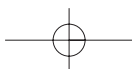
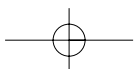
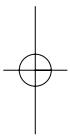
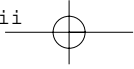


EDUCATION AND TRAINING 14-19





Education and Training 14–19

CURRICULUM, QUALIFICATIONS AND
ORGANIZATION

Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours



Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore

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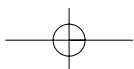
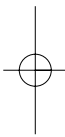
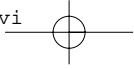
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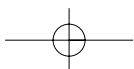
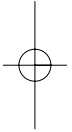
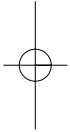
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about the authors

Ann Hodgson has worked as a teacher, lecturer, LEA adviser, editor and civil servant, joining the Institute of Education, University of London in 1993, where she is now a Reader in Education and Faculty Director for Research, Consultancy and Knowledge Transfer. She is a co-director of the *Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education in England and Wales*, as well as a range of local authority and learning and skills council research and development projects related to institutional organization, governance and curriculum and qualifications reform. Ann has published widely on topics related to post-14 policy, lifelong learning and curriculum and qualifications reform.

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p r e f a c e

The fact is that the world does move on and change and something that is achievable today simply may not have been yesterday. (PA 5)

A new volume on the reform of 14–19 education and training in England is badly needed. It will be the first research-based book looking at the 14–19 phase as a whole since the Government’s rejection of the Tomlinson Report and the launch of its 14–19 White Paper in early 2005. This book is our attempt to provide an analysis of the position in 2008 and to offer ideas for the future, which were not deemed possible three years ago.

14–19 Education and Training: Curriculum, Qualifications and Organization seeks to communicate with, and to link, different communities involved in 14–19 reform – practitioners in schools, colleges and work-based learning, policy actors at national, regional and local levels and the academic community with its researchers, trainee teachers and students.

In doing so, the book takes a system-wide view as it describes, and tries to make sense of, a complex set of developments in the implementation stage of government policy. These include qualifications reform and the introduction of the Diplomas, changes in institutional arrangements and the formation of 14–19 Partnerships, the role of apprenticeships and the work-based route and debates about the future organization of 14–19 education and training in England.

We also try to give a voice to a range of policy actors, working in different parts of the system, who were interviewed as a source of evidence for the book. Their views on the 14–19 phase, government reforms and future possibilities were one of several sources of data we brought together to inform the book’s seven chapters, and their quotes are coded (PA) plus

their interview number. We also drew on findings from the *Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales* and from an ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme project *The Impact of Policy on Learning and Inclusion in the Learning and Skills Sector*. Secondary sources included key government policy documents, academic and professional literature and press and web articles.

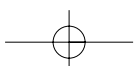
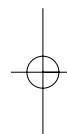
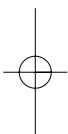
Our starting point is to question the rationale for a 14–19 phase – we do not take it as a given. However, in weighing up the evidence, early in the book we suggest that there are strong arguments for an extended upper secondary phase in England. Nevertheless, we are not convinced that current government policy will be able to produce a strong, inclusive and coherent 14–19 education and training system for all young people. Hence our argument that a 14–19 phase in England still remains largely a ‘policy aspiration’.

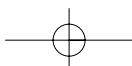
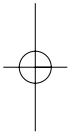
While the book is research-based, it is also informed by debates about a more inclusive and unified approach to 14–19 education and training, which have been part of professional thinking since the late-1980s. This perspective is reflected in different ways across the seven chapters, but our central argument is that a strong and inclusive 14–19 phase should build on the strengths of the English system – bottom-up curriculum innovation, diverse approaches to pedagogy and its offer of a ‘second chance’ post-16 – while also addressing deep-seated problems. In making this argument, the book takes a critical view of policy that perpetuates the academic/vocational divide; competitive institutional relations; employer voluntarism; and top-down politically imposed agendas. We criticise, in particular, an approach to policy that does not provide an explicit long-term vision and does not draw adequately on professional expertise.

Chapter 1 lays out the rationale for a 14–19 phase, but also highlights the difficulties of realising it in the English context. This chapter uses the lens of international comparison to reflect on the main features, strengths and weaknesses of the English system. In Chapter 2 we provide an historical framework through which to understand how the current distinctive English approach to 14–19 has emerged. In doing this, we focus on the major debates around curriculum, qualifications and organization that have taken place over the last 20 years. In particular, we explain the ongoing controversy about the Government’s rejection of the Tomlinson proposals for a unified diploma system. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe and analyse the three separate tracks that structure the 14–19 phase: general/academic; broad vocational; and work-based learning. Institutional and governance arrangements, including the emerging 14–19 Partnerships, constitute the focus of Chapter 6.



