

There must be a better way:

designing and refining post-14 provision

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What is the problem?

- An ongoing failure to cater adequately for half of our citizens in the 14-19 age group.
- Turbulence for the “vocational” 16-19 and inertia/ undue caution for the “academic”.
- “Vocational” that is not, and “general” that is not.
- A dampening rather than exploitation of the creativity of learners and teachers.
- Assessment and qualification-led initiatives that fail to work first time.

Charting the history:

every government initiated assessment-led reform has required urgent, early and unplanned revision.

Initiative	Date of Introduction	Date of review
National Curriculum	1988	2002/3, (Dearing)
NVQs	1990	1996, (Beaumont)
GNVQs	1993	1995, (Capey)
Modern Apprenticeships	1995	2001 (Cassels)
Curriculum 2000	2000	2002, (Tomlinson)

What are the features of the current approach?

- National-level initiatives.
- Qualifications-led, nationalised qualifications.
- An unstated but flawed development process.
- Resources for summative assessment but not for formative / diagnostic assessment.
- Curriculum development as the servant of qualifications rather than of learners.
- Assumptions that
 - there are three kinds of learner
 - they are working at one of three levels
 - individual and intuitional targets should be defined in terms of levels

Current value judgements

- Reform for the academic should be evolutionary and for the vocational should be revolutionary.
- Outcomes matter more than process, and unaccredited learning has little value.
- We do not have the time to properly pilot new schemes.
- It is OK to work out the cost once we have agreed the scheme.
- Learners should be taught in their peer group.

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- Learners should be taught in their peer group.
- *The analogy with the introduction of new medical courses (of treatment).*
- *The paradox of the written guarantee.*
- *So we have unplanned reviews and badly organised remedial action.*
- *It is OK to produce the best quality scheme that can be afforded*
- *Therefore some are always in the "bottom half"*
- *But the world of work (and sport, etc) has vertical structures*

Some modest (alternative) proposals

- Whenever possible, adopt and improve existing schemes.
- Where brand new provision is required, use an explicit and iterative development process
 - Overseen by independent monitors – an “ethics committee”
 - Balancing the interests of different stakeholders, and of the learning programme, assessment regime, and resource requirements

The desire to start from scratch rather than build on what already exists

- The NVQ was originally intended to be “...a framework designed to incorporate and embrace existing qualifications” and to encompass all post-16 vocational qualifications, full and part time
- The GNVQ approach was originally intended to be to “design the framework and to invite awarding bodies to develop GNVQs which meet this criteria”, with it being possible to “modify some existing qualifications to bring them in line with the new criteria very quickly.”

In each case an “innovative” new product was designed instead, and in each case there were severe teething problems. In addition to an over-complex assessment regime, the initial specifications verged on the incomprehensible.

Why not learn from existing tried and tested qualifications?

“Because we thought it would not be difficult to do better.”

The select committee said,

The question remains as to whether more use could and should have been made of existing ‘tried and tested’ qualifications such as BTECs at the outset. What appears to have happened is that a ‘blank slate’ approach has been adopted, ...this seems wasteful to us and makes it likely that old lessons will have to be learned again.

The DCSF replied,

We did not start out by requiring or expecting that all Diplomas would be designed from scratch as wholly new programmes, rather than utilising existing qualifications. Indeed, it was our expectation that DDPs in at least some sectors would want to make considerable use of units and content from existing qualifications.

The first five DDPs reached the conclusion that starting from scratch was the right thing to do in order to make the most of the opportunity, and we warmly welcome the innovative and engaging content that has emerged as a result on the Principal Learning component of the Diploma.

Why not learn from existing tried and tested qualifications?

“Because nothing like this has been tried before.”

Alan Johnson: it is the bit that is missing and has been missing from our education system historically. We have had, on the one side, theoretical study and, on the other side, workplace training, job training, and there has been nothing that mixed the theoretical with the applied to any great degree.

I think nowadays it is easy to go to schools and see young people in Key Stage 4, who are doing things which are clearly vocational training and they are spending perhaps half of their timetable doing something which is quite narrowly focused on, say, motor vehicles as a subject area. for 14 to 16 year olds to spend half or two-thirds of their timetable on that is too narrow.

(Jon Coles)

Source: House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2007) *14-19 Diplomas: Fifth Report of Session 2006-07 (HC249)*. London, TSO.

“It is an education programme we have not used in this country, but our competitors have.”
“Until now, the alternative to GCSEs for many of these students has been training courses”
[Ken Boston. *Diplomas to usher in a brave new world*. TES, March 30th 2007]

Why not learn from previous schemes?

- CSE modes one, two and three
- Unified Vocational Preparation (UVP) – curriculum-led, no compulsory accreditation
- TVEI – an approach to the management of change
- City and Guilds communication skills – teacher-led qualifications design
- Access courses for adults ; the Open University – alternative approaches to progression

Some factors to be held in balance

- The activities and content that motivate the learner – the learning programme
- Outcomes valued by others
 - Employers
 - Higher Education
- An assessment regime that both recognises and supports achievement - certification

The dynamics

Learning programme

(including diagnosis of learner needs)



Resources

(Staff, time, equipment)



Assessment regime

(qualifications)



Outcomes

(needs of end users)



Some modest (alternative) proposals *continued*

- An optional system for national validation of local schemes (c.f. BTEC, CNAAs)
- Progression addressed through bridging courses.
- Components of different levels within the same programme
- Add new levels – e.g. Between GCSE and A level, between A level and degree level
- Abandon attempts to establish equivalences
- Express entry requirements in terms of pre-requisite knowledge and skills, rather than grades.
- Identify the effects of new schemes on the educational ecology

And the result might be....

- Provision for everyone that is fit for purpose, with its own integrity, not just a progression route to something else.
- An education system that features ongoing innovation and development, within a controlled environment.
- Some programmes that major on process and learning experience, as well as others that emphasise outcomes and progression opportunities.
- Provision that utilises and develops the creativity, resources and imagination of both teachers and learners.