

14-19 Centre Research Study: educational reform in schools and colleges in England

Annual Report

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Foreword

This is an extremely important report for all those interested in the development and implementation of educational policy in this country.

The CReSt project was designed to provide a deep and long-term evaluation of the impact on young people and their educational experience of the last government's flagship 14-19 curriculum reform programme. Unfortunately, a combination of budget reductions and the different policy and approach of a new government have led to the cancellation of the project after just one round of data collection.

However, the very cancellation of the project – reflecting the loss of momentum for a policy which, until the last election, was seen by government as critical to the future of education in this country – eloquently makes an important point. Moreover, this is one of the key points made by Head Teachers and others interviewed by the project's researchers: schools and colleges have strategic time horizons which extend beyond the lifetime of any single government. This is also true of many of the other organisations, such as the awarding bodies, which inevitably had pivotal roles in the implementation of the last government's 14-19 reforms.

Our educational system depends upon reasonably autonomous schools, colleges and other organisations to provide choice, variety and provision which is locally relevant. As a result, one of the conditions which must be met if educational policy is to be taken up and implemented successfully is for there to be a critical mass of such institutions which see it as consistent with their own long-term interests and the immediate interests of their students. Although there were quite a few early adopters of the 14-19 Diplomas, most of those put relatively few students through the programme and the broad approach was one of waiting to see before making a major commitment.

The lesson is clear: political capital, funds and energy are not enough on their own to successfully implement major curriculum reform. To be successful, policy needs to be understood and *seen to be valuable* by young people themselves, their parents, teachers and schools – leadership rather than the exercise of authority and marketing is required. This is a lesson which any government with a genuine commitment to school autonomy needs to learn well. In reforming the curriculum, listening and taking note of the views of young people, parents and practising teachers and heads is essential to long-term success. Their views are often different from those of educators with national profiles, academics, educational administrators or ministers themselves, but their active and enthusiastic engagement is essential for success.

There are many other extremely valuable insights and findings in this report, as well. Despite the early demise of the project, a great deal of fieldwork informs its findings and the report faithfully reflects the voices of educators and young people in schools and colleges. I am delighted to have been associated with the project in a small way and urge all those interested in education, whether as policy makers, researchers or practitioners, to read the pages which follow.

Mike Cresswell
December 2010

1 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

The key aims of the 14-19 educational reform programme (DCSF, 2005 and 2008a) were to transform the 14-19 phase of education and training to provide better and more applicable educational experiences for all young people and to raise aspirations as well as quality and standards at this phase. These aims were part of wider goals to make England ‘the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up’ as well as putting the ‘the needs of children, young people and parents at the centre of everything we do’ (DCSF, 2008a: 4)

The primary aim of the Centre Research Study (hereafter referred to as the ‘CReSt project’) was to study the impact of the 14-19 Educational Reforms as a whole upon educational institutions in England over the five-year implementation period (2009-14). This QCDA project began with previous, ‘baseline’ studies, which were conducted by two teams of researchers who studied mainstream and special schools respectively (Gorard et al, 2008; QCDA, 2009). The case reports and final reports from these studies informed the current research, as they described the circumstances and contexts of a sample of institutions prior to the 14-19 reform programme. An unusual aspect of the CReSt project is that it has a broader perspective than the evaluation of any particular reform and takes stock of the complementary and competing effects of the many reforms that affect educational institutions at any time. Separate evaluations of the individual reforms were (or are being) conducted by other research teams (information on which can be obtained from QCDA). As such, the CReSt project aims to take a broad view of the effects upon educational institutions and is not designed to assess the impact of any single policy. From the *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan* (DCSF, 2005) and *Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps* (DCSF, 2008) the following initiatives were outlined for implementation between 2010 and 2014, and are the policy reforms with which the CReSt study is concerned:

- Functional Skills
- Specialised Diplomas
- General Diplomas
- Key Stage 3 curriculum
- A-level changes (including introduction of A* & stretch and challenge, reduction in the number of modules and reduction in coursework)
- GCSE changes (modular courses, controlled assessment)
- Foundation learning
- Raising the participation age

- Prospectus developments
- 14-19 partnership developments
- Increased participation in apprenticeships
- Reduction in the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- National Skills Academies
- Vocational Specialist Schools
- Changes to funding arrangements

By late 2010, when the first year of data collection, analyses and report writing was being completed, we found ourselves in the context and policy arena of a new, coalition Government. Thus the original project structure was devised and commissioned by QCA (now QCDA) and the DCSF (now DfE) to investigate the 14-19 Educational Reforms that were, at the time of writing, the out-going government's vision for the education system. Since the project was commissioned, QCDA have been subject to the new governments' policies in relation to the remit and existence of certain quangos and a new white paper for education has been published from the coalition Government. Thus, this report presents, in considerable detail, research data from a range of stakeholders within educational institutions who are navigating the sea of an unprecedented range of reforms instigated by the Labour government and dealing with these in ways that they see as best for their local context, their student bodies and their aims and goals for their institutions.

In 2009-10, the first year of the project, we studied 18 schools and colleges through case study visits. Through these visits, by interviewing key stakeholders, we found that these institutions are attentive to education policy flux and need to be wily about those policies that they embrace and those that they may see as not applicable to their environment, because in the words of one Head Teacher, "Governments come and go". A lack of policy stability has deep implications for the ways in which institutions behave in response to educational initiatives. Environmental instability was a key feature that affected our research design *and* findings. Ultimately, environmental instability has also affected our capacity to study its effects upon educational institutions. As a consequence of the government policy outlined above, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) will be closed and the CReSt project has been terminated as part of that process. The lessons learnt from the CReSt research are just as applicable to the new political context in which these educational institutions find themselves. To reiterate, the findings of the CReSt project are not aligned to any one particular reform, but how educational institutions deal with reforms in general and how they amend and adapt these to suit their needs. In this respect, this report details a critical moment in time for educational reform and

change and in doing so adds to our knowledge of how we understand policy implementation and how it is enacted and embedded in schools and colleges.

1.2 Methodology

The research approach adopted for the CReSt project was a longitudinal, multiple-case study approach. The overall project involves the participation of 52 educational centres across England. The research has been designed to fulfil specific objectives in terms of providing 'educational actors or decision makers with information that will help them judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions' (Stenhouse, 1985:50). In this respect the 52 case studies are a collective instrumental case study designed to investigate the impact of reforms on schools and colleges in the 14-19 sector of the English education system.

Due to the number and variety of centres participating in the project, the case studies form a collective understanding of the response to, and impact of, the 14-19 reform programme (Stake, 1995). The advantage of multiple cases resides in a greater understanding of the phenomenon as it is played out under different conditions and in different situations in each centre. Such an approach allowed us to look in a holistic manner at these case studies as socially dynamic processes: the programmes under review and evaluation, the implementation of the programme in centres, how the programmes and the opportunities they offer are experienced by the participants. In addition, the research design of this study is sufficiently robust to facilitate an investigation of the phenomenon in a time of unprecedented economic and political change.

A mixed-method approach was incorporated to the collection of data through centre visits and questionnaires. The team carried out 3-day visits with 18 centres in 2009-2010¹. A centre visit protocol was produced and followed by all researchers (Appendix C). This protocol enabled a consistent and rigorous approach to the collection of data for each case study and the consistent use of the research instruments across different cases by different researchers. The centre visits comprised individual and group interviews with key stakeholders (such as Principals, curriculum managers, students, teachers and parents), surveys (to students and teachers) by questionnaire, and collection of documentary evidence. Researcher field notes were also taken during visits in order to inform the description of the centre and its context for the purposes of producing a report of the visit. Teacher and learner questionnaires were conducted in each centre. These were administered electronically and sampling was carried out in conjunction with the project advisor (the main project contact at each centre). In the case of the student questionnaire the project advisor identified a mixed-ability group from Year 11 and Year 13 (where applicable) and in the

¹ A further 17 centres were planned for 2010-2011. The remaining 17 centres would have been visited in 2011-12. The CReST research team would visit all 52 centres for a final visit in 2012-13.

case of the teacher questionnaire distributed an email link to the survey to all teaching staff in the centre.

Qualitative data was transcribed and coded using the structures of the research instruments as well as emerging issues from interviewees. Data analyses were then undertaken to examine individual and collective views and experiences, and to investigate individual cases across different data sources. The analysis of the quantitative data yielded descriptive statistics on variability of practice and typical patterns in the responses given by individuals in each centre.

Making strong claims for the representativeness of our sample of 52 schools and colleges is problematical because there are so many ways in which educational institutions can be categorised in England. Nonetheless, an attempt has been made to generate a representative sample based upon geographical location, deprivation, size, intake, outcomes, denomination and subject specialism (Gorard *et al.* 2008: 3). Seven special centres were included in the sample covering a range and types of special provision. Furthermore, research instruments were designed to be open to stakeholders' perspectives: the ways in which they saw policy and its effects. Impact of the reforms cannot be 'measured' in this research because the processes involved were too complex, with more potential explanatory variables than observations. Rather, a rich, descriptive account of policy playing out in practice has been provided.

1.3 Main Findings

1.3.1 Managing Educational Reforms

Educational reforms are actually shaped through the institutions and practitioners who enact them. Reflecting this, current theoretical models of policy implementation feature top-down and bottom-up aspects of the process. As such, educational stakeholders are not simply change-resistant if they do not adopt a policy – they are actors in the implementation process who play a part in specifying how it will play out in local settings. From the interview data collected, it is clear that there was considerable change and uncertainty in the local and national environments in which the centres were situated. Managers have to be very adept to maintain a strategic course in the face of an influx of environmental instability. Good management in schools and colleges involves far more than assuring the smooth-running of internal processes: it involves navigating the political and policy sea. Schools and colleges have previously been described as incorporating policies wholesale, accommodating them within existing structures or containing policies by absorbing them without significant change to existing structures. This research shows that educational institutions cannot afford to engage wholesale with every national policy because they do not all meet 'policy tests' that educational leaders have in mind.

1.3.2 Policy Reforms

For most schools and colleges, the 14-19 Reform programme is closely identified with the introduction of the Diploma and its component functional skills requirement. Most of the centres had opted for 'cautious engagement' with this new qualification with relatively few students taking the Diploma, particularly at level 3. This may reflect both centre and student caution at taking up a relatively untried qualification which would take up nearly all the curriculum time. The most positive responses about the Diploma came from centres which had engaged with it more fully by, for example, dropping other vocational courses, and were running with larger numbers of students. Furthermore, most centres have adopted a wait-and-see approach, especially given the political uncertainties around the qualification in the new political arena. What emerged from the fieldwork was the important role of BTEC qualifications in many centres' curriculum offer – and how centres were reluctant to move from these to the untried Diploma. The other 14-19 reforms appeared to have had limited impact at the time of the visits. Foundation learning had been welcomed by those involved, while the changes to GCSE and GCE A levels had, in the first two terms of 2009-10, had little direct impact on teaching and learning.

1.3.3 Partnerships

The role of school partnerships in delivering the 14-19 entitlement was a key part of the educational reforms. Centres in the CReSt project reported a wide variety of partnerships, which worked in a number of different ways. Collaborative work was conceptualised as a partnership continuum, with four points, which considered the processes involved: (i) trading services where centres bought, sold or exchanged services and resources (including curriculum delivery, expertise, and space or equipment), with little joint planning or joint delivery; (ii) responsive joint planning with centres responding to a particular perceived need or policy requirement, with the partnership work solely focussed on a particular issue; (iii) systemic partnership where centres have established ways of working together and plan strategically as a group: they may also work responsively but their agenda for joint work is self-regulated and (iv) joint venture describes occasions where institutions have become, in some respects, a single legal entity. Of these types of partnership, trading services and responsive joint planning were the most common. The way in which partnerships worked was influenced by the purpose of the partnership, opportunities to collaborate, the nature of centres and their views and models of collaboration. Partnerships that centres viewed with little enthusiasm were often developed purely in response to an externally-imposed requirement. Where 14-19 work was carried out in existing systemic partnerships, centres were often more positive about the processes and outcomes.

1.3.4 Student Perspectives: consultation, views and experiences, aspirations and engagement

Centres generally have systems in place for consulting students about a wide range of issues that relate directly to the quality of their educational experience. However, areas where students did not feel empowered were in relation to influencing institutional policy formation around curriculum and assessment provision and the qualifications that were available to them. An optimum model emerged for qualifications and examinations systems that focused on fairness and opportunity through the provision of different assessment components, modular structures of delivery and variety in types of qualifications available. However, such a model was in tension with considerations about the amount of assessment that young people experience in their education life-times, the currency of different qualifications, their usefulness in the university and job market places and the relevance of what they are doing at this phase of education to their own aspirations and educational goals.

Student aspirations overall were high with large proportions of responses referring to wishes to engage with higher education and professional jobs. Centres tended to help students achieve personal goals by focusing on personal and inter-personal issues, such as development of personal skills, relationships, attitudes and identity, and on educational issues such as qualifications and learning. Support for future careers also featured in these responses. Furthermore, links between aspirations and the impact of reforms at this phase of education must be seen in the context of raising attainment levels and concrete attitudes of young people towards the realities of employment opportunities as well as higher educational aspirations. The data around disengagement reflected debates in the area by showing that students' levels of engagement are not fixed. Students explained that their relationships with their teachers and peers often impacted on how well they engaged. A positive relationship with a teacher and lessons which utilised a variety of teaching methods seemed to work best in terms of engaging students, whereas poor relationships, feeling labelled, and the quality of teaching could demotivate students. What also emerges from this chapter is that despite disengagement, students for the most part remained aspirational and recognised the value of their education.

1.3.5 Teacher perspectives

The impact of the 14-19 Reforms seemed to vary across teachers and centres. The survey data in particular demonstrated that for teachers there had been only a limited impact on their classroom practices. The overall picture was one of whole class teaching with a strong emphasis on preparing for examinations and improving examination results. Linked to this was the goal of raising student aspirations and to encourage lifelong learning. While still a high priority, teachers reported being less directly involved in the routes their students took for their subsequent educational development. Furthermore, teachers were aware of the reforms' intention to offer a

broader range of curriculum choices and of ways of teaching and learning, as well as this stage of the 14-19 curriculum becoming more flexible, yet they were not convinced that this led students to being more satisfied with the choices available. Teachers tended to be cautiously enthusiastic about the reforms – they welcomed the potential the reforms offered but were also concerned about overall impact in the long term.

1.3.6 Parent perspectives

Previous research indicates that parents play a significant role in children's learning and development. The CReSt study included an examination of parental engagement in education. The data suggests four core themes that are particularly relevant to the relationship between centres and parents: (i) centre staff and students recognise that parents have a significant impact not only on student learning but also on students' curriculum choices and career aspirations; however, it was also recognised that some students may react against parental advice and that some parents may have unrealistic expectations about their child's potential achievement; (ii) centres emphasised the need to communicate with parents, recognising that the complexity of the curriculum reforms may be confusing; (iii) there appears to be considerable variation in the amount of parental engagement with centres and in the expectations that parents have of centres and (iv) many parents have misgivings about the reforms, stemming partly from concerns about the equivalence of the new qualifications and also from disquiet about the future/longevity of these developments.

1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

To summarise, the main messages for educational policy resulting from this research are:

- Educational stakeholders make and shape policy as well as governments (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5)
- National policies are only one part of the policy environment that educational institutions need to consider (Chapter 4)
- Educational institutions often need to have a longer term view than policies might support and educational leaders have key 'policy tests' in mind when they consider engagement with reforms (Chapter 4)
- Involvement of educational stakeholders (leaders, students, teachers, parents) in the creation and formulation of policy would give the objectives a greater chance of success because it would lead to better understanding of the likely uptake (Chapters 4, 7, 8 and 9)
- Educators, parents and students are knowledgeable about existing local, national and international arrangements that impact upon policy implementation, including policy clashes (Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9)

- There is a high level of educational and occupational aspiration amongst students at the 14-19 level (Chapters 7 to 9)
- Obligations to consult young people meaningfully on policy formation and development need to be met. 'Disengaged' students should be included in any forms of consultations (Chapters 7 and 9)
- Educational policies need to be developed with a consideration of their impacts upon and integration with existing educational structures (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)

1.5 Why you should read the main report

It is likely that our intended audiences will be selective about the reading of this report. We draw out below in Table 1, the main findings from each chapter and ways in which different constituencies might engage with the issues raised.

Chapter focus	For policy-makers	For education institutions	For researchers
2) Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad conclusions in relation to national reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A depiction of the tensions that can arise between top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons learned from a multi-site, longitudinal research project
3) Research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and conduct of the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and conduct of the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct of longitudinal, multiple-case study research
4) Strategic management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How educational leaders take decisions about engaging with policy • Educational leaders are not simply change-resistant: they have legitimate management concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategic checklist of considerations regarding education policy, drawn from experienced teacher-manager professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational leaders have to be strategically-minded to buffer their organisations from policy flux • Educational leaders can and do take strategic decisions
5) Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and colleges' reactions to the 14-19 Reforms • Important developments for institutions that were not part of the policy scene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general view of educational institutions' reactions to the detail of the reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thematic report of institutions' responses to the reforms • An outline of changes that were raised by stakeholders that were not part of the 14-19 reform agenda

Chapter focus	For policy-makers	For education institutions	For researchers
6) Institutional partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to the 14-19 institutional landscape to support entitlement and Diploma policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of how educational institutions are working together and their reasons for partnering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A continuum of partnership working
7) Student views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to educational goals by students • Student's views on the reforms • Need for more involvement of young people in policy consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' views on the reforms • How students could be consulted on structural and high-level issues in educational institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An inter-disciplinary look at children's rights, student voice and the 14-19 educational reforms
8) Student aspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of educational and occupational aspirations • Students largely feel supported by educational institutions to become the kind of people they want to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students, though not all, feel they are supported by their educational institution to become the kind of people they want to be • Qualifications are recognised as very important for young people's futures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of student aspiration • Relation between student aspiration and opportunity • Causal direction between aspiration, attainment and life chances
9) Disengagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence of educational goals amongst 'disengaged' students • Reasons for temporary disengagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The many causes of student disengagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for a clearer definition of engagement
10) Teachers' views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2009-10 there was variability in direct involvement with the reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concerns and priorities of teacher respondents in 2009-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demands outside the classroom seemed to cause greatest pressure upon teachers
11) Parental involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of parents in qualification choice • Variation in parental involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of communication with parents • Lack of obvious engagement might not mean disinterest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of leveraging the role of parents in education

Table 1: Chapter content from the perspectives of policy-makers, educators and researchers

1.6 Acknowledgements

We would like to offer a special thanks to each of the centres that participated in this research project. We must also express gratitude to the project advisors in each of the centres for their time and energy acting as our point of contact and recruiting staff and students in their respective centres to take part in the research. Similarly we must thank the governors, school managers, partnership co-ordinators, teachers, students and parents who participated and are the key stakeholders in this research. It is our hope that your opinions and perspectives regarding 14-19 educational reform will impact upon and ultimately influence policy makers.

