



Working to learn: a holistic approach to young people's education and training

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Introduction

How should the government improve the system of education and training of young people who finish their full-time education between the ages of 16 and 19, to make it better for the young people involved, better for the economy and better for society as a whole? This was the question we addressed in our 'Working to Learn' report (Evans *et al.*, 1997).

We believed that there were serious deficiencies in government policy, and that it was important for the views of employers, young people, training providers and others concerned, which have been assembled in numerous research studies, to be marshalled and brought to the attention of policy-makers. The 'Working to Learn' report summarized in this article analyses deficiencies of current policies and makes out a strong case for fundamental reform.

The British Conservative government's approach seemed to be based on the assumption that we were making gradual progress in the right direction. From this perspective, further fine-tuning was all that was needed. The Labour government in the UK has so far adopted a similar attitude. It is, indeed, introducing several major new initiatives, such as the New Deal, the University for Industry and Individual Learning Accounts. A significant development has been the establishment of a statutory right to time off for paid educational leave for 16- and 17-year-olds.

Recently, the Local Government Association, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) agreed to give a right to three years' free education to everyone under 25 (Bright, 1998). These measures include some steps in the right direction. However, these piecemeal initiatives do not represent a coherent strategy to tackle the fundamental problems afflicting work-based learning. We believe that such a strategy is needed, and present our case in this article.

We begin by outlining the reasons why we think that new proposals are needed, from the point of view both of individual young people and the national economy. Despite numerous attempts at reform, the pattern of provision remains incoherent, and international comparisons show that the quality of much of what is on offer to young entrants to the workforce in this country is inferior. Next we consider some of the major changes within the economy and the youth labour market which the development of policy has so lamentably failed to match. Many initiatives have suffered because they were predicated on too simplistic a notion of the problems requiring solution. Despite numerous attempts at the reform of education and training in Britain, the pattern of provision remains incoherent and international comparisons show the quality of much on offer to young entrants to be inferior. The ineffectiveness of policy has also partly been a consequence of conflicting visions of economic development underlying policy and resulting in confusion -

The authors of this article believe that there were serious deficiencies in education and training policy for young people between the ages of 16 and 19 in Britain. The 'Working to Learn' report, summarized in this article, analyses the deficiencies of current policies and makes out a strong case for fundamental reform.



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The longstanding government commitment to voluntarism which is at the root of many problems is then discussed. While employers have extremely important roles in relation to every aspect of employment and training, voluntarism fails to take account of the legitimate and substantial interests of other stakeholders. For example, the wider public interest requires that young people be given broader and better education and training than most employers are ever likely to provide in view of their own relatively short-term private interests.

After outlining the case for a holistic approach to the development of a high quality work-based route, the ‘Working to Learn’ proposals are presented in outline. Admittedly, the direct costs of meeting young people’s needs for broader education and training would be significantly higher than at present. However, reducing the massive and excessive administrative costs in the present system could release funds to be used for these purposes. In contrast, the economic and social costs of continuing on the present path are likely to be substantial.

In conclusion, we suggest that reform of the system of work-based learning to provide high quality opportunities for those young people not in full-time education is a priority because young people need the opportunity to continue to learn beyond the period of compulsory education; and also because without a high-quality system of work-based learning, the foundations necessary for their lifelong learning will be absent.

Background

From a national economic point of view, skills are an important determinant of economic advantage. From the point of view of individual young people, the transition they make from education into

employment shapes their attitudes to learning throughout their lives. We wrote the ‘Working to Learn’ report because research evidence points towards deep reasons for serious past policy failures in this area. Many initiatives have suffered because they were predicated on too simplistic a notion of the underlying problems that have to be solved. There is also a worrying trend of increasing narrowness of policy focus, with the possible exception of parts of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. Several times what were originally broad-based policy aims have become narrowed down. Sometimes, as with the New Training Initiative, economic recession and the associated growth of youth unemployment resulted in a dramatic shortage of training places. The subsequent concentration on finding sufficient places inevitably undermined broader intentions. On other occasions, narrowing has been built in to policy design. For example, the development of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) has restricted the content and scope of training programmes, and led to an over-emphasis on qualifications. Yet research evidence has shown that the achievement of a qualification does not guarantee valuable learning, and that the learning context, the learning process and the expertise of those providing education and training are at least as important as qualification structures in determining scheme success.

