* validity, will have to be addressed on another occasion:

- A sense that higher education is a matter of an immersion in an intellectual form of life – predominantly the European/German idea – will be likely to generate resistance to any attempt to widen the curriculum. Equally, such an idea of higher education will lead naturally to a marked sense of the value of academic freedom: academics should be left free to engage in their research on their own terms. This sense of academic freedom extends also to the students themselves; that is, they are responsible for their own intellectual development and progress. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising under such circumstances if progression rates are slow and non-completion rates are high. Continental Europe, as a result, is faced with the challenges of trying to improve both progression rates (with students whose courses, until recently, often seemed interminable) and completion rates (which, for the UK, would seem excessive).
- A sense that higher education owes something to the wider society, even the wider community, will naturally foster a worldly orientation on the part of students. Academics, too, will be much more prepared to project themselves into the public domain as part of their academic work and identity. These, we might intuit, are part of the dominant academic gestalt in the USA. This responsiveness extends into the curriculum: the curriculum will allow for choice on the part of the student, and the pedagogical frames will be relatively open. At the same time, this sense of responsibility will extend to the wider society, so there is likely to be at least a predisposition towards bearing some of the costs of the student experience.

Two major books coming out of the USA recently speak to these matters from entirely contrasting positions. Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) bewails the loss of standards, of a sense of high culture and of a sense of assured values; while Readings' *The University in Ruins* (1996) bemoans the managerialist corporation that the university has become, but takes up a much more relativistic position and looks to see established a university of 'dissensus'. Yet, for all their differences, which are many and profound, the two books share a sense of the university as 'othered'. That is, there is from within the academic community a sense that the university owes much to the wider society.

The policy implications of such a stance, and of such a set of ideas, are that universities will be relatively open and, as a result, will witness challenges in the maintenance of quality and a satisfactory student experience. There will going be doubts as to what is to count as 'standards' in such a society and amid such ideas of the university – because society will not speak with a single voice.

- In contrast, the English idea of the university represents not so much a middle way but a third way. Here, the pedagogical relationship becomes important. As we have seen, the pedagogical task is the development, if not the transformation, of human beings. As a result, when 'transferable skills' appear as a matter of public policy, as in the Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) inquiry, academics could declare from behind the stockades of their disciplines that their discipline just happened to develop all the transferable skills in question. For any discipline was simply a vehicle through which a wider educational project of human transubstantiation could take place.

Perhaps it is not too fanciful, either, to see here the seeds of a relatively high degree of compliance in the face of probably the most complex, bureaucratic and intrusive national system of quality assurance in the world. After all, academics who had their livings in this milieu of ideas could fairly believe in the integrity of their own teaching activities. Even though England came to be a home to a mass higher education system, ideals of a close pedagogical relationship survived. Peter Scott (1995) talks of elite ideals embedded within the mass system; that is a fair description, but I would prefer to say that we see here precisely the continuation of the idea of higher education as an educational project.

Under such circumstances, it was understandable that the new quality assurance system provoked little resistance. This was an academic community that, whether justified or not, believed in the integrity and quality of its own educational activities. What would be disputed was the 'bureaucracy' that attaches to such quality assurance procedures, for these procedures were bound not simply to intrude but to inject an instrumental and closed tone into dialogic and open processes of educational engagement.

This belief in higher education could also help to explain the alacrity with which this academic community endorsed the expansion of the system and a public agenda of access and participation. After all, if higher education is, essentially, an educational project enabling individuals to become persons as fully as they are able, why limit such a process to a small segment of society? There could be only one answer: there could be no limit in principle. Even so-called elite institutions would want to parade their credentials on this aspect of public policy.

However, the very belief in the integrity and, indeed, the seriousness of their approach to teaching as an enterprise in its own right, cuts two ways when it is suggested that academics might demonstrate their professionalism by signing up for a new professional body (now the Higher Education Academy). Some will be able to demonstrate precisely that they take teaching seriously and sign on the dotted line. To others, such a suggestion will seem an affront to their professionalism, in that it needs to be demonstrated or, worse, tested; or they will see the establishment of a professional body with all its attendant universalising procedures as an intrusion into the particularity of an academic's pedagogic relationships with his/her students. It is hardly surprising, therefore, if a drive towards publicly attested professionalism is met with mixed responses.

It is clear, too, that under such an educationally driven conception of higher education, beliefs in the inviolability of the relationship between research and teaching are likely to be paper thin. This is a conception of higher education that can and should draw on research, but in which teaching is seen to hold its own challenges; and perhaps those challenges – of human development – are ultimately even more severe than those of research. Such a conception of higher education, it might be judged, will tolerate 'teaching-only universities', even if it does not shout its support loudly from the rooftops.

Conclusion

Ideas of higher education, embedded within an academic community, can and will affect academics' responses to public policies on higher education. Within a democracy, and within mass higher education systems, there will of course be all manner of ideas, often contending with each other. No clear sets of ideas or responses will be forthcoming. That, perhaps, is the first and main judgement to emerge from these sketchy reflections: that policy development and policy adoption takes place in the milieu of ideas about higher education. Responses to policies advanced will be coloured by deep-seated ideas about higher education (including its activities, and the roles and responsibilities of its actors) and these ideas may not even be recognised as ideas by those who hold them. They will often be held tacitly, but strongly.

Secondly, and by extension, proposed policy developments may work either with the grain of such tacit ideas of higher education or against them. It follows, too, that in the mixed economy of a mass higher education system, proposed policies will be working with the grain in some quarters within a system, and against the grain in other quarters. But, it may be that, in any country (notwithstanding claims of 'convergence' amid globalisation or Europeanisation) there are dominant sets of ideas. The explanation of any such dominant set of ideas is a complex matter, drawing on social history, economic history, the social class system, the relationships between the state and education, education understood as culture, nationality and so on. Hence the difficulty of identifying the shape and character of any such dominant set of ideas. In turn, estimating responses to the shaping of public policy must be a difficult exercise: such assessments can only be offered with a degree of restraint. But that there is difficulty attached to the exercise hardly represents a challenge to the validity of the exercise.

The shaping of public policy on higher education will be all the more effective for an insightful understanding of the ideas on higher education circulating in the polity. Much work, though, remains ahead if we are to come to an informed understanding of those ideas.

Professor Ronald Barnett, Professor of Higher Education, School of Lifelong Learning and International Development, Institute of Education, University of London, Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL

r.barnett@ioe.ac.uk

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Gender equity in Commonwealth higher education: emerging themes

Dr Louise Morley, University of London Institute of Education

Introduction

This paper is based on current research directed by the author on gender and higher education in the Commonwealth. The project, funded by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, is examining interventions for gender equity in relation to staff development, access and curriculum transformation in Uganda, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and South Africa. Currently the project is examining the nature of writing on gendered change in higher education institutions and is analysing some of the issues that have emerged from scholarship and practice relating to women as students and staff in higher education in the Commonwealth.

A major finding is that while there are considerable differences across the Commonwealth in relation to demographics, national economies and the policy context, gender inequalities – particularly in relation to employment – appear fairly persistent and globalised.

It is unclear why, when there is equity and human rights legislation in 'developed' countries and sizeable investment in gender equity in low-income countries, women are still under-represented in senior positions in higher education. The increasing number of women undergraduates often means that gender equity is not seen as a policy priority and there is an assumption that qualitative change automatically follows quantitative change. Furthermore, gender is usually considered only in relation to basic education and is frequently a matter of policy silence in higher education.

Globalising inequalities

The history of women's engagement with the academy has been characterised by elitism, exclusion and inequality. Seven decades ago, Virginia Woolf (1938) asked:

Do we want to join the procession or don't we? On what terms shall we join that procession? Above all, where is it leading us, the procession of educated men?

Many women globally are still asking the same questions about participation and more poignantly why, having decided to join the procession, they are still at the back of the parade. The devaluing of women has become a normalised social relation in the academy – even within the changing political economy of higher education (Morley 2003). As academic and managerial staff, they are more likely to be in junior positions; as students, their qualifications are worth less in the labour market (Hogarth et al. 1997). The academy forms part of a more complex matrix of gender relations, with gender inequality omnipresent in the wider civil society. For example, 66% of the world's illiterates are women. On average, women's salaries are 25% lower than those of men and, politically and globally, women represent only 10% of parliamentarians (UNESCO 1999).

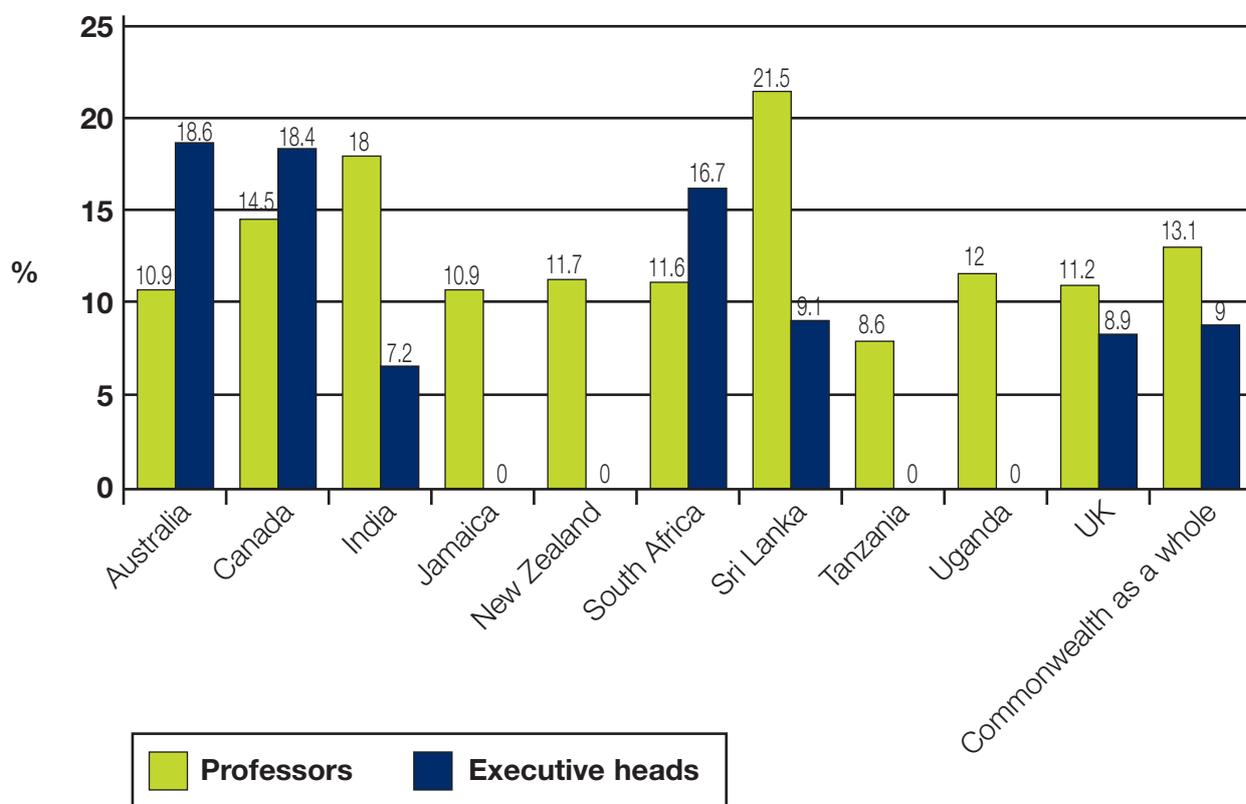
The political economy of higher education is rapidly changing, but generally women are still concentrated in the care-giving and service areas. They are a minority in the areas in higher education where power is exercised and decisions are taken. Despite potent advocacy and inquiry, combined more recently with progressive legislation in many countries, there is horizontal

and vertical segregation in the academy on a fairly global scale. So what is the way forward when universal patriarchal power appears so hard to denaturalise?

Mapping the terrain has been one strategy for change. In Europe, the issue of ‘persistent inequalities’ in higher education is frequently debated and documented (Husu and Morley 2000). For example, in Britain, the first woman became an academic in 1893, and the first woman was appointed as a professor in 1894. By the 1970s, the proportion of women academics was virtually the same as in the 1920s. Scandinavia has some of the most sophisticated equity policies in existence, with quota systems, high state investment in childcare and monitoring of recruitment and promotion processes. However, women still constitute only 11.7% of the professoriate in Norway and 11% in Sweden (Husu 2001). In the ‘developing’ world, gender equity is rapidly becoming encoded in national targets, supported and promoted by the international donor and policy context. Yet progress is also extremely slow.

Lund (1998) found no significant difference between high-income countries and low and middle-income countries in the Commonwealth regarding percentages of women academic staff employed full time. Three years later, the study was updated by Jasbir Singh (2002). She found that the ‘situation pertaining to the status of women in senior management and academic positions in Commonwealth universities had improved only marginally’.

Figure 1: Percentage of women professors and executive heads in selected Commonwealth countries (Singh 2002)



In South Africa, despite the fact that the government is keen to address race and gender issues via transformative policies for equality, authors note that the situation has not changed much since 1990 (Martineau 1997; Mabokela 2000; Ndungane, 1999). Makehubu {or Makhubu?} (1998) observes that Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland have women entering the academy as students, but not as academics or managers. Examples from across the Commonwealth demonstrate that women comprise less than a quarter of professors and executive heads.

Women's under-representation in senior and decision-making roles is not merely symbolic. It is a form of status injury. The lack of women in senior positions is both cultural mis-recognition and a material and intellectual oppression (Fraser 1997).

We must consider what is to be equalised when we call for equality (Sen 1992). A key question is whether there is an ideal morphology of the gender equitable university and a collective dimension to gender equity globally. What aspects of gender inequality universally disturb and discomfort? In the context of post-colonial and post-structuralist debates on whether universal womanhood exists (Blackmore 1999), there are dangers of silencing gender debates. As soon as feminists in 'developing' countries express criticism of patriarchy in their own cultures, or advocate processes of detraditionalisation, they run the risk of being accused of ventriloquising western discourses. Nussbaum (2002) observed that attempts by international feminists to use a universal language of justice and human rights 'is bound to encounter charges of westernizing and colonizing'. While arguments rage about the western-ness of feminism, or the economic value of equity, globalisation of neo-liberalism and post-colonial formations and relays of power have resulted in massive mainstream policy borrowing and transfer across nation-states. Neo-liberal policies for quality assurance and the audit culture have been successfully globalised, while policies for gender equity have not.

However, some international events have encoded gender equity in policy priorities. At the first World Conference on Higher Education, hosted by UNESCO in Paris in 1998, representatives of 182 countries endorsed the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty First Century: Vision and Action, with its commitment to in-depth reform of higher education throughout the world. Article Four of the Declaration is specifically concerned with gender (UNESCO 1998). It was noted, however, that women comprised only 20% of the delegates (UNESCO 1999).

Policy drivers for change

The global political economy of higher education is changing rapidly. Moves towards audit, accountability, user-pay and the enterprise culture have been accompanied by debates on democratisation and the relationship of higher education to globalisation and wealth creation (Morley 2003). Some Commonwealth countries (e.g. Nigeria and Sri Lanka) have experienced major political upheaval, civil war and militarism. Others (e.g. Tanzania) have had socialist governments ostensibly sympathetic to issues of inclusion. The general political trend, reinforced by the international donor community, is towards democratisation. Democratisation is accompanied by an emerging sense of rights and entitlements. Although the contexts of higher education institutions vary considerably in different regions, generally in all regions over the last ten years there has been movement towards a somewhat more inclusive orientation in higher education.

Policy discourses vary. In some locations, the emphasis is on affirmative action (Manya 2000). In South Africa, the policy focus is on redress and repairing damage/injuries to women – particularly

black women – via the transformation agenda (Samson 1999). In Europe, the discourse used to be equal opportunities (Morley 1999), whereas now it is more likely to be social justice and inclusion. Internationally, attention is being paid to gender mainstreaming (Bishop-Sambrook, 2000). Policy drivers in the Commonwealth include:

- public sector reform;
- commitment to transparency in governance;
- human rights;
- economic and social development;
- poverty reduction;
- social justice and inclusion;
- human capital theory;
- the learning society and lifelong learning;
- new markets and the enterprise culture;
- international competitiveness;
- international development targets;
- partnerships with civil society;
- multilateral collaboration;
- state welfare-ism;
- democratisation programmes (e.g. in South Africa);
- macro-economic management;
- new social movements.

