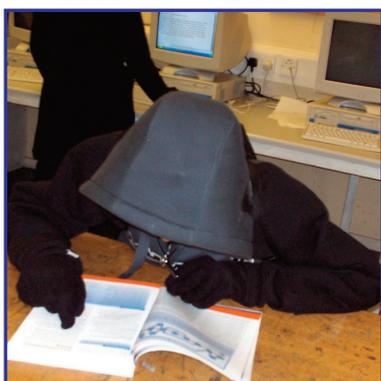


A New 14+: Vocational Diplomas and the Future of Schools, Colleges and Universities

An educational and campaigning pamphlet

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

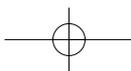
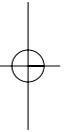
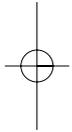
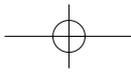


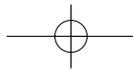
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A NEW 14+ :VOCATIONAL DIPLOMAS AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

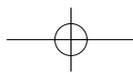
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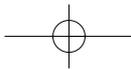
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Foreword

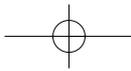
As a new academic year gets underway, yet another two major initiatives for schools and colleges will roll out from Whitehall - the revamped Key Stage 3 curricula and Vocational Diplomas. The latter form the focus of this timely essay.

We are practical people. Teachers want to know how changes work before we implement them. Yet many of the staff expected to deliver these new post-14 courses will be ill-prepared for them, largely because they have not been engaged with their design. Indeed, many students will scratch their heads at how they will actually get from this building to that one according to the complex logistics of a multi-site timetable. Many parents will also be misled into thinking that these courses will guarantee their son or daughter a job in two years time.

Almost every stakeholder in the process, including the CBI, has warned that this will all end in tears, and very soon, because of the flawed thinking and execution by government. They only have themselves to blame, largely because of their refusal to work with rather than against the professionals. Whether it is teachers at the chalkface, their trainers in university departments or the research teams co-ordinated across academia, all suffer the same scowls of disdain from Ministers and their apparatchiks. Incredibly, the unqualified and unelected Lord Adonis remains, post-Blair, as the most powerful voice in Whitehall.

The result, now familiar in the age of neoliberal capitalism, is a perversion of basic common sense language. 'Liberation' and 'democracy' in the context of Iraq actually meant 'invasion' and 'dictatorship' on the ground. 'Education, education, education' in post-

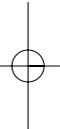
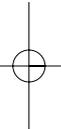


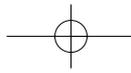


1997 education policy has meant 'privatisation, competition, specialisation' in real schools and colleges. Whilst 'Every Child Matters', apparently, some matter more than others - and the authors show here how true that will be for all our 14 year-olds from September 2008.

Both Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley are perfectly qualified to tell it like it is on these matters. Both teach students and organise inside their respective unions, the NUT and UCU. Their reflections on a lifetime's dedication to these issues deserve a mere half-an-hour of your valuable time. Everyone, inside and outside the educational institutions, will be the richer for having considered their analysis and prognosis.

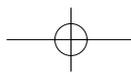
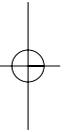
Nick GRANT
Secretary Ealing NUT

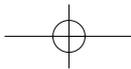




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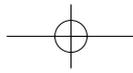
Introduction

Recent years have seen increased participation in post-16 education. 80% now stay on full-time for a year after the compulsory school leaving age. 35% of 18 year olds achieve the equivalent of two A-levels with over 40% progressing to university. Even if staying on has become the norm, government proposals to raise the leaving age to 17 in 2013 and then to 18 in 2015 seek to increase rates still further; aimed at those classed as NEETs (16 and 17 year-olds Not in Employment, Education or Training). Estimated by government as representing 8% or 9%, though considered to be higher by others.

Unlike academic traditionalists who argue more students staying at school or college and going on to higher education only leads to a fall in standards, we welcome this increased participation. Less welcome is the way in which 14-plus education has become a point where students are divided into 'tracks' and 'pathways' which stretch on to a new tertiary tripartism. This is not something exclusive to England. Many of our European neighbours have long established vocational tracks catering for large numbers of students remaining in education and training until their late teens. In other countries however, the extent of specialisation has been less, with students – even those on vocational tracks – continuing to develop more of an all-round general education. Also, the links between vocational training and skilled employment have invariably been more direct and if students have pursued higher level technical/ vocational learning there has been greater, although never complete, parity with those following academic courses.

Rather than adopting the 2004 proposals from the Tomlinson working group which, despite their shortcomings pointed the way to a more integrated approach, the 2005 *14-19* White Paper sought to reinforce the academic-vocational divide. In particular, it announced new specialist Diplomas in 14 vocational areas to be offered as 'alternatives' to GCSEs and A-levels. This pamphlet focuses on the new Diplomas. It examines the context of their development and identifies them as key to an education system increasingly based on divisions *between*, but also *within* different types of schools, colleges and universities. It argues that, rather than 'modernising' education in response to changes in economy and society, as



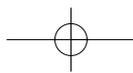


government suggests, the introduction of the Diplomas reflects the increased emphasis played by education in controlling and dividing young people, instead of attempting to improve the life chances of the majority.

It is certainly the case that ‘foundation’ learning (now officially defined as that up to key stage 3 of the National Curriculum) continues to be riddled with SATs linked to league tables, with parents jostling for the positional advantage to be gained from a place in what they consider to be ‘better’ schools. It is in post-14 education however, including non-compulsory further and higher education, where the selective function of education, in terms of labour market placement, is now most significant. As schools and colleges seek to separate a new generation of students into different ‘pathways’ serviced by different types of institutions, there has been a return to the tripartite principles of the 1944 Education Act, only at tertiary not secondary level with the cut taking place at 14 instead of at 11-plus.

As the pamphlet will demonstrate, it is important to look at the education system in its entirety and for reformers to make links between changes taking place in schools and those happening in colleges and universities. Many colleges are changing – no longer providing ‘further education’ and instead becoming ‘tertiary moderns’, leaving ‘academic’ education to school sixth-forms. But Chapter 2 argues that higher education is also becoming increasingly divided between those institutions providing mass HE for the many and those protecting elite HE for the few.

The final chapter of the pamphlet confronts the need to put forward alternatives. It examines the limitations of the Tomlinson proposals and calls for a general diploma for all students, a policy already supported by the National Union of Teachers and reaffirmed in the Ealing Teachers Association motion adopted by the Union’s 2008 Annual Conference. After years of ‘marketisation’ and an obsession with ‘choice and diversity’, it also starts to address the thorny issue of institutional reform and provision. The chapter should not in anyway be considered definitive, but as concerns about the diploma increase, as a contribution to a broader, increasingly essential discussion about the future direction of post-14 learning.



Chapter I

14-19 education, the shape of things to come

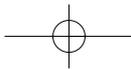
Education and the economy, a new correspondence?