The final chapter lays out possible future directions for reform. We describe three positions. The Government's stance is characterized as 'pragmatic track-based', because its choice-based 14–19 agenda could be seen to lead to a reformulated triple-track system. The second position is taken by what we term 'pragmatic unifiers'. They believe that a broad local interpretation of the national reforms and trying to 'make the Diplomas work' will eventually produce a more unified system. As 'systemic unifiers', we take a third position, in which we argue for the need to view 14–19 education and training within its broader historical and system context. From this position, we argue for a triple shift involving the mutual reform of general and vocational education; the reinforcement of qualifications reform by the creation of 'strongly collaborative local learning systems' and by a more devolved and deliberative policy process that provides spaces for regional and local innovation within a national framework.





acknowledgements

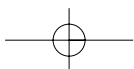
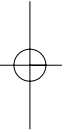
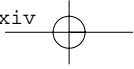
We would like to acknowledge the help and support we received from the Nuffield Foundation and our colleagues on the Nuffield 14-19 Review of Education and Training in England and Wales – Geoff Hayward, Ewart Keep, Richard Pring, Gareth Rees and Stephanie Wilde – in researching this book. It was made much more possible too by the one term's study leave we were granted by the Institute of Education, University of London.

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In addition, we would like to thank the 23 people, representing a wide range of national, regional and local stakeholders and policy actors, who were prepared to be interviewed for this book and provided us with a rich background to 14-19 policy and practice. Particular thanks go to Richard Steer, who organized and participated in the interview process and read through the penultimate version of the whole book to check for consistency.

As usual we want to recognize the patience and tolerance of our families while we were writing this book.

Finally, we are grateful for the encouragement and practical advice we received from Marianne Lagrange and Matthew Waters from Sage.



chapter 1

DISCUSSING A 14–19 PHASE IN ENGLAND

14–19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING – IMPORTANT BUT POORLY UNDERSTOOD

Currently, 14–19 education in England is a paradox. It has become a prime area of policy development backed by serious resources aimed at improving national educational performance. It is a highly charged area with passionate debate amongst educationalists, policy-makers and the education research communities about how it should be organized and developed. At the same time, the majority of those outside the education system do not readily recognize the concept of a 14–19 phase (Lumby and Foskett 2005).

So why is something that is so important to policy-makers and educationalists not obvious to the general public? One major reason is that, despite the Government's recent announcement about raising the participation age to 18 by 2015 (DCSF 2007a), for all young people in England there is still a clear break at the age of 16 with the conclusion of compulsory education. At this point, they will either remain within a school sixth form to study to advanced level or will leave to go to a further education (FE) or sixth form college, enter an apprenticeship or even find themselves a job. Presently, 50 per cent of young people switch institution at 16 (DfES 2007a) and even those who remain at school see the sixth form as a new and distinctive learning environment (Gardner 2007). Moreover, the curriculum and the qualifications that young people take are also structured around a 16+ divide (Higham 2003). The National Curriculum ends at 16

when the vast majority of young people take General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications, and their success in these examinations determines their choices post-16. Compared internationally, the English post-16 system is then highly specialized. In general education, learners study only three or four subjects at General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level). Those taking vocational qualifications will normally focus on one occupational or sectoral area and, for many, these courses will be seen as distinctive from school and offering a fresh start (Coffield et al. 2008). So, both in terms of organization and of curriculum and qualifications, the learner experience is of break and difference rather than of continuity and progression 14–19.

In this chapter we outline a rationale for a 14–19 phase. This is followed by a description of the four features that shape the English system – participation and achievement, curriculum and qualifications, organization and governance and the influence of the labour market, employers and higher education. These specific national characteristics are then viewed within an international context, which demonstrates different possibilities for 14–19 policy. The chapter concludes by suggesting that current government policy has not confronted the historical English system features that work against the creation of a strong and visible 14–19 phase.

Arguments for a 14–19 phase

Given these circumstances, why have policy-makers and educationalists argued in favour of a 14–19 phase since the mid-1980s? We would suggest that there has been one leading reason, which is the need to encourage higher levels of participation in post-compulsory education and training as part of the drive for skills development and economic competitiveness and greater social cohesion (for example, DfES 2005a). England has traditionally trailed behind its major international competitors in this area and still continues to do so, a fact recognized by both researchers and policy-makers (for example Green and Steedman 1993; DfES 2001a; Leitch 2006). The most recent focus on 14–19 as a policy priority was given momentum by the revelation in 2003 that the UK languished 25th out of 29 countries in terms of the participation rates of 17-year-olds (DfES 2003). There is broad agreement that early school leaving with a youth labour market that attracts young people into low-skilled employment has been and remains an issue (Fingold and Soskice 1988; National Skills Task Force 2000; Hayward et al. 2005). The creation of a 14–19 phase, which spans compulsory and post-compulsory education could be seen,

therefore, as England's answer to a historic problem of low post-16 participation.

The second reason relates to young people themselves. Drawing on studies related to 14–19 year olds (for example, Blatchford 1996; De Pear 1997; Bentley 1998; Hodgson and Spours 2001), Lumby and Foskett suggest that they increasingly wish to 'control their lives, to receive respect from other adults, to make choices according to their own preferences and not necessarily to be confined by school parameters' (2005: 6). Lumby and Foskett use this as an argument for a distinctive phase of transition that reaches down into compulsory education and extends beyond school into further study and working life. In the context of this phase of education, the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales has posed the question: 'What constitutes an educated nineteen year old in this day and age?' The Review suggests that there is a set of knowledge, skills and attributes that all young people should acquire to become the citizens of the future (Hayward et al. 2006).