Additionally, theoretical influences have challenged gendered hegemonies in the academy. Feminism, post-modernism and post-colonialism have all raised questions about the power/knowledge conjunction in terms of what is taught in universities and ‘disqualified knowledges’ (Stanley 1997; Spivak 1999). Questions have also been raised about how power is implicit in the way knowledge is produced and transmitted (see Hooks 1995 {or 1994?}; Ribbens and Edwards 1997). The power base of university governance, funding and management has also been challenged. Neo-liberalism in general, and new managerialism in particular, have been interrogated by feminist theorists to uncover the gendered processes involved in the formation, governance and audit of universities (Brooks and McKinnon 2001; Morley 2003).

In the midst of considerable policy and theoretical development, what is happening to gender equity globally?

The intellectual beginnings of the study

The intellectual beginnings of this study were the observation that gender, higher education, and development have rarely been intersected, leading to a silence in terms of policy, literature and research studies. Gender scholars across the globe are trying to account for the persistent inequalities in dominant organisations of knowledge production. However, there is some

unevenness in the data being produced. The West has produced a sizeable amount of published qualitative and quantitative data and critical literature; whereas lower-income countries have had to rely on some gender-disaggregated statistics, quantitative studies (often funded by international organisations) and lone, unfunded studies remaining in the grey literature domain. This was the starting point for the current research project.

International students come to London – many to study gender equity in higher education – and point out that the dominant literature in the field is from the UK, USA, Northern Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, despite considerable gender equity activity also in low-income Commonwealth countries. The nature of gendered change in higher education has not been systematically mapped across the Commonwealth, and there has been an absence of multilateral dissemination. This led to the formation of a partnership with gender scholars in Nigeria, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania, to begin to map and evaluate interventions for gendered change in access, curriculum transformation and staff development.

A first step has been to undertake a search of the published and 'grey' literature in low-income countries (published as an annotated bibliography early in 2004). The transcripts of women experiencing higher education in the Commonwealth, as both students and staff, remain relatively hidden. Lack of published literature does not imply lack of activity or lack of cultural capital. Rather, it can reflect the power relations and gendered and racialised gatekeeping practices embedded in publication and research awards. However, the lack of sustained published documentation of specific gendered interventions for change means that environmental scanning and widespread dissemination of initiatives for gendered change are impeded.

Lack of intertextuality: gender, development and higher education

There is a lack of intertextuality between three distinct bodies of literature:

- literature on gender, development and education;
- literature on higher education in the 'developing' world;
- literature on women in higher education.

The literature on gender, development and education rarely considers higher education. Gender has begun to be a category of analysis at basic-education level in lower-income countries. For example, DFID's International Development Targets refer to 'universal primary education in all countries by 2015' and 'no gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005' (DFID 1998). These targets are essential for poverty reduction, sustainable development and, indeed, creating a population appropriately qualified to enter higher education.

A human capital argument has been that past investment in higher education failed to yield the expected payoffs to national development in many regions of the world. Brock-Utne (2000) points out that, since the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All in 1990, funding agencies have been encouraged to focus on basic education. This is where the greatest returns to education and the greatest educational need are perceived to be. For example, 20 to 30 children can be educated at primary level for the cost of one year at higher education (Chapman and Claffey 1998). There is a 'hierarchy of needs' approach, with higher education perceived to be at the 'luxury' end of the educational market. Yet the university has traditionally been a pivotal institution, linked to the reproduction of gender and class privilege.

The literature on higher education in the 'developing' world tends to be characterised by a gender-neutral approach. Gender tends to be a category of analysis only in relation to access. The qualitative experiences of women once entered remain largely unresearched and untheorised.

Within the Commonwealth, as elsewhere, new competition, markets and sites of learning are emerging. The enterprise culture and the rapid expansion of private education are providing opportunities and threats. Yet few questions are raised about the social responsibility of private providers. In the mainstream literature in higher education studies, course content, pedagogies and organisational cultures have barely been examined for the extent to which they engage with difference, diversity and strategies for transformation (Morley 1999). Debates on borderless universities, offshore, franchised, satellite and on-line learning and the expanding global reach of higher education remain similarly ungendered (Morley, Unterhalter and Gold 2003).

In the literature on women in higher education, there are few qualitative studies in the public domain denoting women's experiences and engagements with higher education outside the West. Gender has entered some higher education discourses in high-income countries. There is some literature on equity and higher education in the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand. All confirm the difficulties at policy, institutional, organisational and micropolitical levels of putting into place strategies for social inclusion in higher education institutions.

The lack of intertextuality has created a policy gap. There are limited opportunities to theorise structural and cultural barriers or, indeed, to analyse qualitative experiences of women in higher education on a transnational basis. Writers across the Commonwealth draw attention to how lack of sustained qualitative data means that the complexities of organisational culture and gendered relays of power are unrecorded. Additionally, the lack of research on gender and higher education is having a serious impact on knowledge production and dissemination, scholarship and literature in the field.

Searching and reading international literature: methodological challenges

The lack of intertextuality, plus the lack of sustained publication of women's experiences of higher education outside the West, led the project to undertake a search of 'grey', semi or unpublished literature in the field. This has been analysed alongside some of the published studies. The intention is to begin a dialogue across different bodies of literature in order to enrich the examination of gender and higher education issues in high, middle and low-income countries. In addition to standard literature search methods, researchers, writers and project directors in this field were asked to assist in identifying literature. The literature was analysed to identify major themes and trends.

While conceptual purity might be an unrealistic aspiration in international gender work, there are always dangers of Westerners misrecognising cultural and organisational practices and imposing inappropriate theoretical frameworks on empirical studies from different countries. A major methodological challenge has been how to read the traces of what is said in diverse socio-cultural contexts without degenerating into orientalism and objectification (Meijer, Prins and Butler 1998).

Themes have emerged in writing from a range of sources across different regions in the Commonwealth. Sometimes, these formulations and associated silences and contradictions articulate with international calls for gender equality in education. As these studies demonstrate, inclusivity has qualitative as well as quantitative implications. Some of the emergent sounds are reminiscent of Young's (1990) exploration of five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

The changing purpose of the university

Global change has had an influence on both notions of the purpose of the university and approaches to change (Barnett 2003; Kenway and Langmead 1998). Increasingly, higher education is being framed as a source of labour market training, and there is a more explicit concern with universities producing new workers (Morley 2003). Hence, Commonwealth universities could be described as having been through three major phases: serving the needs of Empire; serving the needs of independence and nation-building; and, more recently, serving the needs of the knowledge economy. All three phases have been permeated by male dominance.

All phases could also be constructed in terms of elite formation. In spite of major policy changes, the debate on whether higher education is concerned with social reproduction or change (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) is still apparent throughout the Commonwealth. A persistent question relates to the transformatory potential of higher education itself. This is a central aspiration in countries in transition, such as South Africa. Higher education is seen to be a pivotal social institution and part of a rehabilitation process, raising consciousness and contributing to changing professional and social practices. While this can sound utopian and over-ambitious in a market economy, the university has sometimes been a site for the articulation of democratic and progressive values, including feminism and anti-colonialism (Morley 1999). In Bernstein's taxonomy of symbolic control (2001), the school system is coded as reproductive, while universities are perceived as 'shapers': they form and influence, rather than merely transmit received knowledge. Feminist scholarship has also indicated how social movements have impacted on the academy. While the reproductive/change binary is often overdrawn, past evidence seems to suggest that many Commonwealth universities were reproductive, but hopes for the future in countries such as South Africa frame them as transformative.

Yet, throughout the Commonwealth, the university is frequently constructed as an institution complicit with social divisions. Certain social class cultures facilitate the crossing of gender positioning and ease women's entry into elite organisations (Gunawardena 1990; Lovell 2000). Jayaweera (1997) indicates that the heavy investment in higher education in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh has allowed benefits to accrue to the affluent and middle class. This raises questions about whether widening access and participation are redistributive measures.

Counting women in: the access agenda

Low participation rates are an example of marginalisation (Young 1990). Paradoxically, neo-liberal constructs of enhancing participation in an enterprise culture have produced some greater demographic shifts than equity interventions (Morley 1997). More recently, human capital theory and economic competitiveness have driven the access agenda. Concerns about inclusion have emerged at a time of the engagement of virtually all higher education institutions with issues of

globalisation, marketisation, and increasing the quantity and quality of high-level human resources, because of economic policies concerning growth in particular sectors. Hence the access agenda is both democratising and economic.

The access agenda has gained international policy attention and raises questions about structures and mechanisms for inclusion. Some Commonwealth countries, notably Malaysia, South Africa, Nigeria, India and the UK, have encouraged increased enrolment in higher education in order to underpin increased international competitiveness and national prosperity. Various structural inequalities have related to identities; for example, to indigenous peoples in Guyana and Malaysia; to scheduled castes in India; to tribes in Kenya; and to race in South Africa (Mabokela 2000). Access strategies have included: reserved places; use of district codes in Sri Lanka and post codes in the UK; quota systems for women and scheduled castes in Indian universities, and for Malay students in Malaysia; and special programmes for working-class undergraduates or indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand or Canada. The UK initiated a major policy drive to increase participation to 50% by 2010, with particular reference to inclusion of lower socio-economic groups (HEFCE 2001).

Changing quantitative representation requires a nuanced understanding of social context. Kwesiga's (2002) study of women's access to higher education in Uganda is a richly textured exploration of the complexity of factors that create barriers for women to access education. She also reveals the importance of understanding specific contexts in order to identify localised solutions to women's access to education.

It is questionable how far access is linked to social and organisational transformation and distribution of resources. Sexual differences are social practices, and there are varying accounts of the impact of higher education on social change and de-traditionalisation. New constituencies in higher education can still be formed by traditional gender power relations. There is an interconnection between the social and the psychic. The psychic operation of norms can impede political change (Butler 1997). Weakened by the effects of externally imposed power, individuals can internalise or accept its terms. Over-socialisation can ensure social reproduction.

Jayaweera (1997) points out that, despite being university educated, many Asian women continue to internalise negative gender norms and passively accept oppressive social practices including dowry deaths and female feticide and infanticide. Joshi and Pushpanadham (2001), however, describe how educational opportunities for women in India have brought transformational change in social and domestic relationships. Educational and career ambition is gendered. Biraimah (1994) notes that, once entered in universities, Nigerian men's and women's career aspirations are vastly different. Male students, regardless of class, maintained extremely high educational goals, while females, who came primarily from high socio-economic status families, held less elitist goals.

Successful access policies mean that there might be some small expansion of numbers of students and of particular kinds of students. However, there is still the notion of a particular 'body of knowledge', or canon, to be transmitted to an elite 'student body'. Gender equity exists only within set frameworks. It is concerned with women, not gender inequalities or feminism as theory or political practice. Women are included as students, teachers or managers, but the different forms of knowledge or practice that they or any similarly sub-ordinated group might bring are not given epistemic recognition. Power is not redistributed, even though the potential space for access to power might have been widened. As Lovell (2000) suggests, we need 'to challenge the terms of the game itself and not simply secure entry for women as legitimate players'.

Gendered division of labour

A further example of marginalisation is the gendered division of labour in the academy. Explanatory frameworks frequently utilise the structures/agency debate. For example, Singh (1999) offers three categories of explanation for the lack of women in senior positions in Commonwealth universities:

- person-centred, relating to psycho-social attributes;
- structure-centred, focusing on the social structure;
- culture-centred, linking gender and organisational structure.

These explanatory frameworks are apparent in different studies across the Commonwealth. Lamptey (1992) points out that, in Ghana, contrary to expectations, most women reported that they did not face discrimination, but could not advance because of their multiple social roles. Teaching was perceived as compatible with traditional female roles, but research was not. Research was seen as insecure in terms of funding and requiring fieldwork, which would not be compatible with the roles of wife and mother.

The career pathways open for women academics often work against their promotion prospects. Many of the explanations for the gendered division of labour build upon domestic and private domains utilising norm-related discourses of heterosexuality. Mikell (1997) observes that African feminism is distinctly heterosexual and pro-natal. Again, this raises questions about the multiple feminisms across the Commonwealth.

The division of labour is not merely about redistributing tasks, but is also about redefining the cultural meaning and value of different kinds of work (Hunter 2000). Women's career ambitions can be more easily tied to domestic rather than worldly arenas. Entry into management can be both an opportunity and a form of exploitation of women. A recent study on quality assurance in higher education found that many women entered management to take responsibility for the domestic arrangements of audit, leaving male colleagues free to focus on their research (Morley 2003). There has been some sex role spill-over, with women's socialised patterns of caring appropriated by higher education institutions.

Women as managers: serving whose interests?

Questions have been raised in the West about women's access to and engagement with power within hierarchical structures (Deem and Ozga 2000; Marshall 1995; Morley 1999). There is qualitative as well as quantitative lack: women in leadership positions are perceived as impostors, second-rate and fraudulent (McIntosh 1985; Morley 1999). The psychic life of power means that negativity can become internalised. For example, the women managers in De La Rey's South African study (2001) frequently attributed their career success to luck, chance and factors external to themselves.

It is also debatable whether women managers are necessarily gender sensitive or politically committed to representing women's interests (Luke 1998). However, there is a view in many Commonwealth countries that women managers can make a difference. Tete-Menseh (1999) believes that, in the interests of equity, more women in Ghana should be in management positions; this would also strengthen their collective position and be a catalyst for change. Manya (2000) suggests women are perceived as possessing potentially new management styles of use

to higher education. This line of argument tends to be deployed by some writers to suggest that women innately possess more interactive, nurturing skills, and that women are a homogenous group. The gendering and essentialising of management styles and skills are themes in much of the Commonwealth literature.

Shah (2001) offers a more sophisticated analysis in her study of gender and higher education management in Pakistan. She observed that the discourse of equality encouraged women to enhance economic independence, career progression and social mobility, but a counter discourse of gender difference imposed constraints. Patterns of power and subordination were not just gendered, but were also cut across and transformed by class and other social formations. Women's institutional power was constantly undermined by the powerlessness associated with their gender.

It is often around leadership issues that the naturalisation of power is most visible. Odejide (2001) argues that Nigerian society's definition of leadership is masculine. She attributes this to Nigeria's history of militarisation that inextricably links leadership with authoritarianism, a quality that is not conceptualised as feminine. Odejide observes that the volatile nature of staff and student politics in Nigeria, which often involves physical and psychological violence, makes it easy for the community to designate university management as masculine territory. Leadership is frequently elided with control. In Sri Lanka, Gunawardena (2001) notes that discriminatory questions are often asked at appointment boards for senior posts; for example, 'Can they control trade unions, student unions?' While many women do not rise to leadership positions, those who do face many forms of discrimination.

Summary: theorising gendered change

The changing political economy of higher education suggests a logic of iterability, but certain aspects of universities as social institutions seem static. Higher education in the Commonwealth needs to be more equitable and democratic. While policy drivers for change are diverse, there is stability in women's under-representation from academic posts in general and from senior posts in particular. Women are entering the academy in some locations as students, but the academy is slow to change in terms of equity, in contrast to its rapid transformation in relation to new managerialism and neo-liberalism.

The literature suggests that gender equity work, while focusing on exclusion, can also exclude. This is noticeable in the western domination of the literature. Yet writers on gender equity in the Commonwealth are beginning to explore and expose the hidden conditions of existence and labour in intellectual communities. There is a strong sense of limits and counter-hegemonic challenges operating within powerful hegemonies. It is assumed by many writers and development assistance agencies that gendered change entails understanding women within the context of a norm-referenced framework. Many studies tend to perpetuate hegemonic, normative constructions of women and families. This is sometimes accompanied by an engagement with liberal feminism and the belief that equity is achieved by bringing more women into senior positions. The destabilising of conventional gender relations in the academy on very limited levels does not seem to have been accompanied by changes in the private domain. Nor has it always been accompanied by social and political transformation.

Women are also discursively framed as problem areas. With the exception of gender sensitisation programmes, men and masculinities are rarely problematised, or perceived in need of

development and training. There are silences about the forms masculinity takes in terms of initiatives to change higher education and the way in which resistance can constantly mutate.

There are still many essentialised observations about women's qualities and preferred styles of working (Lamphey 1992). Sometimes a social constructionist approach is taken, particularly in relation to women's career development. Career progress, ambition and self-interest are sometimes seen as 'unfeminine', as they imply desire, greed and attention to the self (Walkerdine 1990).