Changes in the organisation of education are often justified in terms of the need to respond to larger socio-economic changes. Like many other policy statements, the 2005 *14-19* White Paper contextualised its proposals in terms of changing economic conditions, particularly increased international competition. Post-war politicians also considered education to provide important 'human capital'. They justified the expansion of comprehensive schools, for example, in terms of mobilising talent through breaking down outdated class divisions. New Labour however, went further than ever before in their elevation and promotion of 'education, education, education' as the main economic policy of government.

In his first speech on education as Prime Minister on Nov 1st 2007, Gordon Brown, like Blair before him, renewed the emphasis on raising standards, arguing that 'there is virtually unlimited global demand for new talent' and that unskilled jobs were continuing to disappear. In doing so he was only repeating the claims of the 2006 Leitch Report which raised alarm bells about UK plc's limited progress, compared with some of its competitors, in the development of the 'world class' skills supposedly needed to maintain prosperity.

Though government has set ambitious targets for increased participation in higher education, they have also lamented the country's apparently poor performance in vocational education. In announcing the new Diplomas in the 2005 White Paper, the government signalled that it wanted employers to be 'in the driving seat' and assigned employer-run Sector Skills Councils a lead role in their development.

The same White Paper, however, points to the transient nature of employment in the 21st century, explaining that young people must expect to have more



than one career and be able to work flexibly across several employment sectors during their working lives. Even if this were true in the way that New Labour say it is, then rather than locking into a narrow specialisation at 14, a good general knowledge and the development of a wide range of poly-technical skills would seem more appropriate preparation.

Other commentators also argue that the reality facing many young people is likely to be rather different to the government's scenario with the 21st century economy increasingly 'polarised' (Henwood, 2003), or 'hourglass' (Cruddas, 2006) and low paid 'McJobs' at least as significant as new professional and managerial opportunities. Clearly, the levels of education and skills amongst the workforce will continue to be one important factor but at best education and training should be seen as only one of a number of ingredients in a successful economy. In current government thinking though, they are often portrayed as the only ingredient for improving output and productivity. This is because they are one of the few remaining areas – having either privatised or deregulated everything else – that government can do anything about. Even if education, education, education has become the main economic policy of the government, a new 'enabling state' has no other role than to maintain the 'learning infrastructure' and facilitate markets. It is up to individuals to inform themselves sufficiently to make wise investments in their own human capital and if they make the wrong choice, they have only themselves to blame. They should remedy their lack of 'employability' by paying for another course or enrolling on another training scheme.

A major problem is that many accounts of the economic aspects of education confuse the collective value to society and the individual returns obtained from gaining particular qualifications. In this respect, we would argue that the government's 'skills agenda' is as much ideological as it is 'technological'. Educational credentials have always been used as screening devices by employers and professional bodies to select from large numbers of applicants with the previously required levels of credentials. In an increasingly insecure labour market however, where many former avenues of recruitment have gone, educational qualifications have become primarily 'positional' goods bestowing a more favourable position in the labour market queue. While teachers and lecturers are under constant pressure to deliver qualifications, students have to work more and more to achieve less and less.

Education without jobs – the emergence of vocational alternatives

It is easy to forget that until the 1970s large numbers of young people left school at 15 (16 after 1972) without any qualifications. Before the oil crisis of 1973 ended the post-war boom with its nearly 30 years of full employment, most school-leavers moved straight into jobs without any of the vocational preparation nowadays deemed necessary. In 1969 for example, a quarter of boys entered apprenticeships that guaranteed employment on completion, many run jointly by employers and trades unions with day-release to colleges.

The assertion by the top private employers' Confederation of British Industry that 80% of new jobs today require the equivalent of 5 A-C GCSE passes does not in itself prove that there has been an equivalent increase in the technical skills required for employment. Only that, as more and more young people now seek to obtain these qualifications, employers expect this to be the norm. Thus, an endemic feature of modern labour markets has been a process of 'qualification inflation' or 'diploma devaluation'. Consequently, for large numbers of young people there is a lack of opportunity to use their educational qualifications in the way they thought they would be able to.

That qualifications take on a rather different function nowadays will be evident in our account of the relationship between academic and vocational learning. Diverting learners into vocational or workplace pathways reflects the increasingly important function of education as a predominant form of social control – a way of 'warehousing' young people in the absence of work, as much as it is a way of preparing them for work.

We also argue that 'rising standards' amongst the population as a whole have continued to put pressure on the value of some established academic qualifications and have led elite institutions to create new ones to secure their exclusive status and privileges. A blatant example of this is the new Cambridge Pre-U exam, as an 'alternative' to A-levels which were originally designed for a small minority but are now the main qualification for over a quarter of a million young people every year.

Meanwhile at the other end of the market, current approaches to vocational learning perpetuate training schemes introduced in the 1970s. Then, new courses often with a workplace theme were taken by 15-16 year-olds who, following the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA1), remained in school for an extra year. In the 1980s, as old heavy industries collapsed and the bottom fell out of the youth labour market, jobless school leavers were forced into compulsory Youth Training Schemes (YTS) – aptly described by Dan Finn as Training Without Jobs. By the 1990s, even though the ten subject academic National Curriculum had been imposed on all students up until 16, with the continued decline of young people’s employment prospects, British Technical Education Council certificates (BTECs) and then General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were introduced for a new generation of ‘stayers on’ not taking A-levels.

These new vocational courses were invariably promoted as representing new kinds of learning which would motivate ‘less academic’ youngsters through their supposed relation to paid employment. Though different to the technical education of the 1944 Act, they were also presented as progressive alternatives to ‘irrelevant’ academic learning. For example, it was argued that they encouraged ‘learning through doing’ with an emphasis on ‘experience’ rather than text books and theory. Rather than ‘listening to teacher’, project-led learning and group work were encouraged.

The new vocationalism was also supposed to reflect changes in the workplace where post-war heavy industry with its ‘Fordist’ techniques was being superseded by ‘Post-Fordism’ – a system of production in which, rather than simply following instructions, workers performed a greater variety of tasks and were expected to be more innovative as well as more ‘flexible’. However, vocational qualifications were constructed around narrow definitions of behavioural ‘competence’, recording what people can do and confirming what they ‘know’ rather than developing any real ‘understanding’. The breaking down of tasks into ‘elements’ and ‘performance’ criteria resulted in top-heavy assessment with mountains of recording – likened by Kathryn Ecclestone (2002) writing about an FE college to testing every bullet in an armaments factory.

Even if the new style qualifications were officially welcomed by employer representatives, there was little evidence that individual employers understood, or paid much attention to them. Employers certainly didn't give students with vocational qualifications preferential treatment. On the contrary, they continued to recruit young people with GCSEs and A-levels, that is when they recruited young people at all. Though employer representatives sat on awarding bodies like City and Guilds and BTEC, it was the Department for Education rather than the Department for Employment (abolished in 1995), that made most of the running.

Instead of modernising learning in response to the demands of the 21st century, vocationalism represented a return to pre-comprehensive 1944 ideas about different sorts of students needing different sorts of education. The academic (A-level), vocational (GNVQ) and workplace (NVQ) 'pathways', recommended by Ron Dearing, the retired Chairman of the Post Office brought in by the Tories in 1993 to sort out growing opposition from school teachers to the National Curriculum, bore a strong resemblance to the 1944 tripartite state secondary school system.