We are grateful for the insight and guidance offered by:

- our Project Board - Alison Matthews, Mike Coles, Leonor Rodriguez-Jaramillo, Rhian Dent, Jas Dhillon, Bridie Sullivan, Lynne Upton, Rebecca Rylatt, Margaret Lawson, Susanna Greenwood
- the CReSt Steering Group - Alison Matthews, Delyth Chambers, Harvey Goldstein, Patricia Murphy, Mike Cresswell, Joy Kettyle, Philip Lidstone and Patricia Broadfoot;
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The ambitious idea for this project, spanning the entire reform programme and representing educational institutions in England, came from Alison Matthews (Head of Research, QCDA).

2 Overview: Education Reform in Schools and Colleges

2.1 Delivering educational reform

Internationally, governments want to drive up standards quickly (McDonnell, 2005) to improve the skills supply for the knowledge economy (e.g. Leitch, 2006). The scope of the Labour government's 14-19 Educational Reform programme could be taken as an indication of their desire to improve education in England quickly. Their *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan* (DCSF, 2005) and *Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps* (DCSF, 2008a) include the following initiatives, some of which are emphasised more (e.g. raising the participation age) or less (e.g. General diplomas) with the updated policy document.

- Functional Skills
- Specialised Diplomas
- General Diplomas
- Key Stage 3 curriculum
- A-level changes (including introduction of A* & stretch and challenge, reduction in the number of modules and reduction in coursework)
- GCSE changes (modular courses, controlled assessment)
- Foundation learning
- Raising the participation age
- Prospectus developments
- 14-19 partnership developments
- Increased participation in apprenticeships
- Reduction in the proportion of young people NEET
- National Skills Academies
- Vocational Specialist Schools
- Changes to funding arrangements

With such a wide array of initiatives, the Labour government were aware of the need for a coordinated implementation plan. In the *Next Steps* policy document (DCSF, 2008a: 73), there is discussion of the local, regional and national levels of delivery. Essentially, this is a top-down approach to policy implementation that maps out the way it will operate at regional and local levels. In their review of 14-19 Education and Training, Pring et al. (2009: 169) write that there is:

“... a top-down approach to governance, which relies on unelected arm's length agencies, policy-steering mechanisms and institutional autonomy to shape the organisational landscape and 14-19 provision.”

A substantive question arising from this research for politicians, policy-makers and practitioners alike, is the extent to which top-down implementation approaches deliver policy objectives. In Chapter four we refer to the well-established 'implementation gap', in which top-down models do not achieve their objectives because of how local factors impact upon the way that policies play out in practice. Looking at the reforms from schools and colleges' perspectives, as this research does, problems with the top-down national model of policy implementation were evident in our findings. Chapter four shows that well-managed educational institutions needed to have a longer-term strategy than might be supported by politically-driven national reforms. Head Teachers and Principals needed to consider the impact that reforms might have upon the shape and capacity of their organisation to deliver the needs of their stakeholders in the future, should the political climate change. From the perspective of educational institutions, national reforms are but one player in the multi-agency landscape in which they operate. Policies interact with each other at local, regional and national levels in unintended ways and educational leaders need to be skilful operators to ensure that they understand what policies will mean in practice for their organisations. Head Teachers and Principals are a rich, under-utilised resource (Gunter and Forrester, 2009) for policy-makers because many of them understand well how policy operates on the ground, how that varies across institutions and geographical locations and, importantly, they have policy memory. That policy memory has resulted in policy learning for the management of schools and colleges in many of the institutions we studied, meaning that they do not become early adopters of every new policy, but consider them selectively, often in a business-like fashion.

The implications of the national and institutional level perspectives can create tensions in the system. Policy-makers have sometimes been noted as seeing educational institutions and teachers as change-resistant, whilst teachers and their managers are frequently portrayed as being pushed from pillar to post by an avalanche of reform. Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010: 550-551) list 177 different policies being enacted in four case study schools that they investigated. From a policy perspective, what is a government to do when they perceive a need for change and a short time to achieve it? There are undoubtedly problems with our education system. For example, too few young people leave education with the skills for life. Notwithstanding, continuous overhaul of the system through different policies, levers and restrictions can result in wasted energy that could be better placed. Our view of the educators we interviewed is that they were largely thirsty for change, but for the right changes that would deliver the intended policy objectives: many of which they shared with policy-makers. One message from this research is that more freedom for institutions to adapt strategies would be a more appropriate policy tactic, to meet objectives and deal with the complexity of local situations.

On one side, successive governments have tried to liberate schools and colleges (e.g. Academies and Free Schools policies), but from another angle, there is a centralisation of policy development and control (Pring et al., 2009: 190). Perhaps this liberates schools from local authority control and some might see local authorities as one of the problems. Our data showed mixed views on the support of local authorities for schools and colleges – some local authority personnel were clearly very knowledgeable and at the centre of activities, whilst in other cases that was less so. It will be interesting to see how the Free Schools policies impact upon institutions' engagement with educational reforms over the coming years. No doubt many educational leaders are considering this policy in relation to the policy tests we have drawn from our interviews with them (see Chapter 4).

The meaning of the 14-19 Educational Reform programme shifted over the course of the year in which this research was completed. Initially, the phrase meant 'Specialised Diplomas' to interviewees, but over the course of the year, it came to mean the Diplomas, apprenticeships, general qualifications and foundation learning. The latter formulation came from a government policy document, which many educators received through their local education authorities. In fact, those four elements under-represented the complexity of the reform programme, but this was probably a useful communicative device. Many of the institutions we visited talked about factors that were affecting them, which may have been local, regional, national or international, that were not part of the 14-19 reforms. A good example of this was changes to BTEC qualifications, which appeared nowhere on the 14-19 radar, yet were having a large impact upon teaching and learning in schools and colleges. From institutions' perspectives, the 14-19 reform programme was not the only consideration and for many of them, it was not the most important either. However, the 14-19 reforms fitted with some of the institutions' own strategic agendas and were therefore important insofar as they related to their own goals.

Some of the reforms (e.g. Diplomas and entitlement) required structural change to the education system because they were built upon the premise that schools and colleges would work in regional partnerships (see Chapter 6). Some readers will find our use of the term 'education system' jars with them because there are those who argue that we have a mosaic of providers rather than a system (Pring et al, 2009: 171). This exacerbates the issue, as some of the reforms required an enormous shake-up of existing arrangements and there was variability in the extent to which this was desirable or achievable for the institutions we studied. Organisational alliances, mergers and internal re-structuring soak up resources and consume energy. To the extent that these new arrangements deliver the policy objectives, the energy is well spent. Thus far into the research, activity around partnerships can be observed, but the improvement in provision for students has yet to materialise in many cases. Given the time span of the reforms, that is to be expected to some extent.

This research is based upon a rich source of data from a variety of educational stakeholders – Principals, governors, teachers, partnership managers, curriculum planners, students and parents. Ultimately, educational reform is delivered through these stakeholders. Parents, for example, were clearly involved in schools’ and colleges’ decisions regarding uptake of the Diplomas. Many interviewees told us that it had been difficult to persuade parents of the benefits of an un-tried and un-tested qualification for their children. A significant message for policy-makers is that consideration needs to be given to the likely decision-makers in the uptake of policy, and formulation of the policy should take account of their views. Further, communication strategies are needed with these groups. Parental involvement in education is an area that warrants further research (see Chapter 11).

A central feature of the 14-19 reforms related to young people and their experience of education and training. Thus, this formed a key aspect of the current research. The areas of interest included the experience of students who were considered disengaged from learning at various levels, the aspirations of young people at this age and the drive to include the ‘student voice’ in understanding the development and implementation of 14-19 educational reforms. The population of young people described as NEET (not in education, employment or training) has been considered an enormous waste of potential. Policy attempted to address the almost 10% of young people between 16 and 18 who form this NEET group, the argument being that if they remain in education and training it will improve the quality of their lives, increase the level of skills in the workforce and enable the UK to compete more effectively in the global economy.

Key aims of the 14-19 educational reform programme (DCSF, 2005 and 2008a) were to transform the 14-19 phase of education and training to provide better and more applicable educational experiences for all young people and to raise aspirations as well as quality and standards at this phase. These aims were part of wider goals to make England ‘the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up’ (DCSF, 2008a: 4) as well as putting the ‘the needs of children, young people and parents at the centre of everything we do’ (ibid, 4). Through the 49 focus groups conducted with young people and questionnaires from a sample of students in 40 centres, students told us that that they were highly committed to educational and occupational aspirations. Few of the ‘disengaged’ students that we talked to were without educational aspiration. In fact, the ‘disengaged’ students were highly engaged with aspects of learning, as the teachers in many of the institutions attested to (Chapters 8 and 9). Young people told us that while they were consulted about many things to do with their physical and social environments, they were not specifically consulted about the reforms (Chapter 7). Furthermore, they tended not to be consulted about changes made to those aspects of their institutions that they described as ‘higher level’ and ‘structural’ i.e. school policies such as curriculum and assessment policies, and qualification selection. For example, choices about examination boards, syllabuses and

assessment formats did not involve student input. Yet students had significant and pertinent views on these matters, as they affect them directly and they have a vested interest in them. Contrasting the views of different stakeholders, a picture emerged of differing currencies for educational qualifications. Young people questioned the currency of some existing qualifications (e.g. BTECs) in terms of their value for future employment or entry to university. The exchange rate for these qualifications is fixed for the performance tables used to evaluate educational institutions, so the currency for existing qualifications was questioned less frequently by teachers than by students. The currency of new qualifications (e.g. Diplomas), however, was raised by all parties.

Aspiration was generally not lacking in the student body participating in this research (Chapters 7 – 9). Given the current economic climate, opportunity might be a scarcer commodity than aspiration. Certainly, more could be done to make consultation and participation more meaningful for students in decisions about their learning environments and structures and we reflect on these issues relating to this within a context of children's rights (Chapter 7). At local and national levels, the challenge will be for the government and educational institutions to meet legal obligations, under the children's rights legislation, to consult young people in constructive ways about all matters of policy that affect them directly; the arena of education should not be slow to respond to these obligations.

We turn next to a brief outline of the research conducted. The detail in the subsequent chapters will be of interest to many readers with different roles to play in the implementation of successful educational reform.

2.2 The 14-19 Centre Research Study (CReSt)

The primary aim of the CReSt project is to study the impact of the 14-19 Educational Reforms as a whole upon educational institutions in England over the five-year implementation period. The QCDA project began with previous, 'baseline' studies, which were conducted by two teams of researchers who studied mainstream and special schools respectively (Gorard et al, 2008; QCDA, 2009). The case reports and final reports from these studies informed the current research, as they described the institutions prior to the 14-19 reform programme. The current study's research aims raised a number of methodological issues, which are discussed in detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3). An unusual aspect of this project was that it stood back from the narrow evaluation of a particular reform (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010, 548), which cannot take stock of the complementary and competing effects of the many reforms that are affecting educational institutions at any time. Additional issues with single policy evaluations include the problem that they are often populated with early-adopter enthusiasts that are likely to

be atypical and therefore generalisation of the findings is problematical. Making strong claims for the representativeness of our sample of schools and colleges is also problematical because there are so many ways in which educational institutions can be categorised in England. Pring *et al.* (2009: 171) described the 14-19 institutional arrangements as a 'mosaic' rather than a system for this reason. Nonetheless, an attempt was made to generate a representative sample of 45 schools and colleges for inclusion in this study, based upon geographical location, deprivation, size, intake, outcomes, denomination and subject specialism (Gorard *et al.* 2008: 3). A further seven special schools were added to the sample, making a total of 52 institutions. The special schools were geographically dispersed and diverse in nature, including a young offenders' institution (QCDA, 2009).

At the outset of this project we were aware that educational institutions are perpetually in an environment of policy flux (Galvin, 2008: 125). Thus, it made more sense to conceptualise the design as a multiple case-study than a pre- and post-test design. Impact cannot be 'measured' in this research because the processes involved were too complex, with more potential explanatory variables than observations. Rather, a rich, descriptive account of policy playing out in practice could be provided. Research instruments were designed to be open to stakeholders' perspectives: the ways in which they saw policy and its effects.

The project was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (now the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency, QCDA) managing the contract on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education, DfE). By late 2010, with a new coalition Government in place, the 14-19 Educational Reforms were the outgoing government's vision for the education system. By studying 18 schools and colleges over the last year, we have found that these institutions needed to be wily about education policy because, in the words of one of the Head Teachers, "Governments come and go". This lack of stability has deep implications for the ways in which institutions behave in response to educational policy. Our conclusion is that rational actors must take account of this environmental instability if they are to act in the best interests of their institution. Environmental instability was a key feature that affected our research design *and* findings. Ultimately, environmental instability has also affected our capacity to study its effects upon educational institutions. The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) will be closed by the new government and the CReSt project has been terminated as part of that process. One of our contractual obligations was to keep a 'risk register' that detailed the potential problems the project might face, rated their likelihood and impact and listed any potential mitigating actions we might take; 'Changing policy climate' was always one of our highest risks.

Many studies with a longitudinal design would have struggled to draw substantive conclusions part-way through the research, but we have drawn some significant conclusions from the study and these are detailed in the following chapters.. We achieved this goal through the construction of the research team, careful management of the voluminous data collection and analysis and a thematic approach to the analysis of the case study data. We outline our approach in detail in Appendix J (Project Overview) so that lessons can be drawn from this approach by other researchers conducting large-scale longitudinal studies, as we have done from researchers who have previously written on this topic.

2.3 Conclusions and recommendations

To summarise, the main messages for educational policy resulting from this research are:

- Educational stakeholders make and shape policy (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5)
- National policies are only one part of the policy environment that educational institutions need to consider (Chapter 4)
- Educational institutions often need to have a longer term view than policies might support and educational leaders have key ‘policy tests’ in mind when they consider engagement with reforms (Chapter 4)
- Involvement of educational stakeholders in the creation and formulation of policy would give the objectives a greater chance of success because it would lead to better understanding of the likely uptake (Chapters 4, 7, 8 and 9)
- Educators, parents and students are knowledgeable about existing local, national and international arrangements that impact upon policy implementation, including policy clashes (Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9)
- There is a high level of educational and occupational aspiration amongst students at the 14-19 level (Chapters 7 to 9)
- Obligations to consult young people meaningfully on policy formation and development need to be met. ‘Disengaged’ students should be included in any forms of consultations (Chapters 7 and 9)
- Educational policies need to be developed with a consideration of their impacts upon and integration with existing educational structures (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)

3 Methodology

3.1 Aims

The CReSt research project seeks to understand the impact of the extensive range of activities (or strands) that go to make up the 14-19 reform programme in schools and colleges in England. This is understood to be a complex contemporary phenomenon, which emanates from:

- the range of activities and opportunities within the reform programme
- the social dynamics and interactions that exist, and are created, within the institutions by teachers, students, administrators, management and parents/guardians

Understanding the social relations within and between these key stakeholders is significant if a comprehensive exploration of the complex interactions of multiple changes occurring within these centres is to be achieved. This approach attempts to provide a holistic systematic review of the reform process and a contextualized understanding of the inter-strand impact of these reforms.

Separate evaluations of the individual reforms are being conducted in other research projects details of which can be obtained from QCDA). This research is interested in the overall effect of *all* of these changes upon educational institutions and is not designed to assess the impact of any single policy. It was defined by changes and reforms current at the outset of the project. For example, apprenticeships are not included in Figure 1 because they were not changed and therefore were not seen as a reform when the research was designed. The educational reforms of relevance for the CReSt project at the outset of the research are presented in diagrammatic form below.

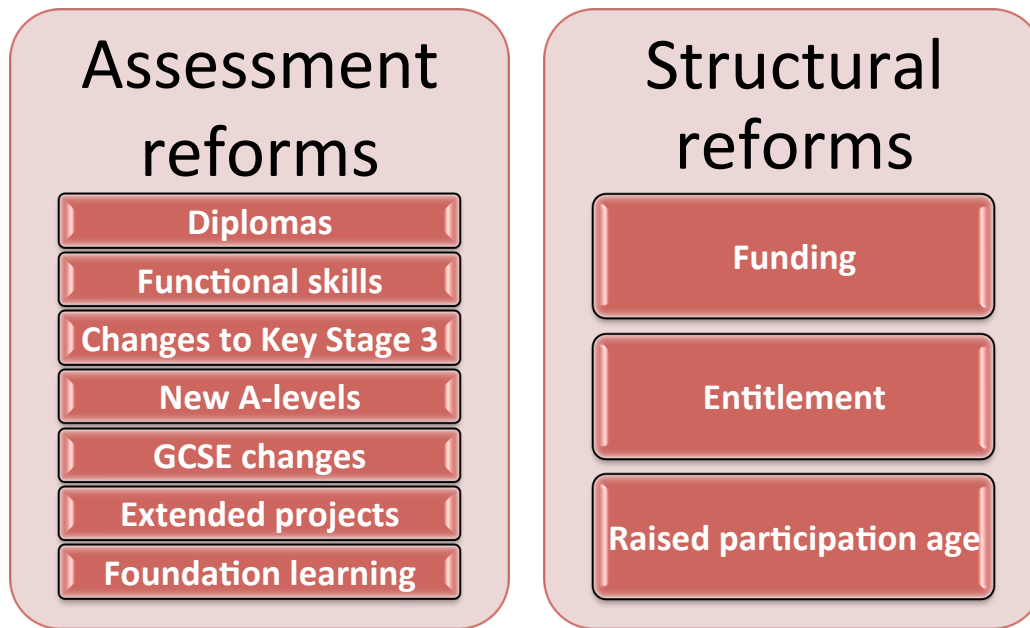


Figure 1: 14-19 Reforms summary diagram

Not only was the educational reform programme wide-ranging at the beginning of the study, it was open to change during the course of the research. Therefore, this research sets out to describe and analyse changes in educational institutions that are associated with the educational reforms and other possible societal and educational changes occurring during the span of the project. Already, significant changes have been made to the 14-19 phase of education that were not anticipated at the beginning of this research. A baseline study was conducted (Gorard et al., 2008), which created case reports for the participating organisations before the educational reforms began. CReSt 14-19 investigates the impact of the reforms as they are taking place and its effects once they are in place. As such, research conducted over time periods, including pre and post 'intervention' (educational reforms) needs to be aware of changes and the likely effects they may have. Our contemporary phenomena are the educational reforms and their societal effects upon schools and colleges and the people who comprise them. Interactions between a school or college and the policy context mean that it not easy to disentangle the phenomenon from the context. Certainly, in the real-world situation in which this research was conducted, there were more variables that could have causal impacts upon the phenomena of focus than data points.

3.2 Design

The CReSt study is a longitudinal, collective instrumental multiple-case study, which involves the participation of 52 Centres. The case studies are *evaluative* case studies (Bassey, 1990), which means that the research was designed to provide 'educational actors or decision makers with

information that will help them judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions' (Stenhouse, 1985:50). Due to the number and variety of types of centres participating in the project, the case studies form a collective understanding of the response to and impact of the 14-19 reform programme (Stake, 1995).