In 1989, the CBI identified a set of minimum foundation training standards that it claimed would allow the British workforce to become competitive, concluding that:

“there is inadequate and insufficient education and training of young people to meet skill needs and the current situation is unsustainable... employers believe that there must be a quantum leap in the education and training of young people both to meet the needs of the British economy and to face the competition on even terms.” (1989:13)

None of the CBI standards has yet been met. Despite the expectations raised by the introduction of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the majority of the trainees left the scheme before completing their training and failed to achieve a full



qualification; and in 1996 14% or more of all school-leavers were not in full- or part-time post-compulsory education, nor receiving benefits, nor on YT.

Even now in the late 1990s, young people can still effectively end their participation in formalized learning when they leave school at 16. We doubt whether current approaches to young people's vocational education and training based on voluntarism can meet either the needs of young people themselves, or those of the economy. And we suggest that the potential of work-based learning to both motivate young people and develop their latent talents is woefully undervalued.

Many young people leave the education system disillusioned with formal learning: they have low expectations of what they can achieve and are little motivated by the quality of vocational provision. The economic and social costs of this continuing failure are very high. Unless initial foundation education and training is accessible to the whole young workforce, costs of subsequent training will be excessive and much will have to be remedial. If many young people are effectively excluded from education and training, or what they are given is unsuitable or of low quality, then they will have poor employment prospects and their ability to become participative citizens will be gravely impaired. Despite current concern about the role of education in creating a more civilized society, the lack of education for social citizenship remains a serious deficiency. Work-based learning for young people needs to address broad issues of social justice, and should do all that is possible to redress disadvantages of gender, ethnicity, social class, geographical location or sexual orientation.

A persistent problem faced by work-based learning programmes for young people in Britain is their low status. In recent years, as staying-on rates in full-time education have increased and participation in training schemes has correspondingly diminished, this problem may well have intensified. With the possible exception of the Modern Apprenticeship, these are schemes for other people's children, and for lower-skilled, lower-status and insecure jobs.

Yet work-based learning programmes will continue to play an important part in the lives of at least one in five of British young people, and of far more in certain areas and in certain groups. They must, therefore, be good enough for anyone to enter. They have a role to play in underpinning the upskilling of the British workforce and the progress towards a learning society. They have a place in extending social justice and in addressing problems of youth alienation which sometimes lead to crime - although improving work-based learning for young people could not achieve such ends on its own.

Employment needs and changes in the youth labour market

Shifts in policy for work-based training for young people have been accompanied by tremendous changes within the economy and the youth labour market. Changes include the massive and continuing shift of employment out of manufacturing and into the service sector; the decline in skilled and unskilled, often male, manual employment; the growing casualization of employment; increases in demand for female labour; a sharp rise in staying-on rates in post-compulsory education, and an overall reduction in the size of the youth labour market.

An increasing proportion of young people are being employed in part-time and temporary jobs, and youth unemployment is becoming increasingly concentrated among lowly qualified males. At the same time, the withdrawal of unemployment benefit for 16- and 17-year-olds, combined with the perceived low status of much YT provision among its potential clients, has led to a growing number of young people disappearing from official statistics.¹ The existence of this 'unknown' group of significant proportions confirms the inadequacy of current provision for the age group, as well as underlining the weaknesses of existing mechanisms for monitoring the transition from school to work.

The potential client group for a future work-based learning route is likely to be significantly smaller than the mass provi-

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1) These youngsters are not legally employed, not in receipt of benefit and not in any form of education or training. Research in South Wales (Istance *et al*, 1994) found that, rather than being the 1.5 to 4.5 per cent of the age group that official government estimates suggested, in South Glamorgan this group accounted for between 16 and 23 per cent of the age cohort at any one time. Research in other areas of the country has replicated these results and confirmed the scale and depth of the problem posed by these 'drop-out' youngsters (Wilkinson, 1995).