BTEC and then GNVQ certificates formed the basis of the vocational pathway. Though these vocational qualifications officially had the same status as academic ones and it was theoretically possible, if extremely unlikely, for students to change from one track to another – Dearing considered vocational learning to be 'separate and distinct'.

From GNVQs to specialist Diplomas – the crisis of vocational qualifications

If GNVQs had some success in terms of student take up (in 1998 over 40,000 awards at Advanced level), 'General' and 'Vocational' were a contradiction in terms. Rather than being qualifications for future employment, increasing numbers of students used them primarily as second-chance qualifications – a way of obtaining a place at university, albeit a 'new uni' or ex-polytechnic. Only in exceptional circumstances did GNVQ students obtain places at old universities. The fact that vocational qualifications were largely assessed by teachers, rather than by written exams, contributed to the growing hysteria

about standards or 'grade inflation' and intensified their 'academic drift'. As a result, as part of the 'Curriculum 2000' partial reform of A-levels, GNVQs were reinvented as 'Vocational' A-levels (VCEs) or GCSEs and then became referred to as 'applied' learning. Adopting more external assessment and more 'book learning', they failed to engage those students already disillusioned with the academic track.

At the same time, despite being organised in a modular system to concur with the new Curriculum 2000 AS and A2 A-levels, the uncertain status of vocational qualifications meant that they were unlikely to attract students from the academic track. The result was that they represented the worst of both worlds. As overall student numbers fell, many colleges and some schools returned to the BTEC qualifications GNVQ was supposed to replace. In 2006 there were over 40,000 candidates for BTEC (or the OCR National) level 3 candidates, more than twice as many as those following the equivalent 'Applied' qualifications, while the number of students enrolling on A-levels continued to rise. We anticipate this history will be repeated with the new Diplomas. On current evidence, it is not clear whether diploma numbers will ever reach those of the GNVQ.

Against a background of concern about the new modular A-levels set up by Curriculum 2000, government commissioned former-Chief Inspector of Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to conduct another 'review'. His working group proposed an overarching certificate combining academic and vocational qualifications, rather like the long-existing Scottish highers. But in the run up to a general election, with *The Daily Mail* and the Tories playing to 'middle England' and warning that abolishing A-levels meant the end of civilisation, Blair ditched Tomlinson. Taking two steps back instead of one step forward, A-levels were reprieved while new vocational, soon to be renamed 'specialist', Diplomas in 14 lines were announced. Five lines were to be available in 2008, another five in 2009 and four in 2010.

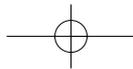
As has been the case with previous vocational qualifications, the diplomas were to be available at entry level one, level two equivalent to a GCSE C grade and level three equivalent to GCE A-level. Levels one and two will occupy about

50% of a student's timetabled study, whereas level three will make up much more. Diploma students will follow programmes of Principal Learning – specialist study in the particular diploma line which makes up half of total study at Advanced level, Generic learning on project work with work experience and functional skills, plus Additional learning in optional subjects.

It cannot be assumed that Sector Skills Council involvement will automatically raise the currency of the Diploma with individual employers. As mentioned earlier, employer and professional representatives have always had indirect involvement in much qualification design through awarding bodies. Furthermore, the need to meet government deadlines resulted in the central departmental Qualifications and Curriculum Authority taking an increased role in overseeing Diploma development and consultants rather than employers finalising subject specialisations.

In the run up to the launch in September 2008, government increasingly played down the direct vocational relevance of the 'world class' Diplomas and instead emphasised their status as an alternative, 'applied' qualification. As with existing vocational qualifications, the majority of Diploma students will continue to be based in classrooms, not in the workplace, and this learning will remain mainly teacher-led. Because schools in particular do not have the specialist facilities to teach practical skills, this could easily result in students learning about and describing construction processes without touching a brick.

Although students on Dips will be required to complete 10 days work experience, this is invariably what most students do already. Once providing an opportunity for employers to recruit young people, for many teachers this 'work experience' has become a ritual as they tramp round workplaces visiting their students and trying to ensure they do something worthwhile. With headteachers increasingly concerned that it could affect GCSE performance, work experience now often takes place at the end of year 10. Neither is it a requirement for the Diplomas that this workplace experience will need to be in the sector that the Diploma student is studying. It has also been rumoured that any paid part-time employment that a student participates in, or relies on to finance their studies, can also be accredited.



From English and Maths to Functional Skills

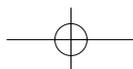
Accompanying the more general reorganisation of post-14 education are moves to reduce the general core entitlement of many students, particularly those on Dips and Apps (the new apprenticeship schemes referred to below).

In fact, all post-14 students will, in future, be required to pass functional skills tests (an amalgam of current 'key skills' and 'skills for life' qualifications) in English, maths and ICT. Functional skills will also be a compulsory part of GCSE syllabuses and candidates will not be able to obtain a maths and English GCSE without them. Many school students, particularly those at level 1 (equivalent to D-G grade GCSE) could be restricted to functional skills work, alarming English teachers seeking to safeguard the more creative aspects of their subject. In addition, we should expect humanities, arts and modern foreign languages – no longer included in the Key Stage 4 mandatory National Curriculum core – to be absent from Diploma students' timetables.

It is also clear that, for the moment at least, functional skills will not be 'embedded' into a student's main course in the way that earlier government documents anticipated but will stand alone as units of study assessed entirely by objective tests. In this respect, functional skills seem to represent no more than a name change and differ little from the current 'key' (formerly 'core') 'skills' except that, at least in the latter, students were required to complete a course work portfolio. 'Basic' (now 'functional') 'skills', in contrast, will be delivered entirely on a 'teach to test' basis. The Diplomas also require students to follow 'personal learning and thinking skills' which will be integrated into their main courses. Potentially more exciting, like the previous 'soft key skills' (as opposed to the 'hard' and easily assessed literacy, numeracy and ICT), PLTS risks being marginalised and subordinated to 'hard' functional skills.

The introduction of 'functional skills' is the result of CBI criticism of school-leavers' abilities in maths and English 'basics' (CBI 2006). However, employer condemnation of young people is perennial. As Glenn Rikowski (2006) wryly observed:

'After James Callaghan's Ruskin College Speech of 1976 and the resulting Great Debate on Education, the 1988 Education Reform Act, ushering in



the National Curriculum, national testing, SATs, league tables, and then Ofsted, together with New Labour's focus on standards early on after 1997 and then the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours – and school-leavers' reading, writing and maths are *still* inadequate for employers! The CBI Report could have easily have been written in the 1970s or 1980s.'

Schools and FE, reconfiguring a two tier system

It is in the way in which Diplomas are to be delivered that inequalities may become the most pronounced. As the White Paper recognises, it is unlikely that individual schools will be able to offer more than one, at most two, Dips and few will have the facilities to offer more specialist areas like Construction and the Built Environment. The government plan to establish 200 vocational schools and the new Academies programme, particularly in city areas where there is both commercial sponsorship and support from local councils, could also be particularly significant as a Trojan horse for introducing the new Dips.