In the eyes of policy-makers, education practitioners and researchers, these reasons provide a strong rationale for a coherent 14–19 phase. However, at this point the consensus breaks down. There are sharply different views about how 14–19 education and training in England should be organized (for example Working Group on 14–19 Reform 2004a; DfES 2005a) given the fact that, at any one time, there are over three million 14–19 year olds from different social and racial backgrounds, with different education histories and different aspirations.¹ Over the last two decades, there has been a major debate as to how common or differentiated young peoples' experience of 14–19 education and training should be in a phase in which 'staying in or moving class is most crucially negotiated' (Lumby and Foskett, 2005: 10).

As Chapter 2 will show, the dominant view, held by both Conservative and New Labour Governments, is that the creation of a 14–19 phase in England is about developing a vocational alternative to academic education. On the other hand, the view held by large sections of the education professional, policy, and research communities is that 14–19 education and training is about transforming learning for all young people. These differing visions have become crystallized around a series of debates, which can be seen to fall into three broad categories: curriculum and qualifications; organization and governance and young people; work-based learning and the labour market. Examples of contested areas include whether the 14–19 phase should be based on an academic/vocational divide or a more unified curriculum and qualifications approach; whether institutional arrange-

ments should be competitive or collaborative; and whether voluntarism in relation to employers and the labour market should be replaced by a more social partnership approach. We will return to these debates throughout the book. Here, we begin our discussion by outlining the main features of 14–19 education and training in England and then examining these through the lens of international comparison.

DESCRIBING THE ENGLISH 14–19 SYSTEM

There are a number of key features that affect the shape of 14–19 education and training in England and the role it plays in young peoples' lives. These include patterns and modes of participation and achievement; the role of qualifications and which ones young people take; where they study; how the system is organized and governed; and the shaping influence of employers, the labour market and higher education.

Participation and achievement

When compared internationally, England has been described as a 'medium participation and medium achievement system' (Hodgson and Spours 2000) and this picture broadly pertains in 2008. In 2006, 77 per cent of 16–18 year olds were in some form of education and training, leaving just under a quarter not engaged with formal study. Moreover, as Figure 1.1 shows, participation in education and training drops off markedly at 17 and 18.

Within the overall level of participation, Figure 1.2 shows that full-time education is the dominant mode of participation post-16. It has remained broadly static over the last decade, but with a slight increase in the last couple of years. However, the recent modest increase in full-time participation has been cancelled out by a decline in the role of work-based learning and employer-funded training. The net result is that participation levels in 2006 are broadly the same as they were in the mid-1990s.

Of those 16–18-year-olds who remained in full-time education in 2006 (61 per cent), two-thirds were taking advanced level courses² with a tiny proportion (2 per cent) on advanced apprenticeships (DfES 2007b). Significantly more post-16 learners were studying in FE and sixth form colleges (30 per cent of all 16–18 year olds) than in maintained and independent schools (23 per cent) (DfES 2007a). These key statistics, taken together, illustrate some of the salient features of the English system. It is education-based, predominantly full-time, with a very small work-based route and a strong role for colleges in post-compulsory education. Initial

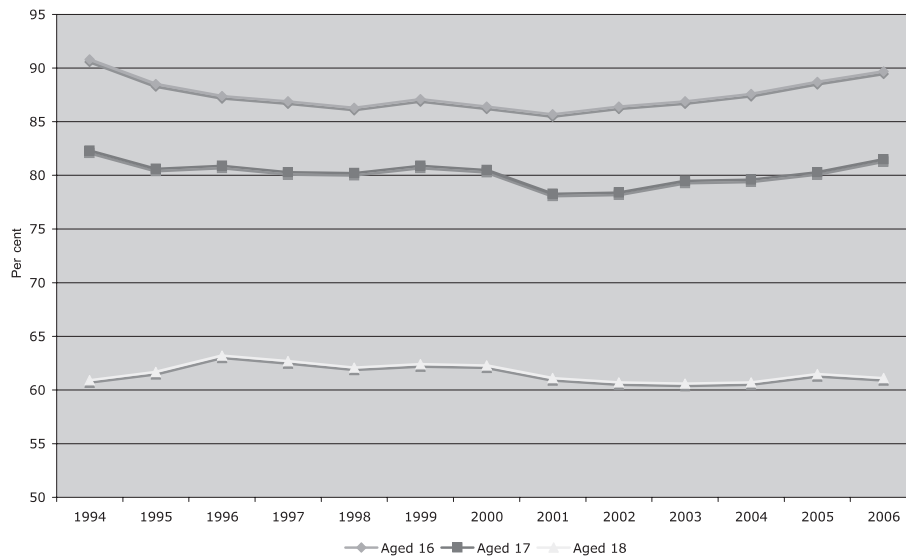


Figure 1.1 Participation of 16–18-year-olds in education and training (full-time and part-time)

Source: DfES Statistical First Release 22/2007 (DfES 2007a)