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sion envisaged for the original YTS, but it is not going to disappear. This smaller client group is volatile and varied in nature. Many will be among the least academically successful school pupils, although the Modern Apprenticeship pilots have shown that others with high ability will continue to choose the work-based route, perhaps especially at 17-plus. Some young people will move into and out of work-based learning, as their circumstances and career ambitions change during their transition to adulthood.

The progress of work-based learning for the 16 to 19 age group cannot easily be separated out from wider problems in the acquisition and usage of skills within the British labour market. The demand for more and better skills is patchy, and the remnants of the youth labour market are one of the areas where such demand may be weakest. Problems in demand stem, in part, from the product market strategies adopted by many companies, and associated systems of work organization and job design that offer limited opportunities for higher levels of skill to be deployed. If firms' demand for skills is to be increased, and the skills that are created are to be put to productive use, policy needs to address ways in which organizations across the economy can be encouraged to 'de-Taylorise' work, and better integrate skills into their competitive strategies. Policies that assume that the demand exists, and that all that is needed is institutional reconfiguration of the supply of skills, are doomed to failure. Many employers have shown little interest in upskilling their young workers. They withdraw many trainees from training before it is complete, and allow them to leave schemes without qualifications.

Prior to its defeat in the general election, the Conservative government was offering two conflicting visions of economic development. One stressed the value of a skilled workforce as the sole source of sustainable long-term competitive advantage. The other told firms that the low labour costs that stem from a highly deregulated, flexible and casualized labour market would create the 'enterprise economy' of Europe. The latter strategy not merely offers an alternative to the former, but its pursuit tends to produce

structural conditions within the labour market that make it increasingly difficult to develop a national workforce capable of sustaining a high-skill, high-commitment, high-quality competitive strategy (Keep and Mayhew, 1996). We need to be clear as a nation which vision we want to pursue, and why.

The need for a more highly skilled workforce is often asserted by a general consensus. If it is to be taken seriously, then there is a need to foster conditions and incentives that would encourage firms towards competitive strategies based on the delivery of high specification, high value-added goods and services needing a highly skilled workforce. Such strategies exist in many other developed countries. They have been absent in Britain, where it has been believed that market forces alone will produce the desired results.

Success is more likely to attend a work-based learning programme that forms part of a wider range of policies aimed at increasing demand for skills. Without a greater demand for higher skills among young employees and their current and future employers, it is harder to create the incentives that would underpin a successful scheme, and there is the danger that the skills being created would be ineffectively used in the absence of product market and competitive strategies that emphasize the delivery of goods and services of high quality.

If any form of work-based learning is to warrant even the levels of government expenditure now incurred, longer-term national employment needs must be re-asserted, with a recognition that society as a whole, not just employers, has a legitimate interest in this being done. This means other stakeholders, such as the trade unions, representing employees' interests, should be involved in regulatory structures.

State-supported work-based learning programmes should be more widely targeted even than at national employment needs, important though they are. Such programmes also have a role to play in helping young people make the transition into being adult citizens and in addressing questions of social justice. Work-based



programmes have enormous potential to widen young people's opportunity for learning. This broader objective is in the interests of the young people themselves and of society as a whole. It requires a general educational component to the programmes, to broaden the abilities and perspectives of young people in their transition from school to adulthood and work. This should be the case for all abilities, whereas in the Dearing proposals (1996), a limited notion of breadth seems to be reserved for the more able.

Many young people between the ages of 16 and 19 are cut off from education and training. Some are in insecure jobs where no training is provided. Others, sometimes referred to as 'status 0' have dropped out of official records, being absent from employment, education or training. In the current English and Welsh social and economic climate, a significant number of these young people see no incentives to join the official system, preferring the attractions of informal labour market activity and crime (Istance *et al*, 1994). We need to offer such young people opportunities for learning that are accessible and of value, whether or not they are able to get a regular job. It is unreasonable to expect employers to shoulder the full responsibility for these broader aspects of a work-based learning programme.