The main vehicle for Diploma delivery however, will be a network of local 'consortia' involving Local Authorities and the soon to be defunct Learning and Skills Council (LSC). 'In every area, providers will ensure that between them they are making a full offer' (14-19 White Paper, 7.25). The number of school students attending college for part of the week is predicted to increase significantly. As a result of the Increased Flexibility Programme about 100,000 14-16 year olds already attend FE colleges for at least a day a week. However, according to the DfES, as many as 350,000 could be enrolled (DfES 2006).

While an extensive survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research (2005) shows that for many young people, attending college can be a positive experience, for others, rather than being 'challenging and inspirational', much of this college provision is a diversion – a way of syphoning off more general disaffection with school (Ecclestone, *TES* 09/06/06).

Despite increased collaboration with schools, colleges continue to be the poor relation. Unable to compete with school sixth forms, which enjoy significant

funding advantages, many colleges have abandoned A-level teaching altogether. Salaries of FE teaching staff still remain up to 30% less than those of school teachers in equivalent positions. The fact that in order to qualify for funding, FE colleges will have to provide a disproportionate number of 'skills based' level 1 and level 2 courses, including many of the new Dips, will compound these differences, as these courses will continue to be funded at a lower rate than level 3 Advanced courses. Severe cutbacks in provision for adult learning leave colleges in danger of becoming the new 'tertiary moderns'.

There has been little input by educational professionals into the design of the diplomas. The NUT and UCU have been concerned about the lack of professional development with an NUT survey showing teachers working in areas making up the first 'gateway' for September 2008 being unprepared and ill informed. Both unions have pledged to support members in conditions of service issues, particularly increased workload. The increased collaboration between schools and colleges in implementing the new courses can only highlight the inequities in pay between school teachers and FE lecturers.

Desperate Diplomacy?

The elevation of Gordon Brown to Prime Minister led to some speculation that some Blairite education policies might be modified. Certainly, Ed Balls' announcement of three new 'subject based' Diplomas in humanities, science and modern languages and a new extended version worth four and a half A-levels at Advanced level or nine GCSEs at Higher, raised some expectations about a change of heart by government. However, if Brown and Balls have tried to broaden the popularity of the diploma, there is no evidence that they are seeking to abolish A-levels. Indeed, the review of 14-19 qualifications has been postponed to allow the Diplomas more time to 'bed in'. So Balls' announcement was bizarre when nothing was known about the course content for these three new Dips, not due to start until 2010.

It is already possible for aspiring science students, for example, to take alternative courses in science by following an 'applied' A-level (or VCE). In 2005/6 the VCE double science option attracted 800 entries compared with over 23,000 for

physics A-level, 34,000 for chemistry and more than 46,000 for biology. Even in business studies, where vocational/applied courses are more established, entries for both single and double VCE, were less than a third of those for the 'equivalent' A-level. At level 2, where we assume the new courses will also be available, it is possible to sit double, even triple GCSEs in science and there are several different humanities combinations. In addition, because of government changes at Key Stage 4, many Year 10 students opt-out of modern languages completely, so proposals for a languages Diploma seem particularly inappropriate.

Though continuing to back the 'industrial' diplomas but considering the new academic diplomas an 'unnecessary distraction', the CBI called the proposals 'over-ambitious' reiterating that employers believed GCSE and A-levels to be a 'cornerstone of the education system' (CBI News release 23/06/08). With approaching a million entries every year, A-levels are still considered the best bet for getting to an established university.

'It has been argued that Diplomas could only be a success if A-levels and GCSE were no longer offered as stand-alone qualifications.. this is not the government's view.' (DCFS internal paper October 2007).

As the Government's Strategy document (DCFS 2008), once again makes clear, New Labour are not planning to replace A-levels. In an age where what you learn is less important than what it will allow you to earn, who among the thousands of existing A-level students would risk untried Diplomas in subject areas currently well provided for and where there are established market leaders?

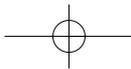
A-levels and the Pre-U

In fact, the debate about whether A-levels will eventually be incorporated in the new Diplomas in the way that Tomlinson and his supporters advocated has been given a further twist as a result of the emergence of Cambridge International Exams' new Pre-U award. As the first 'gateway' of Diplomas get off to a shaky start across a range of comprehensive schools and FE colleges, the new academic year 2008 also sees the launch of the first Pre-U's, in sixty-five schools, mostly in the independent sector.

In contrast to the modular AS-A2 system, the Pre-U returns to the traditional linear approach. With assessment of AS-A2 now increasingly ‘task based’ – aiming to test a variety of analytical or interpretive skills, the Pre-U’s creators aim to restore the importance of essay writing and end of course final examinations. According to its advocates, the Pre-U will offer pupils more stimulation and a system of testing that rewards creativity and lateral thinking. Current A-levels, they complain, only teach students to ‘think inside a very small box’ and discriminate against ‘highly imaginative students’, whose answers may even be marked down because they are considered too sophisticated. According to one independent school head, the Pre-U will ensure that very able students are not held back, while others consider the Pre-U represents a return to the original idea of A-level as a qualification for traditional university entrance. To gain the full Pre-U, students take three ‘principal subjects’, but also complete a research project and a ‘Global Perspectives’ portfolio. Cambridge claim it will be ‘exciting to teach’ and develop ‘an independent and self-directed style and ensure academic integrity’ (www.pre-u.co.uk).

There are, however, other reasons for Pre-U’s emergence. Being primarily designed for academically high-performing students, the new qualification is unashamedly elitist. Its main purpose is to ensure the leading and most expensive private schools re-establish their positional advantage. With A-level pass rates reaching 97% and one in four candidates now receiving an A grade, independent schools, despite the introduction of the new A* grade, can no longer guarantee what their parents are paying for – that their students will be at the front of the queue for entry to top universities. Pre-U principal subjects will have nine different grades. At the top, will be D1 (distinction 1), D2 and D3. Charterhouse School (fees £26,000 per annum) has decided to offer the Pre-U in some individual subjects rather than as an across-the-board certificate, thus creating a brand of ‘super A-levels’. This will, as *The Daily Telegraph* (23/01/08) reassured its readers, mean that independent schools are ‘likely to tighten their grip on leading universities’.

There have always been alternatives to A-level. Oxbridge used to set its own entrance exams and many of its colleges and one in seven universities have

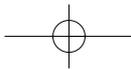


gone back to doing so, especially for courses in law and medicine (which also last longer and therefore cost more). Scottish Highers have already been mentioned and the International Baccalaureate remains an established qualification, popular in International Schools but also attracting a small but not insignificant following, mostly in the independent sector. Until this year at least, as part of its drive to promote ‘diversity’, the government was committed to ensuring that the IB would be available in at least one school or college in every LA. Now, with the emergence of the Pre-U, further expansion of the IB is less certain.

