



Removing the statutory
duty to deliver work related
learning at Key Stage 4

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About NFER

NFER is the UK's largest independent provider of research, assessment and information services for education, training and children's services. We make a difference to learners of all ages, especially to the lives of children and young people, by ensuring our work improves the practice and understanding of those who work with and for learners.

NFER's purpose is to provide independent evidence which improves education and training. As a charity we are always thinking about ways in which we can achieve this purpose. In particular, we are focusing attention on the use of evidence for improvement, taking a proactive approach to setting the research agenda for education and children's services in order to make a real impact on policy and practice.

About this document: Work-related learning

In 2012 the Department for Education held a consultation *Removing the statutory duty to deliver work-related learning at Key Stage 4*. The NFER submitted a response to this consultation. This is set out in this paper. We welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes by drawing on our:

- in-depth understanding of young people's engagement in education at Key Stage 4
- research evidence on young people not in education, employment or training and evaluations of work-related learning including the Increased Flexibility Programme, Foundation Learning, Young Apprenticeships and Diplomas.

Related documents

A broader picture of the issues affecting young people at key stage 4 can be seen from responses that NFER has submitted to other consultations:

- Careers guidance
- Reforming key stage 4 qualifications
- Vocational education (the Wolf Review).

These are available on the NFER website.

In addition, an NFER paper, *Policy Developments and the Risk to NEET Young People*, draws attention to the impact of policy proposal on some groups of vulnerable young people: this is also available on the NFER website.

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The Government is seeking to remove the duty to provide every young person with work related learning at Key Stage 4. Do you think that work related learning should be removed as a statutory duty?

Introduction

NFER does not think that work-related learning (WRL) at Key Stage 4 should be removed as a statutory duty on schools. It is important to acknowledge that WRL is not exclusively work experience and can include a range of learning opportunities such as learning knowledge and skills outside school from experts at college, undertaking work-related projects with input from training providers and employers, participating in problem-solving activities with employers, and visits to and from employers.

We have evidence from our research that WRL has value in three main areas: it helps to engage some young people in education, it can boost some young people's educational achievement and it helps to prepare young people for post-16 opportunities in further and higher education, training and employment including clarifying career aspirations. We believe that WRL will be devalued by adopting a voluntarist approach and leaving it up to schools to decide whether to offer WRL at Key Stage 4. This approach is likely to result in a dramatic decline in schools offering WRL which means that young people will miss out on the benefits that this type of education can provide.

Wolf advocates an 80:20 model of education at Key Stage 4 where a common core curriculum is delivered in 80 per cent of students' time, leaving 20 per cent for options including vocational courses. If implemented, this model has space for WRL which has value and benefits for young people as we outline below.

WRL – value and benefits

NFER has considerable evidence of WRL playing a significant role in engaging and re-engaging young people in education. The evidence is drawn from large-scale programme evaluations which we have undertaken for the Department for Education (and its predecessors), the Learning and Skills Council and the Young People's Learning Agency.

Commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills, we conducted an evaluation of the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) for 14-16 year olds, which was introduced in 2002 to 'create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds of all abilities who can benefit most'. Golden et al. (2006) found that students who had benefited from participation in IFP in terms of their Key Stage 4 attainment were young people who had lower attainment (level 5 or below) at Key Stage 3, and who studied GCSEs in vocational subjects, NVQs and other vocational qualifications. In addition, male students who undertook NVQs

through IFP gained more points at the end of Key Stage 4 than similar students taking these qualifications who were female suggesting that the provision had been particularly beneficial for males.

Golden *et al.* (2005) found that the majority of students who participated in the first IFP cohort achieved the qualifications they had undertaken. Nearly all (91 per cent) of those who had taken GCSEs in vocational subjects had attained passes at grades A* to G and 36 per cent achieved grades A* to C. The comparable figures for cohort 2 were 93 per cent and 39 per cent. Among the students who had taken GNVQs, 80 per cent had achieved the qualification. Around two-thirds of those in the sample who had taken NVQs and other vocational qualifications achieved their qualification. The qualifications achieved by these students contributed to the total points that they achieved at the end of Key Stage 4. Students who participated in IFP attained slightly higher total points overall at Key Stage 4 than students who were similar in terms of their prior attainment and other background characteristics who had not participated in the programme. In other words, they achieved better in terms of points outcomes at Key Stage 4 than they might have done had they not participated in IFP provision.

We conclude that the IFP worked well for students who did not fully engage with classroom-based study and wanted practical experience in an area of interest. This was also true for young people taking Foundation Learning as research by Ekosgen and NFER reported by Allan *et al.* (2011) noted: 'The vocational elements of FL continue to be the most favoured ... The opportunity of work placements (where appropriate and available in the local area) and the development of practical skills were often cited by learners and parents as being particularly beneficial and enjoyable'.

Young Apprenticeships offered 14-16 year old pupils the opportunity to take industry-specific vocational or vocationally-related qualifications alongside GCSEs. Pupils studied the core curriculum and spent two days per week on working towards vocational qualifications with 50 days over the two-year programme being spent in the workplace. As noted by the Education Select Committee's Education – Fourth Report (2011), NFER undertook an evaluation of outcomes for learners who began the Young Apprenticeship programme in 2006. The findings demonstrated positive outcomes, as indicated below:

78 per cent of all Young Apprenticeship participants had achieved five or more A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent, compared to 64 per cent of all learners nationally. Learners who completed Cohort 3 of the programme gained significantly more points in total (94 points more) at the end of Key Stage 4 compared with similar learners in the same schools who had not participated in the programme. Of those who had completed the programme and for whom the destination was known, the majority (95 per cent) progressed into further education or training, and 19% had progressed into an Apprenticeship.