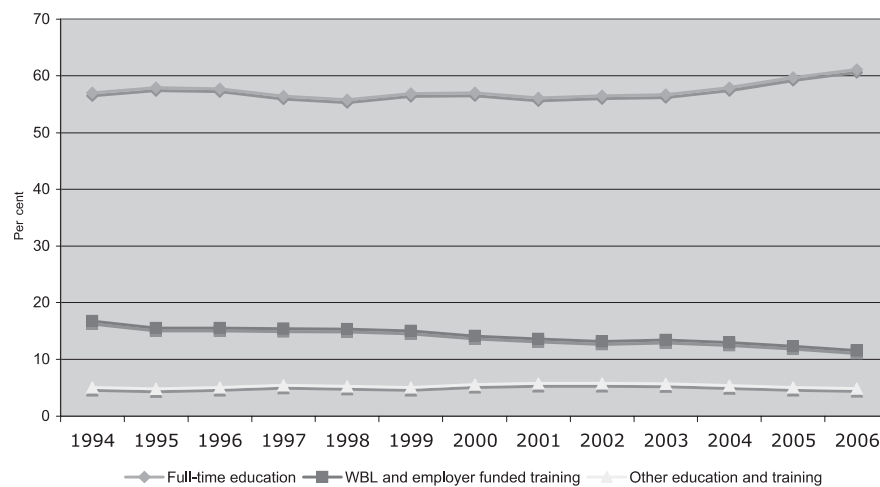


Figure 1.2 Modes of participation of 16–18-year-olds in England

Source: DfES Statistical First Release 22/2007 (DfES 2007a)

post-compulsory participation at 16 is relatively high, but is not sustained at 17 and 18, when the youth labour market exerts an increasing pull. In addition, there is a steady rise in the number of those not involved in education, employment or training (or NEET) from 10 per cent at the age of 16 to just under 15 per cent at the age of 18 in 2006 (DfES 2007b).

Overall, full- and part-time participation rates have not risen significantly since the mid-1990s, fuelling concerns amongst policy-makers that the country may find itself at a disadvantage when compared internationally (DIUS 2007). Hence the recent policy announcement about using legislation to raise the participation age to 17 in 2010 and 18 in 2015 (DCSF 2007a).

However, as Figure 1.3 shows, attainment rates in GCSEs and A Levels have improved steadily over the last 10 years. Since 2001, the A Level pass rate has been boosted by the *Curriculum 2000* reforms. Since 2004, the attainment of 5 A*–C GCSEs has been increased by the inclusion of GCSE equivalent applied/vocational qualifications.

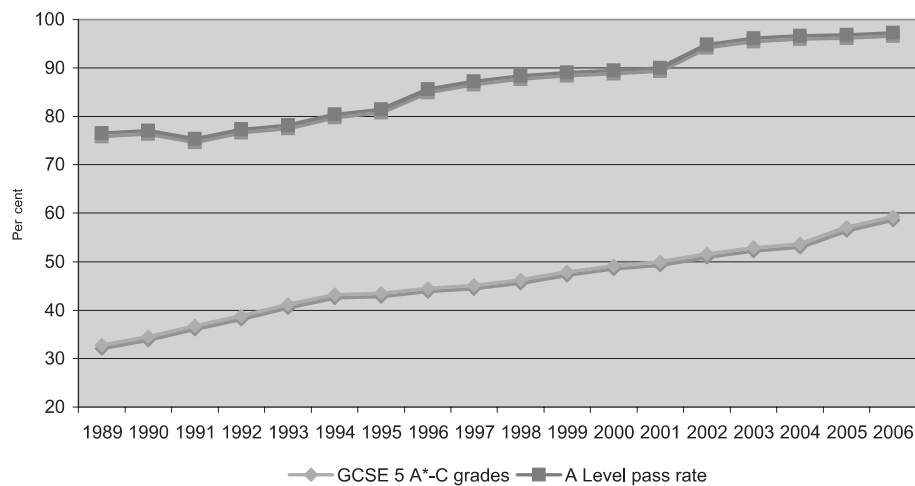


Figure 1.3 Attainment of GCSE five A*–C grades and A Level passes
Source: Tables 18 and 23, *Education Briefing Book* (IOD 2007)

The proportion of 16 year olds gaining five GCSEs at grades A*–C (or equivalent) reached just under 60 per cent in 2006, although the proportion of those reaching this benchmark including English and Maths was much lower at 46 per cent (DfES 2007b).³ At advanced level, pass rates in A Levels and Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs) have risen from 77 per cent in 1989 to 97 per cent in 2006 (IOD 2007), with 68 per cent gaining grades A–C (DfES 2007c) (see Chapter 3 for more detail). Statistics are compiled differently for vocational courses in FE and for work-based learning. In both these cases, ‘success rates’⁴ have improved significantly over the last five years. In FE colleges for 16–18 year olds, they have risen from 64 per cent in 2001/2 to 75 per cent in 2005/6, and for 16–18 year old apprenticeships from 27 per cent in 2001/2 to 54 per cent

in 2005/6 (LSC 2007). These improvements notwithstanding, attainment in vocational learning remains considerably lower than that in general education.