What is the way forward? There is always a tension between feminist change agency and feminist deconstruction. Firstly, advocacy needs to be accompanied by inquiry. Producing data and critical discourse legitimises women's lived experiences in higher education. The lack of sustained qualitative data in virtually all the studies analysed means that the complexities of organisational cultures are not always recorded. There are major issues about the gendering of research opportunities. Many studies, while pointing to important areas for future work, were unfounded investigations by a lone researcher. There is an urgent need for studies in micropolitics, the hidden curriculum and networks, giving epistemic privilege to women's voices in Commonwealth universities. Furthermore, existing studies need better dissemination mechanisms. This could be achieved, in part, via more effective global networks of gender scholars that include low, middle and high-income countries.

While different discourses justifying change are to be found in most accounts, little work utilises statistics to look at intersecting inequalities, or to track longitudinal processes. Gender is one modality in which class, race and so forth are lived, and gender tends not to be intersected with race, ethnicity, disability, class and caste, or sexuality. We need to continue to develop theoretical frameworks for understanding the interlocking relationship of emancipatory struggles of various kinds in different national locations.

The accountability so beloved by the audit culture needs to be extended to equity and social inclusion, with more effective monitoring of international, national and organisational policies, research agencies and professional organisations.

In terms of higher education, we need to keep posing the question about social reproduction and/or transformation. Elite formation can function to produce multiple higher educations, with differential educational experiences and exchange rates for qualifications in the labour market for different social groups. Gender equity needs to go beyond cultural recognition and focus on the redistribution of resources, inside and outside of the academy.

Policy Implications

- Gender should be a category of analysis in UK higher education policy, with particular regard to employment and staffing issues. Furthermore, it should be considered in relation to access, retention, completion, achievement and employability of graduates.

It should also be applied to analysis of entry and achievement in postgraduate studies.

- Policy objectives to increase participation of under-represented groups (e.g. socio-economic groups 4 and 5 and people with disabilities) should take gender into account.
- Accountability and transparency should be extended to equity issues. Gender equity should be a performance indicator for quality audits.

- Equity indicators should be applied to the decision-making processes and allocation of research resources.
- More qualitative inquiries are needed.
- There needs to be more policy monitoring. Statistical information is needed to intersect structures of inequality and to track longitudinal processes.

Dr Louise Morley, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Studies, University of London Institute of Education

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Association of Commonwealth Universities, The UK Department of International Development (DFID) and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for sponsorship of this research project; to Annik Sorhaindo for help with the literature search and the statistical data and also to Penny Burke and Edwina Peart for earlier help with the literature search. Thanks to my research partners: Abiola Odejide in Nigeria, Chandra Gunawardena in Sri Lanka, Joy Kwesiga in Uganda, Amandina Lihamba in Tanzania and Lesley Shackleton and Cheryl de La Rey in South Africa. Thanks to Elaine Unterhalter and Anne Gold at the Institute of Education.

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APEL in Europe: Radical challenges to the idea of a university

Pat Davies, University of Sheffield

Introduction

A key question this paper asks is: what is going on with the assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL) in UK higher education institutions? National student data is ambiguous and suggests that much informal APEL is taking place, but surely underestimates the formal APEL that is operating.

The policy implications for the adoption of a system of APEL such as France has recently introduced are complex. At present they are best expressed in terms of questions:

- What would be the implications of a new alternative pathway to HE qualifications, in which full degrees were awarded on the basis of APEL?
- Can we imagine a system in which one of the roles of a university is to award qualifications on the basis of learning acquired totally outside the academy?
- Would such qualifications have credibility and legitimacy in the labour market?
- Would they contribute to widening participation policy?
- How could we assure equality of opportunity in such a system?
- What kind of services would be needed to support such a system?
- How would quality assurance be implemented and measured?
- What about funding?

Background

The European Commission has been promoting the idea of APEL since at least 1991, when it recommended that 'the positive policies ... which give credit for maturity and for knowledge and experience gained in the labour market' needed to be adopted on a wider scale (CEC 1991). In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty formally enabled the Commission to act in the field of education for the first time (previously it was restricted to vocational training). Although this competence was subject to the principle of subsidiarity, it opened up the way for further EU interventions through the funding programmes.

A white paper in 1995 (CEC 1995) again pursued the question of APEL, albeit rather obliquely, recommending (inter alia) a European accreditation system covering technical and vocational skills and the extension of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to vocational training. The white paper was not well received and most of its recommendations were set aside. However, funding programmes such as Leonardo and the adult education strand of Socrates (1995–99), financed a substantial number of pilot projects to develop policies and practices for the accreditation/validation of work-based learning in higher education, vocational training and enterprises. (See Davies 2002 for a summary of these projects.)

In 1998, the Bologna Declaration signed by the Ministers of Education in 31 countries agreed to put in place a European Higher Education Area, including a common framework of diplomas and ECTS, which was to include lifelong learning activities as well as the mainstream curriculum. This was an important development for the Commission since, although formally outside its policy process, the Declaration clearly gave a major political boost to the support for its declared policy preferences. In addition, the Commission moved to service what has become known as the Bologna process and financed supporting actions and activities of various kinds (see, for example, the Tuning project, González and Wagenaar 2003).

Meanwhile, Commission policy proposals were crystallising around 'lifelong learning' and political support for EU action in this field was growing. The Lisbon Council meeting in 2000 brought this trend to a head and in its conclusions called on the Commission and member states 'to identify coherent strategies and practical measures to foster lifelong learning for all'. For the first time, the Commission had a clear mandate for pushing forward the policy agenda and strong political support for action. The Commission's follow-up proposals (CEC 2000) were thus more ambitious and imbued with a greater sense of urgency than previous papers, and the subsequent Communication (CEC 2001) aimed to turn the proposals into reality. A priority for action was 'valuing learning', defined as 'a comprehensive new approach ... to build bridges between different learning contexts and learning forms, to facilitate access to individual pathways of learning', including recognition of informal and non-formal learning by the formal sector.

In the vocational training field, the Copenhagen Declaration in November 2002 (CEC 2002) paralleled the Bologna Declaration. It was signed by the 31 Ministers of Education and Vocational Training, and this time included the European Commission from the outset. It set out objectives for vocational training policy and practice and requested the member states and the Commission to put in place actions to achieve them. A priority was:

Developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

Thus, by the end of 2002, the political and legislative mandates were all in place for the Commission to push forward one of its favoured policy initiatives: a comprehensive framework (including vocational training at both secondary and post-compulsory levels and in higher education) for the formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It lost no time in taking advantage of this. Even before the publication of its Communication in 2002, the Commission had launched a new kind of programme – Joint Action projects – bringing together Socrates, Leonardo and youth programmes, under three key themes. One of these was the 'construction of bridges between qualifications: a system of transfer and accumulation of training credits for lifelong learning'. One of the projects financed was the design of an European architecture for valuing non-formal and informal learning by all formal education institutions (see Davies 2003 and www.transfine.net). In 2003, there was a further call for 'laboratory projects' to test out the proposed architecture (several projects are currently being negotiated to contract stage).

All these policies and funding programmes are held together in the Commission by the 'Objectives process' – the working groups, technical groups, cross-sector meetings and platforms that are implementing the policies outlined in the Lisbon Council meeting objectives, with a series of target dates up to 2010. At present the vocational training departments are dominant, partly because the Commission has a much longer track record in this field, and partly

because it is less constrained by the principle of subsidiarity than for example in higher education, where university autonomy adds a further layer of complexity. Nevertheless, backed up by the Bologna process, there is considerable political and administrative pressure for universities to put in place systems, procedures and processes for the formal recognition and the award of credits for non-formal and informal learning. ECTS is the favoured tool, since it is relatively well established in universities across Europe, and thus also facilitates mobility.

The UK situation

The obvious question is: what has all this to do with the UK, which ‘has been doing APEL for years’. The NVQ system is, at least in principle, a framework for the formal recognition of work-based learning. This is not the place for a critique of NVQs – there are well-known problems with the current arrangements and some reform is underway – but one might note in passing that it is never discussed as an APEL system. The discourse around NVQs as an assessment framework and the discourse of APEL in HE are quite separate in the UK. In most other European countries, the reform of vocational qualifications to competence-based arrangements and, within that, the formal recognition of prior experiential and work-based learning is debated alongside APEL in HE, adult education and the voluntary sector, are all seen as different aspects of the same set of objectives:

- shortening the study time for individuals (and therefore the cost to all the stakeholders)
- upgrading their skills and competences and acquiring higher and more modern qualifications
- promoting participation in further learning; promoting social inclusion; promoting flexibility in the labour market
- facilitating mobility across national boundaries in Europe.

APEL across all sectors (even if not fully developed in them all) is seen as part of a coherent policy for lifelong learning for those in employment as well as the unemployed and the under-qualified. It is part of labour market policy as well as (and often rather than) education policy.

In the UK higher education sector, despite having been ‘doing it for years’, the record is very mixed. Although a recent survey (Merryfield et al. 2000) showed that:

... the majority of higher education institutions have APEL policies in place at institutional or departmental level (or both) ... almost all new universities and two-thirds of old universities.

However, a number of barriers were identified:

- APEL was resisted by academic staff and professional bodies.
- It was not widely known and understood by employers and potential students.
- It was widely regarded as time consuming and difficult by students and staff: ‘Some staff say APEL is so difficult that it is easier for students to take the module, even when they already have the knowledge’.
- HEIs sometimes have higher expectations of APEL students than for students on taught courses.
- Funding streams make learning options more complex to fund and to cost.

Not surprisingly, the report argued that ‘there is a gap between policy and practice’. It also pointed out that hard data was difficult to obtain through the survey but numbers in each institution were often small, ‘under 100 per year’.

At national level, the data are even more difficult to interpret. As Table 1 shows, a total of 689 students were admitted on the basis of formal APEL procedures in 2001/02. But 25,188 were admitted on ‘the basis of previous experience without formal APEL’ (Table 2) and 13,439 with ‘no formal qualifications’ (Table 3).

Table 1: First-year students with APEL as highest qualification on entry, 2001/02

Level of study	Region of institution				
	England	Wales	Scotland	N.Ireland	UK
Postgraduate	98	0	1	0	99
First degree	310	0	6	4	320
Other undergraduate	253	4	10	3	270
Total	661	4	17	7	689

Source: personal communication, data drawn from HESA 2003

Table 2: First-year students with ‘Mature student admitted on basis of previous experience (not formal APEL)’ as highest qualification on entry, 2001/02

Level of study	Region of institution				
	England	Wales	Scotland	N.Ireland	UK
Postgraduate	2,692	494	117	0	3,303
First degree	4,434	800	118	3	5,355
Other undergraduate	14,481	1,679	370	0	16,530
Total	21,607	2,973	605	3	25,188

Source: personal communication, data drawn from HESA 2003

Table 3: First-year students with ‘No formal qualification’ as highest qualification on entry, 2001/02

Level of study	Region of institution				
	England	Wales	Scotland	N.Ireland	UK
Postgraduate	607	59	97	0	763
First degree	1068	149	566	3	1786
Other undergraduate	9252	713	913	12	10890
Total	10927	921	1576	15	13439

Source: personal communication, data drawn from HESA 2003

In addition, experience or non-formal learning was clearly taken into account in some way in the admission to postgraduate study of 897 students with 'A-levels only'; 353 with 'Highers only'; 596 with 'GCSE/O-level qualifications only'; 138 with 'Access course'; 198 with 'Baccalaureate'; and 1,004 with 'Other non-advanced qualification' as highest qualification on entry – a total of 3,186. Similarly, 3,058 students were admitted to a first degree programme on the basis of GCSE/O-level qualifications only.

How should we read this data? Some form of recognition of some form of experience seems to be taking place on a scale much more significant than formal APEL. The question then becomes: does it matter? Given the difficulties, the complexity and the time-consuming nature of formal APEL procedures, it may be that these informal processes are in the interests of the students. Or it may be that they are incomprehensible, not at all transparent and difficult to promote to employers and potential students since they are idiosyncratic and largely hidden, silent activities. It is certainly not an admissions procedure that is widely advertised or marketed. Is it rather like a black market – everyone does it but nobody talks about it for fear of undermining the formal system or getting caught? Or is it merely a function of administrative practices in the way the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) returns are constructed?

Some years ago, in pre-HESA times, a study revealed margins of error in the recording of entry qualifications of between 8% and 20% (Davies 1997), and although HESA data collection systems are a great improvement on the previous arrangements, there is no obvious way of validating this field of the data. Since data entry is removed from the actual decision-making process and the mass system precludes individual checking, there may be some mismatch between the actual academic practices in admissions and the coding of the highest qualification on entry.

Overall, then, the evidence suggests that APEL in its informal form is quite common but not transparent, not easily promoted, conservative in its impact and concentrated in certain kinds of institutions and certain kinds of courses. The formal version is a minority activity that has little impact on academic processes in HE: it does not challenge the status quo in any way and leaves the admissions process, the teaching and learning process, assessment and the award of qualifications largely unaffected. It remains marginal in terms of numbers, its implications for practice, and its impact on the norms and values of the institution. It is not marketed in any major way and is largely confined to particular areas of the curriculum (especially nursing). It is also under-theorised as a topic in learning theory, sociology or policy studies. Although there are various surveys, descriptive accounts and some attempts to follow up student progress, these are largely small scale; we know little about the theoretical underpinning of APEL (see Colley et al. 2003 for a useful summary of the state of play in this field in the UK).

APEL in France

Other countries are developing quite different arrangements, usually based in law and linked to citizens' rights to enter higher education with certain kinds of qualifications. The trend is not limited to Europe. In South Africa, for example, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a priority in all the education and training reforms being implemented. It is seen not just as a mechanism for promoting entry to further study (vocational and HE), but as an approach to the delivery of the whole curriculum and mainstream assessment practices.

The most radical and well-developed model is in France. In January 2002, the recent modernisation of the Social Law (la loi de modernisation sociale) created the recognition of experience (la validation de l'expérience - VAE) giving individuals with at least three years in paid employment, unpaid work or voluntary activity the right to claim validation of their experience for an award up to and including a full diploma (see Leplâtre et Blanpain 2003 for a full account of this reform). Individuals were given the right to seek assessment and certification of their knowledge, skills and competences and the right to 24 hours' paid leave from work to prepare and present their application. All institutions accredited to award qualifications (including universities) were henceforth obliged to respond to all requests for validation.

All qualifications are covered by the law. State diplomas and qualifications awarded by all accredited organisations and professional bodies must all be registered in a national register (Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles) established by a new national agency (Commission nationale de certification professionnelle – CNNP). In April 2002, a decree was issued setting out the regulations for higher education institutions i.e. universities and other public further and vocational institutions (including those governed by ministries other than education, such as agriculture and health), engineering schools, grandes écoles, and private institutions accredited to award certificates or diplomas. It should be noted here that the law is located in the modernisation of the social contract and has implications for education and training institutions; its source is not primarily in educational reform.

There are two ways of reading this reform. The first is conservative (Feutrie 2002), a second-chance initiative (Aubret 2003), merely the latest step in a continuous stream of development (Merle 2003), and certainly not the end of the story (Santelmann 2003). This reading takes a historical perspective, pointing to:

- arrangements for the award of engineering qualifications on the basis of experience, created in 1934;
- the modularisation of the curriculum and the work of the CNAM;
- the law on continuing education in 1971;
- the 1985 decree that gave the right of entry to university on the basis of personal and work experience, the right to a skills appraisal in 1991;
- the 1992 law that permitted universities to award part of a state or university diploma (at all levels) on the basis on professional/work-based learning.

This narrative builds these changes into a developing and continuously extending system of individual rights in parallel with a continuous process of reform in the system of qualifications. However, it also positions it as a marginal system, evidenced by the relatively small numbers that have taken advantage of the 1985 and 1992/03 legislation. Although the new law extends individual rights and HEIs' obligations considerably, it is seen as a further step that will require adjustment by the institutions, but not as something that constitutes a rupture with the past; and as likely to remain a minority activity. It does however, constitute a modernisation since it firmly locates the individual as a responsible actor in a changing economic, social and cultural world (Aubret 2003).

The second way of reading the reform is to see it as the creation of an alternative system of certification (of the kind represented by the establishment of NVQs in the UK), based on competence. While this has been taking place in France over some years, it has been the site of

considerable struggle between industry and the education and training organisations, and the corresponding ministries for control of the system. The result of these debates and the decrees that followed the law of 2002 have resulted in a collective agreement that knowledge, skills and competences acquired in the workplace will be recognised by educational institutions within the framework of national regulation. To locate higher education in this development is to see it as a much more significant change: learning from experience will be taken into account on an equal basis with examinations; teaching and training are separated from assessment and from the award of qualifications; a completely new mode of access to qualifications has been created (Feutrie 2003a). Although located in a national framework of regulation (the CNNP), for universities in particular this can be read as tantamount to a revolution, certainly a paradigm shift.