3.2.1 Multiple Case Study

Thus the CReSt study employed a case study research strategy using a longitudinal multiple-case, embedded design:

A case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real-life' context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic, programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action. (Simons, 2009: 21)

In single case study research, the intricacies, situatedness and unique aspects of the case are under investigation, often in relation to a key issue. The depth afforded by case study research yields rich data capable of understanding the complexities of the issue under investigation. However the CReSt 14-19 research was designed to be conducted over five years (2009-2014) with 52 centres, leading to 52 case studies, which significantly augments the amount of understanding that can be gleaned on the key issues. This report is based on case study visits to 18 of the 52 centres involved, but also utilises survey data from all 52 centres. Multiple cases can counter the criticism that single case-study research faces in terms of limited generalisability and potential lack of clarity (Yin, 2009). More significantly the benefit of multiple case study research is that it provides a greater understanding of the phenomenon (i.e. the impact of the reform programme on schools and colleges across England) as it occurs under different conditions and in different situations in each of the 52 centres participating in this project between 2009 and 2014.

3.2.2 Centres as cases

A variety of educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and special units make up the 52 centres involved in the project. In relation to the design of the research, centres are conceptualized as complex entities, they are individual instrumental cases which are studied collectively to examine the response and impact of the 14-19 reform programme. However taken together, following the same procedures, protocol, and purpose, they form a collective case study capable of furnishing cross-case comparisons and a collective understanding of the key issue. As Stake (2006) notes, more productive illustrations of a particular phenomenon can be formed on the basis of detailed analysis of local cases in which it exists. Each centre is viewed as a

bounded location which is socially mediated from without as well as within. Seeing schools and colleges as social arenas (Lave, 1988; Wenger,1998) or even as communities in discursive spaces (Stables, 2003) enables them to be examined through multiple perspectives and in relation to the social impact of the reform programme, which they are required to implement and comes from beyond their boundaries. To produce this multi-perspective view of each school or college, data was collected about the processes within the educational institutions and on the views and experiences of those within the organisations upon whom the reforms were likely to have most impact.

Potential cases for this multiple case study were identified using Edubase² by Gorard et al. (2008). The 52 cases represent a sample of educational institutions across England, which includes 45 mainstream schools and colleges and 7 special units. Of the original sample of 52 centres from the baseline study, two centres could no longer participate due to actual or impending closure. Replacement centres which were willing to participate in the study were identified. Consequently, two centres that did not participate in the baseline study have been included in this research.

3.2.3 Sampling cases during the period of the research 2009-2010 and sampling plans for cases during 2010-2013

The findings presented in this report are based on data collected from visits to 18 centres during 2009-2010. The selection of the 18 centres visited in 2009-2010 was made from the sample of centres whose representatives attended the annual conference in 2009. A description of these 18 centres and an indication of the geographical location are presented in Table 2 below:

DESCRIPTION OF CENTRES VISITED 2009-10	
11-16 SCHOOL	5
11-19 SCHOOL	1
13-19 SCHOOL	1
16-19 SIXTH FORM COLLEGE	3
ACADEMY	1
FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE	2
INDEPENDENT	1
SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTRES	3
SPECIALIST COLLEGE	1
LOCATION OF CENTRES VISITED 2009-10	
NORTH	7
CENTRAL	2

² Edubase is a database of educational establishments in England and Wales <http://www.edubase.gov.uk>

SOUTH	9
URBAN/CITY	6
SUBURBAN/SMALL TOWN	6
RURAL	6

Table 2: Showing the distribution of the 18 centres visited in 2009-10 by description and location

Table 2 shows that the findings reported in this annual report come from data collected from a range of different types of institutions and a range of geographical locations.

The CReSt research team planned sampling procedures for the 17 centres to be visited in 2010-2011 and the 17 centres to be visited in 2011-2012. Centres were to be contacted by the research team and a convenient date for a visit was to be provided by the centre. This form of sampling was selected in order to ensure the continued participation of the centres, which ultimately results in the successful participation of all centres in two centre visits for the full duration of the project. The timelines of planned fieldwork over the duration of this project, including the baseline study carried out 2008-2009, are detailed in the next section on longitudinal research.

3.3 Longitudinal research

The CReSt project was designed as a longitudinal study in which data collection was planned at intervals over the period of the project. The baseline team conducted visits with the 52 centres in 2007-8 as described in Gorard et al. (2008). The CReSt research team intended to carry out the visits to the 52 centres between 2009 and 2012. Thus, 18 centres were visited in 2009-2010, with a further 17 centre visits planned for 2010-2011; and the remaining 17 centre visits were planned for 2011-12. The CReSt team then planned to visit all of the 52 centres for a second time in 2012-13. Therefore each centre would have been visited twice by the research team over the life of the project. A timeline of the actual and planned visits to the 52 centres is presented below in Figure 2. However, as this project will not be continuing, the subsequent fieldwork outlined for 2010-11 onwards will not be undertaken.

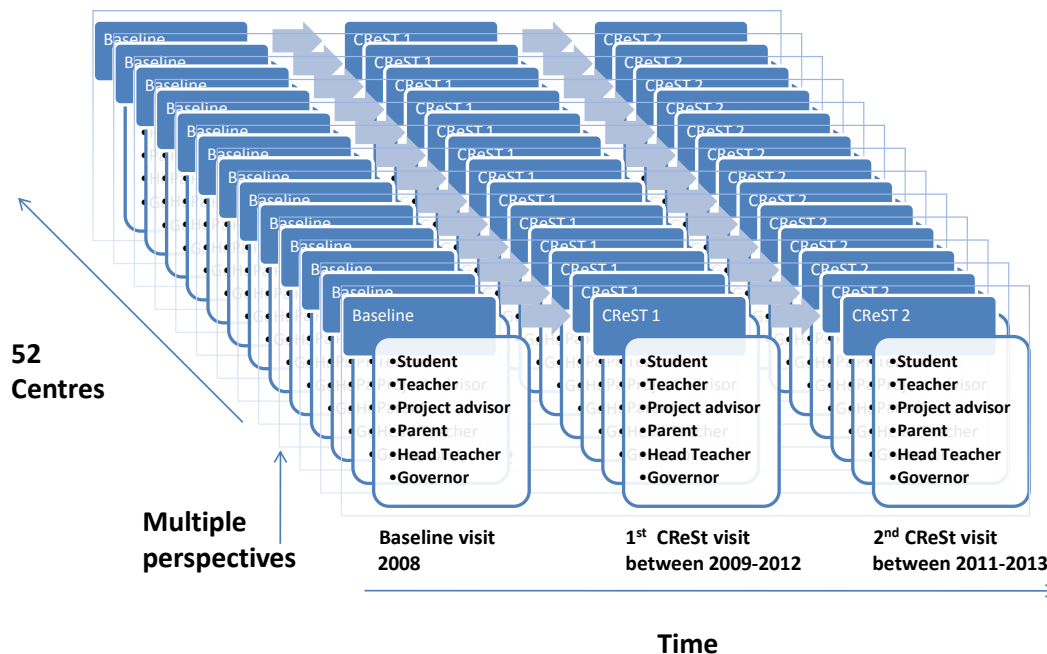


Figure 2: Diagram showing the timeline of centre visits and the multi-perspectival approach designed by the CReSt 14-19 project

The diagram also indicates which views were obtained from the range of stakeholders at each centre (i.e. students, teachers, parents, project advisors, Head Teachers, governors) at certain intervals. This facilitates the investigation of change over time within a particular group of stakeholders within and between 52 centres.

The details of how these perspectives were obtained through the data collection methods are discussed in following sections. However, before proceeding it is important to note that in longitudinal research maintaining contact and the development of a good working relationship between the research team and the centres involved in the study is paramount to continued participation.

3.3.1 The role of the annual conference in maintaining contact with centres

Every year, the research team and project advisors meet at the annual CReSt conference. The annual conference was a further means through which contact with the centres involved in the study could be maintained, particularly during those years when the centres were not visited by

the CReSt researchers. It was also a means through which to obtain feedback from centres about current findings from the research which could also inform developments in data collection. Furthermore, contact was maintained at the point of case report writing, when the project advisor was consulted in relation to the accuracy of factual reporting present in the case report. The relationships between the research team and the centres were generally ones of engagement around the phenomenon being investigated, centre issues, and negotiation in regard to the research and reporting processes.

3.4 Data collection

In order to produce a multi-perspective view on the impact of the 14-19 reform programme, from each of the 52 centres, data was collected using a mixed-method approach. This approach to data collection counters the potential disadvantages of an over-reliance on one single method of data collection and allows the same phenomenon to be investigated from a number of perspectives. The mixed-method approach to data collection employed by the CReSt team used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups carried out during centre visits. Documentary evidence was also collected during centre visits and is detailed in section 3.5. Further additional data was collected through the CReSt annual conference, and accessible national databases. The procedures for data collection using online surveys are described in section 3.4.1. The procedures for data collection during centre visits are described in section 3.4.2. The research instruments, i.e. questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group schedules are described in detail in section 3.5.

3.4.1 Data collection through electronic surveys and sampling respondents

Methodologically, in longitudinal research, there is a need to ensure that contact with cases is maintained and participant attrition is minimized (Cotter et al., 2002). Therefore the administration of questionnaires annually was simultaneously a means of data collection and a way in which contact can be maintained and possible attrition countered.

Teacher and learner surveys were conducted in each centre during the period 2009-2010. These were administered electronically and sampling of respondents was carried out in conjunction with the project advisor. In the case of the student questionnaire the project advisor identified a mixed-ability group from Year 11 and Year 13 (where applicable). To achieve this, it was suggested that 50 pupils in each year group are evenly selected across tutor groups, with the first few and the last few students on the register being asked to complete the questionnaire. For example, if there were 5 tutor groups, ten students from each tutor group would complete the survey with the first five and last five on the register in each tutor group. In the case of the teacher questionnaire

distributed to all 52 centres during 2009-2010, project advisors were asked to distribute an email link to the survey to all teaching staff in the centre.

Questionnaires were delivered electronically to case institutions. Project advisors were sent an email on 1st March 2010 containing links to the Y11, Y13 and teacher surveys. An accessible, simplified version of the survey was created for students in special centres who may have struggled to access the language used in the standard versions. Staff at the special centres were asked to judge which questionnaire was most appropriate for each individual student.

Instructions in the email requested that advisors choose a mixed ability sample of 50 Year 11 and/or Year 13 students to complete the survey depending upon the centre (not all centres have both a Year 11 and a Year 13). The email suggested that tutor groups were used to provide a range of ability. Centres were also asked to request all their teachers to complete the teacher survey. Completion of the surveys was requested by 19 March 2010. The first email was followed up by a reminder email 2 weeks later, and a phone call 1 week after that. The survey closure date was extended to 20 May 2010, to allow for more responses.

The number of centres who took part in each survey can be seen in Tables 3 - 7.

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
		Centres	Students
11-16 school	9	7	239
11-18 school	24	17	521
Special Education centre	7	2	13
Total	40	26	773

Table 3: CReSt project centres and responses for Year 11 questionnaires

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
		Centres	Students
11-18 school	24	15	328
6 th form college	5	3	247
FE college	7	6	339
Special Education centre	7	2	14
Total	43	26	928

Table 4: CReSt project centres and responses for Year 13 questionnaires

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
		Centres	Students
11-16 school	9	-	-
11-18 school	24	-	-
6 th form college	5	-	-
FE college	7	-	-
Special Education centre	7	4	58
Total	52	4	58

Table 5: CReSt project centres and responses for Accessible student questionnaires

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
		Centres	Teachers
11-16 school	9	7	140
11-18 school	24	19	348
6 th form college	5	4	141
FE college	7	5	173
Special Education centre	7	7	80
Total	52	42	882

Table 6: CReSt project centres and responses for Teacher questionnaires

Some institutions choose to send out an email inviting all students in the year group to take part. A few of the smaller centres (particularly special centres) had less than 50 in each year group. As a result, differing numbers of students from each institution responded to the survey ranging from 5 to 66 respondents for the Year 11 survey and 5 to 134 respondents for the Year 13 survey (Table 7). The sampling method used raises questions about the representativeness of the results, certainly for some of the centres, and checks will need to be made in subsequent work on the representativeness of the sample nationally, for example in terms of prior educational attainment.

Responses per centre	Year 11	Year 13	Accessible	Teacher
Mean	29.7	35.7	14.5	21
Standard Deviation	16.0	34.7	11.3	18.3
Minimum - Maximum	5 - 66	5 - 134	6-31	1-79

Table 7: CReSt project centres and responses to questionnaires

3.4.2 Data collection during centre visits and sampling participants

As described in section 3.3, the research was designed to include two visits to each centre over the duration of the study. The centre visits are designed to take place over three days. For the visits conducted during 2009-2010, a centre visit protocol was produced (Appendix C). This protocol was followed by all researchers who visited the 18 centres during 2009-2010. A protocol which details the procedures for data collection during centre visits ensures a consistent and rigorous approach to the collection of data and the consistent and reliable use of the research

instruments administered during centre visits across a number of different centres by different researchers. Researcher field notes were also taken during the visits conducted during 2009-2010 in order to inform the description of the centre and its context for the purposes of producing a case report of this visit.

During the three-day centre visits conducted in 2009-2010, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were carried out using interview schedules. The recruitment of participants was coordinated by the project advisor who followed CReSt researcher guidelines. The guidelines for participant recruitment to teacher focus groups were as follows: 6-8 teachers with a mix of gender, experience and subject areas, (as far as possible). The guidelines for participant recruitment to student focus groups were as follows: Year 11: 6-8 students with varying achievement levels and gender; Year 13: 6-8 students of varying achievement levels and gender; Years 10-13: 6-8 students who are more, or less, disengaged from the learning process.

This type of negotiated approach to recruitment, accounts in a transparent manner for the differences and variation which can exist in individual centres, while at the same time meeting the aims of the research design. It was noted by the research team who carried out visits during 2009-2010 that, on occasion, in a number of centres those who were approached to participate were those who had been previously involved in student/teacher discussion groups for other research or reports. On other occasions the participants may have been those for whom the Project advisor had most immediate access. This research project does not make claims to report on behalf of all the views of all individuals in the centres. However the data collected from the learner and teacher questionnaires provides a larger sample of views and a degree of methodological triangulation with the data collected from the sample of individuals who took part in student and teacher focus groups. During the 2009-2010 visits, interviews and focus groups were conducted using interview schedules (Appendix E and section 3.5 below on Research Instruments) which included questions and visual prompts for discussion in relation to the 14-19 reform programme (Appendix D). The level of moderator involvement in the focus groups was moderate, as detailed in the centre visit protocol (Appendix C). These measures ensured that data was collected on the same topics from all centres visited by the research team. Information leaflets and consent forms were provided to all possible participants at the centres through the project advisor and only those participants who had completed consent forms participated in the data collection (see section 3.8 for Ethical Considerations addressed by the CReSt research team).

3.5 Research Instruments

Eleven research instruments in order to gather multi-perspectival data from each of the 52 Centres. Data on the views and experiences collected from a range of key stakeholders in each of the centres including: students, teachers, parents, curriculum managers, governors and Head Teachers allows for a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, i.e. the impact of the educational reforms on centres. The design of the research instruments (interview and focus group schedules and questionnaires) and the items which they contain were derived with reference to policy and relevant theoretical frameworks. To exemplify this process, the following example is given: the Principal interview schedule contains items originating from policy on strategic planning and relevant literature on human resources management, management of organisational collaborations and educational values.

A selection of these research instruments were piloted with project advisors at the annual conference in 2009. Feedback from the project advisors resulted in the amendment of particular items on the learner and teacher questionnaires and interview schedules. All of the changes suggested and indeed made were concerned with making the process of data collection more convenient and more transparent for participants. The research instruments used in this year's data collection are detailed below in Table 8. This table provides detailed information on the design, purpose, origin and procedure of each of these research instruments.

Instrument	Description	Purpose	Origin of items	Procedure
Project advisor /Curriculum manager interview schedule	A semi-structured interview designed to be carried out with the person appointed by the centre as point of contact for the project team. The same schedule was used to interview the centre's curriculum manager if the project advisor did not have a curriculum role.	To investigate how the centre has responded to reforms in terms of curriculum management; financial and logistical matters; human resource management; timetabling	Policy: review of 14-19 educational reform policy documents (DCSF, 2008; QCDA, 2009) produced items relating to curriculum, learning pathways, student choice, support for choice, teaching and learning. Theory: literature on philosophy of education; policy implementation; management of educational institutions	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit. Interview recorded and transcribed.
Partnership Manager interview schedule	A semi-structured interview designed to be carried out with the person recognized by the centre as the liaison between the centre and any partnerships/collaborations	To investigate patterns of collaborative working; links between partnership working and opportunities to learn.	Policy: Diplomas require centres to work in consortia with each other and employers. Theory: educational management and governance literatures, literature on mergers, alliances and partnerships more broadly.	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit. Interview recorded and transcribed.
Principal interview schedule/ Chair of Governors interview schedule	A semi-structured interview designed to be carried out with Principal or Head Teacher. The same schedule is used to interview the Chair of Governors	To investigate the patterns of collaborative working; links between partnership working and opportunities to learn; impact of the reforms upon strategic planning	Policy: implementing the 14-19 reforms impact upon the strategic planning for schools and colleges. Theory: literature on strategy, human resources management, management of organisational collaborations and educational values.	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit. Interview recorded and transcribed.
Teacher focus group schedule	A focus group schedule designed to be carried out with a group of teachers across a range of subjects, to represent a range of subject areas, both genders and at least one head of subject	To investigate the effect of the reforms upon teachers and their classroom practices.	Policy: Reforms relate to curricular and assessment changes, cross-institutional working; increased leaving age; personalisation Theory: literature on educational reforms, teacher practices and with teachers' educational values.	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit. Discussion recorded and transcribed.
Student focus group schedule: Year 10 Year 12	A focus group schedule designed to be carried out with 6-8 students in different year groups. The same focus group schedule is carried out with a group of students identified as disengaged	To investigate the views and opinions of learners on the wider context of their education; attitudes to teaching and learning; opportunities to engage with the reforms.	Policy: a review of 14-19 educational reform policy documents (DCSF, 2008; QCDA, 2009) produced items relating to student wellbeing ; happiness; personalisation; choice of routes;	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit. Discussion recorded and transcribed.

			widening participation; aspirations; achievement; consultation with young people on policy matters. Theory: literature related to motivation and identity; self-determination; children's rights and pupil voice.	
Parent interview schedule	A semi-structured interview schedule designed to be used during face-to-face interviews with parents or during telephone interviews.	To investigate parents' views about curriculum choices; support offered by centres; their child's progress; their contribution to their child's learning.	Policy: Parental involvement in education as pivotal in children's achievement (DCSF, 2007) and the need to understand the range of courses and qualifications that centres offer (DCSF, 2008). Theory: literatures on parents' involvement in their child's education and influence on learning.	Instrument employed by researcher during centre visit if possible or after the centre visit conducted by telephone. Interview recorded and transcribed.
Student questionnaire	An online questionnaire containing open and closed items designed to be completed by students.	To investigate students' views on their education and its relationship with their lives, aspirations and well-being.	Policy: a review of 14-19 educational reform policy documents (DCSF, 2008; QCDA, 2009) produced items relating to student wellbeing ; happiness; personalisation; choice of routes; entitlement; engagement; enjoyment; basic skills; increased leaving age; financial matters; widening participation; aspirations; achievement; consultation with young people on policy matters. Theory: literature related to motivation and identity; self-determination; children's rights and pupil voice.	Questionnaire delivered electronically to students once a year. The project advisors conduct the sampling and administration.
Teacher questionnaire	An online questionnaire containing open and closed items delivered electronically to teachers	To investigate the effect of the reforms upon teachers and their classroom practices.	Policy: Reforms relate to curricular and assessment changes, cross-institutional working; increased leaving age; personalisation Theory: literature on the educational reforms, teacher practices and with teachers' educational values.	Questionnaire delivered electronically to teachers via the project Advisors once a year.