What these statistics cannot adequately explain is the stark differences between the educational experiences of 14–19 year olds in the current English education and training system. Young people who do well at school and gain good grades at GCSE (for example five or more passes at grades A*–C) have all post-16 options open to them, although they are most likely to remain in full-time education either in a school sixth form or sixth form college and to take A Levels. For those who fail to reach this GCSE threshold, post-16 options are limited to vocational qualifications below advanced level (the majority of which will be offered in FE colleges), or to a variety of training programmes, such as Entry to Employment (Hayward et al. 2005). As one of our interviewees observed: ‘Huge numbers of people emerge out of this system now believing still that “education and training are not for the likes of me” – de-motivated and dysfunctional’ (PA 15).⁵

High attaining learners are more likely to make a seamless transition in the 14–19 phase with many simply remaining in their 11–18 school for the whole of this period, while low-attainers have to negotiate a complex set of curricular and institutional transitions (Stanton and Fletcher 2006). However, many of the latter are willing to do this because of disaffection with the school system and the opportunities that further education (FE) colleges and work-based learning provide for a second chance (Coffield et al. 2008).

Curriculum and qualifications

Qualifications play a fundamental shaping role in the English 14–19 system, but the role of curriculum is much weaker. Qualifications define what learners study, how they are assessed and, in many cases, determine how they are taught (Ecclestone 2007). The English system has a National Curriculum at the beginning of the 14–19 phase. It ensures a core of common curricular experiences for all learners up to the age of 16, comprising English, mathematics, science, ICT, physical education, citizenship, work-related learning and enterprise, and religious, personal social, health and careers education. While on first sight this appears quite a broad curriculum, in international terms it is narrow. Since 2002 and the publication of the Government’s 14–19 Green Paper (DfES 2002), 14–16 year olds no longer have to study a modern foreign language, the arts, humanities or design and technology, although these have to be on offer to them should

they wish to continue with them up to the age of 16. The accent in policy has been on flexibility, choice and ‘personalization’ throughout the 14–19 phase, with a very limited common entitlement for post-16 learners, which only extends to functional English, Mathematics and ICT, although these are not compulsory. Compared internationally, two things stand out in relation to the English 14–19 curriculum. First, it is difficult to continue in general education post-16 unless you achieve the benchmark of 5 A*–C grades at GCSE. Second, there is a very limited notion of curricular breadth post-16 both for those taking A Levels and for those taking a vocational route. This has been a source of controversy for at least two decades.

The corollary to a weak curriculum approach to 14–19 education and training is the strength of the qualifications hierarchy. There is a perverse synergy between general and vocational qualifications, with the former always ‘shaping’ the latter (see Chapters 3 and 4). An interviewee highlighted the system ‘pull’ of A Levels: ‘As long as you’ve got something as a Gold Standard with the A Levels, everything else that you’re going to do is going to be judged in terms of how closely it aligns with them’ (PA 9). The culture of the 14–19 phase is, therefore, determined by A Levels and GCSEs, which are not only numerically dominant (virtually all 14–16 learners take one or more GCSEs and 40 per cent of 16–19 year olds take two or more A Levels – DfES 2007a), but also politically totemic. A Levels have a history going back nearly 60 years and GCSEs are seen as the direct descendants of O Levels, which still persist in the public imagination.

Vocational qualifications for 14–19 year olds, on the other hand, are much newer, suffer from constant reform and name change, either as a result of government policy or by private awarding bodies attempting to sell a new product (see Chapter 5).⁶ As we have seen, they are taken by a much smaller number of young people, are viewed as ‘alternatives’ to mainstream A Levels and GCSEs and are primarily associated with lower achievers and FE colleges. As a leading educational commentator put it: ‘vocational education – a great idea for other people’s children’ (Wolf 2002).

The purposes, pedagogy and assessment regimes are very different in general and vocational qualifications (Ecclestone 2002). In the former, the dominant features are preparation for higher study, subject and theoretical knowledge and external assessment, with an accent on selection and rationing (Young 1998). Vocational qualifications, on the other hand, are primarily designed for preparation for work or higher-level occupational study at advanced level, although, at the lower levels, they have also been used by government for social inclusion purposes (Keep 2005a; Fuller and Unwin 2003).

14–19 qualifications have thus become a site of social competition and even constitute a ‘social battleground’ (Lumby and Foskett 2005), as they divide young people and social groups (Clarke 2007) and increase social inequality, a process exacerbated by the market reforms of school and college finances (Machin and Vignoles 2006).

Organization and governance

The English institutional landscape has become more complex over the last 20 years as a result of both Conservative and New Labour policy to increase choice and competition (Hayward et al. 2005, 2006). The 14–19 phase is not delivered by dedicated 14–19 institutions. Instead there is a ‘mixed economy’ of providers: 11–16 schools, 11–18 maintained and independent schools, sixth form colleges, local authority controlled sixth form centres, skills centres and academies, general FE colleges, tertiary colleges, City Technology Colleges, new academies, independent training providers and, of course, employers. Even the *Building Schools for the Future* initiative has not fully acknowledged the 14–19 phase and its need for area-based planning.