Aubret (2003) contends that these two readings arise because the first is based on what is set out unequivocally in the text (*ce qui est posé*) and the second is based on an interpretation of what is possible as a result of the law (*ce qui est présupposé*). He argues that the law raises numerous questions around three dimensions:

- the political and social – particularly issues of equity and equality of opportunity and of access;
- the institutional – with some notable exceptions, the 1985 and 1992 laws have not been a great success in many universities in terms of numbers, and the new law will require a major change of approach and involve some significant conflicts, especially around assessment methodologies and the relative status of knowledge, skills and experience;
- the theoretical – in particular theories of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Is some knowledge not able to be acquired through experience? What is the relationship between experience and identity in this context. What about negative experience and collective experience?

Feutrie (2003b) argues that the law poses four kinds of rupture with the past:

- all qualifications are affected;
- all experience must be taken into account;
- since there is no longer any need to participate in any education and training course to obtain a diploma, it is a completely new way to access qualifications;
- the assessment panel (*le jury*) has a new role of prescription – if it does not award the whole diploma it is obliged to specify what the candidate needs to do to complete.

He points out a number of characteristics that are more interpretative; for example in prescribing what the candidate needs to do to complete the diploma, the panel is not restricted to courses at the university – it could ask for more experience of a particular kind, attendance at a seminar or conference, a report or any other appropriate and relevant activity or programme. In addition, VAE should involve a significant *accompagnement* (advice, guidance, tutorial support, etc); it must be located in a prospective career plan; and the assessment process is characterised by a dialogue between the candidate and the panel. The details of how these aspects are implemented at institutional level are largely under the control of universities themselves and therefore likely to vary considerably.

Even in the interpretative domain of assessment methods, it is possible to identify approaches of the two kinds. The first, and more conservative approach according to Feutrie (2003c) is a ‘weighing’ approach in which the candidate’s knowledge skills and experience are weighed

against the diploma; the diploma is awarded when the two sides are in balance. The other metaphor is of a balance sheet with the candidate on one side and the diploma on the other. Both imply a rather mechanistic form of assessment complete with checklists of knowledge skills and competences defined as outcomes of the course or programme. The second and more radical approach is more developmental and dynamic; the candidate is assessed on a personal and professional trajectory, and the diploma is awarded on the basis of a holistic equivalence.

As indicated, the extent to which the radical version of VAE permitted under the new law is implemented in the HE institutions generally has yet to be seen, since the regulations have been in force little more than a year. However, some universities awarded full diplomas during the 2002/03 academic year, suggesting that those that were particularly active in implementing the previous regulations were very proactive in promoting and exploiting the possibilities afforded by the legislation. It is also clear that the new legislation is provoking interesting political, sociological and theoretical debates.

Policy implications and challenges to the idea of a university

The emerging French model, even in its 'conservative' form represents a major challenge to the idea of a university and the role of academic staff. The fact that a full diploma can be awarded on the basis of experience is a new concept and the idea that it is merely a step along a continuous path of development and reform is belied by the 'noise' around the new law and its various decrees. As indicated above, it has raised fundamental debates about the role of educational institutions and qualifications in society and in the distribution of opportunity. While these may be old debates, they have been given a dramatic new twist with this legislation.

At the institutional level, the French model poses many questions. Firstly, in what sense is a degree awarded totally on the basis of experience, a diploma of University X? In principle this is less of a problem in France, where most (but by no means all) diplomas are national (diplômes d'état) rather than university diplomas. However, there is much more difference between diplomas from different universities than is commonly thought in the UK, especially in postgraduate degrees, and a strong, albeit tacit, hierarchy that varies by diploma as well as by institution. Secondly, VAE as set out in the new French law separates the functions of teaching and assessment and shifts the role of the university away from the former and towards the latter. Thirdly, it formally adds a new dimension to the role of academic staff: assessor and designer of learning outside the academy. It requires quite a different approach to assessment and different quality arrangements for that process. It enlarges the learning space of the university beyond its walls and beyond its control, into a range of different spaces: work, voluntary sector activity, independent learning, all of which require new forms of collaboration and experience for academic staff as well as for candidates. If it is to be taken seriously it requires a mass information campaign, proactive universities and changes to the way VAE is resourced in universities.

While the numbers may be relatively small at the moment, rising participation rates among young people, demographics, rapidly changing work practices, and the needs of the labour market and pressures towards employability all suggest that far from a diminishing demand for APEL as the impact of rising participation rates works its way through the system in the UK, it may be a significant market for universities in the post-experience field. In addition, if the Foundation degree grows in importance as a university diploma leading to employment, there may be further scope for development there. To adopt arrangements similar to the French would imply even

more radical changes to employment law in the UK. The idea of employees' right to request APEL and to 24 hours' paid leave to prepare for APEL would truly be revolutionary in the English context.

Pat Davies, University of Sheffield

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Trans-national, private and for-profit education: mapping, regulation and impact – lessons from international comparisons

Robin Middlehurst and Steve Woodfield, University of Surrey

Introduction

The paper reports on a small-scale piece of international policy research commissioned by UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning. The research was undertaken from October 2002 to September 2003. Its focus was on mapping the extent, range and impact of trans-national, private and for-profit tertiary education provision in a sample of four countries and was intended as the first stage of a larger project that would include a wider range of countries.

The stated aims of the project were initially set out in two stages. Stage one aimed to map the current extent and describe the nature of trans-national, private and for-profit provision in tertiary education in a sample of five countries; and to explore the legal, regulatory and financial issues related to such provision in the host countries.

The second stage aimed to:

- assess the impact of such provision on the education system of host countries (e.g., in terms of increasing participation, the development of the local tertiary sector and the wider political, economic, social and cultural context)
- compare and contrast the impact of trans-national, private and for-profit provision in a range of national and regional settings
- identify and explore the key issues, challenges and opportunities for traditional tertiary education providers resulting from the growth and development of trans-national, private and for-profit providers and provision.

In the event, the sponsors were keen that some attention was given in stage one to the issues and questions raised in relation to stage two.

Context and rationale

The tertiary education context in which students, providers and national governments now operate is changing rapidly as a result of demographic trends, the complex effects of globalisation on economies and societies, and a shift of the role of government in public services from provider to facilitator, regulator and partner. Despite different traditions, political and economic systems, technological levels and cultural outlooks, similar challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation are in evidence world-wide. (See UNESCO 2003; Alderman 2001b; McBurnie 2001; and Altbach 2002 for a full discussion of these issues.)

Universities and colleges in the developed world, many of which have enjoyed a long history of majority state funding, are now under pressure from governments to generate new income streams. In parallel, many developing countries struggle to finance public services adequately while operating within the constraints of economic restructuring and international debt servicing. In the developed world, universities have been encouraged by their governments to become

better managed and more entrepreneurial and to exploit themselves locally and internationally through the quasi-commercialisation of ideas and inventions and via international student recruitment. In developing and transitional countries, market-orientated development plans rely on greater contributions from stakeholders such as students, the private sector, overseas investors and aid donors, as governments recognise that they can no longer ensure the growth of tertiary provision at the required rate through public funds alone.

Demand for tertiary education is increasing in all parts of the world and, according to IDP Education Australia (IDP) forecasts, the global demand for international higher education is set to exceed seven million students by 2025 (Bohm et al. 2002). This represents over four times the global demand in 2000, although there are significant regional differences as developing countries seek to expand access to their youthful and growing populations.

In the industrialised countries, the trend is for a diversification of access to previously disenfranchised groups and new 'clients' such as working adults, older learners and learners at a distance, often at postgraduate level. This expansion has also been stimulated by the human resource requirements of the growing global knowledge economy, which places a premium on higher level job-related and transferable skills. Many nations have sought to achieve their development aims and international competitiveness through expanding their knowledge-based sectors, which requires knowledge workers with tertiary education qualifications. In addition, students themselves are seeking to become individually competitive and to enhance their opportunities for employment both at home and in the global employment markets. Students view the potential return on investment from higher education as high, particularly in vocational courses with a direct link to employment (such as business studies or ICT), either at home or overseas.

Providers of tertiary education have responded to demand by increasing supply both in terms of traditional types of study, and via more flexible study modes and vocationally orientated courses. This diversified provision includes; trans-national provision; corporate and 'corporatised' universities; distance-based universities (such as the Arab Open University and African Virtual University); and specialist 'vendor-led' training, particularly from companies like Microsoft and Cisco Systems in partnership with other providers (CVCP 2000; Taylor and Paton, 2002). There has also been an increase in the range of local or indigenous private and for-profit provision in many developing and in some developed countries in an attempt to absorb demand as quickly and cost effectively as possible (Levy 2003). In other countries with a long tradition of private higher education, there has been a further expansion in this sector.

The worldwide market for the export of educational services existed long before the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) discussions relating to educational services became prominent on the inter-national agenda (Wagner 1998). The World Trade Organization (WTO) has reported that this market was worth \$27 billion a year (Alderman 2001b). This market has grown out of, and complements, the historical internationalist nature of tertiary education, which had previously focused on collaborative rather than trade-oriented relationships such as student and staff exchange, technical assistance, joint research projects, and curriculum development. Today this form of internationalisation remains strong, particularly (although not exclusively) in Europe through the Bologna process. The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 commits European governments who signed it to help create an European Higher Education Area by the year 2010. This will mean that the historically different university systems in each country will achieve greater comparability and compatibility, and a commitment to the 'employability' and mobility of students and academics.

Until recently, the majority of the export income for providers has come from the recruitment of fee-paying international students. The traditional arrangement has been for universities in the developed world to recruit such students to study on their campuses, particularly in the US, UK, and Australia (Bennel and Pearce 1998). However, high fees and associated living costs tend to restrict both the number and type of such students that are able to take advantage of overseas opportunities, especially during periods of economic instability and recession. To cater for less well-off students, or those unable to travel abroad to study and to reduce the burden of overseas study grants, universities from the developed world have created new trans-national methods of exporting education to countries in the developing world. Trends in the 'export' of students and the 'import' of new forms of educational provision have contributed to the steady increase in the 'global flow' of students. These alternative forms of provision have been facilitated by recent developments in information and communications technology and the increasing world-wide penetration of the Internet.

While recognising that there may be overlaps, as well as other types of provision that do not fit neatly into this categorisation, Machado Dos Santos (2002) describes the following types of trans-national provision:

- franchising – where a whole course/programme from an institution in one country is licensed and delivered entirely by staff in an overseas institution;
- branch campuses – similar to a franchise, but the franchisee is a campus of the franchiser;
- corporate universities – established by large corporations that organise their own institutions or study programmes, which are not part of a national education system;
- distance learning institutions – learning where learners and teachers are separated, and the institution may or may not be located within the originator country's education system;
- international institutions – institutions offering international programmes/qualifications that are not part of a specific national educational system;
- offshore institutions – autonomous institutions belonging to an overseas educational system where they may have no campus;
- programme articulations – inter-institutional arrangements, whereby two or more institutions define a joint study programme in terms of study credits and credit transfers (e.g. twinning, articulation agreements); faculty from one institution often travel to teach on the twinned course;
- validation – institutions in one country awarding their degrees for a course designed entirely by a partner institution; awarding institutions may decide not to offer these qualifications/courses themselves;
- virtual universities – institutions whose only contact with students is by remote means.

For the project, there were three key points to note in relation to these categories. These are important for any research in the territory of trans-national education:

- Many of the providers in the above categories are private and/or for-profit when operating or enrolling students outside their "home country" (if such a base exists at all).
- Information about ownership and the organisational structures for trans-national providers is not always transparent, and it is often difficult to obtain, since this data is not systematically collected by national or international organisations (Altbach 2002).

- Some the providers described above operate outside 'official' education systems. Therefore information about their ownership, activities and students is often not available, if collected at all.

Host nations in developing countries have themselves made a variety of responses to the growing demand for tertiary education. Many lack adequate public tertiary education provision and infrastructure, not least because donor funding in support of education has tended to concentrate on basic rather than tertiary education in recent years (World Bank 2002). Therefore, in principle, they see the value of locally available trans-national or private-sector initiatives that are less dependent on state support, help them to fill the 'knowledge gap', and help develop local capacity in their aspirations towards the development of knowledge economies.

Different governments have responded in different ways to the availability of an often bewildering variety of new trans-national, private and for-profit provision. Not all of this provision is of high quality. Some may compete with indigenous provision, or serve only relatively elite markets (such as rich students) or niche markets (such as business qualifications). Therefore, some countries restrict foreign ownership (for example, Mexico and Thailand); some require various forms of registration and quality assurance (SAR Hong Kong); while others insist on local partners for foreign providers (Bulgaria). The role of indigenous private tertiary providers and their potential alignment with trans-national providers, plus regulation of online and for-profit providers, especially those with no local base, adds further complexity.

A further important issue for governments is the contribution that the new providers do (or do not) make to the development of 'knowledge economies'. Their contribution to the socio-cultural development of the country in terms of research and wider relationships with society are also significant, since these domains have long been viewed as important responsibilities of the public universities (Kwiek 2001).

The changing nature of demand and supply in tertiary education that has emerged since the late 1990s has been described as the 'business of borderless education' (Cunningham et al. 2000; CVCP 2000). Beyond the responses of governments, this phenomenon has caused a range of other reactions, some favourable and some hostile within the wider literature. On the positive side, it is argued that borderless developments offer new opportunities for learning that are flexible and responsive to a range of needs in the global knowledge economy.

On the negative side, it is feared that the dominance of Anglo-American provision and forms of study in the market will inhibit cultural diversity, contribute to a 'brain-drain' of qualified graduates from developing countries, threaten indigenous educational provision, and reduce still further already scarce public resources for – and therefore control over – tertiary education sectors (Alderman 2001b; Altbach 2002). The fact that many of the new developments represent a growing 'trade in higher education services' (Yelland 2000) has raised further controversy, particularly among those who argue that tertiary education should not be sold as a commodity, but should be provided as a public good (UNESCO 2003; Altbach 2001).

The changing context of tertiary education described above, the variety of responses to it in different parts of the world, and the challenges and controversies that have arisen as a consequence of recent developments provided an overarching rationale for this project.

More specific rationales included:

- a need to provide policy agencies, institutions and researchers with baseline data about the extent and range of trans-national, private and for-profit developments in different countries and regions;
- a need to provide information on the ways in which different countries are responding to trans-national, private and for-profit developments, particularly in terms of their national policies and regulatory, financial and quality assurance arrangements; such information will help governments and others to share practice in a complex and fast-moving policy domain, and help host nations to understand better how to manage relationships between their countries and providers to the benefit of all stakeholders;
- a need to cast light on the range of views and controversies surrounding trans-national, private and for-profit developments (and trade in education in particular), by examining the perceptions and impact of such developments, the challenges they pose, and how these challenges are being addressed. A particular contribution of this study has been to seek to view these issues from the viewpoint of the specific countries in the sample, since such perspectives are important for understanding how sustainable development in trans-national education can be achieved.

Research questions

The following questions guided the research. Although the main focus was on mapping and regulation, questions of perception and impact were addressed wherever feasible.

Mapping

- How much trans-national, private and for-profit provision is there in each country?
- Who are the providers and partners (e.g. countries and institutions)?
- What forms does trans-national and private/for-profit provision take (e.g. organisational and delivery arrangements, subject focus, type of students)?
- Who are the main stakeholders?
- What is the 'fit', if any, with indigenous provision?
- Is the country mainly an importer or exporter (or both)?
- What is the rationale for the development, or lack of development of new forms of provision?

Regulatory and other frameworks

- What is the government's policy and role in relation to the provision of trans-national, private and for-profit provision?
- What arrangements do countries have to control and monitor trans-national, private and for-profit provision (e.g. financial arrangements, regulation and quality assurance)?
- Are such arrangements the same or different from those that apply to indigenous provision (whether private or public, for-profit or non-profit)?
- In terms of government actions, what appears to have helped or hindered developments (e.g. infrastructure, quality assurance, price and financial support, staffing arrangements)?