Table 8: CReSt Research Instruments

As noted in earlier sections, additional data were collected during the centre visits in order to provide contextual data about the centre. Documentary evidence (listed in Table 9) which contributed specific information about each centre was used in the 2009-2010 case reports.

School/college strategic or development plan
Information on the school's/college's approach to teaching and learning
School/college curriculum, including qualifications offered
Outline of enrichment activities
School/college Prospectus
Information, advice and guidance practice for learners
Outline of which courses are running post 14 and/or post 16
Staffing structure
Staff list including staff responsibilities
Documents indicating partnership arrangements.

Table 9: List of documentary evidence collected during centre visits

3.6 Data collected during 2009-2010

The following two sections detail the amount and type of data collected through the electronic surveys and research visits in the 18 centres during 2009-2010.

3.6.1 Amount and type of data collected through electronic surveys and number of respondents

The administration of the teacher and student questionnaires during 2009-2010 resulted in over 2500 questionnaire responses. As detailed in Appendix F and Table 10 below, the student questionnaires were conducted with two year groups; 771 students responded from Year 11 and 1009 students responded from Year 13.

<i>Total number of teacher questionnaire respondents</i>	<i>Total number of student questionnaire respondents</i>
<i>Female: 542</i>	<i>Female: 999</i>
<i>Male: 338</i>	<i>Male: 781</i>
<i>Total: 880</i>	<i>Total: 1780</i>

Table 10: Number of respondents to electronic surveys

3.6.2 Amount and type of data collected during centre visits

Data collected from centre visits during 2009-2010 resulted in a total of 89 interviews and 66 focus groups. Each interview and focus group lasted between 60-90 minutes in length, producing transcriptions between 5000-12000 words in size. Over 30 interview/focus group participants at each centre contributed to the production of this data. The transcriptions of focus groups and interviews resulted in a qualitative database containing the in-depth views and experiences reported by over 500 respondents across England (Table 11). The size and breakdown of this qualitative database of over

1 million words is also illustrated in Figure J1 (see Appendix J). In addition over 180 texts were collected as documentary evidence from the 18 centres visited during 2009-2010.

Type of data	Number	Words transcribed
Project advisor interview	18	90,889
Curriculum manager interview	3	20,183
Partnership Manager interview	14	72,688
Principal/Head Teacher interview schedule	18	106,656
Governor interview schedule	15	84,691
Parent interview schedule	17	61,903
Additional interviews	4	10,501
Total number of interviews	89 interviews	
Teacher focus group	21	167,779
Student focus group: Year 11	9	96,242
Student focus group: Year 13	11	95,177
Student focus group: Disengaged	15	100,917
Additional student focus groups	10	33,210
Total number of focus groups	66 focus groups	
Documentary evidence	180 texts	

Table 11: Details of the amount and type of data collected during centre visits conducted during 2009-2010

3.7 Data Analysis

High quality research uses an analytical strategy which is capable of a) addressing the most significant aspect of the study, b) accounting for all relevant evidence and possible conflictual interpretations, and c) uses the researchers' expert knowledge (Yin, 2009). The analytical strategy adopted in this research project leads to the conclusions presented in the following chapters of this report on how the 18 centres visited in 2009-2010 responded to the 14-19 educational reform programme. This strategy further identifies the evidence-based propositions on the wider impact of the educational reforms and societal effects upon schools and colleges. Table 12 below shows the type of analyses and sources of data used in the corresponding chapters of this annual report. Chapters in this report include quantitative analyses, qualitative analyses or both types of analyses. as a result of the mixed-method approach taken in this study.

Chapter	Primary data source	Broader data informing the analysis
4) Management	Educational management and governance code, incorporating qualitative data from 116 interviews and focus groups, covering every instrument type (excluding quantitative)	Baseline case reports Current year case reports
5) Policy	Codes: (i) learning pathways, (ii), curricular and assessment changes and pressures, (iii) learner choice and curriculum personalisation, (iv) views on the 14-19 reforms, (v) basic skills, (vi) specialised diplomas, (vii) raising the participation age, (viii) entitlement, incorporating qualitative data from almost all interview and focus group conducted	Baseline final reports Data collection and analysis 2009-10
6) Partnerships	Codes: (i) centres and partnerships support, options and choices offered (ii) partnerships (iii) effects of inter-organisational working on teaching practices, incorporating qualitative data from 155,134, and 30 interviews and focus groups (respectively), covering every instrument type (excluding quantitative)	Other chapters in this volume Policy documents Evaluations of specific policies
7) Student Perspective	Codes: (i) curriculum and assessment changes and pressures (ii) views of 14-19 reforms (iii) voice, participation and rights (iv) philosophy and values of education from the 42 student focus groups (all types)	Published literature
8) Aspirations	Questions 14, 15, 16 and 17 from the Year 11 survey and the Year 13 survey, focusing on goals and aspirations, and how the school was helping students to be the kind of people they wanted to be.	
9) Disengagement	Codes: (i) engagement, motivation enjoyment (ii) aspirations (iii) philosophy and values of education (iv) views of 14-19 reforms (v) learner choice and curriculum personalisation, drawing upon data from 14 focus groups with disengaged students and 2 additional student focus groups.	
10) Teachers	Codes: (i) teacher workload (ii) teaching practices (iii) views on 14-19 reforms, from teacher focus groups and using the teacher focus group instrument. Quantitative data: utilising teacher questionnaire focusing on: (i) work pressures (ii) impact of 14-19 changes on the teacher's school or college.	
11) Parents	Codes: (i) parents' involvement in their child's education (ii) parents' evaluations of opportunities and choices, composed of qualitative data from 80 and 57 interviews and focus groups (respectively), covering every instrument type (excluding quantitative)	
Appendix F	Year 11: Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20	
Questionnaires	Year 13: Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20 Teacher: Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	

Table 12: Summary of data sources used in each chapter of the annual report

The interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaire items produced a type of data which takes the form of a text, i.e. a transcript or a written response in the case of the open-ended questionnaire items. They are a form of qualitative data, in which passages of text are examined as “proxy for experience” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

The first step in understanding the large amounts of data collected from centre visits was to code the qualitative comments transcribed from the interviews, focus groups and the open-ended questionnaire items. The CReSt research makes use of both policy/theory driven concepts and data-driven ideas. In educational research the two approaches to the coding of qualitative data is not exclusive. CReSt data has therefore been analysed both deductively (driven by theory/concepts) and inductively (driven by ideas emerging from the data). This is referred to as “retroduction” (Bulmer, 1979) and strengthens the rigour of the analysis. This means the same data collected during 2009-2010 has been examined repeatedly. Firstly it has been examined deductively within case (within an individual centre) and subsequently inductively across case (all centres).

Firstly, the CReSt research team developed a theory/policy-driven coding framework, which is itself a form of analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994: 56) and followed recommended good practice for the creation of codes in educational research as presented in Dey (1993). The data analyses were performed using the CReSt coding manual (see Appendix A), after the data had been collected from each Centre. The manual was produced by the CReSt team in line with good practice in qualitative team research in order to record the process of creating, revising, and removing codes (MacQueen et al., 1998). The CReSt coding manual contains a refined list of codes and definitions which allows for ease of coding when there are multiple coders (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). The CReSt coding manual also tracks decisions made in relation to the updating of codes and their definitions (see Appendix A). Twenty-three first level codes were derived and their frequencies can be seen in Table 13, represented in words transcribed. The composition of the codes in terms of instrument types contributing to the codes is shown in Figure 3.

Code	Words
Centres and partnerships support options choices offered to students	303,212
Engagement motivation enjoyment (plus opposite)	215,732
Educational management and governance	229,614
Learning pathways	196,302
Partnerships	193,135
Learner choice and curriculum personalisation	151,443
Views on the 14-19 reforms	168,960
Curricular and assessment changes and practices	142,721
Teaching practices	116,910
Achievement	104,926
Aspirations	77,242
Philosophy of education or values	87,145
Specialized diplomas	78,790
Widening participation	61,619
Basic skills	40,670
Parent's involvement in their child's education	36,712
Parents evaluations of opportunities and choices	37,717
Voice, participation, rights	28,725
Increased leaving age	23,651
Well-being and happiness	22,000
Entitlement	12,429
Teacher workload	13,283
Effects of inter-organisational working	11,943
Total	2,354,881

Table 13: Code Frequency represented in the number of words transcribed

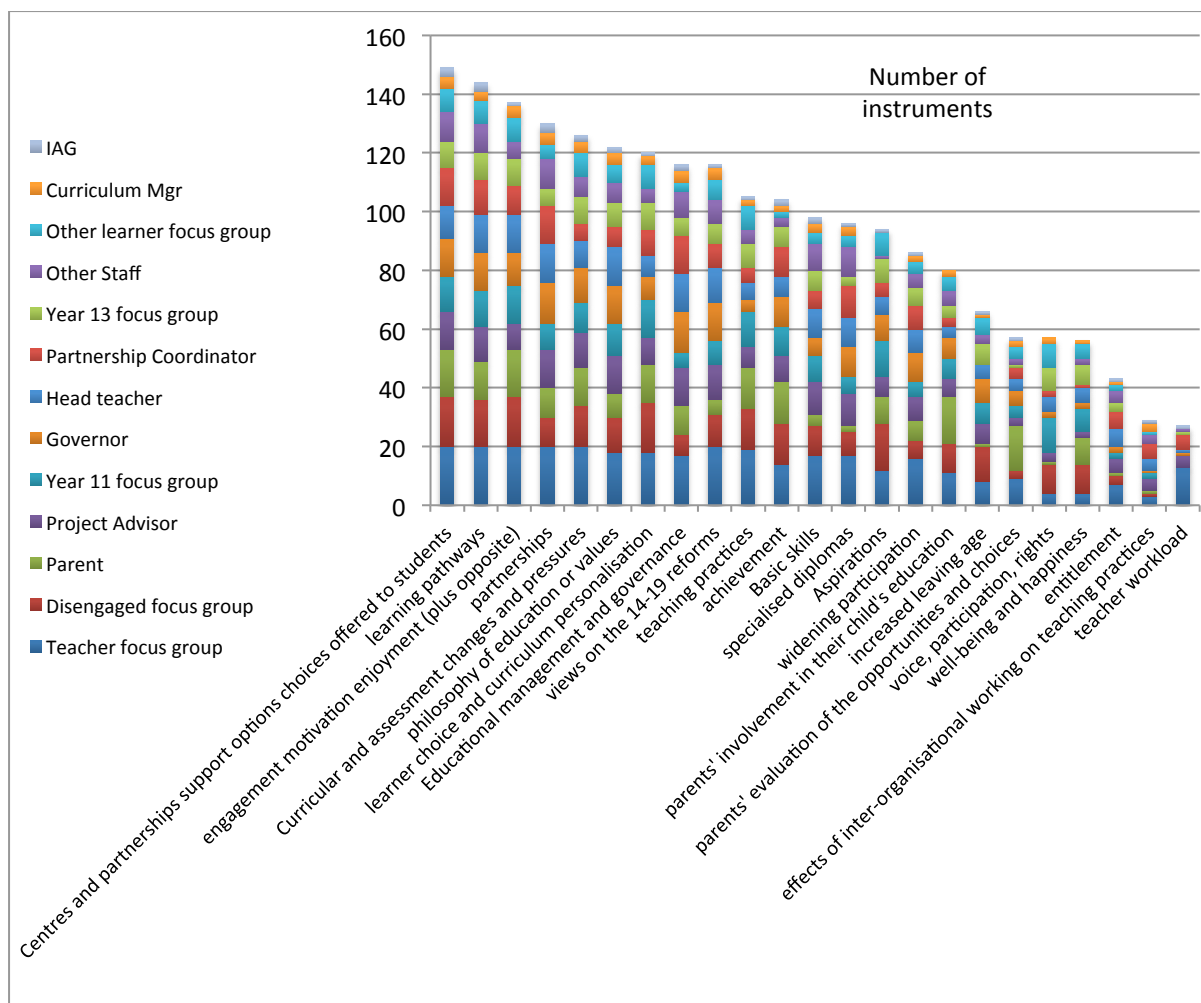


Figure 3: Number of sources of each kind coded under the 23 first level codes (note that this graph does not indicate number of words)

Furthermore the coding manual is a means of ensuring consistency between team members and is evidence of the rigour employed in the process of analysis. Computer software was used in both the management of data and in relation to analytical procedures, such as code and retrieve (Weitzman and Miles, 1995). The tools available on the software were used to check the reliability of the process of analysis. Coding comparison queries were carried out to ensure consistent application of coding by multiple researchers. The CReSt coding manual also serves to detail the results of the coding comparison queries and documents the team decisions reached in during team meetings throughout the research process in relation to the coding of the qualitative data.

Subsequently, the deductive approach to the analysis of qualitative data described above was followed by an inductive data-driven approach to coding on the same data. That is, the same primary data (e.g. the transcriptions of the recorded focus groups) were analyzed in two complementary ways allowing for a thorough and rigorous examination of the entire dataset of qualitative data. This approach is essential to allow the data from all centres to be examined as a collective multiple-case study and allows key issues affecting all the centres to emerge and be reported. The key themes which emerged from the first analysis of the whole dataset (i.e. all interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire responses), the process of carrying out the research, and team discussions in relation

to the aim of the project form the basis of this annual report. The themes identified which affect all centres are: Management, Policy, Partnerships, Learners, Aspirations, Engagement, Teachers and Parents. The dataset was examined in relation to these themes and a further set of data-driven codes were added to the CReSt coding framework. These are detailed in Appendix A. These codes were used specifically by the researchers reporting in particular chapters of this report. The findings presented in all sections of a first draft of this annual report were read and critiqued by team members and steering group committee members, as recommended by Stake (2000) in team case study research.

The questionnaire items produced data capable of quantitative analysis and the production of descriptive statistics. Following the administration and completion of the online surveys, descriptive statistics for each item of the questionnaires based on responses provided from samples in each centre were produced. These are presented in the first instance in the case report for the centre. Further descriptive statistics for the whole sample of centres responding in 2009-2010 are produced. This allows for the comparison between centres and the discussion of findings from the collective multiple case-study. Further details of the quantitative analyses carried out on the questionnaire data are presented in detail in Chapter 8 and Chapter 10 of this annual report. In addition details of the findings from the all the quantitative analyses are presented in Appendix F: Survey results.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In designing and conducting this project the CReSt research team followed the BERA Ethical Guidelines, Queen's University of Belfast's Codes of Practice, and the University of Bristol Code of Research Practice. The CReSt project applied for and received ethical approval from the relevant Research Ethics Committees in both institutions. The project team committed itself to ensuring that data was collected only from those who were fully informed. All participants were asked to confirm their consent and consent was sought to record all interviews. All participants were asked to complete a self-consent form. Parents of younger students were sent a consent letter and asked to confirm permission for their children to be involved. Consent letters include asking permission for data collection, storage and use. Enhanced police checks were received for all researchers who collected data with students in schools and colleges. Although the centres involved in the project indicated their willingness to support the project over the full five-year period, all participants and institutions remained free to withdraw at any point without prejudice. The project conforms to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. All paper records are kept securely locked. Electronic data is password protected and only accessible by the project team. Data from all cases is stored using school/college pseudonyms and individual roles only. Individual's names are not used. It is the perspective of the role holder which is of interest, not that of named individuals.

3.9 Reporting

3.9.1 Case Reports

Following each centre visit a case report was written by the researcher who carried out the centre visit. The case report incorporated the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data gathered through the online surveys and research instruments used during the visit to each centre between 2009-2010. The case reports include comparisons drawn between individual centre responses to questionnaires and the collective sample of all centres responding to questionnaires during 2009-2010. They also contain qualitative analyses produced from first level theory/policy coding and researcher field notes. To ensure factual accuracy of reporting, a draft of the case report was presented to the project advisor. Feedback was discussed and where appropriate amendments were made. The information in the case reports which were completed during 2009-2010 structured information in the following manner: 1) the Centre Research Study, 2) the context of the centre, 3) the perspectives on the 14-19 reform programme, 4) partnership arrangements, and 5) a summary of the findings of the annual questionnaire. The case reports produced after the 2009-2010 visits also took into account the findings and description of contexts from the baseline case reports completed in 2008-2009. These 2009-2010 case reports were structured in such a way as to be drawn upon by the centre itself for use in self evaluation or assessment procedures.

3.9.2 Annual Reports

Following the production of the case reports, an annual report was to be produced for each year, presenting the main findings from the research carried out during that particular year. This annual report takes into account the data collected from the 18 centres visits and the annual questionnaires. This report is structured around key issues and responses of key stake-holders to the impact of the reform programme during 2009-2010. The findings which are reported in this annual report are the *collective* responses of all the cases who participated in the research 2009-2010. The structure and content of the annual report is therefore a cross-case synthesis of responses to the issues investigated at each centre that year. Furthermore it is a cross-case synthesis of the data collected through the annual questionnaire to all centres. In effect, the annual report describes current responses from multiple stake-holders within the centres visited. It further identifies what has been done and what may be indicative of future developments. Furthermore the annual report highlights which conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the data collected during 2009-2010.

3.10 Limitations of the Research

The CReSt project follows a research design and research strategy which can most comprehensively meet the objectives of the research to examine the impact of the 14-19 reform programme within practical constraints. As noted in the Executive Summary of this annual report, a significant amount of data was collected in the period covered by this report. An advantage of multiple-case study design is that it furnishes a depth of data unavailable to any other type of research design. One limitation however, is that given the richness of the data produced, it is time-consuming to both collect and

analyse to the fullest extent possible all of the data gathered during 2009-2010. Due to the amount and depth of data, a possible limitation may lie in the lack of breadth of data, or the generalisability of findings to other centres across England, or on a national scale. Indeed the centres in this study although varied in type and geographical location represent only one jurisdiction in the UK. A number of procedures employed by the research team countered any limitations due to a lack of reliability. Working across two sites, using computer file sharing and data management software the research team found that a transparency of procedures and record-keeping assisted not only in cross-site working but also facilitated high levels of rigour in all aspects of the research process. This was particularly evident in the recording of decisions made in relation to the coding of qualitative data, inter-rater reliability of coding, and in the administration of research instruments during centre visits.