Whilst recognising the real motivation behind Pre-U however, we should nevertheless address some of its pedagogic claims. Many school sixth-form and sixth-form college teachers may have some sympathy with the arguments that A-levels have been ‘dumbed down’, that there is too much assessment and that it is unnecessary to have the AS and A2 modules. They may also agree with those who claim it is possible to obtain a good grade by covering only key aspects of the syllabus, rather than really understanding the subject as a whole. These accusations need to be taken seriously - we will return to this later. A-levels may be very different to what they used to be - they are more accessible - but there is no definitive research evidence that they are getting easier, or that some are harder to pass than others.

Of course, as Cambridge Exams make clear, there is nothing to stop state schools introducing the Pre-U, particularly in individual subject areas where they may have expertise and especially now that the exam regulator, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has given it official backing. However, many comprehensive schools struggle to provide a variety of A-level and vocational options and simply won’t have the resources to offer parallel courses in individual subjects.

The Pre-U alters the 14-19 landscape still further. A few of the schools teaching the new qualification from September may be officially part of the state sector but it is likely the Pre-U will form the basis of a new ‘upper-track’ for the private schools, leaving A-levels for the many and specialist Diplomas for anybody else, outflanking the government’s own version of tripartism. The



Pre-U also reminds reformers that, despite attempts to promote ‘diversity’ within the state sector, the key divisions within education, as in society in general, revolve around differences in income and wealth – the ability to pay, as represented by the persistence of private schooling.

Awaiting the go-ahead from government to raise the £3,000 undergraduate course fee-cap, distancing themselves from the new Diplomas and with strong links to the private schools, elite Russell universities have also been actively involved in the development of the Pre-U.

Here comes the ‘Burgerlaureate’!

As the diplomas have now been officially categorised as ‘applied’ learning, the government has announced a revamp of workplace-based education. Reaffirming the Dearing approach, the DCFS *Strategy* document for example, emphasises that there are now three types of post-14 education. Seeking to shore up the ailing Modern Apprenticeship scheme for those aged 16 – with one in five of 16-18 year olds to be on an apprenticeship by 2010 – the government also proposes to expand and revamp Young Apprenticeships, a scheme for 14 and 15 year-olds, particularly those considered to be ‘academic failures’ and/or potentially ‘disruptive’, who currently spend up to two days per week with an employer or training provider.

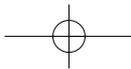
Unlike old-style industrial apprenticeships, a place on a New Labour apprenticeship will not guarantee employment – only improved ‘employability’. Of course, there are some excellent schemes with reputable employers but, despite the financial incentives available, many employers are still reluctant to participate and, as a result, increasing numbers of current apprentices are not really ‘employed’ at all. Instead, they become a group nobody wants, participating in schemes run by private sector training providers or local FE colleges and, like the school leavers who progressed to Youth Training Schemes in the 1980s, only receive an ‘allowance’ not a wage. Similarly, like the old division between YTS mode A and mode B ‘real apprenticeships’ leading to jobs are differentiated from apprenticeships going nowhere.

However, it was the news that fast-food chain McDonalds would be offering



employees a 'training' equivalent to A-levels that grabbed media attention at the end of January 2008. Particularly when it became known that QCA was recognising it – along with courses from two other major companies, the airline Flybe and Network Rail. McDonalds are piloting what they call a basic shift manager's course covering everything McDonald's 7,000 managers across the country need to know about the day-to-day running of its outlets. This ranges from basic operational requirements, to finances, marketing and human resources. Learning on this course will be divided up into credits. The standard of these credits will equate with GCSE grades, A-levels or a national Diploma. Though an employee will not be completing a full A-level equivalent, only part of one, when 17 year olds are legally required to participate in education and training from 2013, a 'McQualification' will probably suffice (the fast-food giant could then design a course which would be equal to a whole A-level). With incredible ineptness Gordon Brown quickly gave support, while Skills Minister, John Denham, said it was an important step towards ending the old divisions between company training schemes and national qualifications.

Criticising the McDips is not an example of 'academic snobbery' towards practical and vocational learning as some daily newspapers implied. In an increasingly uncertain labour market, most teachers would welcome government backing for good quality vocational training delivered by reputable employers, preferably in collaboration with FE colleges, but many will be bewildered if not appalled at why this has been extended to the notorious fast-food chain. McDonalds have been exploiting youngsters from the earliest opportunity, not just with the 'McFood' they sell children but also with 'McJobs' fitted around school and college hours and which any self-respecting teenager seeking to earn a bit of cash will tell you are the lowest of the low. Promoting 'McLearning' is the latest and most inept attempt to 'McDonaldise' (Ritzer 1996) the lives of young people. Similar processes are at work in what has become mass higher education.



Chapter 2

Mass universities for the many, elite universities for the few

Degrees of difference

The increased participation and the new divisions within 14-19 education are reflected in higher education. As noted earlier, GNVQs and other vocational qualifications allowed students to progress to HE and also enabled student numbers to expand – but in ‘new’ post 92 institutions, rather than in the older universities.

DCSF press releases have argued that over 100 universities have now backed the Diplomas which have also been incorporated into the UCAS tariff. Like the 1990s however, when many universities happily published statements about GNVQs, there is a huge difference between a student who meets the basic minimal entry requirements and one who is able to achieve a place at a ‘selecting’ university. Of course there may always be some exceptions – Cambridge University supposedly likes the Engineering diploma but less than half of university admissions tutors were able to make positive statements about the Diplomas being good alternatives to A-levels, while unfortunately but significantly, a number of Russell universities do not use the UCAS points system, preferring to ask for particular grades in particular subjects.

A new type of differentiation is the two-year Foundation ‘degrees’ covering specific vocational/occupational areas and designed for those at associate professional level, (for example, laboratory technicians and teaching assistants). These are common in what now call themselves ‘The Million+’ universities (see below), although increasingly franchised out to colleges to fuse parts of FE with HE and vice-versa. While these were originally aimed at part-time or ‘twilight’ adult students, they are also offered on a full-time basis, replacing the old HND – thus helping government reach its HE participation targets.

The development of Foundation degrees and the proliferation of various types of Business Studies and Information Technology degree courses at post-92

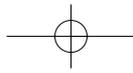


universities has facilitated the extension of the vocation pathway into HE – what David Blunkett referred to as a ‘strong ladder of progression from age 14-15, up to foundation degree and beyond’(DfEE 2000, 10). A 2002 Green Paper describes how a 14 year-old ‘who wants a career in the hotel and catering industry may choose a Hospitality and Catering vocational GCSE... at 16 he or she might take vocational A-levels... leading to a Foundation degree in Hotel Management’ (DfES 2002, 4.46). The announcement of the specialist diplomas should be seen as the latest attempt to shore up this superficial approach to ‘lifelong learning’. Maybe Government dream of Diploma Universities?