Impact

- What kind of access exists in each country in relation to trans-national, private and for-profit education?
- Has such provision increased or widened access and participation in tertiary education?
- Is there evidence that employment prospects have increased for graduates (locally or internationally)?
- What perceptions (or other evidence) exist about the positive impact arising from the new provision (such as skills development, quality enhancement, capacity building)?
- What perceptions (or other evidence) exist about the negative impacts arising from the new developments (such as dominance of Anglo-centric curricula, brain drain, and damage to indigenous public provision)?
- What perceptions exist concerning relationships between new and existing providers?
- What policy issues arise from examining the context and position of trans-national, private and for-profit provision in the sample of countries?

Methodology

Data and information were initially collected from readily available public sources to create country case studies for Jamaica, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Bulgaria. The case studies, with supplementary questions, were then sent for verification, augmentation and amendment to a range of in-country experts from ministries, agencies and research institutes. After updating the case studies, a summary report was produced that drew comparisons across countries in relation to: overviews of each country; national education systems and policies; regulatory frameworks, accreditation and quality assurance; trans-national, private and for-profit provision; and local perceptions of impact. The report provided a comparative analysis across countries with reference both to the wider literature and to the data collected in the study. A series of policy implications for governments, institutions and agencies, both national and international, are reproduced below.

Because the study was undertaken in a short period of nine months, with limited resources and without the benefit of in-country research, as well as other difficulties of terminology and availability of data, there were some gaps in the data. The research also focused on a topical and volatile policy issue about which there is much speculation, often a paucity of data, and a fast-moving agenda at national and international levels as countries adjust to globalisation and associated economic, technological and social developments.

Case study findings

The countries in the sample differed markedly in terms of geographical locale and size, demographic profile, literacy levels, economic profile and stage of development, history and culture, and wealth. Their education systems also differed in terms of levels of primary and secondary schooling, participation rates at these levels, and the quality of such provision. All these factors have an influence on the nature of the tertiary education system and associated government policy. In the sample countries, the public tertiary education system was generally strong and well-regarded.

Demand for tertiary education is increasing in all the sample countries, but the reasons for this appear to be subtly different. They include the influence of reforms and improvements at lower educational levels; increases in per capita income and a growing middle-class; demographic imperatives combined with success at secondary level; and narrow and inflexible supply in a public system. Demand for distance learning also appears to be increasing, stimulated by both supply and government policy and investment.

Most of the sample countries have similar policy goals including: increasing access and widening participation; increasing the economic relevance of tertiary education; improving quality (and governance and management) in public institutions; containing public expenditure on tertiary education or increasing the revenue generated by public institutions; and increasing and enhancing science and technology training. National identity and cohesion were also of importance for some governments. However, the means of achieving these goals differ, and not all policy objectives were universal: one country (Bulgaria) was seeking to control access, not increase it.

Context is all-important when seeking to understand the nature of developments in each country and the reasons for them. In our sample, the extent, range and form of 'new providers and provision' varies widely, although certain variables seem to be significant. These include:

- historical educational traditions and cultural values (e.g. the status of overseas study, the existence or otherwise of an elitist public education system)
- adequate development of primary and secondary schooling (in terms of access, participation and sufficient quality to assure a foundation for entry to tertiary education)
- the influence of government socio-economic policy
- a level of economic development sufficient to create demand for fee-paying programmes, combined with under-supply of sufficient or relevant public education
- the adequacy of student financial support arrangements
- the form, focus and level of 'applied rigour' of the regulatory framework
- the influence of the World Bank's policies and funding.

The majority, if not all, of the countries in our sample are engaged both in the 'export' and 'import' of students (and staff) and the 'import' of new provision and providers. The main exporters of provision are the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, but other countries are also involved – for example, Germany, Russia, the Ukraine, France, the Netherlands and India – and Malaysia is actively seeking to become a regional hub for higher education. In this sense, international linkages and trade in higher education are clearly widespread.

The vast majority of trans-national provision appears to be at the postgraduate level and private in nature; while the majority of local private provision is at sub-degree or degree level organised through franchise arrangements with local or international universities. Both types of provision take the form of vocationally focused courses (for example, business, finance, ICT) that can provide a rapid return on investment through increased employability and access to local and global employment markets. Most of the provision is 'traditional' in nature, taking place in local universities or other institutions of higher learning and involving a degree of face-to-face contact (even distance learning). However, we should point out that we uncovered limited information about non-campus-based trans-national provision (such as e-learning), and that offered by corporate providers, since this information is not generally collected by official agencies.

All of our sample countries are either developing or seeking to revise their structures for regulation, quality assurance, and university entry. This has happened in parallel with the expansion and diversification of provision, and perhaps as a direct consequence. Currently the key issues are whether the countries have the funding and capacity to support the development of such structures and ensure their effective implementation.

The impact of globalisation in tertiary education is evident in our sample countries. They have responded to the challenge presented by the increasingly competitive global knowledge economy by seeking to develop their education and economic sectors in order to compete effectively in a global market. To paraphrase McBurnie, they are not passive recipients of trans-national, private and for-profit education, they are seeking to 'leverage' such provision to aid the development of their tertiary sectors and their national economies (McBurnie, 2001). This is especially the case in Malaysia, which has adapted its national system to accommodate new forms of provision, while also seeking to ensure that national economic and social benefits are attained in the process.

Assessing the impact, either positive or negative, of trans-national, private and for-profit provision is complex and for a complete picture, requires more detailed in-country data gathering than was possible in this study. However, it is clear that local circumstances are all-important. These include: the country's stage of development, in terms of 'new providers and provision' (as reputations, status and contributions change over time); and the existence, scope and effective functioning of national regulatory and quality assurance regimes. It is also important to note the complementarity and mutual influence between local public and new private provision (both imported and local) in our sample countries; impact flows in both directions.

Policy implications

The national and regional context is key when seeking to understand or determine the appropriate balance and opportunity for benefit from trans-national, private and for-profit provision; one size does not fit all. Governments can influence developments positively through a variety of mechanisms including:

- current national economic policy and economic strength;
- clear policy priorities and national agendas – e.g. national integration, economic development, enhancing quality and standards, promoting international collaboration;
- stage of development of the ICT infrastructure (e.g. networks) to support distance learning and flexible study;
- level of investment in and, improvements in access to, secondary education;
- education expenditure priorities – for example, system restructuring programmes, increasing literacy, expanding vocational education, improving teacher training, expansion of science and technology;
- government influence on national tertiary systems in terms of their quality, flexibility and relevance to national needs (curricula, qualifications frameworks);
- a regulatory and quality assurance regime that encompasses all forms of provision and is widely disseminated and rigorously applied;

- a regulatory and quality assurance regime that is clear about responsibilities for quality assurance, both local and international;
- financial mechanisms and regulations that align with national policy objectives (quotas, bursaries, and clear 'rules of engagement' for all providers).

In some of the areas described above, institutions and institutional agencies can also influence developments positively, both in collaboration with governments and independently. We also believe it is important for governments and institutions to keep up-to-date with the changing international context related to trans-national education. For example:

- the potential and actual impact of a move from 'collaborative internationalisation' to 'commercial' internationalisation' in several countries;
- the global employment market in certain industries – management, business, ICT and its potential impact on local and regional economies;
- the ways in which 'borderless' institutions can gain access to students world-wide without the knowledge and control of national bodies – some national agencies monitor educational advertising for this reason;
- the impact of closer regional economic and/or political integration (such as the European Union, CARICOM, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)) and its effect (or lack of effect) on trans-national provision and international collaboration;
- the increasing commercialisation of quality assurance procedures to gain competitive advantage (e.g. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of emerging quality assurance systems).

Maintaining government awareness of the position of trans-national, private and for-profit provision in the country and region over time requires the collection and analysis of current and trend data to guide decisions about:

- the nature and extent of demand for tertiary level studies – by subject;
- the needs of the local economy – what type of students are required?
- current local supply by type of institution and mode of delivery;
- the operations of providers that operate outside traditional record-keeping channels, i.e. trans-national, for-profit companies, and corporate provision (especially non-accredited providers);
- possible models and approaches to managing the development of a 'mixed educational economy' (as in Malaysia);
- clarity over national interests, such as national identity, regional agendas, social cohesion, skill shortages, increasing access, diversifying access to under-represented groups, and attitudes towards 'brain drain'. Our research demonstrates the complexity of the issues involved when seen from different perspectives and the range of solutions potentially available to countries and regions to address the areas of national interest.

The need for national and regional regulatory and quality assurance arrangements appears to be of increasing significance given the rise of new providers and forms of provision. There is a need for:

- establishing effective and functioning regulatory frameworks;

- developing and embedding accreditation and/or quality assurance arrangements that are fit for purpose and relevant to the national and regional context;
- providing up-to-date and relevant public information to guide students and other key stakeholders;
- supporting quality enhancement through national and international partnerships;
- improving staff–student ratios, financial management and governance in tertiary institutions;
- setting expectations for ‘home’ quality control and monitoring for foreign providers;
- providing and encouraging suitable financial support arrangements for students;
- providing clarity and transparency regarding national requirements (linked to national needs), for example: entry criteria, quotas for poor students, limits and/or quotas on foreign student numbers, curriculum content, financial incentives for shortage subjects/skills (such as tourism, IT and so forth);
- measures to address fraudulent institutions, companies and agencies;
- measures to identify and monitor the activities of ‘borderless’ institutions;
- establishing arrangements that link quality assurance and accreditation arrangements with those relating to qualifications frameworks and the recognition of credit and qualifications.

International agencies can also make an important contribution through:

- working towards international agreement on standard categorisations and terminology to aid data collection and sharing of data;
- collecting and publishing information and data about developments, national systems, quality assurance regimes, etc.;
- supporting international collaboration and information exchange;
- assisting in building capacity, particularly in relation to regulation and quality assurance
- working with governments and institutional agencies to clarify responsibilities for quality assurance (the balance between the respective responsibilities of importers and exporters);
- assisting governments to identify and collect relevant data;
- supporting research into costs and benefits of Transnational Education (TNE) and private provision (e.g. impact on local provision, money saved from overseas study, income from overseas students, research output, economic competitiveness, etc.);
- providing financial aid (for example, from the World Bank) to support infrastructure development in relation to information and communications technology, student support and regulatory arrangements.

Lessons from international comparisons

A variety of lessons can be learned from comparative research of the kind described above. Many of the lessons are implicit in the description of the study and its findings. In relation to the research process itself, the short timescale and very limited resources meant that detailed in-country data collection was not possible, nor was it feasible to gain ‘triangulated’ perspectives

from a range of stakeholders. The paucity of good-quality data and the wide range of sources of relevant information are further issues for researchers. Policy agencies and research councils can address both of these issues.

The deliberate choice (by the sponsors) of very different countries brought the research questions into sharp focus and enabled a picture to be built up that was as far as possible 'true' to each specific context, and capable of interpretation in terms of that country's systems and policies. However, since the same template for data collection was adopted across countries, some comparisons were also possible. Given the intense international debates about the issues under investigation, this 'double-lens approach' is very helpful in achieving a balanced view of what is happening in relation to aspects of globalisation and associated impacts. Too often, the specific context is ignored in favour of generalisations that can be inaccurate, insensitive to local issues, and even harmful.

The findings and associated policy implications highlight many specific actions that can be taken forward by a range of stakeholders including governments, institutions and agencies at national and international level (for example, in relation to data collection and international quality assurance). By focusing on the detail of the cases from the perspective of countries that import trans-national education, it is also possible to highlight the potential or actual impact of actions taken by exporting countries. The presence and influence of the UK and its competitors is clear in all the sample countries. UK-focused investigations do not always offer the kind of perspectives that were captured in this study. These perspectives are important for those engaged in presenting the UK's case in international arenas; marketing UK educational provision; or negotiating international agreements, such as GATS or the recognition of qualifications.

Professor Robin Middlehurst, Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Centre for Policy and Change in Higher Education, University of Surrey

Mr Steve Woodfield, Research Officer in the Centre for Policy and Change in Higher Education, University of Surrey

The Centre for Policy and Change in Higher Education (CPC-HE) forms part of the Centre for Policy and Change (CPC), an interdisciplinary research and development unit at the University of Surrey in the UK.

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The employability of graduates: cross-country comparisons

Lee Harvey and Tamsin Bowers-Brown, Sheffield Hallam University

Introduction

Employability is often confused with getting a job, or getting and maintaining a graduate job. However, employability is more than that; Universities UK claim:

It is a property of the individual, and should not be confused with simply getting employment, which is subject to many external factors, such as recruitment practices and the state of the economy. (Universities UK, 2002)

The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) defines employability as: 'A set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.' Exploring the notions of employability further, Harvey (2003a) states:

- Employability is about developing a range of attributes and abilities, not just job-getting skills.
- Employability is not something distinct from learning and pedagogy but grows out of good learning.
- What employers are looking for are flexible graduates who can add value when necessary but can also help transform the organisation in the face of change.
- Higher education is rapidly developing an array of approaches for explicitly enhancing the employability of their students.
- Increasingly higher education institutions are developing an integrated, strategic approach to employability issues.

United Kingdom

Employability and its relationship with higher education has become a more prominent issue over the past few years. This can be directly attributed to key developments in higher education policy. The first key change is the introduction of tuition fees, which places students in a consumer role. As consumers, many students place emphasis on an education that will see them rewarded with the employability skills to gain a career with substantial monetary reward. A second factor involves the expansion of higher education and the consequent increase in the number of graduates seeking professional or skilled employment.

The Future of Higher Education white paper (DfES 2003a) asserts the government's desire to widen participation in higher education to 50%. The result will be an increase in the number of highly-educated people seeking work in the graduate labour market. The government believes that this increase in participation is fundamental if the UK is to compete in a global knowledge economy.

However, the widening of participation does not automatically guarantee that the students graduating will be work-ready or will have gained the necessary employability skills to participate in the graduate labour market. The knowledge economy is dependent on lifelong learning and

higher education is a key player. Graduates will be expected to gain the skills that will help them to remain employable throughout their working life. As Teodorescu (2003) states:

Throughout the developed world, the emerging knowledge-based economies will be increasingly dependent on constant and lifelong learning and training. The new graduates will have to be self-sufficient, self-directed, lifelong learners; understand when they need information and what kind of information they need.

Graduates will be expected to leave university with these skills in addition to the knowledge of their chosen subject:

The issue of the relationship between higher education and working life is in the core of defining the identity of higher education institutions, and more importantly, it is the question structuring the relationship between higher education and society. (Tynjälä, Välimaa and Sarja 2003)

The issue of employability in the context of higher education has been on the agenda in the UK for more than a decade:

The employability debate is not a new one for HE. The Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) highlighted the objectives of providing 'instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour'. More recently, the Dearing Report into Higher Education (1997) emphasised the importance of education for employability _ focussing on the development of key skills and the importance of work experience. (Lees 2002)

The late 1980s saw the initial stages of pressure from the government for higher education to contribute directly to economic regeneration and growth (Ball 1989, 1990). This was more profit linked and based on the Thatcher government's notions of enterprise, which were ideologically unacceptable in much of the higher education sector. The Council for Industry and Higher Education (1992) has constantly advanced the view that 'those charged with overseeing the "quality" of higher education should seek employers' views not only on the skills they immediately need but on the long-term demands of employment, including flexibility and adaptability, which students must be prepared to meet'. In 1996, the Council for Industry and Higher Education declared:

Most British people, most educators and most students now believe that it is one of higher education's purposes to prepare students well for working-life. (CIHE 1996)

In an attempt to produce graduates who show these skills, many institutions in the UK have attempted to ensure that the curriculum incorporates techniques to develop and improve these attributes. More specifically, work-related programmes such as Foundation Degrees or the Graduate Apprenticeship attempt to build on students' existing skills and to enhance their long-term employment opportunities. The recent development of Foundation Degrees has linked higher education directly to the workplace (DfES 2003b):

They are an intermediate, work-related higher education qualification. They are designed in conjunction with employers to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional levels (<http://develop.ucas.com/FDCourseSearch/About.htm>).

The employability agenda has been addressed in different ways by different higher education institutions and some have been quicker than others in adopting measures to help students move easily from higher education to employment. There have been numerous approaches to improve the employability of students such as embedded skills, additional core-skills, work-experience and evaluation of what has been learned.

Higher education institutions are engaged in four broad areas of activity to help develop student employability:

- Enhanced or revised central support (usually via the agency of careers services) for undergraduates and graduates in their search for work. To this can be added the provision of sector-wide resources.
- Embedded attribute development in the programme of study often as the result of modifications to curricula to make attribute development, job seeking skills and commercial awareness explicit; or to accommodate employer inputs.
- Innovative provision of work experience opportunities within, or external to, programmes of study.
- Enabled reflection on and recording of experience, attribute development and achievement alongside academic abilities, through the development of progress files and career management programmes. (Harvey 2003a)

This categorisation draws on a recent review undertaken for Universities UK (Harvey, Locke and Morey 2002).