One difficulty which can affect longitudinal research is participant attrition. This was experienced at the outset of the CReSt project. Two of the original centres included in the baseline study could no longer participate. However replacement centres were sought and achieved and procedures to maintain contact and good professional working relationships with centres were employed. As the CReSt study collects data from centres at specific points in time it therefore has no indication of the process of events which unfold either side of these visits. Information can only be obtained at discrete points in time, as illustrated in Figure 2. This may limit the inferences that can be drawn about how centres respond to the educational reform programme over time. Further potential limitations reside in the use and design of research instruments. If such instruments are not carefully designed and piloted they may fail to capture the type and amount of data that was intended. The design of the CReSt instruments rely on policy concepts as specified in the aims of the research. The piloting of instruments with a variety of stake-holder groups before being administered allowed for amendments to be made where necessary and countered potential limitations of the research instruments.

4 Maintaining a course through the waves of policy reform: Strategic management of Educational Reform in Schools and Colleges

4.1 Policy implementation

This chapter steps back from reactions to specific reforms to look at how centres have told us they respond to reforms in general – what factors influence the extent to which they engage with reforms. Implementation of the educational reform policies must occur with and through the educational institutions like those studied in the CReSt project for the objectives of those policies to be met; such as a higher retention rate of students in education and training. The sheer volume of 14-19 reforms created a significant task for centres to keep up with the initiatives. Similarly, in the CReSt project, we recognised that keeping up with policy changes was a daunting task for the project team. Given this, we might have expected to find educational institutions being buffeted by a policy sea, with central government creating the waves and Head Teachers trying frantically to roll with them. Instead, we found strategic and even business-like planning in centres, with Head Teachers taking stock of a range of issues before deciding which reforms they would implement and to what degree. Admittedly, the educational policy environments changed rapidly and unexpectedly at times, which made strategic management difficult for centres. Before turning to the ways that educational stakeholders considered reforms, we need to discuss the process of policy implementation itself, to unpack assumptions about how policy is rolled out across the country's education system.

Three ways of characterising the process of policy implementation exist in the research literature: top-down models, bottom-up models and hybrid models (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Old-fashioned, top-down approaches saw implementation from a rational, systems perspective, with central policy-makers taking decisions and others putting those decisions into practice. In the 1970s and 1980s, research focused upon the practice of policy implementation and it became obvious that a range of local factors, other than the policy-makers' original objectives, influenced policy implementation. Hybrid models attempted to integrate the concern for policy objectives to be met with the observation that actors influence and shape the policy through the implementation process. Nonetheless, discussion of policy in top-down terms is still commonplace in the media and by politicians (Hill and Hupe, 2009: 58) and may well be the informal theory of policy implementation in the minds of many policy-makers.

Lack of consideration of the bottom-up influences on policy implementation has been seen for many decades as a reason for policy failures – for what has become known as the 'implementation gap'. Thus, we might consider policy-makers who do not think through the likely bottom-up effects to be naïve, but that would overlook the historical context to top-down thinking in the civil service. Prior to the 1980s, civil servants *did* spend time identifying policy implementation obstacles and attempting to avoid them. Rather than thinking through the possible problems in advance, some authors have characterised Thatcher's approach as a political desire for a speedier, pragmatic approach to policy formation in the civil service (Hill and Hupe, 2003). Instead of specifying the likely implementation

problems, she wanted them to be dealt with as they arose. Although the details of bottom-up effects upon policy impact might seem dull to people keen to get things done, they profoundly affect the success of policy.

Additionally, Saunders (1985, cited by Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992) argued that schools responded to externally initiated change in one of three ways:

- (1) Adaptive extension – incorporating the policy wholesale,
- (2) Accommodation – adapting the policy generally to fit the existing structures, or
- (3) Containment – existing structures absorbing the policy without radical change.

This is referred to in the management literature as ‘buffering’ of the institution from impacts of the external environment on the organisation (Meier and O’Toole, 2008). Thus, previous research indicated that schools and colleges would have a distinctive perspective from Government: leaders of educational institutions would evaluate the reforms, selecting the aspects to incorporate, adapt or contain. So far the reforms have been discussed as external change drivers to these institutions, but as will be seen below, in some cases the policy complemented an institution’s existing strategy, vision or practice.

4.2 Strategic management

So far we have been looking at policy implementation and treating schools and colleges as part of that process in education, but they are institutions in their own right and our research aimed to look at how a multiplicity of policies impacted upon them. Strategic management is about setting the long-term direction of the organisation (Mellanhi, Frynas and Finley, 2005) and the process involves thinking, planning, implementation and review. Agreeing upon a definition of strategy is notoriously difficult (see Nag et al, 2007). By ‘strategic management’, more than vision, objectives and aims is intended and more than planning is meant. Bracker (1980: 221) defined it as follows,

“Strategic management entails the analysis of internal and external environments of firms to maximize the utilization of *resources* in relation to *objectives*.”

Thus, we mean the setting of objectives as well as the planning and doing to meet them. We did not collect data on the *process* of strategic management, but the interviews with many of the stakeholders showed how the policies interacted with the centres’ strategic management plans.

Certainly, there was evidence in our interviews of schools and colleges having been influenced by the business literature on management and strategic planning. There are debates in the educational management literature about the extent to which business models can be imported into the educational context because it can be difficult to define the customer, the product and profit is not the main driver or success measure (see, for example Bush, 2008). Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) argue the case for use of business principles in education, noting that the context of an organisation is important for management, no matter the sector. However, they too recognise that there are limits to

this approach and it is disastrous to manage schools entirely as though they are a business. Bureaucratic style management, with management itself seen as a set of transferable skills has become far more accepted in the public sector over the past two decades. Importing of management principles into education without adaptation has been widely described as 'managerialism' (see Exworthy and Hall, 1999: 25). Ball (1987) writes that in a managerialist approach, "Getting done becomes more important than what was done or how one got there". Managerialist approaches see policy as a strategy to be implemented without engaging with the professional views of educationalists. Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008: 26) argued that the current interest in educational leadership in the research literature is a reaction to this:

"It would also be accurate to observe the current interest in leadership derives from the belief that there is a *moral crisis* in education. Leadership involves the definition and explication of values that underlie the direction in which the organization will move. Thus leadership has come to be viewed as an essential antidote to the unthinking acceptance of a direction derived from a set of policy initiatives."

There was little evidence of unthinking acceptance of policy initiatives in the strategic management of the schools and colleges visited this year. Instead, we observed educational institutions that were very much in the driving seat and evaluating the 14-19 reforms in terms of what they could do for their organisation and its stakeholders. Local, national and sometimes international factors affected centres' strategies. Not only would immigration affect some schools and colleges, courses were marketed internationally and in collaboration with overseas institutions in some instances. Most of the institutions had a strategy document that outlined, in broad terms, the type of organisation that it strives to be and the ways in which it will move towards those goals.

Principals, senior managers and many of the teachers had the longevity of experience to have an historical overview of educational policy. As such, they were aware of the key factors that they had to take into account in deciding whether and how to engage with these policies. Strategic management was not driven by external forces of change such as government policy in these institutions – it was driven from within the organisation and took into account the environment, which included the 14-19 reform programme. The following quotation from a School Governor illustrates what we were told in many of the interviews:

Well, it's good point actually, to what extent all that's happened as been dependent on central government policy. I think probably the school would have been looking at a lot of this anyway, because it already was...

(Governor)

These organisations had created strategic plans derived from their perspective, from which the 14-19 reforms were only one aspect of the environment. As we will see in the following sections, these institutions did not allow the reforms to dictate the vision or overall direction of the strategy for good reasons. This was not essentially about resistance to change or central control, or moral crisis, but about rational response and medium to long-term vision for their institutions.

Lumby (2002: 91) argued that strategic management in educational institutions is constrained by legislation, state funding, community expectations, custom and practice and choice of customer. She argued that these constraints are not so much a feature in business environments and questions whether schools' choices can truly be seen as strategic. However, there are constraints upon strategic management in business and all of the factors cited by Lumby affect strategic planning in business to a greater or lesser extent, depending upon the sector. For example, transport, financial or energy sectors are heavily affected by all of the issues. Changing the product offer and the customer base is theoretically easier for a business than for a school or college, but there are resource and capability issues that might be insurmountable for a business, making some strategic courses unrealistic. The difference in strategic planning constraints between business and the public sector is, of course, one of degree and not absolute. Lumby (2002) did not claim that the difference was absolute. Instead, she questioned whether schools could make strategic choices. There was clear evidence of strategic choice in the management of schools and colleges in this years' data. Examples of this included:

- A small 11-16 school that recognised the advantages of its size and was lobbying the local education authority to avoid expansion,
- A Further Education college that was setting up collaborative partnerships in China and
- A secondary school that had chosen to become a trust to free itself from local authority control and was federated with local primary schools.

Our data contrasted with a study of five Further Education colleges in Scotland (McTavish, 2006: 425), which reported that

“In the internal management of the colleges studied, there was substantial evidence of a strategic approach and also indication of an accommodation of managerial, professional and other interests. However, key aspects of the external environment militated against a comprehensive rational view of strategy, the most significant of which was a dissociation of the college strategic planning process and funding. It was also felt that the essentially local nature of FE made it difficult for senior college staff to think and act strategically and that there was a ‘strategic capacity gap’ within the sector not addressed by any of the support or representative bodies.”

Staff of FE colleges, as well as the schools, included in this year's research were very much aware of the external environment and talked knowledgeably about its relationship with their strategy and plans. We noted that Head Teachers, some Governors and those in management positions in the institutions generally talked more knowledgeably about the reforms than the teachers in the focus groups. Teachers tended to be aware of the reforms and some were directly involved in the preparation for specific reforms. This could be evidence of managers buffering the organisation from the high volume of reforms: involving staff as and when they needed to know, but keeping information general until such time. At the time the data were collected, some teachers were involved with new A-levels, functional skills, the Diploma and foundation learning. For many of the reforms, the impact upon classroom practice would come at a later stage. Thus, there are few quotations about the reforms from teachers in this chapter.

Boisot (1995, cited by Davies and West-Burnham, 2003) categorised strategy in relation to the turbulence of the environment and the organisation's understanding of the issues. Aspects of a school's strategic management can be described using this typology, rather than it applying to the organisation as a whole. Davies and West-Burnham (2003) argued that some aspects of a school's strategic management were predictable (such as a particular cohort size following initial intake into the school) and therefore strategic planning could be undertaken. This is a low turbulence, high understanding situation. Where there is high turbulence and good understanding, the school might have an overarching vision that guides its direction. Strategic intent takes this further, by being more concrete about the kinds of activities that will fulfil that vision. However, Davies and West-Burnham described strategic intent as knowing where you want to go, but not knowing precisely how to get there (2003: 299). In this position, the organisation has to be able to tolerate ambiguity. Intrapreneurship describes the delegation of activity to individuals or sub-units within the organisation to dynamically address and be held accountable for specific aspects of strategy. In a situation involving a high volume of educational reforms with considerable detail associated with them, it might be expected that this kind of strategic management approach would be commonplace. We encountered 'partnership managers' in our case schools and colleges this year, acting as intrapreneurs. Lastly, emergent strategy is a reactive process that involves learning by doing. Davies and West-Burnham (2003: 298) wrote that,

"This is an approach often deployed by school leadership when faced with multiple initiatives from government. The schools are left with little time or choice as to whether or how to implement the change but build up experience by doing rather than by planning ahead. A good example would be the introduction of performance management for teachers in England. After going through one cycle of the performance management system, the school will have done some things well and can repeat that experience. The things with which it has been less successful will emerge and will not be repeated. Thus a pattern of successful experiences is built up and a strategy is formed."

Our data indicated that centres used a range of policy tests when considering how the educational reforms should be integrated with their strategy (Figure 4). We describe each of these in turn in the following sections.

Best interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What do our students need? •What do our stakeholders and community need?
Longevity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How long is this policy likely to last? •Will this policy have continued political support?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is there an attractive funding stream associated? •Can we continue to fund this? •How will this affect the shape and capacity of the organisation?
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can this be done locally? •Do other policies complement or conflict with this? (locally or nationally)
Doppelgänger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is this similar to previous policies? •Is it better than previous policies?
Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are we required to do this by law? •Are we obliged to do this by regulators? •Is a powerful stakeholder (eg LEA) pressing for this?

Figure 4: Policy tests – how centres decide the extent to incorporate policies in their strategies

4.2.1 Best interest

Many of the interviewees talked about strategy in relation to the best interests of the school or college and its learners or the community more widely. This was the core of the values and ethos behind these organisations and therefore a major test for an educational policy. Often, centres were very well connected with the needs of local business and the likely progression routes of their students into Higher Education. ‘Best interest’ was mentioned by many interviewees, as the following quotations from two different centres illustrate:

FE teacher: *Yeah, I think that's what it is. I think it's the community. We are very dedicated in getting the best for our students, there's that kind of ethos in the college.*

And

Head Teacher: *Good to Great. It was when we had Ofsted in 2008 we were good. Now of course the next Ofsted category is outstanding and I actually think that although outstanding is quite hard to achieve these days because of the new regime with Ofsted, I still feel that you can be an outstanding school and in many respects not that wonderful. And I kind of want to be wonderful. And so the Good to Great, the great is beyond outstanding really. It's to really create something where students really feel they can thrive and do well.*

Interviewer: *Tell me about that. What do you mean by good to great? So effectively I think what you're telling me is that the outstanding criteria aren't really what yours are.*

Head Teacher: *Well I think the outstanding criteria are exacting and they do reflect good standards and good quality. But I think in terms of how a whole institution is, a whole community is, or even how a whole organisation or business is, I think it's more than that. And I think that you want something which has real heart and soul and where people really feel they belong, all people, which is always a challenge for a school that everybody feels they belong and they have an equal stake in what you offer. And that's what we need to do.*

First, from the perspective of the institution, the policy might not be in the best interests of the school or college and its learners or the community more widely. For example, some Head Teachers considered Diplomas to be an inappropriate specialisation and tracking of students at age 14 and therefore believed it to be against the best interests of their students to promote Diplomas. On the other hand, entitlement is a policy that connected well with many centres' views of offering the best for students, as there was concern to be able to offer a distinctive choice for students for whom the current model was not engaging. Many interviewees talked about how alternative models, such as the Diploma, BTEC or Entry to Employment had drawn students in and ignited enthusiasm for learning. Parental support for adoption of new policies was an important stakeholder consideration for centres, as the following quotation indicates.

Parent confidence in a new programme and ...being perhaps acutely aware ...is it going to be recognised? We've heard about new programmes before that come and go and come and go ... I think the term 'diploma' is awful because there are so many Mickey Mouse diplomas for all sorts of things

(Teacher)

Personalisation of learning fitted well with many of the institutions' existing initiatives and there was therefore good cultural fit with that policy. This was particularly the case in Special Schools. However, the policy on personalisation of learning had yet to materialise into concrete national initiatives when the data was collected (other than as entitlement and Diploma policies). Further, there were concerns about funding for this (see Section 4.2.3).

4.2.2 Policy longevity and planning

From the institution's perspective, good management requires planning. It is a formal requirement for schools and colleges to have management plans (Lumby, 2002: 86). These requirements come via Ofsted inspections for schools and funding links in colleges. Chapter two indicated the span and complexity of the 14-19 Educational Reform programme. To keep pace with policy developments has been a difficult aspect of this project for the research team because it is so fast moving. So what effect does this have on planning in schools and colleges? The following quotations illustrate the impact of policy and political changes upon planning. In this college, a business-like process of strategic planning had taken place, involving a wide range of stakeholders, but policy changes (especially the reduction in funding for adult learning) had rendered it obsolete and within months the college had to begin the strategic planning process again.

I think just from my observations with all these sort of things going on these are actually quite confusing times for the college. You asked about strategy and sometimes we develop a strategy and then something changes and we have to re-think our strategy and constantly modify it which is what does go on here, I have to say. Some – certainly from a governor's point of view, I remember twelve months ago we went through a huge developing strategy meetings over a couple of days and then at the beginning of this year when the funding had changed and the whole of the economy looked different we all got together again and looked at that strategy and threw a few things out of the window and brought a few new things in so it's a constant process.

(Governor)

Interviewer: *Going back to what you were saying about having to change your plans, do all these changes at a national level make it difficult to plan?*

Head Teacher: *They do, and I think to some extent, there's a little bit of uncertainty still, certainly with the election looming. I think, if we're going to have a change of government, which is a possibility, I think some of these national priorities are going to change. I think, for example, there may be question marks over the diplomas.*

Interviewer: *So is this an unusual period or is it always like this?*

Head Teacher: *I think there are always uncertainties, but I think it's particularly difficult at the moment.*

Implementing educational policies takes time and it has to be planned ahead. Changing the examination system is a case in point. Governments might be keen to effect changes to learning and skills in this way, but it will take longer than a parliamentary term to implement the changes and it might take longer than that for them to have the desired effects, as teachers and students need to become accustomed to the syllabus and demands of the new assessments. For example, new A-level examinations outlined in the *White Paper on Education and Skills* (DfES, 2005) were sat for the first time in summer 2010. Frustratingly for politicians, the effects of most of their educational policies are unlikely to be seen until at least the next parliamentary term. Getting policies implemented in a hurry is therefore important from a political perspective. Now from a centre's perspective, as one of the Head Teacher's put it, "governments come and go", so it would be unwise to plan the long-term future of a school entirely upon current policy. Principals needed to have a longer-term view than current policies might permit.

The reality of planning in a school or college is that, policy rhetoric notwithstanding, not every policy will have longevity. Figure 5 shows an email message sent to schools and colleges on 9 July 2010. Support for implementing the Diploma from regional and consortium advisors was cancelled with almost immediate effect. Experience of the quality of support from these advisers was variable across centres, but nonetheless, if you had been relying on this advice to implement new diploma programmes over the coming years, you would have a problem. This is just one example. Another would be the complex changes to post-compulsory education funding bodies: Wolf (2009: 32) lists 21 quangos that have had a responsibility for post-compulsory education funding or content between 2006 and 2009, ten of which were created, five closed and six remained in existence over that period. Regional development agencies have subsequently been scrapped, so the number of funding bodies that has remained constant since 2006 has reduced to five and some of the newly created bodies will close or are under consideration (e.g. QCDA, Young People's Learning Agency). Schools and colleges cannot rely on the stability of policies (or politicians) and must plan independently.