The problems of voluntarism

Voluntarism for employers takes different forms. Employers are free to choose whether or not to involve themselves in youth training programmes. They are free to choose whether or not to train young people whom they employ. They are free to terminate any employment and/or training placement, subject to employment law, and they are being given increasing freedom to determine the nature of training a young person placed with them receives. But it is against the national interest for employers to provide full-time jobs without training to young people under the age of 19. There is a need for legislation to make it illegal to employ young people for more than the equivalent of three days per week, except as part of an approved training programme. Supple-

mentary training should be provided for those employed part-time. This would ensure a level playing field for all employers, and reinforce the existing trend towards fewer jobs without training for 16-19-year-olds in Britain.

It would be unfair and unworkable to remove from employers the right to terminate employment or a training placement. However, young people should be protected from situations in which they are unable to continue training through no fault of their own. Every 16 to 19-year-old should, therefore, have an entitlement to an on-going learning programme which should continue regardless of contextual changes.

It would be unrealistic to expect employers to provide the breadth required in such a system on an entirely voluntary basis. There is need for government stimulation of the capacity of small and medium-sized firms - which account for a very large proportion of employment - to offer more and better work-based learning opportunities. There should be public funding of the broader educational elements, and the entitlements of learners to job-specific, occupational and general education need to be secured through nationally agreed frameworks, backed by legislation. For example, learning for citizenship and the wider employment agenda require all young people to have access to off-the-job learning, which very few small and medium-sized employers could possibly provide themselves. Further, many young people placed with small employers would require a second placement to give them greater breadth of experience. Although employer goodwill could provide such opportunities for some young people, it could not guarantee them for all. A voluntarist system involves the danger that those employers facilitating breadth and flexibility are disadvantaged if their training costs are higher than those of rivals who train more cheaply or do not train at all. Legislation could ensure the entitlement of young people, and give involved employers a level playing field.

So structures should be put in place to allow employers to determine the level of their involvement, with mechanisms for that to be supplemented where necessary.



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The right to choose the level of involvement should be balanced by an acceptance of nationally and locally agreed programme standards, so that the interests of young people, employers in general and the state as a whole could be safeguarded. This would require the replacement of employer control over training with partnership structures where employers have a key role and a strong voice, as should others such as education representatives and the trade unions.

Group training schemes could have a greater role in stimulating the training capacity of small and medium-sized firms. They expanded rapidly in the late 1960s, stimulated by Industry Training Boards - especially by the Engineering Industry Training Board. Their primary role was not to provide training, but to act as training departments for small firms which could not afford their own. This involved them helping small firms recruit and select trainees and devising training programmes for them (Senker, 1992). In recent years, group training schemes have been transformed into private training providers. Many still provide ‘training department’ services for small companies on a commercial basis. For example, they help small firms to secure TEC financial support for training and assessment to NVQ standards by dealing on their behalf with the paperwork, and also by training and providing assessors and external verifiers. However, the emphasis for many years has been on them competing in the training market.

To meet the wider social need for youth trainees, such organizations need to be encouraged and supported in devoting resources to partnership with employers to help stimulate and meet the need for many more young trainees. In addition, support needs to be made available to encourage and stimulate the creation and development of many more such organizations. They are still concentrated in specific sectors, particularly engineering, and such services need to be far more widely available to stimulate demand for trainees. The present availability of these services reflects market demand, but does not reflect adequately the important roles these organizations could play for the wider benefit of society. There are continuing problems of finding work place-

ments in areas of low employment and for those who need special support and/or a sheltered work environment. In these cases, the social costs of not making special provision outweigh the costs of providing alternative placements through appropriate forms of community activity, sports and recreational activity with a work dimension. The voluntary sector is a major potential provider both of training and work placements.

The need for a holistic approach

Motivation for the development of a high-quality work-based route derives from recognizing that the workplace can be a creative and motivating site for learning; and that this requires an integrated and holistic approach to enabling young people to combine on- and off-the-job learning experiences.