Enhanced or revised central support

The careers service is the area traditionally linked to helping graduates find employment. These services have traditionally offered students help and advice on finding a job after graduating. There is now more emphasis on developing employability through lifelong career development. For example, the University of Bristol offers a service called 'Skills for Success' run by the Careers Advisory Service. The service includes a two-hour interactive workshop with graduate recruiters. Students are advised to choose from topics including presentation skills, team working, marketing, making applications, interview skills and body language. Certificates are awarded to students who attend five workshops.

Embedded employability skills

Much of the debate about core skills lies in the area of whether skills should be embedded in the curriculum or delivered as stand-alone modules. In the case of embedded skills, there has been concern from some academics that the core subject will be sacrificed to accommodate them. However, many of these skills are already acquired through the process of learning, and it is unlikely that there would be much change in the core syllabus.

Fallows and Stevens (2000) explored the initiative introduced at the University of Luton, where the strategic decision was taken to embed employability skills into all undergraduate programmes. The authors discuss how the key skills of information retrieval and handling, communication and presentation, planning and problem solving, social development and interaction were introduced as key learning outcomes. They state that course teams are already recognising that the skills initiative is having a positive effect on student performance generally.

Sheffield Hallam University has also embedded key skills across the university. The pioneering work of Sue Drew and others in the 1980s has resulted in key skills as an element taken for granted in programmes at the university. Embedding employability is very much part of the

culture of the university; indeed, de facto activities have been the basis of strategy statements rather than the other way around.

Yorke and Knight (2003) include free-standing curricular provision that supports career planning and job-search strategies in this category. They state that in many cases a preferred way of enhancing an institution's contribution to student employability is to strengthen the careers service, although the impact will be muted if the service lacks a curriculum presence.

Work experience and work-based learning

Work experience and work-based learning have always had links to higher education in fields such as medicine and dentistry. The advantage of work experience has been recognised by many universities, particularly the post-1992 universities, and is a part of many undergraduate programmes. In the School of Business and Finance at Sheffield Hallam alone, 500 students each year take a work placement within a 'diverse range of over 250 organisations in the UK and overseas'. As Harvey et al. (1998) claim:

... work experience is increasingly sought by employers when recruiting graduates and a range of relevant experiences will better equip graduates for the flexible workplace of the future.

The Graduate Apprenticeship Scheme also includes a work-based element. Employers and National Training Organisations work with higher education to design programmes to embed 'employability skills', provide authentic work experience, add further qualifications and prepare the graduate apprentice for a smooth transition into the graduate labour market.

Work experience has been identified as the most appropriate medium to develop interview skills, appreciation of the workplace culture, interpersonal skills and team working (Harvey et al. 1997). Such skills are not necessarily gained through an official work placement. A part-time job can be equally beneficial if students are able to reflect on the skills they have developed.

To ensure that work experience is a quality experience, employers, participating academics and students must all be committed to it and be fully aware of its implications. Planning and responsibility for success need to be shared, which means ensuring adequate, trained and supportive supervision. The quality of work experience is greatly enhanced by prior induction and briefing, facilitation of ongoing reflection by the student, debriefing and identification of outcomes.

Ideally, students would be encouraged to develop a varied work experience portfolio including, for example, a mixture of course-embedded placements and part-time work. Mature students may have different work experience requirements from traditional under-graduates. This can be represented through progress files and incorporate school-based work experiences, thus developing a seamless approach.

Providing a framework for students to reflect on and articulate learning from work experience in an ongoing way is pivotal to employability development. When recruiting, employers are interested in the ability to identify and communicate what has been learned from work experience. However, reflection needs to be seen in a wider sense than reflecting on the development of narrowly defined, job-relevant skills. Although retrospective reflection on work experience can be meaningful, a well-planned experience, with ongoing and built-in, 'real-time', reflection, linked to identifiable outcomes, is likely to optimise the learning potential.

Personal development planning

Personal development planning (PDP) is a method that helps students to reflect on their experiences and promote the skills or attributes they have gained, as well as helping them to identify the skills they need to develop in the future. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) defines the PDP process as:

Structured and supported processes to develop the capacity of individuals to reflect upon their own learning and achievement, and to plan for their own personal educational and career development. (QAA 2003)

The Personal and Academic Development for Students in Higher Education (PADSHE) project, begun at the University of Nottingham and extended to the University of Newcastle, has been prominent in promoting students' personal and academic records (Yorke and Knight 2003). PADSHE involves the following elements:

- institution-wide guidelines with scope for individual interpretation by discipline, academic led, via a proactive, equal-entitlement approach to academic support and guidance;
- dual-purpose personal and academic records (PARs);
- personal development plan for students and QAA documentation for departments;
- staff–student partnership in one-to-one discussions, academic feedback and progress overviews, option choices and forward plans;
- quality-assured personal tutoring;
- published calendar of PAR-related events in every department;
- published baseline agendas for tutorial meetings, agreed by staff and students;
- holistic developmental component: opportunities for students to record and plan skills and career development, work experience, extra-curricular activities (University of Nottingham 2003).

Personal development plans have been seen as a cycle involving the following steps:

- analyse development needs;
- identify an action plan;
- review action;
- evaluate effectiveness (www.universal-manager.co.uk).

The evaluation stage links directly with another process of improving employability: reflection.

Reflection

Reflection involves encouraging students to reflect on what they have learned; it sees employability as a process of learning rather than a product: 'a concerted holistic approach to developing students' study skills, encouraging them to reflect and articulate what they have learned' (Harvey 2003a).

In many cases, students will already have gained the skills they require for the workplace. Often, it is just a question of encouraging students to interpret what they have learned and to make them aware of their skills and capabilities.

Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has funded the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) to help the sector engage with this policy priority. ESECT seeks to challenge the idea that there is a choice between educating and developing employability: rather employability is enhanced by good learning. ESECT also seeks to promote integrated approaches to employability and to help students understand the implications of this process.

Wales has stolen a march on the rest of the UK in encouraging a strategic approach to employability in universities. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), with the Welsh Development Agency, undertook an audit of employability development opportunities in institutions in the late 1990s, to see how graduate development matched the needs of the Welsh economy. This audit provided the basis for subsequent Work Experience and Employability Plans drawn up by institutions, as required by HEFCW. This process has led to much more co-ordinated thinking in Welsh institutions about the extent of employability development, how it is embedded in programmes, how central services and programmes co-operate in delivering employability development opportunities, and in identifying a senior manager to take overall responsibility for ensuring continuing progress and improvement in this area (Harvey 2003b).

Staff at a higher education institution can be involved in the development of students' employability in various ways, and there is much debate over which is the best method. However, one thing that is generally accepted is the value of producing graduates who are employable. 'Employers as much as students and educators expect an undergraduate programme to produce analytic, critical, reflective, transformative graduates' (Harvey et al. 1997).

Employability for life

In recent years, there has been a notable shift of emphasis in the concept of employability. Institutions are moving away from the idea that employability is purely about finding immediate employment to the recognition that it is a lifelong requirement. This has led to a more holistic approach in the development of graduates. Institutions are now seeking to develop employability attributes as an explicit and embedded part of academic learning rather than a bolt-on provided by the Careers Service.

Some universities have recognised that graduates will require assistance long after they graduate. The University of London encourages its graduates to join its Grad Club, at a cost of £50. Membership provides careers advice for two years after they graduate. This is similar to alumni programmes in the USA offering graduates lifelong career support. The University of Virginia's alumni office offers students:

A range of services focused on: clarification of career direction; life-work balance issues; job search strategies; networking resources; graduate/professional school planning and application; mid-career management.
(University of Virginia, 2003)

In the 21st century job market, the concept of a job for life seems a thing of the past. Generic attributes have become a requirement for graduates who wish to remain employable throughout their working life. Employability is about learning, and the emphasis is now less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view

to empowering and enhancing the learner. Employment is a by-product of this enabling process (Harvey 2003a; Lees 2002b).

'Employability' is not something static but something that a person can grow throughout life. Furthermore, older undergraduates – who are often to be found on part-time programmes – will already have developed many of those achievements that employers value, although they may not fully appreciate how much they have to offer. (Yorke and Knight 2003)

Bennett, Dunne and Carrie (1999) explored the way higher education institutions have attempted to incorporate the development of core or generic work skills into degree programmes to meet employers' requirements. It was felt that the skills demanded lacked clarity, consistency and a recognisable theoretical base, and steps must be taken to develop a national model of generic skills.

However, the issue of the expansion of higher education is an international development and not particular to the UK. Global economic factors mean that graduates are not necessarily restricted by national borders in their search for employment. Increasingly it will be necessary to have a model of generic skills that are recognised not just nationally but internationally.

The issue of employability linked to higher education has been encouraged in the UK for many years, and to a much greater extent than in most other countries. Australia and Canada have also encouraged employability development in higher education for more than a decade. As Little (2003) notes, the term 'employability' is not widely used outside the UK. Although the relationship between higher education and employment is now at the forefront of higher education policy in some countries, it is virtually non-existent in others.

Australia and New Zealand

The Graduate Careers Council of Australia has been in existence for 30 years. Its mission is to be:

... the leading authority on the supply of, and demand for, new graduates in Australia; and to use this position to foster employment and career opportunities for graduates, in association with the higher education sector, government and business. (<http://www.gradlink.edu.au/content/view/full/820>)

The GCCA website offers services to help students develop their career prospects. The gradlink section contains a range of online booklets that provide information to help in the transition to a full-time graduate position, for students at any stage of their study who are thinking about their future employment.

In Australia, much has been done in the area of developing what are commonly known as 'graduate attributes':

Broadly speaking, generic graduate attributes in Australia have come to be accepted as being the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable in a range of contexts. University students are intended to acquire these qualities as one of the outcomes of successfully completing any undergraduate degree at university. (Barrie 2003)

These attributes are either delivered through stand-alone courses or embedded in the curriculum. There are several key features to this definition of generic graduate attributes:

- These outcomes are referred to as generic in that they ... may be developed in various disciplinary contexts and are outcomes that in some way transcend disciplinary outcomes.
- They are abilities that are to be looked for in a graduate of any undergraduate degree. They are not entry level skills. Rather they are considered to be an important outcome of university level learning experiences.
- They are referred to as generic attributes rather than generic skills in recognition that as outcomes they encompass more than skills. An attribute is a more global term for outcomes that might encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- These outcomes are outcomes of the usual process of higher education. That is, they are not a set of additional outcomes requiring an additional curriculum. Rather they are outcomes that can be reasonably expected from the usual higher education experience. (Barrie 2003)

The President of the University of Melbourne's Academic Board, Professor McPhee, believes that the generic attributes are not something that graduates immediately realise that they have gained:

Broad generic skills such as critical thinking, a capacity for independent learning, leadership and related personal skills do not necessarily spring to mind when students reflect on what they have gained from their years of study.

It is necessary, therefore, for students to be made aware of the skills they have attained:

The Academic Board is asking that every subject description communicates to students what may be described as the generic skills they will develop while studying their chosen course. (University of Melbourne 2002)

The University of Melbourne website includes information on which generic skills are acquired through each degree programme (perhaps because including a statement of such outcomes in university plans is a requirement of funding (Barrie 2003)).

In 'Striving for Quality: Learning, Teaching and Scholarship' (2002), the Australian government asserts:

The first stage in the development of graduate attributes was essentially rhetorical, as universities made explicit statements valuing such capabilities. Most Australian universities are now working towards embedding their lists of graduate attributes into the curricula and developing strategies and systems for assessing and recording outcomes.

Most Australian universities have detailed information about how the university is delivering graduate attributes (for example: University of South Australia 2003; University of Technology Sydney 2003; Griffith University 2003).

Australia also has a Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA), a three-hour test that runs nationally for students in higher education. Students sit the test at the beginning and end of their bachelor's studies to measure of the growth in their skills. Skills that are monitored include, critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understandings and written communication.

In New Zealand, employers have some direct input into the higher education process. Since 1990, the New Zealand Qualification Authority has been developing the National Qualifications

Framework (NQF), in consultation with specialists from education and industry. The Framework has ten levels of progression; levels seven and above equate to graduate and post-graduate qualifications (NZQA 2003). It is designed to provide nationally-recognised, consistent standards and qualifications, and recognition and credit for all learning of knowledge and skills. Industry Training Organisations established by particular industries and professions are responsible for:

- setting national skill standards for their industry;
- providing information and advice to trainees and their employers;
- arranging for the delivery of training on and off-the-job (including developing training packages for employers);
- arranging for the assessment of trainees and the monitoring of quality training.

They are responsible for about half the standards of the framework.

The University of Otago in New Zealand has made development of skills attributes and knowledge to enhance employability an objective in its teaching and learning plan. Students are expected to graduate with 14 core attributes, one of which is workplace-related skills. The plan states that the university strives to develop in students skills, attributes and knowledge that enhance their employment prospects and their capacity to make a positive contribution to society. The university will:

- ensure that graduate profiles and the curricula of programmes and papers address the development of relevant skills and attributes along with disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge;
- provide a safe environment for students which allows relevant generic skills and attributes to be acquired and practised;
- seek feedback and input from employers, graduates and other stakeholder groups on the skills and attributes which are currently relevant to them, and those which they anticipate being relevant in the future, and the extent to which they are demonstrated by graduates of the University of Otago. (Fogelberg 2002)

South Africa

In South Africa, higher education institutions have to comply with a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF is outcomes-based education, with critical outcomes and specific outcomes. Degree programmes have to demonstrate that they conform to minimum requirements set by the NQF for the critical outcomes, including:

- identifying and solving problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;
- working effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community;
- organising and managing oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively;
- collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information;
- communicating effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion;

- using science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others;
- demonstrating an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation;
- contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual aware of the importance of:
 - a) reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
 - b) participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities;
 - c) being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts;
 - d) exploring education and career opportunities;
 - e) developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

At the University of the Free State in South Africa, an eight-credit module on general skills is being integrated with the undergraduate curriculum. The course covers group functioning and intercultural etiquette; introduction to information technology; finding information; data base searching; subject-specific communication; self-regulation: personal and financial management. Assessment is by means of a portfolio. Work experience is followed by reflective writing exercises based on these experiences.

Canada and the USA

The Corporate Council on Education, a programme of the National Business and Education Centre in Canada, produced the Business and Education Best Practices Handbook. It lists the critical skills required of the Canadian workforce, under three broad categories: academic skills, personal management skills and teamwork skills. Under these headings come: communication, thinking, learning, positive attitudes and behaviours, responsibility and adaptability, and working with others. Several Canadian universities have introduced these outcomes into their careers programmes (see, for example, Okanagan University College 2003).

Brock University's web home page states 'Careers begin here!' It claims the highest employment success rate for Ontario's universities at 98.3% (Brock University 2003). The university offers several schemes to assist student employment and career preparation, including optional services as well as elements integrated into academic programmes. Skills Plus, for example, focuses on employability skills development. Experience Plus facilitates development of a career portfolio and assists students in obtaining career-related employment on graduation. According to the Careers Service at Brock University, the Experience Plus record

... will track students' skills developed in on-campus part-time jobs (Community Plus), volunteer opportunities (Volunteers Plus), and leadership positions and provides additional career-related certificates (such as First Aid/CPR).

The record serves as a summary of the skills/certifications that have been developed whilst a student has been at Brock. Students are encouraged to present the Experience Plus record alongside a career portfolio to employers.

Little (2003) found that work-based/related learning and portfolios were the preferred method in the US and Canada. Indeed, Canadian universities encourage and enable internships (equivalent to placements in the UK), and research the learning outcomes associated with them (Knapper and Cropley 1999).

In 1998, Dalhousie University in Halifax introduced a career portfolio programme that aimed to help students understand the value and transferability of their learning, knowledge and skills to their personal and career development (Little 2003):

The Dalhousie Career Portfolio recognizes that undergraduate students want a high quality academic program, but are also very concerned about career opportunities after graduation. The program enables students to maximize career development opportunities that are part of their Dalhousie educational experience. (http://is.dal.ca/~career/career_1728.html)

Portfolios are also used by Missouri Western State College and Oregon State University in the USA. Dartmouth College provides an 'electronic house' where students can document their competencies and capabilities. Stanford University provides an e-folio for students to 'capture, organise, integrate and reuse the results of their formal and informal learning experiences' (Little, 2003).