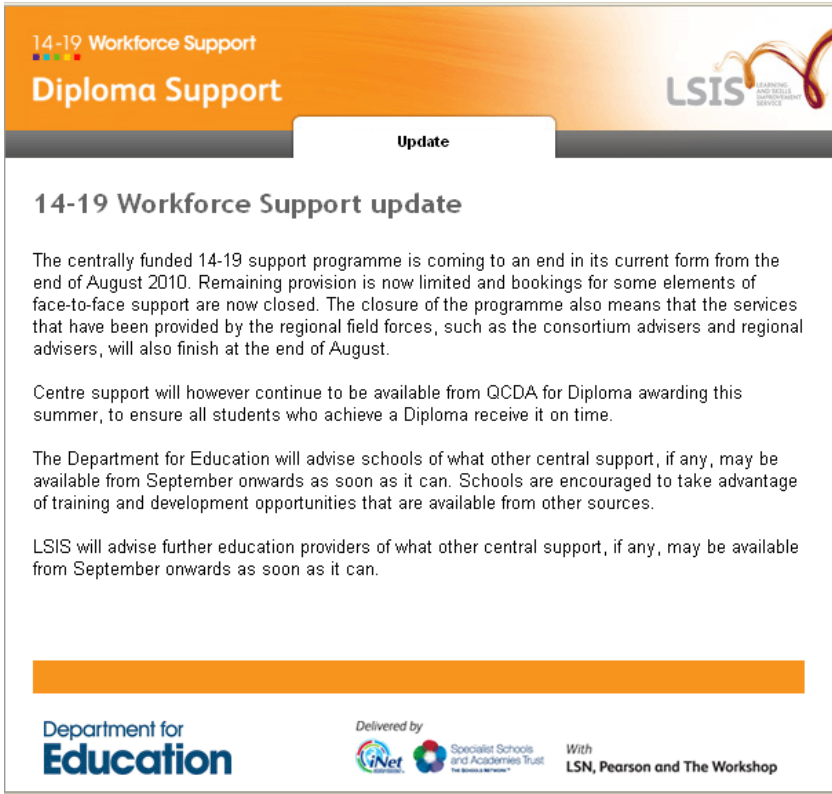


Figure 5: Department for Education email withdrawing the Workforce Support programme

Educational institutions need to be managed for the long term interests of their stakeholders and if a policy was likely to be fleeting, resources could be wasted in pursuing it. Adoption of policies could incur re-organisation of centres, including capital expenditure, partnership agreements or major changes to logistics (e.g. staffing, timetabling). Some of this could have long-lasting implications for the organisation that might be difficult to unravel. Since the interviews were conducted in an election year of a third term of a Labour government, there was scepticism about how much political support some of the policies were likely to have over the longer term, as the following quotations demonstrate.

Governor: I just think we need to get this election out the way and be clear about the political direction of everything actually, don't we, so we can all have a good cough and clear our throats and start again.

And

Teacher: Possibly the political climate – people, perhaps, you know, educationalists are nervous about a change in government and what might happen.

The phased implementation of Diplomas had helped, as this had given centres the chance to set up structures and learn from others who had adopted the Diplomas before them. The educational landscape is such that the planning in centres now involves liaising with other educational institutions and wider organisations to deliver on the entitlement and diploma policies, as well as other locally- and nationally-generated initiatives. Hodgson and Spours (2008: 98) outlined the complexity of the landscape for the delivery of raising the participation age policy.

“What lies behind these measures, however, is a highly complex set of institutional, organisational and governmental arrangements. Implementing the policy of raising the participation age to 18 involves multiple national, regional and local government ministries and agencies, some directly under governmental control and others working in an arms-length manner, hundreds of different education and training providers with different missions and employment conditions for staff, serving different groups of learners and with varying degrees of autonomy from central or local government, as well as employers and other privately-owned partners who are expected to participate in a voluntary manner”

4.2.3 Sustainability

Relatedly, institutions had to consider whether the policy would be sustainable over the medium and long term. An attractive funding incentive might foster engagement with a policy, but short-lived financial support could lead to a centre committing to an arrangement that could not be supported in the longer term. Thus, the sustainability of the funding was considered. If the changes could be incorporated without fundamentally altering the shape and capacity of the organisation, then short-lived financial incentives were more likely to be attractive. Alternatively, short-term funding that could make an existing strategy viable was attractive. The following quotation illustrates the dilemma some schools face in relation to the logistic changes that would result from implementation of the Diplomas, as well as the difficulty in persuading people to support changes that might be politically doomed. Further, this teacher was pointing out that although posturing regarding the Diplomas was very positive (especially at a high level in central government), people were aware of the Conservative party's views on Diplomas. Informal dialogue between professionals was bound to cover this issue.

Well you know, we need to plan that a number of years in advance and when we get down to the nitty gritty of timetabling for a year, I kind of need to know what is happening. I am not going to gamble changing everything for the school, and the whole set up of the school, to be told come June, when we get a change of Government, whatever stripe that is, that actually Diplomas were an unmitigated disaster and we are going to ditch them all. And then kind of, you have to hold the line, a bit a Waterloo situation going on, with holding the line, 'Diplomas are here to stay'. 'They might alter slightly but they are here to stay' and every other message, often not official messages, but sometimes, you know from official people, are saying otherwise - Diplomas are going to go.

(Teacher)

4.2.4 Coherence

Local factors influence the extent to which a policy is attractive or feasible. Some interviewees saw the consortium arrangements for the delivery of entitlement and the Diplomas as an urban model that was unsuitable for more remote schools and colleges. Equally, local factors could facilitate policy take-up. There was enthusiasm in some quarters for apprenticeships because there were good local connections with business and, the recession notwithstanding, they considered that apprenticeships might be a good way to keep young people from becoming NEET.

Additionally, local decisions and policies could either complement or counteract national policies. An example of this was where a local education authority had decided to withdraw transport funding for post-16 learners. Staff at the FE college considered it likely that the Local Authority (LA) had not realised that the local 14-19 consortium had been planning 14-16 entitlement on the basis of the

transport links that were supported by the funding for post-16 learners. Implementation of the entitlement and Diploma policies were reliant not only upon other centres, but upon the LA and even the local bus company. As such, centres are not always in a position to adopt a national policy due to local policies.

Coherence concerned more than the interaction between local and national policies, as national policies were not always joined up and led to problems in practice for those trying to implement them. An obvious example is the need to cooperate with local competitors. That is, local schools and colleges would be competing for students and funding with an institution, yet the entitlement and diploma policies required collaboration (see also Chapter 5). Evaluation of institutions based upon performance table results would also be problematical if courses were delivered across institutions. Although many schools and colleges were working on cross-institution quality assurance mechanisms, these were designed to protect the interests of the learner and the home institution, but could not solve the underlying policy discrepancy. Another policy clash was the drive to reduce NEET and the introduction of the QCF. More than one institution mentioned that the Entry to Employment qualification was a very useful way of avoiding young people becoming NEET, yet it did not meet the requirements of the QCF and they considered that foundation learning did not have enough practical, work-based content to engage the target group.

Some participants welcomed the foundation learning initiatives, especially in Special Schools. The point is not that they were unpopular, but that there were policy clashes when the reforms played out locally. As such, those setting strategy for these institutions had to consider the coherence of the policies in practice in the context of the organisation.

Coherence of the policies with funding mechanisms came up in many of the interviews. The economic feasibility of providing personalised learning and entitlement, which often generated small class sizes was raised. Additionally, cuts in the adult learning budget had a knock-on effect upon the number of courses that were economically viable in colleges, which in turn reduced the entitlement offer.

4.2.5 Doppelganger

Policy memory was evident at this level of the education system and doppelganger policies were identified by those who had been in education for a number of decades. Of course, some interviewees did not agree that there was a need for some of the policies that they considered kept coming around in different guises. For example, policies on the level of coursework in qualifications had waxed and waned over the years. Even where there was agreement with the policy principles, stakeholders could be wary of doppelganger policies due to their experiences with a previous round of policy. An example of this was the introduction of a new qualification (functional skills) to tackle the shortage of basic skills in the country. Many interviewees supported the need for basic skills education and qualifications, but had previously engaged with basic, core and key skills policies. Previous iterations might have been seen as a failure, or even an overlooked success, and this

influenced the extent of engagement with the current policy and the speed of uptake. This was a strategy for titrating effort – participants waited to see how some of the policies would play out in practice before investing heavily in it. After all, considerable investment of time and energy, as well as leadership of colleagues can be needed to implement new qualifications policies. Judgment calls were taken as to where that effort was best placed.

In discussions about doppelganger policies, there was an element of scepticism regarding whether the policy would deliver its intended aims in a manageable way. As such, details of the curriculum, administration, funding and delivery of the policy formed the content of professional concerns about whether to adopt certain policies. ‘Watch and learn’ was a policy stance reported by many interviewees, who were taking opportunities to network with colleagues who were early adopters. Networking opportunities were coordinated by national organisations, but were also a fortuitous consequence of some of the partnership arrangements. Essentially interviewees were looking to see whether the policy was likely to deliver valuable benefits with a feasible level of resources.

4.2.6 Compliance

Institutions might have to implement policies to at least some extent if they were under a legal or regulatory obligation or if a powerful stakeholder insisted upon it. Even if a school or college could resist a particular policy that, for example, an LA favoured, it is in the organisation’s interests to maintain good relations with powerful stakeholders. Agreeing to some policies might even make disagreeing with others more palatable to powerful stakeholders. None of the interviewees mentioned the fact that leading these reforms could give individuals more exposure within and outside an organisation, producing networking and career development opportunities. For example, Head Teachers and Principals were chairing local consortia – a position requiring considerable leadership skills. More junior staff members were coordinating new developments within and across organisations. These were good opportunities for developing and demonstrating skills to a wider audience. Therefore, although none of the interviewees were impolite enough to mention it; adoption of a policy might be a good career move for individuals. This is not included in Figure 4 because we have no evidence that it was a primary reason for adoption of a policy in any of the centres we studied – we are simply noting that is an advantageous consequence for some individuals. Performance tables and targets from Government and governmental organisations were important factors for centres and some policy decisions were certainly related to meeting or improving upon numerical targets. These factors were part of the policy mix – schools and colleges had a lot of considerations, coming from a variety of sources to take into account in their strategic management.

4.3 Conclusions

Stakeholders talked about how their organisations responded to the reforms and their approaches are presented here as a series of policy tests. Educational institutions cannot rely on the stability of policies, structures or educational leaders and therefore must plan independently. To manage schools and colleges strategically, Principals need to have a longer-term view than current policies might permit. They also need to evaluate the reforms from the perspective of their institution and its local

environment. Many of the stakeholders we interviewed were politically savvy, having experienced several waves of educational reform and with an overview of the educational landscape. As such, they asked the following policy tests whilst deciding the extent to which their institutions should engage with the reforms:

- Is this in the **best interest** of our learners, stakeholders and wider community?
- Will this policy have **longevity** and continued political support?
- How **sustainable** is this policy in terms of funding and its impact upon the shape and capacity of the organisation?
- Is this **coherent** with other local and national policies (and relatedly is it feasible)?
- Have there been **doppelganger** policies and how well is this one likely to deliver in comparison?
- Are we required to **comply** with this by law or by a powerful stakeholder or regulator?

Rather than educational institutions being buffeted by a policy sea, these institutions were taking strategic decisions regarding their fate, although those decisions were clearly contextualised by the policy environment as well as other local and national factors.

4.4 Implications for policy

Control of the implementation of educational policy by central government is impossible because there are many levels at which policy is shaped. Policy has increasingly been created centrally in England (Pring et al., 2009: 190). At the same time, it has become more difficult for governments to control policy implementation because successive governments have amplified the complexity of educational institutional arrangements. Private and public organisations with different priorities and levels of connection with central government are now involved with the delivery of educational policies. The ‘bonfire of the quangos’ (Pring et al., 2009: 197) will reduce this complexity to some extent, but it will not eradicate it. Conversely, the ‘free schools’ policy will increase complexity: adding to the wide variety of existing funding and governance arrangements for schools.

Persuading educational stakeholders to engage fully with the policies is one possible way to reduce what from a top-down perspective would be viewed as the implementation gap. Policy communications with schools and colleges regarding new educational policies would be more persuasive if they addressed these tests, but the reality is that a variety of perspectives will persist in relation to the answers. For example, governments might be more confident of their likely longevity (in policy rhetoric at least) than some educational stakeholders. Educational institutions have rights and responsibilities to have independent views and to adapt, accommodate or contain policies as best they can, in the interests of their stakeholders. Discussing policy implementation models more widely, Hill and Hupe (2003: 483) put it as follows,

“In such cases ‘gaps’ between two bodies may be misleadingly seen as ‘deficits’ when the ‘lower’ tier has clear capacities and probably rights to adapt or even disregard

policies from the 'upper'. In fact both layers then have policy formation prerogatives. Referring back to Cline's distinction, 'collaboration' questions are confused with 'communication' ones."

Further, if policy-makers engaged with the practical realities of policy implementation and attempted to address some of the obstacles (for example coherence), the policies would stand a greater chance of fulfilling their objectives. To achieve this, dialogue between leaders of educational institutions and policy-makers would be necessary. Pring et al. (2009: 187) take this further, arguing for a more distributed model of policy-making, or 'devolved social partnership'. In keeping with this approach, Hill and Hupe (2003: 475) wrote that in the policy implementation literature more generally, there has recently been a trend

"to highlight situations in which there is participation in the policy process by actors who, in the initial top – down formulation of the problem, were seen as simply implementers whose recalcitrance explicitly or implicitly might be the problem."

4.5 Implications for future research

Along with the rest of the country, the 18 institutions included in this research currently await the coalition government's spending review and policy decisions regarding the educational landscape, including the 14-19 educational reform programme. To varying degrees, these institutions have engaged with the Labour government's reforms or buffered their organisations from their effects. An interesting question to ask in future research would be whether these educational institutions' policy engagement strategies had been beneficial for the organisation and its stakeholders. Conceivably, some institutions might have changed their structure and capacity irrevocably in response to the partnership agenda. Possible changes to policy such as withdrawal of funding for the establishment of partnerships arrangements, abolition of the Diplomas and removal of the entitlement policy could leave such institutions feeling that they had been sold out at a national level. What schools and colleges do when they have implemented a policy failure with far-reaching consequences for their institution is an interesting topic for future research.

5 Policy Implementation

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report some of the reactions from teachers, students and other stakeholders to the reforms as they are implemented in the schools and colleges visited. It is not the intention here to offer an analysis of the policies themselves, but to discuss how they have been perceived, how centres have responded, and their reported impact to date.

There have been evaluations of each of the strands in the reforms, but these can only tell a partial story. A centre may take on a particular strand with considerable enthusiasm (the 'adaptive' approach discussed in the previous chapter), but that may temper the commitment to other strands ('containment') or even avoidance of them. The Diploma provides a good example of this range of responses.

5.2 The 14-19 Reforms³ - The policy intent

The centrepiece of the reform programme was described as 'the creation of a new national curriculum and qualifications entitlement' which allowed young people to receive a sufficiently broad education to be able to progress further in learning and into employment. This entitlement was to be met through collaborations which offered a far broader curriculum than many schools could then offer. One central goal was to retain those students who might otherwise drop out of education, employment or training. These young people make up 9.2 % of the 16-18 (DfE, 2010) and are often referred to as NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) though this shorthand is recognised as unhelpful (House of Commons, 2010). Research for DCSF (DCSF, 2009a) found that around one-fifth of young people who were classified as NEET were so because they were dissatisfied with the available opportunities and a further two-fifths were positive about learning and so may be responsive to further opportunities (See Chapter 9).

This entitlement involved the development of four learning pathways through the 14-19 education landscape: Diplomas; GCSEs and A levels; Foundation Learning; and Apprenticeships. Mastering functional skills was embedded in each of these pathways. While there had been a steady expansion of apprenticeship opportunities over the previous ten years, there was a fresh injection of funding in May 2009 (Apprenticeship News, 2009) along with the creation of the National Apprenticeship Service, which was launched in April, 2009.

The intention by May 2009, when the CReSt project began, was to introduce 14 Diploma lines of learning by 2010: five in 2008, five in the next year, and four in 2010⁴. Every 14-19 student would

³ This summary is based on the QCA *Reform Programme and Evaluation* document, itself a summary of the DCSF website information, downloaded 14/05/2009

⁴ At that time the Diploma was called the 'specialised Diploma' as a 'general Diploma' involving GCSE's and A levels had been mooted. However this was soon shelved and so 'the Diploma' became the official title.

have an entitlement to take any of these 14 Diploma lines of learning which would be achieved through the development of partnerships of schools and colleges to form a Diploma Consortium. Gaining Functional Skills qualifications in English, maths and ICT would be a necessary part of passing the Diploma, as would the completion of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) , intended to cover 'areas of competence that are most demanded by employers' – such as team working and creative thinking.

The project is a compulsory part of the Diploma programme at all three levels – but it can also be taken as a standalone qualification for 14–19 learners. Part of the Diploma's generic learning component, the project accounts for 60 guided learning hours at foundation and higher levels and 120 when taken as part of an advanced Diploma.

The 14-19 reforms also included changes to both A level and GCSE. At A level this involved reducing the assessment burden (by moving from six to four modules in many subjects) and increasing the 'stretch and challenge' of the examination papers. An additional A* grade would be introduced and first awarded in 2010. GCSEs would be reviewed and new specifications developed and 'controlled assessments' introduced to replace coursework. The key stage 3 curriculum would be 'freed up' so that schools 'would have more scope to stretch young people' and to help those who had fallen behind to catch up.

For those who make limited progress at or below level 1, Foundation Learning (formerly the Foundation tier⁵) has been introduced which offers learning progressions that incorporate flexible qualifications drawn from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Foundation Learning programmes combine subject or vocational learning with functional skills and personal and social development. They provide learners with choice and the opportunity to specialise – and a clear path towards level 2 qualifications or other goals

The structural elements in the reform programme included raising the minimum age at which young people leave education or training to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. Calling it *Raising the Participation Age* was intended to signal that it was far broader in scope than previous policies to raise the school leaving age, since it included training at work. There would also be an expansion of Apprenticeship opportunities and placing responsibility for education and training of all young people to 18 with local authorities 'so LAs can take a more holistic view of services for under 19s'.

A cautionary note needs to be signalled on terminology in this report as a whole. In the period of this research to date (2009-10), the use of language around the reforms has changed in some instances. Often we use the original terms in this annual report, as they were the terms in use when the research was designed and the data were collected. It is an indication of the fast changing nature of policy that some of the terms seem outdated only six months after the data were collected. Examples of such

⁵ Foundation Learning Tier was used in official documents (e.g. QCDA's *Foundation Learning Tier: 14-19 Delivery Guidance for 2009/10 published August 2009*) until October 2009 when it was superseded by Foundation Learning (e.g. QCDA's *Foundation Learning, increasing choice and flexibility for learners at Entry level and level 1*, Oct. 2009)

changes include 'Specialised Diplomas', which are now 'Diplomas'. Another reason for sticking with the original term here is that many centres talked about the BTEC National Diplomas as 'the Diplomas'. The reason the term changed over the period was that the 'General Diplomas' were dropped from policy plans, which meant that the word 'Specialised' was no longer necessary and drew attention to the now unnecessary contrast with General Diplomas. Reasons for other changes were not obvious to the project team, such as the 'tier' being dropped from 'Foundation Learning Tier'.