The concept of a ‘community of practice’ provides a useful model for considering how the different partners who come together on the work-based route might complement each other (Lave, 1991). At the centre of the community are the young people who combine theoretical and practical knowledge with skills to transform their practice. Both the workplace and the off-the-job learning must, therefore, be organized in such a way as to ensure the young people can demonstrate as well as acquire new skills and knowledge and, hence, their true potential as both employees and trainees. Because a high-quality work-based route should transcend the boundaries of both the traditional classroom and shopfloor/office, we would advocate the development of new pedagogical approaches. These might comprise a pedagogy of work (Fuller and Unwin, 1996) practiced in such a way as to create meaningful links between learning, production and work organization. An expansive approach to learning would be adopted so that young people would be encouraged to question workplace practices.

The ‘Working to Learn’ proposals are intended to provide young people with a broad, work-based learning experience to prepare them for a future of uncertain



change, and to help them to grow and develop as people. New forms of work-based learning for young people are most likely to be effective in the context of a new style and direction of policy-making at national level. A broad, holistic model of work-based learning needs to be underpinned by legislative authority. Such a programme should be built around partnerships at local and national levels, in which the sometimes conflicting but legitimate interests of various stakeholders can be expressed and considered. In addition to young people and employers, stakeholders with a legitimate interest in work-based education include trade unions, the state and professional providers of training and guidance.

At national level, delivery of work-based education and training would be through partnership between sectoral and/or occupational groupings and locally approved training providers. Occupational groupings would be particularly important where skills are cross-sectoral (for example, secretarial skills), and there would be the need for a national consortium of partners with a remit to look across sectors and help to minimise duplication of effort and provision. Sectors and/or occupations could create sectoral templates for the scheme in partnership with other interested parties. In the case of sectors with many small employers, NTOs could be encouraged to establish group training provision to deliver schemes.

Partnership is also important at the level of individual young people and employers, and the structure should reflect the legitimate needs of the different partners. In this context, the concept of entitlement is central. 'Working to Learn' would centre on the development of job-specific competence within the workplace, in ways similar to current youth training schemes and the Modern Apprenticeship. However, it should go much further. Young people studying for the 'Working to Learn' qualifications would receive a variety of learning experiences - a balance of on-, near- and off-the-job learning, determining that balance would involve considering the needs of the different stakeholders and the availability of local facilities. Off-the-job experience and learning might be on the employer's premises, or elsewhere.

Each trainee would work in at least two different placements to ensure sufficient breadth in their learning experience. In many larger firms, this might mean spending time in more than one department. In other circumstances, a temporary move to a second employer might be necessary. In recognizing that young people change, that their original choices of training placement might cease to be appropriate, and that a key aim of 'Working to Learn' would be to nourish the growth of the person, the scheme would build in the opportunity to change occupation at least once, with no penalty to the young person, the employer or a training provider. Furthermore, all young people would be entitled to a period of work sampling if appropriate.

Educational breadth is essential to contribute to personal growth and as preparation for future changes in career and work. It should embrace communications and numeracy skills, but go well beyond them. Trainees might usefully learn about business organization and the role of trade unions. There should also be scope for trainees to follow studies of their choice.

Mechanisms would need to be provided for allocating the trainees to particular training providers and establishing that training and workplace arrangements are satisfactory. This function could be carried out by the Careers Service. A flexible form of development plan for an individual training programme should play a central role. This would differ from the action plans which have constrained developmental work and have tended to become bureaucratic and 'paper-driven' in their operation. It would focus on the evaluation of past and present experiences and on self-managed learning in order to anticipate future actions. A mentor would give the young person guidance and support, and where necessary would take the young person's part, for example by acting as sponsor or advocate and making arrangements. Mentors should have powers to intervene if either the young person was being inadequately trained or an employer or other training provider was not getting reasonable behaviour from a trainee.

A key part of learning for an occupation is to acquire extended experience in that

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occupation. For this reason, and to make possible the greater breadth advocated, full-time training should be a minimum of two years, with the possibility of extending this to three years where necessary. Those who learn fast should be stretched by developing their skills, knowledge and understanding further, not by early completion.