Fees and the market in HE

The growing inequalities within higher education described above have also been intensified by the end of mandatory grants and the introduction of fees. Free public service higher education ended in England in 1997. This had been anticipated earlier in the decade by the freezing of student maintenance grants and the introduction of student loans. Then the New Labour government accepted the widely anticipated and bipartisan recommendation of the Dearing Report on Higher Education to introduce annual undergraduate student fees of £1,000 a year rising with inflation, together with the unexpected scrapping of maintenance grants. This saddled students with debts variously estimated to vary by course and institution from between £10,000 and £20,000. In 2006 New Labour broke its 2005 manifesto promise not to raise fees further by allowing them to rise to a maximum currently ‘capped’ at £3,000 a year. As a concession, this sum is no longer paid up-front but repayable after graduation and after the graduate receives a salary over a minimum income threshold.

Introducing fees contradicted the government’s goal of ‘widening participation’ to higher education. Indeed, in 2006 there was a 15,500 fall in the number of applications for the first time in eight years (although an increase in Scotland where the former system continues – except for English students) and numbers may have peaked at 44% of 18+ year-olds entering HE (40% of males and 47% of females). There were disproportionate falls amongst adult, minority ethnic and working-class applicants – precisely those for whom government said it intended to ‘widen participation’ – but the overall fall in



applications of minus 3.1% was less than predicted. From the government's point of view, this was a success and, with a reported rise in applications for 2008 despite anticipated demographic downturn, it can be anticipated fees will rise again in 2010. As it is, even with most university Vice Chancellors playing what they think of as a clever game in raising their fees to the permitted maximum so that there is no variably priced market – a ruse they will be unable to sustain when the cap is raised or removed – a market in HE has been created in which all HE institutions are ranked in a league table that is rapidly polarising.

Universities and colleges have positioned themselves accordingly in the market for anticipated higher fees. At the top is a self-styled 'Russell Group' of research-intensive universities whose students, like those in the US Ivy League, are selected internationally and graduate to an international labour market, especially the growing numbers of postgraduates already paying higher fees. Next comes the 94Group of nationally recruiting and mainly teaching campus universities. Lastly, the Million+ Group of locally or sub-regionally clearing and increasingly training universities, recently renamed to emphasise their possession of most students if least research funding.

The disproportionate affect of fee increases on mature, minority ethnic and working-class students, also limits the number of 18+ year-olds able to continue the post-war tradition of 'going away' to university. Increasingly, more study locally while living at home. Students living at home are also more likely to be in paid employment during term time with consequent deleterious affects on their final qualifications (see Callender 2008). Differences between the working/home and non-working/away intensify what are already very different campus cultures. Indeed, term-time employment is expressly forbidden in the contract Oxford University signs with its full-time undergraduates and non-completion of courses is highest at those institutions referred to as Higher Education Institutes – the not quite universities that rely mainly on recruiting local and more working-class students.

As with the US Ivy League of elite universities, only a degree from the top universities – or from their postgraduate schools – may soon be regarded as



‘real education’, although what they teach is often increasingly academic and remote from reality. Mass universities for the many are thus combined with elite universities for the few. In this worst of both worlds, academic competition shadows medieval flummery, entrenching the general rule that the older the institution, the younger, whiter and richer are its students (Warwick University being the exception that proves the rule).

Paying more for less

Many in the mass of students and trainees working their way through this certification system have been fooled by the government’s promise of ‘widening participation’, which often appeals particularly to their parents. As John Cruddas MP observes (2008, 147),

‘The central contradiction of the knowledge economy thesis and the higher education debate is the belief that there is a massive expansion in the demand for graduates.’

With recession undermining this belief, the cake may not be worth the candle for many current and would-be students as they move from one module to another with no established peer groups and sensing that no one cares about them in increasingly chaotic and overcrowded institutions where they either sink or swim. They have little time and space for generalised reflection and negotiation of meaning with their teachers. Even on the most traditionally academic courses in elite universities which can be expected to raise their fees the highest as soon as they are permitted to do so, thus privatising themselves out of the system, anecdotal evidence indicates students are churning out essays and other assignments as a mark of quality over competitors. But most students are well aware the required formats do not demonstrate real knowledge, or even thought, on their part but are a matter of acquired technique.

A lucrative internet industry enabling students to purchase finished essays and assignments written for them by ‘specialists’ and the repeated accusations of plagiarism and cheating – from primary headteachers fiddling their SATs returns to secondary and HE students buying and selling coursework – is further confirmation that ends have become more important than means and that an

increasing number of students no longer consider it necessary to learn at all. As a result, government have culled coursework from GCSE (long regarded as a cornerstone of progressivism) and urged a return to traditional exams, like the Pre-U. 'Students', as one of them wrote in a final year Education Studies project at Greenwich University in 2004,

'learn to connect their self esteem and what they may achieve in later life to their exam results. Over assessment has made subject knowledge and understanding a thing of the past as students are put through a routine year after year, practising what exactly to write and where in preparation for exams.' (quoted in Allen and Ainley 2007, 85)

Educated or certified?

Although the correlation between the level of education, level of skills and economic performance has been exaggerated, as argued earlier, for individual students and their parents, the possession of educational certificates continues to be regarded as a major positional good. This results in a situation where, as Stanley Aronowitz says of the USA:

'Collectively we have come to conflate education and schooling and have placed our hopes for a secure, if not bright, future in the credentialing process.' (2008, xii).

Compared with the working class 'lads' featured in Paul Willis' influential 1977 study, for example, things couldn't be more different. Willis's 'lads' looked forward to leaving school and following friends and relatives into 'real work' – manual employment on the factory shop floor. For most of today's young people, a batch of established qualifications, if not a degree, is now considered essential for securing anything that can be considered 'a proper job' and, most importantly, avoiding falling into a life of 'McJobs' – joining the ranks of a new dispossessed, 'underclass' section of society.

As England follows the USA with what Aronowitz calls a 'Go to college or die' culture amongst young people, *The Guardian* (05/06/08) reported a nine percentage point increase in the number of parents who would send their children to private school 'if they could afford it'. For the really rich, qualifications have always been less important than other aspects of social

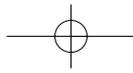
capital in guaranteeing the future earning power of their inheritors. This is not to say they won't happily spend £25,000-plus annually to secure a place at a leading private school. This compares with £9,000 average across the private sector as a whole with its ubiquitous cut-price crammers, private tutors and on-line courses of variable quality.

Parents who cannot afford private fees are increasingly prepared to use all means necessary to get their children into what they consider 'good schools' – private coaching, moving house, even regularly attending church for a year or two! Yet at the same time they invariably show little desire to become involved in day-to-day decision-making, for example by being school governors or even attending school AGMs. For many teachers meanwhile, 'teaching' continues to be a daily grind restricted in schools by 'behaviour problems' and with endless administration also in colleges and universities. And everywhere, the constant pressure to meet new market-state targets which only set teachers up to fail.

Rather than being judged in terms of its intellectual benefits, succeeding in education has become an obstacle course. Instead of producing a learning culture, a 'culture of instrumentalism' prevails where students from primary to post-graduate schools only learn what they need when they need it. Worse, the pressures of league tables, which now apply to universities and departments within them as well as to schools, mean teachers only teach what they need to. For example, a *TES* front page declared 'No need to read books' (13/08/06) as English teachers provided 'extracts' for GCSE.