The result is that, in institutional terms, the 14–19 phase does not exist in any meaningful sense. Not only is there a sharp institutional break at 16+, but this is compounded by curricular and qualifications division, in which different providers deliver different balances of academic and vocational programmes. The effects of this division and complexity are felt most acutely by those learners who fail to achieve five A*–C grades at GCSE and who are often forced to leave school at 16 in order to access vocational learning (Hodgson and Spours 2006a). One of our interviewees highlighted the unfairness of this: ‘I’ve always thought that the most vulnerable young people are the ones that don’t need to be told at 16 “you have to go elsewhere because the school doesn’t cater for post-16” or to be told at 16 that “actually, the school doesn’t want you at 16 thank you very much, we’re focusing on A Levels”’ (PA 10). Moreover, as we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, competition between schools and between schools and colleges makes the provision of impartial guidance for young people difficult to achieve.

The Government’s response to this complex institutional picture has been to face two ways simultaneously. On the one hand, it has promoted institutional diversity as part of its choice-based broader public service reform agenda (PMSU 2006, 2007). On the other, it has exhorted providers to collaborate to meet the requirements of its newly established 14–19 Entitlement⁷ and, in particular, to give learners access to the new 14–19

Diplomas (DfES 2005a, 2005b) – see Chapters 4 and 6 for more detail.

While 14–19 institutional arrangements work against the concept of a 14–19 phase, recent government policy has attempted to reform governance arrangements to develop a more coherent approach to funding, planning, guidance and inspection. In 2007, the Department for Education and Skills was split into two new ministries: the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). The former has responsibility, among other things, for 14–19 education and training. Moreover, from 2010, local authorities (LAs) will fund, plan and co-ordinate the 14–19 phase at local level, a role which has been shared with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The Common Inspection Framework now covers all education and training provision for 14–19 year olds as a result of the merger between the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in 2006. The Connexions service, which is responsible for the well-being and guidance of young people, was brought back under LA control (DfES 2006a). However, LAs do not have jurisdiction over FE colleges, which are independent corporations, nor over independent schools, academies, trust schools, training providers or employers. Some LAs are very small and, as we explore in more detail in Chapter 6, powers invested in them may not be equal to their responsibilities.

Unless this changes, LAs will not be in a position to create a more coherent 14–19 institutional system out of a complex mosaic of competing interests. In the current context of national policy supporting institutional competition and a weakly planned local landscape, 14–19 institutional arrangements may actively be fuelling social and racial segregation. Recent research suggests that school sixth forms and sixth form colleges cater mainly for Level 3 and white British learners, while colleges of general education take the majority of Entry Level 1 and Level 2 post-16 learners and a higher proportion of Black and ethnic minority groups (Stanton and Fletcher 2006).

INFLUENCE OF THE LABOUR MARKET, EMPLOYERS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The youth labour market has played a defining role in the 14–19 education and training system in England, because it has been a major factor in determining post-16 participation patterns (Ashton and Green 1996; Hayward et al. 2006). On the other hand, employers are noted for their relative lack of involvement in the provision of apprenticeships (see Chapter 5) and their

‘curious absence’ in relation to the education and training system as a whole (Keep 2005a). Government policy in this area has been noted for its voluntarist approach and the lack of a regulatory framework to promote employer engagement (Hayward et al. 2006). The effects of a relatively marginal role of employers in the organization and provision of the 14–19 phase has not allowed the work-based route to flourish and to provide high-quality vocational learning for large numbers of young people (Nuffield Review 2008a, 2008b). This vacuum has had to be filled by FE colleges, independent training providers and government initiatives, such as Young Apprenticeships and Entry to Employment. Despite employers’ relative lack of engagement, their voice is privileged by government in an attempt to make the 14–19 phase more ‘employer-led’ (for example DIUS 2007) and has been influential in shaping government policy, not only on vocational qualifications but also on GCSEs and A Levels (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Higher education providers have a long history of shaping secondary and post-16 education (Wilde and Wright 2007) and their influence on an emerging 14–19 phase is as strong as ever because they control entry to sought-after university places (Lumby and Foskett 2005). With this power, universities affected the course of the *Curriculum 2000* advanced level reforms in England (Hodgson et al. 2005a). In the context of a 50 per cent higher education participation target, universities are being courted by government to support the new 14–19 Diplomas (see Chapter 4). Some vice-chancellors have even been recruited as ‘Diploma champions’ (DfES 2006b) and a number have been given a role in designing these qualifications.

In summary, it is possible to argue that the weight of historical arrangements continues to work against a strong 14–19 system. One of our interviewees put it more starkly: ‘I mean it’s only a construct when all’s said and done. There isn’t a 14–19 phase. It’s split in the middle ... it’s an assertion of existence from the centre’ (PA10).

THE ENGLISH 14–19 SYSTEM VIEWED FROM A DISTANCE

At this point it is important to stand back from the detail of the English system to examine how far it reflects wider international trends. As Raffe argues, international comparison helps us to understand our own system better and to identify cross-national trends and pressures that affect all countries in order to ground policy options in a broader context (2007: 140). Green and colleagues (1999) remind us that policy-makers in different countries face common pressures and challenges but respond to these through their own national histories and traditions.