At Kalamazoo College in southwest Michigan, completion of a portfolio is a graduation requirement for all students:

Kalamazoo's Portfolio helps students understand and articulate their educational experiences, see the connections between the parts of a 'K' education, collect their significant academic and experiential work in one place, develop long-term goals and plans that give coherence and direction to their education, and learn Web design. (Kalamazoo College 2003)

Students are expected to develop a portfolio throughout their four-year degree course and must then publish it on the web.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong University has a department called the Teaching and Accreditation of Core Competencies at School and University. The core competencies needed to prepare students for tertiary education and life after graduation were determined in a three-tier consultation with secondary schools, university teachers and employers. Now an accredited programme, the Key Skills Programme presents a systematic approach in the practice of: communication, working with others, problem solving, and improving own learning and performance. These key skills are considered relevant to current studies and training, and will also be useful after graduation. It also states that the key skills are what employers look for when they recruit and promote their staff (Hong Kong University 2003).

Europe

In Ireland, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council is assembling expert groups to determine the standards of skill, knowledge and competence that learners must display in order to attain an award. Standards for 'soft skills' will be addressed as part of this process. First-year

business studies programmes traditionally include a Communications module, which includes presentations and team-working. So beneficial has this been that similar modules have been included in other disciplines, including engineering and science.

Denmark is making a number of changes to its higher education organisation, partly as a result of the Bologna process of harmonisation of degree structures across Europe. For example, a Danish Qualifications Framework has been developed, similar to those in New Zealand and South Africa. The action plan, Better Education, published by the Danish government states that it 'is the aim to reduce the dropout rate and ensure that even more university graduates enter the labour market faster' (<http://pub.uvm.dk/2002/better2/02.htm>).

Copenhagen Business School has now developed a model as a point of departure for all study boards responsible for the continuous development of the quality of a study programme. According to the model, boards must:

- work out a qualifications framework for the programme they are responsible for;
- adapt the curriculum to the programme-specific qualifications framework;
- set up a forum for continuous work place contact, to be able to adapt to programme-relevant changes in the labour market that impact on the qualifications framework.

In Nordic countries, the majority of graduates have traditionally been employed in the public sector. However, this is changing. Some jobs can be filled by any graduate, others are particular to degree subject. The former are on the increase and so employability skills become even more relevant.

In Finland, employability skills are being developed through the career services, which encourage students and graduates to develop interpersonal skills, communication skills, creativity, practical problem-solving skills and awareness of their capabilities and skills. The measures are similar to those offered by UK careers services. Staff and students are encouraged to see the importance of improving employability, and the careers service at the university expects measures to be incorporated into the syllabus and personal study plans. Students have access to traineeship guides to help them get the most out of practical training. Group activities, individual counselling and guidance encourage students to plan their careers, for example by working in the field of their studies or choosing suitable minor subjects on the basis of the needs of their future work. Events delivered in co-operation with employers also offer up-to-date information about the skill demands of employers.

In both Germany and Sweden, an alternative to higher education – the 'dual system' – helps students move from school to work. It involves a work placement and attendance part-time at vocational college and is more academic than the similar UK modern apprenticeship scheme. Students must also study languages, politics, economics and a range of other non-job specific areas. However, in Germany there has been an increase in participation in higher education 'divorced from the needs of industry' (Gibbons-Wood and Lange 2000).

Development of core skills seems to lie outside the higher education system in Germany. The Federal Institute for Vocational Training and employers have been at the forefront in developing core competencies. Gibbons-Wood and Lange report that some German polytechnics offer practical work experience, and that it is now recognised that higher education needs to be aimed at shorter, more vocational courses.

However, at the University of Cologne a project entitled 'Students and the world of work' has enabled students in the faculty of education (where job prospects are low) find employment in other fields of work. The elective module, over two semesters, offers students the opportunity to complete applications, do training activities and presentations, and face interview panels. Students must take a minimum of eight weeks' work experience.

In the Czech Republic, the Centre for Higher Education Studies is currently working on a project for the Ministry of Education that involves consulting employers for suggestions towards the content of study programmes. Helena Sebková of the Centre for Higher Education Studies states:

The employers miss so-called 'soft skills' of graduates, which means that graduates lack communication skills (both oral and written), ability of self-presentation, flexibility and ability for teamwork (interpersonal skills), sufficient adaptability, creative problem solving and management skills.

She believes that the higher education leaders are aware of these weaknesses and are willing to take problems into consideration. However, her research indicates that higher education teachers are sometimes still hesitant about the substantial changes. Halfway through the project, it is clear that too much focus in Czech higher education has been on memorising data, deep theoretical knowledge partnered by a lack of practical experience. This is similar to the experience of the University of Cyprus, where theory predominates and there is not much evidence of practical learning. In Spain, as well, the degree level rather than competencies is seen to be important. José Gines Mora, of the University of Valencia, believes:

The great challenge that we are facing now in Spain is precisely this: to improve employability. But at the moment it is just matter of discussion and I do not know when it will be implemented.

Conclusions

Evidence shows that some countries have taken greater steps than others towards incorporating the employability agenda within higher education. Although what is expected of a graduate is similar throughout the world, there are differing methods of ensuring that this is achieved. In certain parts of the world, higher education institutions regard a university qualification as sufficient evidence of employability. Other countries have developed wide-ranging steps to incorporate measures such as work-based learning and graduate attributes into the university curriculum.

The last five years have witnessed accelerating engagement with employability within the academy. Initial piecemeal accommodation of employability through skills modules has developed into a more diverse array of opportunities. In some institutions, these have been developed into an integrated, holistic strategy, most recently linked to learning and teaching policy.

Indeed, it is this integrated approach and the clear emphasis on learning that have moved employability into centre stage. The evidence from the UK suggests that the way forward in employability strategies within higher education is through an integrated approach. The necessity for higher education institutions to share experiences in developing further employability initiatives is fundamental.

It does seem as though some central spur is needed to move this process forward in a significant way, whether this is driven by government, funding councils or other quality quangos. The government agenda has been significant in the UK, reinforced in the Dearing Report and its aftermath. However, Wales seems to have the most strategic approach as the outcome of an audit and the funding council's subsequent requirement for clear employability development plans. The Welsh experience shows that initial requests for reporting employability-development opportunities and plans to improve them resulted in rather haphazard approaches, but feedback and repeated requests for updating over three years has led to a much more structured, strategic and integrated approach to embedding employability.

A similar experience seems to be occurring in Australia. The first stage resulted in 'essentially rhetorical' submissions. However, most institutions are now moving towards a more strategic approach to embedding and focusing on outcomes assessment. The South African developments echo this process. Similarly, the development of qualifications frameworks has also raised the employability issue, and takes a particular form in parts of Europe, such as Denmark, where it is linked to the development of bachelors and masters qualifications, which requires a reassessment by commerce and industry of their own assumptions.

It is a moot point whether Australia's introduction of the Graduate Skills Assessment is a good strategy. On the one hand, it might focus attention on employability development. On the other, it may detract from academic learning. In Brazil, for example, national subject final-year tests in some disciplines are primarily used to assess the quality of institutions (rather like a higher education version of the standard assessment tests in the UK school system). Anecdotal evidence suggests that employers are using these as the basis of selection and recruitment, rather than the graduate's final examinations and award.

The key concern, in any development of employability, as the debates and reticence in some parts of Europe attest, is that too much attention will be placed on developing work skills. The key is to see employability not as training, nor as developing 'core' skills for employment, but as the holistic development of the individual. Good employability development is synonymous with good learning in general. The focus is on developing critical reflective practitioners capable of learning and continuing to learn in whatever area of activity they pursue after graduation, be it paid work, self-employment, voluntary work or other activity. Employability development is not at odds with theoretical learning: good conceptualisation, analysis, synthesis and critique are fundamental to employability.

Policy implications

The international comparisons explored above suggest that the UK is doing very well on providing employability development opportunities in higher education. Several policy issues, however, emerge from this preliminary analysis:

- Employability needs to be closely equated with good learning, and definitely not seen as employment rates of graduates from institutions.
- A clearer central steer on embedding employability in the curriculum would appear to be appropriate. A mechanism might be introduced to encourage an integrated approach within institutions, with a clear strategic oversight.

- It is important for institutions to have a clear idea of the activities that enhance employability, and the same mechanism might be used to encourage comprehensive audits.
- Such a mechanism might be similar to the Work Experience and Employability plans already introduced in Wales by HEFCW, or as part of the Quality Assurance and Improvement plans required by DEST in Australia.
- It might also be worth considering a clearer statement of employability outcomes that should be in all programmes, as in the South African National Qualifications Framework critical outcomes. The current subject benchmark statements in the UK might accommodate this, although they are perilously close to a national curriculum already; and any further specification may significantly undermine academic freedom, innovation and creativity.
- It is important that UK higher education does not forget its academic mission in the pursuit of employability. Keeping in mind that good employability is synonymous with good learning will inhibit employability excesses.

Lee Harvey and Tamsin Bowers-Brown, Centre for Research and Evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University

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Building school efficacy: key lessons for policy, practice and research from the IEA Civic Education Study

David Kerr, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

Introduction

England was one of 28 countries that participated in the two-phase IEA Civic Education Study, known in England as the Citizenship Education Study (and referred to hereafter by this name¹). This is the largest study ever undertaken in citizenship education, in which 90,000 14-year-olds, as well as teachers and head teachers, were surveyed. In England, a representative sample of 3,043 14-year-olds, 384 teachers and 118 head teachers from 128 schools participated in the study. Its main goal was to identify and examine, in a comparative framework, the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their role as citizens in democracies. One focus of the study was on schools, and a second on the opportunities for civic participation outside the school, especially in the community.

The interrelationship between school and community was described in the study through a model known as the 'Octagon' (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). The Octagon shows how the context of young people's everyday lives – activities in the home and at school and inter-action with family and peers – contributes to their political knowledge, understanding, engagement and participation. The study's findings were trailed, in advance, as informing and stimulating discussion among policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and the general public about the direction of citizenship education in schools and local communities.

This paper explores the outcomes of England's participation in the study from the perspective of the National Research Co-ordinator (NRC)². Though comparisons with other countries are a natural consequence of involvement in comparative studies, the impact of in-depth, national-level analysis of England's dataset from the study carries greater potential significance.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first briefly explains the context of citizenship education in England, which had a significant influence on the reasons for England's participation in the study and continues to impact on how the findings have been received. The second part explores some of the major findings from the in-depth analysis of the national dataset for England and the key questions they raise for policy, practice and research. The findings are examined in relation to students' civic knowledge and skills and attitudes to civic institutions, engagement and participation. The third part looks at how the study has been received and the extent to which the main findings and key questions have been acted upon in England. Finally, the conclusion explores the main lessons that can be drawn from England's participation in the study.

¹ The title was changed in England because of the ongoing policy initiative in Citizenship and to avoid any confusion between the terms 'civic' and 'citizenship' education. It was felt the change in title would make it easier for participants in England to understand the study's aims and purposes.

² Each participating country nominated a National Research Co-ordinator (NRC) who acted as the point of contact between the international steering group and the national context. The NRCs co-ordinated the national case study in Phase 1 and the selection of the national sample of young people and schools, collection of data and further analysis of the national dataset in Phase 2, coming together once or twice a year for meetings about the conduct and progress of the study. They are listed in Torney-Purta et al. (1999).

The context of citizenship education in England

England's participation in the study, and the findings concerning students, teachers and head teachers in England, must be viewed within the national context of citizenship education and, in particular, of recent policy changes. There has never been a tradition of explicit teaching of citizenship education in English schools, or of community service for young people. Indeed, citizenship education has never been part of the formal curriculum in schools. As a result, there is no consistent framework, nor a solid research base, on which to discuss and make judgments about the effectiveness of policy and practice (Heater 2001; Kerr 1999a).

However, there has been a rapid and historic change of fortune for citizenship education in England over the past six years (Potter 2002; Crick 2000, 2002). A major review of the place and purpose of citizenship education in schools in England centred on the work of the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools, chaired by Professor (now Sir) Bernard Crick, and commonly referred to as the Crick Group.

The Crick Group's unanimous report set out a clear definition of citizenship education and a framework for its delivery in schools (Crick 1998). This focused on three separate but interrelated and balanced strands:

- social and moral responsibility: children learning from the very beginning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other;
- community involvement: learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community;
- political literacy: learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values. This updates the 1970s definition of political education with a term that is wider than political knowledge alone.

The Crick Group's work has led to the formal introduction of citizenship education in the school curriculum for pupils aged 5–16. Citizenship is part of a non-statutory framework for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship at Key Stages 1 and 2 (pupils aged 5–11) and a new statutory foundation subject at Key Stages 3 and 4 (pupils aged 11–16) (DfEE/QCA 1999a, 1999b). Schools were legally required to deliver citizenship education at Key Stages 3 and 4 from September 2002.

The new Citizenship Order at Key Stages 3 and 4 is deliberately 'light touch' and has programmes of study and an attainment target. The Citizenship Order does not prescribe a particular curriculum model for how citizenship education should be developed by schools. Teachers and school leaders use their professional judgement to do this, based on the context of the school and its local communities.

Participation in the IEA Citizenship Education Study

England was one of the last countries to join the study, in 1997, after Phase 1 was already underway. The decision to participate was taken by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), because of the study's timely and strategic value in informing rapidly developing national policy. It was hoped not only to learn from experiences and practices in other countries, but also to find out more about the state of citizenship education policy, practice and research in England.

Phase 1 of the study centred on drawing up a national case study on civic or citizenship education developments in each country. The case study for England was intended to provide an up-to-date review and baseline of current practice and research. Meanwhile, the combined national case studies would give a clearer picture of the range of approaches to, and challenges to be faced in, developing citizenship education.

Phase 2 was based on questionnaires to a representative national sample of 14-year-olds, their teachers and head teachers. This was to provide a clearer picture about the attitudes of young people to education and citizenship, and of the current approaches to the citizenship dimension in schools and local communities. The knowledge, skills and attitudes of students and the attitudes of teachers and head teachers in England, could then be compared in both international and national contexts.

The timing was perfect in making this information available prior to the public consultation on the Crick Group's proposals for Citizenship to be added as a new statutory subject to the revised National Curriculum.

England's results from the study

There is not space in this paper to detail all England's results from the IEA Citizenship Education Study (see Kerr et al. 2002a, 2002b). The main findings are highlighted where they are significant in relation to either results in other countries or to the national context of schools and communities in England.

Phase 1 Findings

Participation in Phase 1 of the study met expectations and produced a number of key findings in relation to the national and comparative context of citizenship education (Kerr 1999a, 1999b), including:

- recognition of the importance of national context in defining the aims of and approaches to citizenship education in schools and in the curriculum;
- realisation that England was not as far behind other countries in its approach to citizenship education as was anticipated, and that many countries were experiencing similar challenges to those in England concerning the review of this area.

In addition, the lessons learned from past policy approaches to citizenship education in England were detailed. The review of current practice produced baseline data and identified the gaps in relation to practice and research in citizenship education, as well as the key challenges facing the development of citizenship education in schools in England.

Phase 2 Findings

The Phase 2 findings gave a comprehensive picture of the development of the citizenship dimension among young people in England and in other countries, particularly their civic knowledge and skills, their civic attitudes and their current and intended civic engagement and participation (Kerr et al. 2001, 2002a, 2002b). Policy-makers, practitioners and researchers can now begin to discuss the most effective approaches to the development of citizenship education in schools and communities.

The main findings from England's participation in the study are as follows:

- Students in England have an understanding of fundamental democratic values and institutions such as laws and political rights, but the depth of that understanding is problematic.

In England, students' scores on civic knowledge were similar to the international average. However, they scored significantly higher on the sub-scale of civic skills (being able to interpret civic-related material, such as an election leaflet) than on the sub-scale of civic content knowledge (knowledge of key civic principles and practices, such as what is meant by democracy). Students in England had the greatest difficulty answering items that addressed their knowledge of democracy and government, on topics such as political representation and elections, the principles underlying democracy and the role of trade unions. The lack of knowledge of 14-year-olds in England about the processes and practices of democratic society, and about government and elections in particular, is a matter of concern.

- Young people agreed that good citizenship includes the obligation to vote.