Should I stay or should I go?

The qualifications system has, as many students know only too well, become like running up a down escalator so that they increasingly need to run harder simply to stand still and where they have to give more and more only to get less and less. This is not to deny that the nature of the occupational structure has changed but it is an indication that the old working manual : non-manual middle class division of post-war years, which was also a division between those with and those without academic qualifications, has been pulled apart and replaced by an increasingly insecure 'working-middle'. Studies show rates of

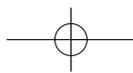


social mobility slowing down (Sutton Trust, 2005) indicating the emptiness of talk about society becoming more 'meritocratic'. Rather than there being 'more room at the top', the down escalator is also becoming increasingly overcrowded with all the people running up.

Will it still pay to become a graduate? If previous employment patterns persist, those graduating can anticipate earning £100,000 to £150,000 more in total lifetime earnings (presuming they work throughout their lifetime) than non-graduates and as a result continue to consider it worthwhile. Yet, the increasing cost of being a student cannot be discounted. New students about to begin their courses are now likely to run up £21,500 worth of debt by the time they graduate, while one student living index (Royal Bank of Scotland 2007) shows the average expenses of a student passing £200 a week outside London, with one third of those students working during term having to average 20 hours a week and with average parental contributions running at over £70 a week.

More significant may be the continued rise in the number of graduates. Certainly, many of those in the government's own 'student listening programme' were worried about a future over-supply and being 'forced to undertake, at more expense, post-graduate study to maintain a competitive edge with potential employers' (DIUS 2008). Rather than reflecting an increase in 'graduate jobs', graduates may be merely pushing non-graduates further down the earnings structure.

Student awareness of these contradictions is growing. They are the natural allies of teachers, researchers and all those working in education to all levels who seek to reclaim the system for its original purpose of enlightening rather than foreclosing the minds of future generations.



Chapter 3

What are our alternatives?

Desperate diplomacy turns to meltdown

If Ed Balls' announcement of new Dips represented a thinly disguised desperation – an attempt to shore up an ailing programme that has attracted few friends, the May 2008 announcement that the number of students signing up for the first round of Diplomas starting in September 2008 would be scaled down from 45,000 to 20,000 to ensure 'quality' can be interpreted as a potential meltdown. This followed a *TES* (28/03/08) survey of some of the schools and colleges listed as future Diploma providers showing many had no definite plans for running the Dips or in other cases had only signed up in hopes of extra funding.

Nobody is arguing that those teachers and lecturers – now probably vastly reduced in number – required to deliver the new Dips in schools and colleges from this September should not do the best for their students. Indeed, the vast majority of teachers in schools, colleges and universities will, regardless of increasingly unfavourable conditions generally, always continue to do this. It is also crucial that the NUT and UCU use the unity created around their current pay campaigns to defend their members' conditions of service and be prepared, for example, to intervene in potential disputes between schools and colleges about diploma funding or student welfare and support. However, there is also a huge opportunity for both unions – and all other teacher and lecturer organisations for that matter – to promote alternatives. Militant talk on picket lines and radical talk in the classroom must be accompanied by clear proposals for alternative programmes that address both the content and increased democratisation of learning as well as its funding and distribution. It is to questions of policy that we now turn.

A general diploma for everybody

As was made clear at the start of this pamphlet, we welcome increased participation in education. Increased participation beyond the statutory leaving age in particular allows the potential for us to develop new types of

relationships with our students and to promote our concerns as *educators*. An alternative post-14 policy must begin by developing a new approach to the curriculum. First, we must reject Dearing's 'pathways' approach which, as we have argued, continues to be central to New Labour policies. We must also recognise that the Tomlinson proposals for an over-arching diploma, within which all existing qualifications would be linked, raised as many questions as they provided answers to, for there would be continued tensions between the respective values of these qualifications and the promotion of the diploma as a whole.

For example, it would have been possible for elite schools to endorse the Tomlinson model in principle (as indeed they did) but continue to concentrate on the A-level qualifications within it, resulting in the surrounding diploma becoming no more than packaging. So, any overarching certificate would have to be made compulsory for all students and there would need to be a requirement that all schools and colleges award it. It would also have to be the basis for university entrance, accepting that a significant degree of compulsion for the new arrangements represents a major contrast to the 'voluntarist' approach which relies on internal market mechanisms or hides behind the banner of 'choice and diversity' for parents and defence of their entry requirements by academics. In particular, this would challenge the power of top private schools and elite universities.

Rather than simply trying to resurrect an over-arching certificate, proposals outlined by the National Union of Teachers point the way forward. The Union calls for a multi-level diploma consisting of core, specialist and work/community modules through which students can explore areas linguistic and literary, mathematical, scientific and technological, aesthetic and creative, human, social and political.

A new approach to learning

Reforming qualifications, however, entails much more than simply aiming for equality of status for various types of learning. It also requires us to address issues of pedagogy and challenge some traditional conceptions of knowledge. Many school teachers continue to remain relatively uncritical of 'academic'

education. They consider that learning should cover a range of clearly defined 'subjects' and be valued 'for its own sake' – for the purpose of intellectual or scientific enquiry.

For example, we argued that while claiming to be defending academic integrity and intellectual curiosity against an obsession with targeting and testing, the Pre-U was primarily a way of defending traditional privileges and inequalities. While we should not dismiss totally some of its pedagogic assertions, we would also argue that this approach to learning has also been used to maintain academic subject hierarchies as well as divisions between 'experts' – 'teachers' and 'students'.

The 'progressive education' of the 1970s with its emphasis on cross-curricula themes and on the importance given not only to student-centred but also to local and community-based knowledge, was an attempt to challenge this. Is there any reason why this type of learning shouldn't have equal status with what has generally been regarded as 'high culture'? The central question is, to quote again Stanley Aronowitz: 'to achieve scientific understanding in ever widening groups of the population' and 'make possible the progress of the mass and not only small intellectual groups'(159).

Rethinking vocationalism

It is also essential that the concept of vocational learning be redefined. As we argued earlier, in learning about construction 'off site', the new Diplomas have little to do with acquisition of practical skills, being at best 'applied'. So within a new general diploma there is a place for the development of real work-based learning – at least as an option for those students who genuinely desire it. But a major aim should be to broaden the definition of vocationalism to include, as part of a general curriculum core, a better understanding of the political, social and economic aspects of employment and work. Students need to learn about work as well as to work.

The origins of what could be referred to as a 'critical vocationalism' can be found in the work of early 20th century American educationalist and philosopher, John Dewey, who argued for an inclusion of 'the study of

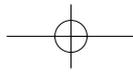
economics, civics and politics... to bring the worker in touch with the problems of the day and the various proposals for its improvement' (Dewey 1966, 318). It is equally, if not more, visible in the work of early 19th century radicals who argued that as well as technical instruction, working people needed to develop 'really useful knowledge' about ways to change an economy that created poverty and exploitation (Johnson, 1981).