5.3 14-19 reforms: policy perceptions and implementation

There were limited references in the interviews to the 14-19 Reforms as a comprehensive suite of reforms. Most respondents would home in on particular elements of the reforms which impacted most directly upon them. Those who did discuss the philosophy and intentions of the 14-19 Reform programme were generally in a managerial position such as governor, Principal or curriculum manager (See Chapter 4). This section will briefly consider reactions to the 14-19 Reform programme as a whole before looking at responses to those elements of it which impacted most directly on the centres visited.

5.4 The 14-19 Reforms programme.

The main thrust of comments on the whole programme was that the reforms were seen as offering 14-19 students a broader range of curriculum options, including more coherent vocational routes, which would lead to a more personalised offer for students. This was much in line with the government's rationale at the time. As one governor put it:

To me, it's looking at the personalised, individual education of each child to satisfy ourselves that we've got a curriculum that can actually satisfy the needs of all those pupils so when they go on to further education we've given them the best start that we possibly can so they can choose the pathway that they actually want to take.

(Governor)

This was summarised by another governor:

Well, more than anything else, the move to increasing the involvement of older kids staying at school and perhaps a greater emphasis on vocational training as part of that.

(Governor)

However this same governor was critical of the coherence of the implementation strategy:

My understanding was that the Diploma would be the way in which all vocational qualifications were certificated. Well it doesn't look like that's the way it's going in the slightest, so we're still going to end up with a proliferation of BTECs and OCR things here and God knows what, they're still going to be very difficult to actually – for young people to make sense of and find their routes of progression through.

(Governor)

5.5 The Diploma

For most respondents the Diploma was the centrepiece of the 14-19 reforms. It attracted more comments in the transcribed interviews than all the other reform programmes put together. For those involved '14-19 has tended to mean, in reality, Diploma development'. Even for those not taking it on at this stage, there may have been considerable local discussion of partnership arrangements, with the risk that 'we lost focus on everything else apart from the Diplomas'. Most of the take-up reported in our interviews was for the level 2 Diploma and involved 14-16 year old students, which reflects the national picture across the 750+ centres awarding Diplomas⁶. This in turn led to some of the FE college staff perceiving it as largely a school-based diploma, with partnerships being primarily between schools.

For some respondents 'the Diploma' was a misleading term as many centres were familiar with both BTEC and OCR Diplomas:

A Diploma in BTEC circles means 4 GCSE equivalents as opposed to a Certificate and then you have got the OCR National Diplomas and now you have got these Diplomas. So if you talked to just about anybody in school, let alone outside school, if you ask them what Diploma means, they will not give the answer that you might be looking for, which is about the Diploma lines of shared practice within schools.

(Project Advisor)

This was particularly the case for those teaching in FE colleges who have had long experience with other vocational diplomas. Some saw the Diploma as largely a school-based initiative which meant that the term was less familiar:

We're delivering a strong range of specialist National Diplomas in graphics, fashion and textiles and ND art design, so I think in terms of the reforms I think probably the school sector approaching Diplomas as a new qualification. We have a long history of delivering National Diplomas and I feel quite passionate that we do them well, and it's not an add-on qualification, it's really very much the focus of our FE activity.

(Teacher)

5.5.1 Perceptions of the Diploma

The reactions to the Diploma have been complex and varied. They ranged from seeing it as the way forward, 'we've gone for it big time', to those who see little need for it when GCSE and A level success mean there is no appetite for change. The most common attitude appeared to be what one Head Teacher described as *cautious engagement* which involved both political and financial considerations:

'You've got to be sensible on the principle that we'll have to manage this place with our colleagues with increasingly tight public resource over the next two, three, four, five years, and you have to look at curriculum innovation through that filter to a certain extent, and you can't afford to back a loss maker, a loss leader for very long'.

⁶ DCSF (2009b) reported that in 2008-9 65.7% of the 10262 participants for there was matched data were taking level 2, with 20.5% taking level 1 and 13.7% taking level 3 Diplomas.

(Head Teacher)

The main themes which emerged from the interviews were about the curriculum and resource demands of the Diploma and the uncertainties about its status, recruitment and future. These are closely linked to each other since, for example, funding uncertainties will impact on the resources that centres are willing to make available.

5.5.2 Curriculum, recruitment and resource demands

All those we spoke to recognised that involvement with the Diploma made considerable demands on their resources. These included, in the early stages, planning time, partnership meetings, revision of bids and establishing funding. If the bid (through the local authority 'Gateway') was successful, and that process sometimes took up to two years, there were decisions to be made about when and where it would be offered. Sometimes this was done but recruitment was very low – making the course barely viable:

Two years of getting through the gateway, and a lot of planning for that, preparations, training, meeting with schools, schools have now dropped out of the delivery. The amount of work and effort that's gone into that, and we're looking at September, there's probably a group of about 12 students....In terms of resources, I just think it's crazy, spending time on it when money is very, very tight.

(Teacher)

This was a common theme, especially with smaller schools which were dependent on partnership arrangements and expertise in other centres to be able to offer a range of Diplomas. Many of the centres reported recruitment of less than ten on the Diploma lines they were offering. This had led to a disproportionate impact on timetabling as the timetable needed to be arranged so they could spend whole days on the Diploma, especially if they had to travel elsewhere for some of the course. Some of these recruitment difficulties were closely linked to travel problems between the centres, particularly in more rural areas where time-consuming journeys were involved. For some centres the Ofsted focus on 'safeguarding' had added further administrative obstacles since any drivers had to be vetted.

5.5.3 Curriculum demands

This theme involved two main elements: the curriculum content of the Diploma, and its assessment, and the timetabling implications. There were mixed, and sometimes contradictory, views of the content of the diploma lines. For some the Diploma offered an up-to-date curriculum:

'The new 14-19 Diplomas, the content in Health and Social Care is fantastic, it's up-to-date, you can see it's written by people who are practitioners in the field now, you know, it's really quite exciting'

(Teacher)

This teacher then noted that students were still applying for the A Levels because they were 'tried and trusted' which in itself was another common theme.

The most common curriculum concern in relation to the content of the Diplomas was its *size*. Taking a Diploma involved almost all of the students' time. This was often compared with other vocational qualifications such as the BTEC qualifications which allowed a range of other options to be taken alongside them:

Well I think BTECs can sit alongside nicely traditional GCSEs, and pupils can have a mix and match option, whereas if you go for the Diploma, you've taken out all your option routes and then you've got to go down that particular route, and it's obviously very vocational, whereas here you can take a performing arts drama, and sit it alongside a GCSE in history. So, I think the pupils get the best of both worlds in that way.

(Teacher)

The implications of this were pointed out by one Y11 student:

Well, the thing is the diploma's fantastic and everything, but I don't think there was enough flexibility within the options, you know, if you take one thing that immediately wipes out say some more choices which, you know, there's no way you can take two things at once. And I mean for me personally, I'm looking to go on and do music at college, but I couldn't do music GCSE and the creative and media diploma, so now I'm finding it really hard to get in to music college because I don't have the music GCSE, so I'm having to try and get in to it other ways.

(Y11 student)

This was also seen as an issue for level 3 Diplomas too:

But where it does become a big issue, I think, is at level three, because if you do a diploma you've already opted for sort of two and a half A level choices, so you're either going to ... You're going to get another A level on top of that, possibly two, as your additional and specialist learning, and so I know that has been a real issue for some youngsters, especially when you're at that point of thinking "I think I want to do this at university, but I'm not 100% sure." And it's a new qualification, and are we clear about what entrance requirements are?

(Head Teacher)

Linked to the scale of the Diploma were concerns about the way it was assessed. Because each of the elements had to be passed, it was possible that a student would be successful in everything except one element (maths functional skills were the most commonly cited) and not be awarded the Diploma, and its equivalent GCSE points. This again was seen as a problem in relation to other qualifications:

The reason they're very hard to pass is, in order to be credited with a Diploma you have to pass every component, and we already know through work based learning apprenticeship frameworks, which have got very low success rates, that's difficult because if a learner doesn't pass one particular little bit they don't get the Diploma, or they don't get the apprenticeship...So for example a level two diploma, the young person has to get all three functionals at level two, and people who are looking at functional skills assessments at the moment say they were very hard.

(Partnership Manager)

5.5.4 Timetabling

The Diploma is perceived as having had a considerable impact on school timetabling. It involves allocating blocks of time, often whole days, to diploma teaching. This means that other subjects have to be restricted to other days:

The fact that it has, dare I say, skewed the timetable and I think the children that are on it didn't realise quite what a mammoth thing we were taking on.

(Teacher)

The timetabling side of it. It resulted in a lot of double lessons, kind of on the same subject in one day, not necessarily doubled together. But Year 9 for example, have science, maths, science, maths on a Tuesday. So it means that if they then miss a Tuesday they've missed two of their maths lessons and two of their science lessons. (Teacher)

The centre which was among the most committed to, and positive about, the Diploma operated with a longer school day (8.30am – 5pm) which had reduced some of these timetabling and recruitment issues:

The Creative and Media ...gives us more opportunity to working across the faculty whereas before we were split into two different qualifications. There was the BTEC in Performing Arts and there's a BTEC in Art & Design. We've taken both those groups of students and put them onto the first year of this Diploma. So we've got a year group of about fifty plus students and I think that other centres have got, maybe, eight in a year group or something like that..... Basically we've jumped in with both feet and other places have maybe kind of tentatively started off with a small group of students.

(Teacher)

5.5.5 Recruitment and retention

As indicated, one of the major concerns for centres has been the recruitment of students onto the Diploma. Despite elaborate consortium arrangements, the take-up was often disappointing during 2009-10. The small numbers also dramatically increased costs:

Well as far as the diploma route, I think the barrier is the numbers because the numbers make it difficult to timetable. They also really mean that getting those students between schools becomes expensive if you're taking a bus of 40, that's not bad. If you're taking one in a taxi it starts to get expensive, yeah. And I don't quite know how we crack that. (Governor)
Well, let's give a really good example. This is a real example; we're running a 14 – 16 Diploma in Society, Health and Development. We are the lead partner and we're delivering the lead line of learning here. There are 16 students on the course, but they come from 5 different schools, and the schools take responsibility for delivering the other elements... the functional skills, the additional qualifications, supervising extended projects, and what we have is very variable practice.

(Head Teacher)

Various reasons were put forward for the relatively low uptake. The Diploma is a new qualification which was seen as competing with established general and vocational qualifications. Many centres, and parents, were more comfortable with the familiar – at which these centres were proving successful:

I have not seen the radical change in balance in forms of accreditation at 16 nor at 18 right? I'm seeing the same sorts of young people do very much the same sort of things in some different ways....I think delivery is getting better but I'm still seeing the same forms of accreditation and a school like this has still got its main focus in GCSEs and A Level and I hope that doesn't sound conservative or inward looking, it's simply a reflection of reality.

(Head Teacher)

With regard to Diplomas we are aware of the changes, we keep abreast of the changes, but until I think we're convinced that what they offer would enhance the outcome of our children then we will leave it at that situation or just watch it, and then if we think it's a better product then we would actually consider encompassing it, but at the moment I think the jury's out on Diplomas, let's be honest.

(Teacher)

But I think that these sorts of things, especially when they're not something you have to do, like this change from O-levels to GCSEs everyone had to do, but Diplomas you could easily just carry on doing A-levels or a BTEC or something. It's just an option. And there are very similar things with similar titles in other more familiar types of education, so I think it will probably take a while for it to come in and be a sort of recognised way forward.

(Teacher)

In contrast some centres that had adopted Diplomas had seen a change in engagement of the students:

I've been involved quite heavily with the two centres, and what I've seen happen there is absolutely amazing. Students, at the ages of 14, are just so motivated, they're independent, they're enthusiastic, enthusiastic about learning, and you get enthusiastic students at the moment, but it depends on the day of the week. These ones are enthusiastic all of the time, and it's just... It's amazing, it's breathtaking, and it's so positive. So the future could be very bright for us.

(Teacher)

Some of the hesitancy about the Diploma stems from the political uncertainty (see below) and from its unproven 'currency value' in the educational and employment market:

If they [parents] hear vocational and if they hear Diploma, they're going to think vocational, they're not going to want their kids doing that programmebut until it's tried and tested and gone through a few years, there's actually not going to be enough evidence for parents to say, oh yeah, my child can invest two years on this Diploma.

(Teacher)

5.5.6 Policy uncertainty and funding

Centres were well aware that the Diploma was a flagship policy of the Labour government and that any change in power after the May 2010 election could have a direct impact on the support and funding for it. Those commenting on this saw the political uncertainty as the reason for the cautious response from many schools and colleges:

...many institutions are waiting for the election because there is a view that the political context, that if Labour get back in then it's quite possible the Diplomas will continue and there will be a backing for it because they've spent nearly £50million on it, if the Conservatives get

in I think there's a fear that it might last for a year or two but it will go, so people just won't commit to it.

(Curriculum Manager)

It was generally recognised that the early phases of the Diploma had been generously funded, though the high costs of setting up partnerships and arranging travel had made this funding necessary:

So at the moment you do get approximately about an extra £1,000 per student to enable you to do that. If that money wasn't there then schools wouldn't be able to send students out to colleges and to training providers or to other schools and would have to really keep that provision within the school, which would mean that the provision for the student wouldn't be anywhere near as good.

(Partnership Coordinator)

5.6 Summary

The perception of the centres visited in 2009-10 was that, for most, the Diploma was seen as the central plank of the 14-19 Reforms. However, engagement with it has generally been cautious. Introducing a new, and substantial, qualification meant it was untried and its acceptability to selectors, particularly the universities, unknown. It was also joining a crowded qualifications market in which many schools and colleges were comfortable with what they were already offering. Many centres already provided a range of vocational qualifications, particularly BTECs, which some saw as a better 'size' than the Diploma as they allowed other qualifications to be studied alongside. This was compounded by the fact that failing one element of the Diploma – often the functional skills component – meant the Diploma was not awarded.

However, where one centre had made a full-blooded commitment to the Diploma, including replacing other qualifications with it, there were reports of a much more positive impact on both staff and students. This centre had reduced some of the concerns about timetabling by operating a longer and more flexible school day which more easily accommodated 'blocks' of teaching time. In this centre there was an emphasis on broad vocational pathways from Year 7 to Year 13. This more applied approach appears to have motivated students who entered in Year 7 with very low attainments (the worst in the local authority). In 2009 over 30 students went on to university.

Another reason for caution was the complex partnership arrangements that had to be put in place, particularly by smaller secondary schools. This often involved timetable disruption, as days had to be 'blocked' for travel to other centres, and expensive travel arrangements. Several centres reported pulling back students and teaching them in their own school, even though the resources may not have been as good.

The political uncertainties around the sustainability of the Diploma have also acted as an inhibitor, leaving most centres with a small-scale take-up which in turn leads to a disproportionate demand on resources.

5.7 Functional skills

Functional skills seem to be providing a headache for everybody

(Project Advisor)

The policy intention of functional skills was to meet employer and HE criticisms that GCSEs at grade C or above provides no guarantee that a candidate or employee has mastered basic numeracy and literacy to a satisfactory standard. Functional skills will replace key skills and are examined by external tests which seek to use realistic situations. They therefore have a different emphasis to GCSE English and mathematics, and the assumption is that there will be a need for specific teaching and learning.

Functional skills were widely mentioned in the centre interviews and focus groups. Nearly all these saw the current policy as problematic. For those offering the Diploma, functional skills were seen as the most difficult hurdle for many students, since the Diploma cannot be awarded without them having been passed at the appropriate level (Level 1 for Foundation Diploma and Level 2 for higher and advanced Diplomas). Functional skills are a component of all Diplomas; all Foundation Learning pathways and all Apprenticeships. They are also available as stand-alone qualifications. Functional elements are also a part of new GCSEs in English, mathematics and ICT and are included in key stage 3 and key stage 4 programmes of study.

5.7.1 As a barrier to Diploma success

The most frequent comments were about how students who had been successful in all the other components of the Diploma may not be able to pass because of problems with functional skills. This is different from the general qualifications that most are taking in which a failure in one paper or component can be compensated by performances in other ones. There was also a feeling that this was a widespread problem, since the published pass rates for the Diploma were only based on those who had passed functional skills, those who failed only because of functional skills were not included, 'so we have absolutely no idea how many have not passed functional skills' (Project Advisor).

There was indignation that a single functional skills test might stand in the way of success in the Diploma:

...the problem is for me there are many students who have got the ability to do the majority – well they will get the principal learning, they'll be able to do the project and they'll get the personal learning thinking skills and they'll probably get their English and ICT but they may not get their maths and it can't be right that they don't achieve their full qualification because of maths or do you say because you can't achieve your maths on that level you can't do all of this, it's just absurd.

(Partnership Coordinator)

5.7.2 Different to GCSE

One of the factors that was seen to compound the difficulty of Functional Skills qualifications was that they are very different to GCSE and key stage 3 English and mathematics. So students might pass their GCSEs in English and mathematics and still fail their functional skills:

...you know GCSE maths is not GCSE functional skills and we're having to unlearn some things that we've done with children in order to learn the right way of preparing children for functional skills exams. Children who can sail through and get a C and above in their GCSE who are really struggling with functional skills. [It] is the application and ...being able to see what the question is about, you know.

Mathematics was regularly singled out as the stumbling block for many students, even those who were successful at GCSE. Again it was the format of the questions rather than the mathematics that was seen as the main problem:

...it wasn't so much that it was the difficulty of the Maths content which meant that all our students failed, but it was the way in which the questions were worded in various different vocational contexts and, therefore, it's meant that our Maths team are reviewing their schemes of work to have questions that will apply to lots of different vocational contexts so that next time they do it, they'll do well.

(Curriculum Manager)

The students taking functional skills, which they often still referred to as 'key skills', expressed similar views, one commenting on how the scenarios were more suitable for adults (for example, carpet fitting) than students. Others debated the value of functional skills, including these FE college students:

Female 1: *I think it is just like being back at school with doing like a test rather than doing the course work which is what you do in the Key Skills.*

Male 1: *I think key skills should be optional. For people who need the UCAS points. But a lot of people who –*

Male 2: *It's only like ten UCAS points though. Ten or twenty. Most uni's don't even accept them.*

Male 1: *I know. Apparently the college just does it to get funding.*

Female 2: *It's pointless though because you don't really need to do it if you've already got a C in GCSE, whereas they should just let all those people have that hour and a half off.*

Male: *The skills you get from key skills aren't very practical at all.*

Because of the differences from both GCSE and the key skills qualifications they replace, centres have had to decide how best to teach functional skills. Centres had recognised that some form of direct teaching would be needed to prepare students and had generally moved to doing this 'in-house' rather than leaving it to partnership centres which may be delivering the principal learning component of Diplomas.

The variety of approaches reflects Ofsted findings in its review of the 14-19 Reforms: 'In contrast to the principal learning component of the Diplomas, work in functional skills lacked coordination in just under half the consortia visited and, as a result, the quality of teaching and learning varied considerably. In view of the centrality of functional skills within the future 14–19 curriculum generally, as well as the role of functional skills as an integral part of the Diplomas, this is a key area for development' (Ofsted, 2009, p.4).