Over three-quarters of students in England said they would vote in general elections. This contrasts with the declining numbers of adults, particularly young adults, who vote in elections in the UK. The Electoral Commission estimate that for the 2001 General Election the turnout rate for adults was 59 per cent, the lowest turnout in post war history and down from 71 per cent in the 1997 General Election. Meanwhile, the turnout rate for 18 to 24 year-olds in 2001 was 39 per cent, down from 66 per cent in 1997. It suggests that the intention to vote, or not to vote, assessed at age 14 is not a reliable predictor of actual future voting behaviour.

- Students with higher levels of civic knowledge are more likely to expect to participate in political and civic activities as adults.

Schools have an important role in shaping future participation, by teaching about topics such as elections and voting.

- Schools that model democratic values and practices, through encouraging students to discuss issues in the classroom and take an active role in the life of school, are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement.

This is not the norm for many students, however. Only about one-quarter of students say that they are often encouraged to voice their opinions during class discussions. Students in England have few opportunities to discuss political issues whether at school, at home or with their peers. The norm in classrooms is a didactic approach, with an emphasis on teacher talk, textbooks and memorising facts, dates and definitions.

- Four out of five students indicate that they do not intend to participate in conventional political activities (except for voting) and young people are only moderately interested in politics.

Only one-quarter of the students in England agreed strongly with the statement 'I am interested in politics'. Young people appear to be more open to other forms of civic and political engagement, such as charity work or non-violent protest marches. By age 14, young people are already members of a political culture and hold concepts that largely correspond to those of adults.

- Schools and community organisations have untapped potential to influence positively the civic preparation of young people.

Students believe that working with other young people can help to solve problems. Just under three-quarters (72 per cent) of students in England agreed or strongly agreed that students acting

together could have an influence on what happens in school than if students acted alone. The large majority of students across countries, including in England, have had some positive experience with students getting together at school, either formally or informally, to solve problems and improve their school. The school environment provides students with opportunities to take part in 'real actions' that matter to them. This sense of 'school efficacy' – of young people feeling that they can improve things in school – is also positively related to civic knowledge.

'School efficacy' may be as important a factor in future political behaviour as the broader sense of political efficacy – the extent to which citizens can make a difference in government decision-making – that has frequently been measured in research on citizenship education.

- News broadcasts are the most prominent source of political information for young people.

Watching television news has a positive effect on civic knowledge. England is among the countries with the least extensive viewing of television news, and students in England show the lowest level of trust in newspapers compared with those elsewhere.

- Students are supportive of the rights of women and of immigrants.

They are particularly supportive of the rights of women, but have relatively less positive attitudes towards immigrants compared to those in other countries. England was one of ten countries, all European, including Germany, Italy, Denmark and Switzerland, with scores on immigrants' rights significantly below the international mean score. However, it should be noted that lower scores did not indicate very negative attitudes toward immigrants. Rather, students in the lowest-scoring countries showed less positive attitudes to immigrants' rights than their counterparts elsewhere.

There is also concern that in England, as in other countries, a minority of students hold especially negative attitudes to other groups in society. This is of particular concern when their apparent beliefs and attitudes are discriminatory and, if acted upon, would be contrary to the law.

- Students in England have relatively less positive attitudes towards their country or nation compared to those in other countries.

However, boys have more positive attitudes about national identity than girls. Students in England support the need to defend the independence of their country and are resistant to attempts from outside to change the UK's traditions and culture.

- Gender differences with regard to civic knowledge are negligible in England.

Students in England are only moderately interested in political issues, with girls expressing less interest than boys. Boys are more willing to engage in protest behaviour than girls.

- There was consensus among teachers in England that citizenship education is important for students, that schools have a strong role to play and that citizenship education should be part of the formal curriculum.

Teachers felt that citizenship education would be improved if they had better materials, more subject matter training and more teaching time.

- Student attitudes may suggest the growth of a 'new civic culture', characterised by less hierarchy and more individual decision-making.

Young people appear to be gravitating towards actions linked to more informal social movement groups rather than to more formal conventional political parties and groupings.

An agenda for developing citizenship education

Viewed together, the Phase 1 and Phase 2 findings surpass the expectations of England's participation in the study. Not only do they offer a baseline for citizenship education in terms of research, policy and practice in England – they also identify indicators for developing effective citizenship education in schools and local communities. These key questions provide an agenda for action in developing citizenship education in England:

- How are we going to help students develop depth of understanding about the democratic process?
- How can we improve students' civic knowledge in ways that interest them and encourage them to participate?
- How can we encourage more schools and teachers to develop an active and participatory approach to citizenship at whole school and individual classroom level?
- How are we going to convince young people that democratic engagement in society is worthwhile?
- How can we give students more opportunities to address issues that matter to them and build their sense of school efficacy (the belief that they can improve things in school)?
- How can we increase students' viewing of television news broadcasts and critical use of the media?
- How should schools and teachers handle the minority of students with especially negative attitudes to groups in society that are discriminatory and may lead to unlawful behaviour, and what are the contexts in our society that give rise to such negative attitudes?
- How can we build on teachers' strong support for citizenship education?

The next section of this paper examines how the study's findings and this agenda for action have been received and acted upon in England to date.

How the findings have been received and acted upon in England

Importance of audience and context

The acid test of the success of England's involvement in the IEA Citizenship Education Study is how the findings and agenda for action have been received and acted upon. This is examined in relation to five groups identified in the IEA study's publicity material as its crucial audiences: press, policy-makers, practitioners (head teachers, teachers and teacher educators), researchers and the general public.

An examination of audience awareness must also take into account the changing national context within which such awareness-raising takes place. There have been rapid developments in policy-making and practice in citizenship education during England's participation in the study. These developments continue to have a considerable impact on how the findings have been received and acted upon by different audiences.

For example, while Phase 1 participation took place in relative obscurity. Phase 2 was carried out in the full glare of press and public interest in citizenship education, after the Crick policy proposals had been made public. The full national findings from Phase 2 were released after

Citizenship had been accepted as part of the revised National Curriculum, and policy-makers and practitioners were gearing up to its formal introduction as a new statutory subject from September 2002.

Phase 1 Findings

Because of the timing of their release, the findings from England's participation in Phase 1 of the study were neither commented on nor directly acted upon by the press, practitioners or general public (Kerr 1999a, 1999b). Instead, the main audiences for the findings were policy-makers and researchers.

The findings had an immediate impact on the policy-making process. The Crick Group's definition of 'effective education for citizenship' was influenced by the Phase 1 findings and by other comparative studies (Torney-Purta et al. 1999; Kerr 1999a, 1999c). The findings provided an insight into the approach to and challenges of developing citizenship education in other countries. They also enabled, through the national case study for England, a review of the main lessons from previous policy approaches to citizenship education and a sense of the challenges facing the development of coherent practice. These lessons and challenges were taken on board in the Crick Group's deliberations and recommendations (Crick 2000, 2002; Kerr 1999a).

The Phase 1 findings also proved of interest to researchers both in the United Kingdom and in other countries. They considerably strengthened the research base for citizenship education in the UK by filling in many of the existing gaps in knowledge and understanding. They also succeeded in alerting researchers and policy-makers in other countries to the major policy review of citizenship education currently underway in England. This dimension has been taken forward by a number of international organisations, with high-profile international seminars and exchange visits to countries as diverse as China, Colombia, the USA, Bahrain and Australia over the past few years, and the creation of a citizenship network involving England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The British Council has set up an initiative to promote Citizenship Education (CE) and Human Rights Education, using the network of British Council offices worldwide, and working with national and international partners, to enable the exchange of information, skills and practices. The Council of Europe has established an Education for Democratic Citizenship Project, which aims to encourage and share developing policy, practice and expertise across member states. Representatives from England have been invited to join the Project steering group and have made presentations at European and regional meetings and conferences.

Phase 2 Findings

The Phase 2 findings, because of the timing of their release, succeeded in reaching more of the study's intended audiences, and achieving greater impact than Phase 1, at least in the short-term. The initial blaze of press publicity on the release of the national report on the findings from the in-depth analysis of England's dataset was helpful in raising the study's profile with both practitioners and the public. However, press reporting focused almost exclusively on the comparative dimension of the study. The headlines concentrated on how students in England compared to those elsewhere, particularly in relation to national identity, patriotism, and their limited interest in politics (The Sunday Times 2002; BBC 2002). This was extremely selective, giving a partial – and misleading – view of the study's findings. There was little or no focus on the

key questions and agenda for action for citizenship education raised by these findings. Nor was there discussion of the implications for practitioners and their pedagogic practices. This held true for reporting in the education press (TES 2002).

The engagement of the other crucial audiences with the study's findings was more limited and ad hoc. The main engagement with practitioners was through feeding back the results of the study, and how their students had performed compared to the national sample, to the 128 schools in England that participated. Feedback from these schools suggested that this was well received and assisted schools in preparing for the formal introduction of Citizenship in the National Curriculum. Meanwhile, the national report was brought to the attention of researchers in the UK and made available to the network of National Research Co-ordinators in other participating countries.

Policy-makers were the exception. The DfES quickly reviewed and acted upon the findings and the shared agenda for action for citizenship education in two ways. The first was to break down the main findings and shared agenda for action in ways that particular audiences could access and understand easily. The emphasis was on increasing the impact of the findings by highlighting their relevance in meeting current challenges in citizenship education. DfES requested a research brief of the main findings from the national report and funded a set of broadsheets outlining the main findings and key recommendations for action (Kerr et al. 2002 {is this a or b? it is b}). Each broadsheet is targeted at a particular group who are crucial to the development of citizenship education: head teachers and senior managers, teachers and co-ordinators, and young people.

The second way that DfES acted upon the findings was more long-term. It acknowledged the value that policy-makers placed on having a strong research and evaluation base upon which policy and practice in citizenship education could be developed. The national findings provided a comprehensive pre-compulsory Citizenship baseline concerning the civic knowledge, skills, attitudes and desired behaviour of young people in England, and the practices and beliefs of teachers and head teachers. However, with citizenship education moving rapidly from a policy proposal to a real school subject, there was now an urgent need to strengthen this base in order to identify, measure and evaluate the extent to which 'effective practice' in citizenship education develops in schools. Accordingly, DfES has commissioned an eight-year Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study, to be carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). This is tracking a cohort of over 18,000 11-year-olds who entered secondary school in September 2002 and, as such, are the first students to have a continuous statutory entitlement to citizenship education, until they reach age 18. The over-arching aim is to assess the short-term and long-term effects of citizenship education on the knowledge, skills and attitudes and behaviour of students. The longitudinal study promises to be of significance for citizenship education not only in England but also in other countries (Kerr et al. 2003).

Challenges and next steps

Despite the attention of the press and the considerable efforts of policy-makers, the true potential of the findings – and its agenda for action in informing ongoing policy, practice and research in citizenship education in England – remain largely untapped. This is particularly true with regard to practice. Researchers have identified a number of key challenges facing practitioners.

These include:

- gaining agreement on the conception or definition of citizenship, among the many competing definitions in existence at present (Rowe 1997); McLaughlin (2000) sees the Crick definition as 'a controversial one which is open to challenge';
- bridging the gap between policy intentions and actual practice, including the gap between the breadth of the Crick Report and the sparser statutory Curriculum Order. The Curriculum Order provides the main starting-point for teachers and schools in approaching Citizenship and needs to be read alongside the Crick Report in order to fully understand the aims and purposes of this new school subject. However, it is questionable how many co-ordinators and teachers will read the Crick Report, which provides the vision and aims for citizenship education upon which the statutory Curriculum Order for citizenship in schools is based (Pearce and Hallgarten 2000; Davies 2000; Newton 2002);
- agreeing on the curriculum location for citizenship (Frazer (2000) draws attention to the fact that 'sheltering under the umbrella of citizenship education' are a range of interest groups with 'a range of differing and possibly conflicting interests and concerns');
- achieving teacher ownership of the aims and teaching and learning approaches associated with citizenship education, what McLaughlin (2000) terms achieving 'taxonomic bite'; there is a growing interest and literature on this in teacher education (Brett 2003; Davies 2003);
- giving teachers sufficient training and confidence to teach sensitive and controversial issues in citizenship education through active approaches, such as discussion, debate and drama;
- agreeing how citizenship education should be assessed, reported and inspected (OFSTED 2002, 2003);
- helping schools to address the community involvement strand of citizenship education through the school as a democratic community, in partnership with representatives from local communities (Miller 2000; Alexander 2001; Potter 2002).

The findings provide a shared agenda for action for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to discuss and tackle these issues in tandem and, in particular, to build a stronger sense of 'school efficacy' through citizenship education. Key challenges in England, therefore, are to raise the profile of the study within and across these different audiences and to show how the findings can lead to effective practice in schools (Kerr, 2002).

If this is not addressed, there is a danger that the legacy of England's participation in the study will be limited to worthy, but lengthy, research reports gathering dust on library shelves. That would represent a tragic waste of time, effort and funding. The study has great potential to inform and, perhaps more importantly, to influence citizenship education developments in England at this crucial juncture.

Although time and resources remain a major issue, some small steps have been taken, in terms of both practice and research:

- production of broadsheets outlining the main findings and points for action, including the notion of 'school efficacy', for different audiences (at present awaiting further funding if they are to be distributed to all schools, teacher education institutions and communities involved in citizenship education);

- seeding of the findings into citizenship education 'communities of practice', professional networks and practitioner journals where they will be promoted and, hopefully, acted upon;
- assistance in the conduct of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study, whose analytical framework, instrument design and analysis plans has been informed by the lessons from England's participation in the IEA study;
- secondary analysis of the national findings (Schagen 2002; Steiner-Khamsi et al. 2002); a number of PhD students are currently exploring the opportunities for further analysis provided by the national dataset for England;
- attempts to keep the network of National Research Co-ordinators (NRCs) connected and functioning through conferences, seminars and articles at international, European and national levels, and follow-up collaborations using the national and international findings to inform policy and practice in participating and non-participating countries (Steiner-Khamsi et al. 2002; ACSA 2003).

However, these activities take time, effort and resources; the opportunities to meet with other NRCs came to an end with the publication of the international report in 2001, and funding in England ceased with the publication of the national report in 2002. This raises the broader issue of how to build in the effective dissemination of outcomes, beyond the written report, at national level in large-scale comparative studies.

The challenges and next steps must be put into perspective. They are not unique to England, but apply equally to the majority of countries that participated. Indeed, developments in England are ahead of those in other countries in many respects. For example, only Australia, USA and the Czech Republic, with England, have so far published full national reports on the Phase 2 findings (Baldi et al. 2001; Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood 2002).

Conclusion

With hindsight, it is possible to identify five main lessons that emerge from England's participation in the IEA Citizenship Education Study:

1. Recognise that the power of comparative studies is as much in the findings from the analysis of national datasets as it is from the analysis of the international dataset. England's participation in the IEA study has illuminated and enhanced existing policy, practice and research in citizenship education in the UK.
2. Understand that national context plays a crucial role in the reasons for participation in comparative studies and the extent to which the findings are publicised and acted upon by different audiences. England's participation in the IEA study was framed by the current policy initiative in citizenship education. It is no coincidence that the study findings have so far had a greater impact on policy-makers than on other audiences.
3. Ensure that a dissemination strategy is built into the proposal to participate, and is fully funded. England's participation in the IEA study was funded for the collection, analysis and reporting of outcomes about young people, their teachers and head teachers. However, funding for reporting was largely confined to the publication of a lengthy national report more suited to an audience of academics and researchers than to practitioners.

4. Examine the findings carefully and target emerging messages for particular audiences in ways that make the findings relevant to their everyday practice. Otherwise, the true potential of the findings to inform policy, practice and research will not be realised. Policy-makers have begun to explore this route for the IEA study findings. However, much more remains to be done if the messages are to be widely disseminated.
5. Use the momentum of participation to sustain the networks that are created and to build on the findings. It is important to guard against involvement in comparative studies being an isolated, largely irrelevant, one-off experience. England has gained considerably through participation in the IEA Citizenship Education Study and is now a major force in a growing European and international network of researchers and policy-makers interested in citizenship education. This marks a considerable turn-around from the initial reasons for England's participation in the study. It underlines the powerful benefits that have emerged from this participation.

On balance, there have been many more positives than negatives from England's participation in the IEA Citizenship Education Study. Though the true potential of the findings in informing citizenship education pedagogy and practice remains largely untapped, involvement in the study has left a considerable legacy. In particular, it has helped to lay the foundations upon which policy, practice and research in citizenship education in England are being built.

David Kerr, Principal Research Officer, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) d.kerr@nfer.ac.uk

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Published by the Department for Education and Skills

ISBN: 1 84478 313 8
Ref No: CR2003

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