Wider international trends

In several important respects, the idea of a 14–19 phase in England broadly goes with the flow of international developments in what is termed ‘upper secondary education’. This term is used to describe the phase that follows primary and lower secondary education. Le Metais (2002), in a study of international developments in upper secondary education, identified a number of common features of these systems, many of which England shares. These include a desire to increase participation up to the age of 18 or 19; the fostering of broad skills for employment, independent study and citizenship; softening the boundaries between general and vocational education; attempting to make learning and accreditation more flexible; concern to increase the number of learners studying mathematics and science; and greater accountability through more external assessment. In addition, Clarke and Winch (2007) point to the fact that apprenticeships are in decline across all European systems, leading to the need to provide more vocational education in schools and colleges. They also argue that European systems need to converge further in order to cope with large-scale migration, amongst other things.

Beyond these common features, it is possible to distinguish groups of countries which appear to share particular features. According to Green (2006), the UK upper secondary system broadly falls into what he terms the ‘Anglo-Saxon model’, along with the USA, Australia and New Zealand,⁸ which are characterized by high levels of school diversity and regulation through quasi-market competition. He also notes that these governance features tend to reduce social mobility and increase social inequality in education.

There are, however, aspects of upper secondary education where England finds itself almost alone or sharing system features with a near neighbour. England and Wales are the only two countries that have decided to begin their upper secondary education phase at the age of 14. Commonly, upper secondary education systems begin at the age of 15 or 16, ending at 18 or 19. In terms of aims and purposes for the upper secondary phase, England’s focus is narrow in comparison with other countries. It expresses the aims of 14–19 education almost exclusively in terms of choice and flexibility, a strategy designed to raise educational participation and performance. Other countries have a broader set of purposes. Sweden, for example, sees its upper secondary education ‘helping students develop their personalities and an interest in culture and the humanities and providing the general education necessary to play a full and

responsible role as citizens in a democratic society' (Le Metais 2002: 9). Pring argues that the absence of shared aims and values for the 14–19 phase in England is the result of policy-making being dominated by the 'limited concept of academic and vocational' (2007: 128) and by a general lack of vision. In addition, and crucially in terms of debates about 14–19, England is alone in not prescribing any core of compulsory learning beyond the age of 16. A related feature of the English system is that it does not have a common school leaving award to mark the end of the upper secondary phase. Most countries have some form of diploma based on a common core of subjects, a block of associated specialist learning and a range of electives, of which perhaps the most widely known are the French Baccalaureate, the US High School Graduation Diploma and the Irish Leaving Certificate (Le Metais 2002). Hence, one of the reasons for the recent debates about diplomas, graduation certificates and overarching awards in the English system (see Chapter 2).

Difference, however, does not automatically signal weakness. The English upper secondary system is judged to have some strengths. It is seen to be flexible, offering strong opportunities for 'second-chance learning' and to have a long-standing tradition of 'bottom-up' innovation (Raffe et al. 1998). These strengths are also reflections of its major weaknesses described earlier – its elective nature, which prevents breadth and strong common learning, the fact that its academic/vocational divide contributes to social segregation and that the upper secondary system is constantly remediating for learning failure in lower secondary education.

Home international comparisons – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

In international comparison, the UK is often treated as a single unit of analysis. However, 'home international comparison' between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland reveals that countries which share important UK-wide features, such as labour markets and higher education institutions, can take different paths of development in the area of upper secondary education (Raffe 2007). A process of divergence has taken place, particularly following democratic devolution in Scotland and Wales in 1999 (Raffe 2006). Here, we briefly consider the different approaches taken to upper secondary education by the governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Raffe (2007) suggests that policy-makers have key strategic choices to make about the organization of upper secondary education. They have to decide

between a more 'track-based' (that is separate and distinctive vocational and academic pathways),⁹ a more unified (that is a common learning and qualifications structure) or a more 'linkage' approach to qualifications frameworks (that is retention of separate tracks but increasing the links between them). They also need to make decisions about whether to develop a single phase of upper secondary education that straddles compulsory and post-compulsory education; how to structure progression and whether to opt for a more baccalaureate-type model or a more 'climbing frame' approach; as well as how to organize work-based provision.¹⁰ Policy-makers in the four countries of the UK have adopted different approaches in these areas.

The Scottish *Higher Still* reforms began in 1999 with the introduction of new national qualifications covering all general and vocational courses in schools and colleges for learners beyond the age of 16. *Higher Still* has thus been described as a unified curriculum and qualifications framework for upper secondary education (Raffe et al. 2007), although this does not mean that all learners take a single diploma-type award. Instead, they pursue a range of both general and vocational modules within a single credit-based framework. Unlike England, Scotland has not adopted the concept of a distinct 14–19 phase. Since the publication of *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive 2004), the Scottish Government has emphasized the all-through nature of education 3–18, but with flexibility from 14+.

In some respects the Northern Ireland education system stands apart in having an 11+ examination, which selects students for either grammar or secondary modern schools, although this form of selection will be abolished from September 2008. However, in other respects, it is closer to England, being in the process of developing a 14–19 phase with an increasing focus on vocational provision and collaboration between schools (DENI 2007).