Significantly, the Education Select Committee report concluded that: 'The success of Young Apprenticeships suggests that high-quality vocational training for 14 to 16

year olds can raise engagement and academic achievement, and we urge the Government to consider how best to build on this model'. The Education Select Committee's reference to 'high-quality vocational training' is important – some WRL, particularly work experience, has not been good enough. However, this should not be used as a reason to marginalise WRL which, as the Education Select Committee asserts, if sufficiently developed (as in the Young Apprenticeships model) should be built on. This could make a major contribution to developing a coherent platform for learning from 14 to 18 in line with the Raising of Participation Age.

NFER research (Spielhofer *et al* (2009)) on **young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)** found that two-thirds were open to learning and that more work-based provision below, or at, Level 2 was required which reflected their preferred learning styles. This highlights the importance of providing courses that interest and inspire young people to engage in learning and help to prevent them becoming NEET.

WRL can make a significant contribution to young people's preparation for employment. Surveys of employers often reveal that some or many respondents consider that young people should be better prepared and equipped for the labour market. For example, Johnson and Burden (2003) found that 'The majority view among employers was that schools and colleges provide inadequate preparation for young people in relation to what is expected of them ... this is an issue on which there was almost complete unanimity between employers and young people. Almost without exception, employers felt that young people who had undergone a period of work experience while at school (either through formal programmes or through part-time work) were better equipped than others for the world of work. Young people expressed similar views, although there were some misgivings about the quality of some work placements'. Similarly, the CBI/EDI education and skills survey 2010 stated that '70% of employers want action to improve the employability skills of school leavers'. A recent employer survey report by the British Chambers of Commerce (October, 2011) recommended that: 'Young people must be supported to develop employability skills as well as formal qualifications. Business confidence in school leavers is very low. Often this is because professionalism or communication skills are lacking ... To date, the Department for Education has not done enough to incorporate enterprise skills and employability into the main curriculum'. Research by the Young Foundation found that considerable numbers of young people felt unprepared and under-supported in their school-to-work transitions. Only just over half (51 per cent) of the 493 young people aged 13-25 surveyed agreed that their education and experience at school prepared them, or is preparing them, for the world of work. Significantly, almost one in three of the respondents identified lack of work experience as a key barrier to employment for them.

It is important to note that, as Raising the Participation Age (RPA) includes young people going into jobs with training, it is important for these young people who may be entering the workplace at 16 to be allowed opportunities of WRL pre-16. WRL at

Key Stage 4 is also useful for preparing young people for taking up apprenticeships which the government is committed to expanding.

WRL – developments

There is the issue of how WRL can be further developed and refreshed especially if the decision is made to retain it as a statutory duty at Key Stage 4. We think that there would be merit in WRL providers being more creative in finding ways to supply it. A productive working relationship between schools, colleges and employers is pivotal. Raising employers' awareness of the benefits to be gained (e.g. contribution to corporate social and community responsibility ambitions, access to free market research with young people and increased understanding of how they learn and their skills which enhances recruitment expertise) is essential for securing employers' engagement particularly at a time of recession. We suggest that the Work Pairings models being developed could be applied to pre-16 as well as post-16 WRL. A central broker, such as Education Business Partnerships, can help schools to deal with the challenges of providing work experience. Using this type of brokering service could assist schools to source appropriate placements and could encourage schools to provide work experience especially if WRL no longer becomes statutory at Key Stage 4. A British Chambers of Commerce employer survey (2011) reported that the majority of businesses surveyed (65 per cent) offered schools, colleges and universities some form of WRL activity 'with work experience placements being the most popular activity'.

Evidence from NFER's evaluation of Diplomas showed what a creative approach to WRL can look like: young people valued a series of one-day visits to different employers more than a block placement with one employer as this had given them a variety of opportunities. In this model, employers have less to commit to and young people gain exposure to a range of employers and learning experiences. We also found that young people taking Diplomas valued talks and presentations given by employers in school or college. WRL was the part of the course young people liked most and they requested more of it which is evidence of the perceived value to them.

We support two of the government responses to the Wolf review which we think would enhance WRL. The first focuses on strengthening vocational teaching in schools by allowing them to hire suitable staff, including professionals, to demonstrate and teach. The second aims to facilitate the enrolling of students under 16 in colleges. Wolf (2011) identifies a clear benefit: 'The great advantage of colleges is that they can offer vocational programmes without needing large additional capacity, and have a critical mass of professional staff already available'.

Destination measures at Key Stage 4 (and 5) should contribute to schools needing to provide more good quality WRL opportunities at Key Stage 4. Such opportunities will enhance young people's awareness and understanding, and will serve to clarify career aspirations, and therefore their most appropriate education and training routes post-16.

The principles of good quality and meaningful WRL are similar to other types of learning: agreeing a clear purpose, aims and objectives; careful planning and preparation; the provision of learning activities which engage, stimulate and stretch learners; and appropriate and rigorous monitoring, evaluation, assessment and review which identify progress and learning outcomes and achievements. The challenge is to ensure that these principles are applied consistently to WRL as it is further developed and diversified to meet the changing requirements of young people in response to Raising the Participation Age and labour market conditions.

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