It cannot be denied that the addition of areas like 'citizenship' to the school curriculum can be used by teachers to address a number of controversial issues, (Wrigley 2006) but at the same time it should also be recognised that, rather than constituting a new approach to learning, they are in danger of being seen as no more than 'add-ons' to a discredited one.

Creating local democracy and accountability

Reforming the curriculum is not enough, or even possible, without other changes to the larger structure of education. In opposition to the government's 'choice and diversity' agenda in which schools, colleges and universities jostle for advantage and where those that can 'select' students for high status academic courses leave others to 'recruit' for diplomas, a comprehensive 14-19 provision should be provided across a number of sites attached to schools, colleges and other community learning organisations. But there needs to be serious discussion about whether everything can still be provided by reconstituted Local Authorities, groups of LAs, or whether there should be a new type of elected and accountable sub-regional education and training authorities.

Democratic planning would enable a form of cooperation and provision that went way beyond that supposedly being offered by the current consortia – avoiding both unnecessary competition and duplication. Within these new structures, some form of financial self-management would be able to continue but for stability to be achieved it would be essential that infrastructure and staffing levels remained the responsibility of the 'centre'. It would also require establishing equal pay with school teachers for lecturers concerned with 14-19 education, as well as standardising professional qualifications. Alongside official LA/Area structures, local forums with representation from teacher/lecturer unions, parents, other community users and, of course, students, could play an

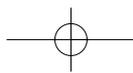


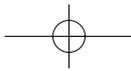
important role in both monitoring but also in the generation of policy.

Planned local/sub-regional provision would include higher education. Universities, particularly elite ones, have used arguments about ‘academic freedom’ to prevent ‘political’ interference by Government. As Alex Callinicos (2006) argues, much of the independent research base of universities has been subordinated to the interests of the illusory ‘knowledge economy’ and the needs of ‘wealth creation’. It can be reclaimed to contribute solutions for the urgent environmental and other problems facing society. Research needs to be both separated from teaching in dedicated national research centres and simultaneously integrated in scholarship, scientific investigation and artistic creation for teachers and students at all levels of learning.

Education reformers have concentrated on widening access following the precedent of post-war university expansion with so-called social mobility that we can now recognise was a product of the specific conditions of economic development at that time. Widening participation is of course important and campaigns against fees should remain a focal point for new alliances between staff and students. However, we should not forget to ask what we are widening to. As this pamphlet has argued, the antiquated and hierarchical practices of established universities and their approach to learning have ensured that more visible inequalities persist ‘further down’ the education system. As a result, the reform of higher education is perhaps the greatest challenge, especially as sections of it are so integrated with the reproduction of society’s elites.

Rather than relentless selection at which the majority fail at every fence, we need to establish a principal of entitlement. This already exists to an extent in Scotland, as in France and even the USA. In this republican tradition, there is a presumption that those who complete their schooling and assume citizenship at 18, move on to their local university while continuing to live at home as a matter of course. Beyond a general diploma for all school and college ‘leavers’, the Platonic divisions of first, second and third class degrees should be replaced by grades that reflect much more formative assessment over undergraduate courses lengthened to four years in line with Scotland and the Bologna reform of European qualifications followed by two years Masters.





Getting organised

To achieve the changes necessary to transform schools, colleges and universities from credential mills where the curriculum is dominated by standardised tests into sites of genuine education, we need new types of campaigning alliances between teachers, students and local communities. Teacher unions – particularly the NUT and UCU – must use their resources and organising power in new ways, transcending their narrow ‘professionalist’ perspective on teaching and learning, turning outwards to become social movements, able to engage in real discussion about programmes for education.

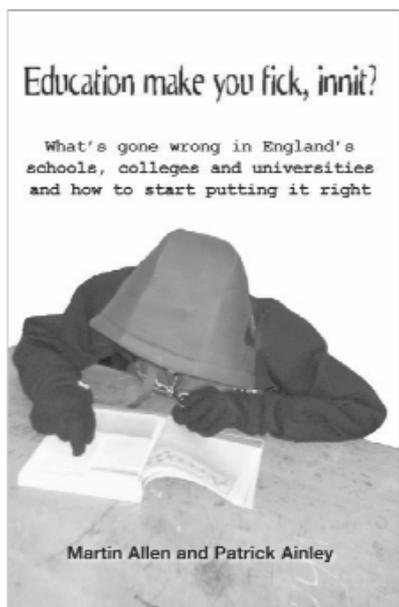
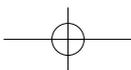
We can begin by asking questions about the Diplomas. What is the point of Diplomas alongside A-levels? And how can academic A-levels be made relevant not just to paid vocational employment but to wider social and environmental questions of purpose confronting society? We can also move to a broader discussion about the purpose and role of education in general.



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Education make you fick, innit?

What's gone wrong in England's schools, colleges and universities and how to start putting it right

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

This book links teachers and students in schools, colleges and universities to ask what has happened to education in a mass system of lifelong learning from primary to postgraduate schooling. It explains how allegations of 'dumbing down' and deskilling contrast with claims of rising standards for a world class workforce, showing how education has become the main means of social control in an increasingly divided and self-destructive society. Rather than emancipating the minds of future generations, education forecloses their possibilities. In this sense, Education Make You Fick, Innit?

Ainley and Allen argue that to understand how this occurred and what can be done about it, the system has to be understood as a whole. What is happening in schools makes sense only in relation to similar systems of control in FE and HE where privatisation in particular is in many ways more advanced. They detail successive perversions of the comprehensive ideal for schools to the latest 'personalisation' agenda that stretches across the new raised leaving age of 18, showing how competition and control combine to set institutions and individuals against one another in a market for inflated qualifications. They reject the relentless testing and selection of students in prolonged training that still does not guarantee employment.

From their experience of teaching and researching in schools, FE and HE, the authors call for democratic control to reverse privatisation and maintain free provision so as to remain true to the Enlightenment ideal of understanding society in order to change it.

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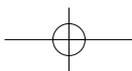
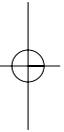
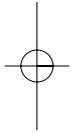
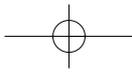
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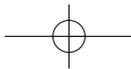
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A New 14+: Vocational Diplomas and the Future of Schools, Colleges and Universities

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

Written in an accessible and campaigning style, this pamphlet affords a valuable context to the introduction of the first group of specialist diplomas for 14 year olds in September 2008.

The diplomas are the latest in a line of failed initiatives that have sought to provide vocational 'alternatives' for those young people staying in full-time education and not considered 'academic'.

Rather than developing any useful employment skills, Allen and Ainley argue that their introduction reflects the changing significance of education in the division and social control of learners that now extends from school to college and on to university.

Those who are opposed to the current post-14 agenda, must not only put forward radical alternatives to the current curriculum offer but also, the authors argue, address issues of democracy and accountability. To do this, teacher trade unionists must make new types of alliances with local communities and also with their students

Martin Allen works in 14-19 education at a school in West London and is active in the National Union of Teachers.

Patrick Ainley is Professor of Training and Education at Greenwich University School of Education and Training.

For further comment on 14-19 education and to order more copies of this pamphlet visit www.radicaled.wordpress.com

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