Wales shares some common features with the English system. Both countries organize upper secondary education in terms of a 14–19 phase with a policy focus on increasing rates of participation, achievement and progression through greater curricular choice, an emphasis on skills development and work-based learning, qualifications reform and a more personalized approach to learning, advice and guidance (WAG 2002; DfES 2005a). Wales also has 14–19 Networks of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers that broadly correspond to England's 14–19 Partnerships. However, in Wales, 14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform is articulated through a common framework entitled *Learning Pathways 14–19*. This comprises six key entitlements which, together, offer young people broad programmes of study combining formal qualifications, non-formal awards and informal experi-

ences (WAG 2002: v). Learning Pathways will be accredited through the *Welsh Baccalaureate*, which is a single overarching award recognizing this wide range of qualifications and experiences. In comparison with England, therefore, Wales has moved decisively in a more unified direction and attempts to ensure breadth of learning throughout its 14–19 phase (see Hayward et al. 2006, Chapter 2, for more detail on the Welsh system).

What these brief vignettes of the three other UK systems demonstrate is that significant curricular and qualifications divergence is possible even though all four countries share a similar economic context. We will argue in the final chapter that it is important to use international comparisons when considering future policy directions in England. However, this aspiration needs to be tempered by the realization that there is no strong evidence to date that policy-makers are willing to engage in policy learning of this type (Raffe and Spours 2007).

CONCLUSION

In describing the English system through the lenses of international and home international comparison, we have noted a number of features that make it distinctive. Together with Wales, England is the only national system to describe its upper secondary phase in terms of the years that straddle compulsory and post-compulsory education. It is largely school- and college-based with a very small work-based route and low levels of employer engagement. Despite the fact that it has an ‘integrated’ institutional structure (that is, schools and FE colleges deliver both general and vocational education) it is, nevertheless, highly selective in terms of qualification pathways with a strong hierarchy between academic and vocational learning. Because of these features, there is a relatively narrow core curriculum 14–16 and no common core or clearly articulated overarching aims and purposes for the curriculum post-16. Moreover, unlike, many other systems, there is no single award to mark the end of the upper secondary phase. Finally, institutional arrangements are highly marketized, which can be seen to compound curricular and qualifications divisions.

We started this chapter by suggesting that a 14–19 phase was important but largely hidden from view because of the sharp break at 16, which pervades the public psyche. Government policy has not yet addressed historic curricular, qualifications and institutional discontinuities despite the Government’s focus on 14–19 policy since 2001. We will argue in this book that as a result, while a 14–19 phase is necessary, it is still exceedingly fragile and requires further reform.

NOTES

- ¹ This rough calculation for the phase as a whole is based on the number of 16 year olds in 2006: 662,300 multiplied by five (DfES 2007a).
- ² In international terms, advanced level courses or Level 3 corresponds with qualifications required for entry to what the OECD refers to as 'tertiary level education' but what is called 'higher education' in England.
- ³ GCSE equivalent includes GCSEs in applied subjects and General National Vocational Qualifications at Intermediate Level.
- ⁴ Successful completion is defined by the number of learning aims achieved divided by the number of starters, excluding any learners who transferred onto another qualification within the same institution (LSC 2007).
- ⁵ Between September and December 2007, with the help of Richard Steer, we interviewed a total of 23 policy actors (PA) involved in the 14–19 reform process. They included politicians, policy advisers, senior civil servants, academics, officials from national government agencies, awarding bodies and representatives of local authorities, teacher unions and professional associations and employers. We have used codes (PA 1–25) for interviewees and have not indicated the organization to which they belong in order to fully protect their identity. We realize that this limits the salience of some of the comments but it was necessary to respect interviewees' rights to anonymity so they could speak more freely. From these interviews, quotations have been selected for their illuminative powers but all interviews have been used as background information, triangulated with written sources.
- ⁶ The English system is alone in having private awarding bodies, which are regulated by a non-departmental public body, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).
- ⁷ All 14–16 year olds are entitled to National Curriculum core subjects (English, mathematics and science), foundation subjects (ICT, PE, citizenship, work-related learning and enterprise, religious education, personal, social, health and careers education, all 17 diploma lines and up to choose courses in the arts, design and technology and modern foreign languages. 16–19 year olds are entitled to all 17 diploma lines, and functional English, mathematics and ICT up to at least Level 2.
- ⁸ We distinguish here between UK systems in which England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland share important features (for example the labour market) and England-specific characteristics that affect 14–19 in particular, such as institutional organization and governance.

- ⁹ We use the term ‘academic’ rather than ‘general’ when describing distinct qualifications tracks. The term ‘track’ refers to a qualification-led curriculum which has a distinctive content, assessment and mode of learning. It thus tends to channel learners in a particular direction, minimizing opportunities for flexible movement between different types of qualifications and curricula. We contrast the notion of a ‘track’ with the idea of a curriculum ‘route or routeway’ which allows learners to progress either horizontally or vertically. This is made possible when qualifications are less distinctive and share common properties in terms of assessment, knowledge and skills.
- ¹⁰ By the term ‘baccalaureate approach’ we refer to the organization of learning and its accreditation through a grouped award, such as the International Baccalaureate, which stresses coherence and breadth. A ‘climbing frame approach’, on the other hand, is based on modular or unitized qualifications which allow learners more flexibility in terms of programme design and accumulating credit for progression.