Broad frameworks would be developed nationally, but the details of the individual programmes will be worked out locally. We envisage the creation of sector-specific local partnerships between employers and other training providers, with the balance depending upon the ability and willingness of the individual employers to provide a high-quality, broad-based programme. Many employers, especially small ones, cannot cope with the complexities even of current narrowly focused training approaches, let alone programmes with the wider objectives advocated here. Their role is and should remain central, but there is a need for structures to support and enhance the contribution which such employers can reasonably make.

At local level, local learning co-ordination units (LLCUs) would have the prime responsibility for balancing the needs of the various partners involved in a training programme, while giving the legitimate needs of the young trainee primacy. Financial and regulatory functions would be operated at local level through the LLCUs. We envisage four kinds of training provider relating to the LLCU: employers, an extended network of group training schemes working in cooperation with smaller employers, private training organizations and Further Education (FE) colleges. The last three would all need to establish liaison arrangements with the trainee's employer through the LLCU. Providers would allocate an appropriately qualified mentor to each trainee,

Regulation would take place through sectoral or occupational boards which would establish standards for training courses and job placements within their remit. This would include stipulations about courses and placements leading to recognized qualifications, and in the case of employers acting as training providers, this might include the existence of

structured work placement programmes, the employment of a recognized trainers and/or achievement of standards such as Investors in People.

Funding distortions: how resources could be used more effectively

Our proposals outlined above would cost significantly more than present arrangements in terms of the direct costs of the education and training provided. However, the complexity, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of present arrangements for administration are excessive to the extent that it is probable that our proposals could be delivered at little or no extra net cost to the public purse.

Funding methodologies for the UK's system of post-16 education and training are far too complex. The government funds education and training for 16-19-year-olds via four main systems:

- a. Local Education Authority (LEA) school sixth forms receive funds through their LEA's Local Management of Schools (LMS) system.
- b. Grant maintained school sixth forms receive funds from the Funding Agency for Schools.
- c. FE and sixth-form colleges receive funds from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).
- d. Work-based training providers receive funds from their local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs).

Each of these systems operates in a unique way, even though some of the courses and qualifications they deliver may be the same. FE colleges and private training providers participate in an annual battle to secure adequate funding from a steadily reducing allocation granted by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This annual scramble for funds has contributed to short-term planning and has acted against the development of a robust infrastructure to support the work-based route. Moreover, outcome-related funding has promoted finan-



cial priorities above concern for the quality of the learning process and the quality of learner achievement.

One of the main consequences of annual funding allocation and budget cuts is that providers cannot afford to invest in the capital equipment required for vocational subjects such as engineering and construction. Providers are forced to deliver courses which require little in the way of resources and can be taught largely in the classroom. Outcome-related funding also biases providers towards courses that are risk-free in terms of ensuring students will achieve the necessary passes and which take the minimum amount of time. In the current competitive climate, it is easier for training providers to increase profitability by cutting costs than by improving the quality of their programmes and their relevance to local labour market needs. Therefore, the pedagogical, occupational, locational and social aspects of the community of practice, identified by Fuller and Unwin (1999), are weak. The main controls on the quality of training provision are the achievement of specified qualifications and the attraction of customers. NVQs are inadequate to protect programme standards, and young people and many employers do not choose a training programme because of its quality or lack of it (Steedman and Hawkins, 1994). These factors combine to cause major distortions of funding priorities away from meeting the needs of local economies and providing young people with a meaningful occupational identity and status.

For the purposes of this chapter, the two most relevant funding systems are those administered by the FEFC and the TECs, as both provide resources for the work-based route. A key difference between TECs and colleges is in the level of funding freedom they enjoy to operate as individual organisations. All colleges have to comply with the FEFC's national funding methodology, whereas each TEC negotiates its own funding arrangements with its Government Regional Office (GRO).

Although they operate under different funding arrangements, colleges and TECs have to co-operate at local level to deliver the work-based route. Colleges, for example, may act as managing agents for

YT (Youth Training) and all colleges provide off-the-job training for both YT and Modern Apprenticeship. TECs control a national pot of some £20 million which colleges can draw on in their efforts to meet the needs of local labour markets. TECs and colleges may also collaborate on bids to the Single Regeneration Budget and to the European Social Fund.

The current system is manifestly inefficient, involving the waste of large funds in cumbersome administration. We estimated that there could be enough money in the present system to allow every 16-year-old in an annual cohort to study to NVQ level 3, based on an average cost per programme of £ 6,500. To liberate that amount of funding, however, requires a considerable alteration of the existing arrangements. Structural reform of the system could yield savings which could make major contributions to funding the additional costs inherent in some of our proposals.

Furthermore, the current funding regime ensures that much training effort is ineffective from an economic point of view, being deployed to create competences which are relatively inexpensive to produce, rather than creating those competencies in demand and needed to enhance the productivity of the economy.

It is also relevant to take broader considerations of social cost and benefit into account. The Prince's Trust estimated that the average cost to the public purse of a crime committed by a young person (aged 10 to 20) was £ 2,620 in 1994. Given that 44 per cent of all crime is committed by young people, the bill for 1994 came to £ 5,500 million. By helping more young people to participate in interesting education and training directed at meeting the economy's needs, and by helping even slightly to reduce youth crime and its enormous costs, the work-based route outlined above could represent a first-class investment of public funds.

Conclusions

Central to the development of a high-quality work-based route is a recognition that the workplace can be a creative and mo-

“Providers are forced to deliver courses which require little in the way of resources and can be taught largely in the classroom. Outcome-related funding also biases providers towards courses that are risk-free in terms of ensuring students will achieve the necessary passes and which take the minimum amount of time. (...) The main controls on the quality of training provision are the achievement of specified qualifications and the attraction of customers. NVQs are inadequate to protect programme standards, (...) These factors combine to cause major distortions of funding priorities away from meeting the needs of local economies and providing young people with a meaningful occupational identity and status.”



“The legacy of earlier failed attempts to solve this problem lends to colour perceptions of what is possible, and the effort invested in the creation of institutional mechanisms and modes of delivery that have subsequently been discarded has led to disillusionment and cynicism about any future developments.”

tivating site for learning and that an integrated and holistic approach is required which enables young people to combine on- and off-the-job learning experiences. There are a number of deep-seated inter-related factors that have contributed to this country's inability to deliver a coherent, comprehensive, high-quality work-based education and training route for the young. These include an education system that in some cases produces young people who want nothing more to do with formalized learning; a society that has low expectations of what many young people can achieve, an implicit belief that many are destined for unemployment or a life of low-skill work that requires little in the way of formal preparation; cynicism (often well-founded) about the quality of provision on government training schemes aimed at the unemployed; the continued existence of employment opportunities for the young that offer little or no training; and little demand from UK employers for a general upskilling of the workforce. The result has been work-based learning for the young that has, in effect, been aimed largely at the lower achievers from the schools system. Many youngsters, especially from the most disadvantaged groups, have fallen through the gaps in the system and do nothing. Reforming our system of work-based learning so as to provide high quality opportunities for those young people not in full-time education is a priority both because all young people need the opportunity to continue to learn beyond the period of compulsory education, and also because without a high-quality system of

work-based learning for the young, the foundations necessary for an effective system of lifelong learning will be missing.

If there were a simple solution to these issues, it would have been discovered and adopted long ago. All aspects of the problem of youth training are complex, and some are intractable. Furthermore, economic and political circumstances, combined with recent institutional and political history, significantly constrain the avenues that are available for policy development. The legacy of earlier failed attempts to solve this problem lends to colour perceptions of what is possible, and the effort invested in the creation of institutional mechanisms and modes of delivery that have subsequently been discarded has led to disillusionment and cynicism about any future developments.

Unless we are willing to face up to these issues, and to tackle them in a broader and more co-ordinated fashion than hitherto, significant progress is unlikely. While it is important to build on the strengths of the work-based learning route embodied in the apprenticeship tradition, simply tinkering with the institutional mechanisms is not a sufficient response. Failure to attempt more far-reaching reform, based upon higher expectations, notions of entitlement and active partnership between all those involved in the provision of learning opportunities for the young, will mean that 10 years from now we will still be bemoaning the inadequacy of provision for young entrants to the labour force.

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