5.8 Summary

Functional skills, as they currently operate, are seen by teachers and students as one of the most negative features of the 14-19 reforms, particularly in relation to the Diploma. Because they have to be passed in order to gain the Diploma they are seen as a major stumbling block for many students, including those who have already been successful in GCSE English and mathematics.

5.9 Raising Participation Age (RPA)

One of the announced intentions of the 14-19 Reforms was to raise the minimum age at which young people leave education or training to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. This was commented on regularly in the course of centre visits. Despite adopting a more general term which would also cover apprenticeships and part-time education, many of those commenting referred to it as *raising the school leaving age*. This was a source of some confusion, particularly for students, as it was often interpreted as having to stay on in the same school until 18. This was evidenced by the student who thought FE colleges would suffer because no students would be entering:

... there will be a whole sudden block and college will suddenly lose out on people, because there will be two years where they don't get many people.

The focus groups of disengaged students were the most vocal on this topic. While some could see the value of extending education (*I think it's better because you're getting more education and, like, you're leaving with a better thing, like, grades, so you're getting more of a chance of getting a better job and things*) most emphasised that this should be a choice for a student:

...if I was in year 7⁷ I'd be furious about it. Yeah I would really not like to do it. I like the choice of being able to come to college or not.

Several students pointed out that by age 18, when they were treated as adults for such purposes as voting in elections, students would have the right to choose whether or not they stayed on. These less engaged students also recognised that there were likely to be motivational problems for students who would not otherwise have stayed on having disliked school up to 16 – a theme picked up by the teachers who commented.

The teachers, managers and governors took a more logistical approach to the topic with concerns about resources and how such a change would be managed. Several of the teachers and managers saw the RPA as a move to mask unemployment figures. More generally staff and governors recognised that RPA involved training and other forms of education so saw this policy as something FE might welcome. However there were concerns about whether FE would be able to meet the very diverse needs of some of those staying on:

Well all colleges want as many students at their colleges as possible, so I think it probably fits alright with them. They're probably quite happy about it... I think they've got a big juggling act on their hands to be honest because there are an awful lot of different things that are being

⁷ The year that would be first affected by the policy.

asked to deliver. I don't think that it is particularly easy for them and I know that everyone is stretched with funding as well.

(Teacher)

...what do we have in [this city], about 11% of NEET. Those are not the young people that schools and colleges compete for and those are not young people the sixth forms are going to be after are they? I think there's been a bit of kind of rather naff GCSE thinking that supposes that actually yes we're going to create some vocational sixth forms, we'll actually mop up some of these young people – it won't be like that, not for a minute will it, because they can't! They're just not geared up to do it anyway.

(Governor)

5.10 Summary

The proposed raising of the participation age in education and training was greeted with caution by those most directly affected – students who would typically have left at 16 and those who would have to teach them. Their concerns were partly based on a common misunderstanding, encouraged by their use of the term 'raising the school leaving age', that they would have to stay in school (even if it was currently an 11-16 school). These students insisted staying on should be a matter of choice rather than compulsion. Predictably, teachers were concerned about the resource implications and the curriculum provision for the full range of students.

5.11 Alternative qualifications – the central role of BTEC foundation and diploma qualifications

One of the more unexpected findings from the case study interviews was the prominence attached to BTEC qualifications by many of the centres. There were 45 comments on this in the interviews. Support for them came from Head Teachers and governors and was often based on a combination of their contribution to school results (with the level 2 BTEC First Diploma equivalent to 4 GCSEs) and of offering a more practical curriculum that engaged students in a way that GCSEs may not:

The changes have taken place mainly vocationally in terms of BTEC. Looking at the learning styles of some of the pupils, and recognising that the traditional GCSE pathways suit some, suits many of our children, but there are some that it really doesn't suit, and that a different form of assessment often would enable that child to achieve more, and that's why there's been a move towards an increase of BTECs.

(Teacher)

Here, we're very keen on offering as broad a range of curriculum as we possibly can, and to that end, we've really got stuck into BTECs, and this is the first full year where we've given a much fuller range of BTECs, considering that the vocational options are important our students too, and not just to focus on the eight plus GCSEs, which has been historical, and forcing students to go down a particular route, which perhaps isn't applicable for them.

(Governor)

One of the perceived strengths of BTEC qualifications was that they had currency value with employers and selectors in a way that the specialised Diploma did not as yet have:

BTEC has a currency, employers know what it means, they know what a GCSE is, they know what an A level is, they haven't a clue about bloody Diploma.

(Headteacher)

There was an accompanying concern that changes in equivalences with GCSEs could be used to undermine the adoption of BTECs:

What we have to do is work with what we know, that is why that school is sticking with BTEC because it works for them and they won't change until they are told that is not happening anymore and they will hold it to the end because it is working for them. Until the currency of BTEC's changes, right BTEC's are no longer worth GCSE's.

(Project advisor)

Such a change was thought less likely by the impact it would have on schools and the consequences for policy makers:

I'm not sure what'll happen to BTECs, because so many schools have improved their results with BTECs. No government is going to want to come into power and suddenly have a GCSE results plummet in their first summer, but I can't see them keeping the same weighting.

(Teacher)

5.12 Policy issues

A number of respondents commented on what was seen as policy indecision around qualifications such as BTECs in relation to the Diploma. Because they were being allowed to coexist, this made the task of establishing the Diploma far more difficult:

I just think the Government bottled it and I think the decision makers have bottled it with regard to what happens to BTECs. If they'd what they said with GNVQ's which is GNVQ's will go, here's a four year warning, this lot will go then, this lot will go the following year, and then you tell providers that, then providers will think, 'Well, what's going to be my curriculum alternative then?' And obviously BTEC's have benefited enormously from that. I never really understood why they got rid of GNVQ's but at least with that there was clarity of plan. This seems to be complete uncertainty from the very beginning as to whether Diplomas will grow because people will voluntarily choose to start doing Diplomas rather than BTEC's, because students, teachers and institutions will naturally see them as better than BTEC's, or are BTEC's going to be part of the Diploma framework.

(Headteacher)

And if the Government means what it says and ultimately the market will decide, well my guess would be that BTEC's will stifle Diplomas as birth unless national decision makers are going to be more decisive about what they want and where they want us to go. So that would explain why cautious engagement has been the touchstone here.

(Headteacher)

5.13 Summary

The Diploma, as yet, coexists alongside some well-established suites of qualifications, in particular the BTEC qualifications. Given the BTEC has high recognition and currency value, many of the centres visited were not inclined to switch from them to the new qualification. This was in part because of their equivalence value to GCSE but also because they were recognised as an important source of broadening the curriculum and offering a vocational dimension. This was something to which students appeared to respond well, since, like the Diploma, it offers a more applied approach. The main uncertainties were around policy decisions, but there was some confidence that BTEC was too important to interfere with substantially.

5.14 Other 14-19 Reforms

The interviews and focus groups offered, by means of a summary diagram (see Appendix D1.10), opportunities to discuss any of the main reforms. However, there were relatively few references in the focus groups and interviews to elements in the 14-19 Reform programme not already discussed in this chapter. The most frequent of these references was for the Foundation Learning initiative and this received a generally positive response from those who commented:

So foundation learning in my personal view is a very exciting piece of reform that meets the needs of learners at that level. For me it's exactly right, because all of those young people probably need some personal and social development input. We want them to be functional, and we want to get the vocational experience, so I don't think you can argue with that, from my point of view I think that's sound. Whereas the Diplomas, although I think some of the Diplomas work very well, it depends on the lines of learning. Some of them are appropriate to what I think a young person may need, particularly for progression.

(Project advisor)

The changes to GCSE and GCE A levels had produced little impact on schools during the first two terms of 2009-2010. While teachers were beginning to address the impact on their teaching, there was limited experience in practice. This was in line with evaluation of the changes (AlphaPlus, July 2010). This evaluation found that 'Assessments at A level have become less predictable, which, together with a lack of exemplar materials, has meant that teachers have been less certain about what to expect in the A2 examinations this summer and less confident about whether they have prepared students sufficiently' (p.13). Similarly there was limited experienced of the controlled assessment in GCSE. Take-up of the extended project had been fairly restricted, with only just over five thousand candidates entering in 2009 (DCSF, 2009b). There was recognition that more Apprenticeships would be important but this was tempered by the difficulty in arranging them with employers during a recession.

5.15 Chapter summary

The CReSt centre visits showed that, for most schools and colleges, the 14-19 Reform programme is closely identified with the introduction of the Diploma and its component functional skills requirement.

Most of the centres opted for 'cautious engagement' with relatively few students taking the Diploma, particularly at level 3. This may reflect both centre and student caution at taking up a relatively untried qualification which would take up nearly all the curriculum time. The side-effect of this was the impact on school timetables as days had to be blocked for diploma students to attend their courses. This was sometimes combined with costly transport demands for the small groups of students on the courses. For those involved the main concern was often about low success rates in the functional skills components, failure of which meant the Diploma could not be awarded. This set the Diploma apart from other qualifications – both general and vocational. The most positive responses about the Diploma came from centres which had engaged with it more fully by, for example, dropping other vocational courses, and were running with larger numbers of students.

Most centres have adopted a wait-and-see approach, especially given the political uncertainties around it in the build up to the May 2010 general election. What emerged from the fieldwork was the important role of BTEC qualifications in many centres curriculum offer – and how centres were reluctant to move from these to the untried Diploma.

The other 14-19 reforms appeared to have had limited impact for schools and colleges overall at the time of the visits. Foundation learning had been welcomed by those involved, while the changes to GCSE and GCE A levels had, in the first two terms of 2009-10, had little direct impact on teaching and learning but were starting to impact on students (see Chapter 7 for more detail).

6 Partnerships

6.1 Educational Partnerships in the context of the 14-19 Reform Programme

The recent reforms in 14-19 education, implemented under the 1997-2010 Labour government, have increased the emphasis on partnerships between schools, colleges and other organisations. Historically, the focus of partnership working was often centred on catering for a small group of disaffected learners. The new 14-19 responsibilities of local authorities which include entitlement to a particular type of education, fair opportunities for progression, provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG), and Children's Trust legislation, mean that educational partnerships are now more wide-ranging and address the needs of a wider range of learners. The DCSF (2008c) suggested that in order to deliver the full range of pathways to students, collaboration between providers would be necessary. 14-19 partnerships were expected to enable:

“the pooling of resources and facilities to deliver a more responsive service and economies of scale over time; a more personalised offer to a larger number of learners; and the maximum opportunity for providers to deploy their specialisms” (DCSF, 2009c: 7)

Despite early references to wider multi-agency partnerships and integrated services which would be needed to engage the full range of learners (e.g. DCSF, 2007), the main 14-19 policy thrust around partnerships has focussed on relationships between different educational institutions, and shared curriculum provision – particularly around Diplomas. The need for partnership working beyond Diplomas is clear, however, Pring (2009) argued that a single educational institution on its own is unlikely to meet the needs of all its students, so there is a need for “comprehensive systems” where schools and colleges work with each other, and with organisations such as: independent training providers, employers, youth service, and voluntary bodies. There is an implicit assumption that partnerships result in operational expansion and financial savings, and the policy push towards these goals requires a flexible and efficient approach to partnership working in the English educational system. Ironically, this policy trend towards collaboration, runs against the competitive education system that has developed in a culture of autonomy, inspection, accountability, enrolments and reward (Hodgson and Spours, 2006). Nonetheless, centres of all types are now unable to work in isolation, and collaborative work is being pursued in many different ways.

While partnerships are undeniably a key part of the 14-19 educational reforms, they necessarily function within a tangled web of pre-existing relationships. Cross-organisational collaborative work happens for a variety of reasons, not all of which are directly related to the 14-19 reforms. The complexity of school partnership networks, which have combined effects on their operation, was evident when discussing what partnerships mean to different people in centres. Therefore this chapter will focus on partnerships within the context of the 14-19 reform programme, but not *only* on those partnerships that arise out of the reforms.

Data for this chapter came mainly from the interviews with Head Teachers, partnership coordinators, and governors. Some data came from interviews with project advisors, curriculum managers,

teachers, and other staff. Little data from students and parents was incorporated in this chapter, as students and parents commented infrequently about partnerships. All participants were prompted on the reforms, but in the Head Teacher, governor and partnership coordinator interviews diagrams that represented partnerships at the time of the baseline study were also used as prompts, to start discussions about how collaborative arrangements had changed and what other partnerships were developing. First-level codes used as a basis for this chapter were “centres and partnerships support options choices offered to students”, “partnerships”, and “effects of inter-organisational working on teaching practices”. Second-level codes were generated from the content of these first-level codes. These second-level codes were then used to develop the themes that are described in this chapter. These themes, therefore, can be described as emergent from the data, rather than driven by theory or existing literature and first-level codes.

6.2 A continuum of partnership working

Partnerships in 14-19 education have been conceptualised in a variety of ways. Hodgson and Spours (2006) described ten different models of partnerships in terms of their level of formality of structure. These ranged from federation between schools (extremely formal), where there may be a joint governing body, through to occasional, localised collaborative activities (informal) which are usually run between centres without the involvement of local authorities, central government or other over-arching bodies or funding providers. Billett et al (2007) focussed on the ways in which partnerships develop or emerge, and outlined three types. They described community partnerships as those which emerge from within a community, enacted partnerships as those which are imposed but have goals that a community engages with, and negotiated partnerships as those which arise from a recognition by different organisations of the need to work together to reach a particular goal.

Higham and Yeomans (2010) believed that most partnerships originated as negotiated partnerships. They categorised partnerships in 14-19 education according to four inter-related dimensions: inclusivity (who was involved and how did they participate); depth (to what extent participants engaged with the partnership, and how much impact it had on practice); scale (geographical spread and numbers of participants); and focus (what the partnership aimed to do). They suggested that variations along these dimensions led to three broad orientations of purpose: technical collaboration, which tends to be about strategy, rather than practice; instrumental collaboration, which tends to be in response to a specific agenda but may not be long-lasting; and committed collaboration, where partners have established their own goals and values, and are likely to continue working together. Such descriptions served to characterise partnerships at a moment in time, and Higham and Yeomans described how partnerships may start as technical or instrumental collaboration and develop into committed collaboration.

Many types of partnership and work with other organisations were described in the interviews with centres. Looking at the processes that took place, joint work appeared to vary in its degree of “jointness”: how much centres plan work together, and the extent to which partnership is embedded

within a centre, vary considerably. Different centres reported different approaches towards partnership working, and different instances of joint work within a centre can have very different characteristics. The degree of “jointness” of a partnership’s processes can be illustrated on the following continuum of collaboration (Figure 6).

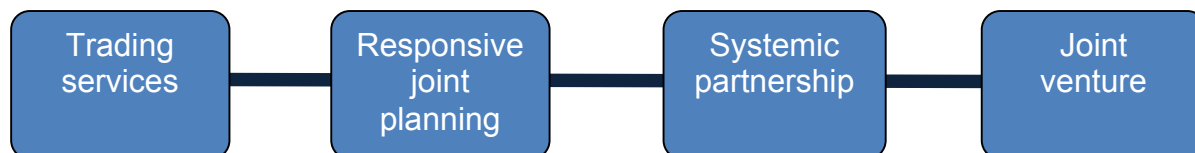


Figure 6: A continuum of partnership work

Trading services refers to times when a centre may buy, sell or exchange some kind of service. Twelve of the 18 centres referred to this kind of activity. This may be in terms of a school sending a less motivated student to a college for a particular course, perhaps benefiting from a more vocational course in a different environment, or a centre may buy in a whole course from another provider, if for example the centre does not have the expertise to teach a course themselves.

Connexions was mentioned by many centres as an organisation with whom they worked, although this was often only to the extent that Connexions used space in the centre and were accessed by the students. Some centres mentioned using other organisations to arrange work experience and careers events:

What I need to mention is that we have a fantastic partnership with East [county] Business Partnership, and they do our work experience placements with us. And they also provide us with conferences and workshops, they work with us for the Careers: Today and Tomorrow. And they actually do all the... in terms of the work experience placements, you know, they do all the risk assessments and the health and safety checks and all those types of things.

(Project advisor)

Buying in such provision was not limited to the smallest centres who did not have a wide range of in-house opportunities: larger 11-19 centres also reported using courses and teachers from local colleges. On the other side of the coin, staff in colleges and some schools described how local schools and other organisations accessed their expertise and resources. This was described by some as a valuable source of revenue, and by an independent centre as fulfilling their public benefit obligations:

But we do have to make sure we meet our public benefit obligation. The main way we do that is by offering means-tested bursaries to girls... To families who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford the education that we offer. But we do have to develop links with local maintained schools. And, as I say, those are growing. We've got a reasonable link with a local maintained school which has recently introduced classics and our head of classics is supporting them in their delivery of Latin, their moderation of tests and that sort of thing. And I can see that growing. We have had in the past reasonably strong links with local primary schools as well, where we've run workshops in their schools on debating, we've visited to teach Spanish because it's not a modern language that's commonly delivered in the primary schools.

(Deputy Head Teacher)

Trading services is not, however, limited to delivery of teaching. Some centres allowed other organisations to access their facilities, such as drama studios, sports facilities, and other specialist spaces. Other centres spoke about buying and selling other types of expertise, including business support services and training:

Well business development is actually looking at other funding streams for the college really and using what resources we've got here and taking them out to a market place and using them in a different way. So it may well be using people in the multi-media department to go into Newsquest International which they've done in the past down the road and do Quark Express training or animation for their website. And that's good because it then creates an opportunity where we can go back and say, 'Can we use you as a work placement?' Or, 'Can we use you for an apprentice?'

(Staff Governor)

A key characteristic of trading services is that there is little sense of shared planning between organisations. A centre will make a decision to purchase (or not to purchase) a given service depending on whether that service is seen to meet a need. It may be that some negotiation is entered into when purchasing a service and relationships may be one-off exchanges, short-lived, or ongoing, but in essence the buyer and the seller remain separate entities. One centre described the advantage of this way of working as being able to control the extent of the relationship:

With [alternative provision] we paid for a service, with the college we paid for a service which is easier in many ways, because you just say no we don't want the service anymore or yes we'd like more of the service.

(Head Teacher)

Responsive, joint planning refers to situations where centres come together in order to address a shared need. This may be in response to a policy directive, such as delivery of the entitlement, or the consortiums developed to address Diploma delivery:

Well, obviously the 14-19 education reforms, this is the main driver there, and the amount of change that government want to see happening. An educational institution, no matter who they are, can't be all things to all people, so hence the need for collaborative working, if you like. So that, I think, is where it comes from. You know, if you want to deliver, for instance, a land-based Diploma, it needs an awful lot of resourcing, and not everyone has it, but if that's the entitlement then, you know, the children within that area need to go somewhere for it.

(Partnership manager)

Or teacher development needs, or the needs of students:

It's enabled us to canvas potential partners in areas where they're better equipped to meet the needs of our youngsters whether they are like institutions through the learning federation or outside and where that expertise is not available or is impractical due to the length of journey times to study or the lack of transport infrastructure, we've looked at working with partners in house particularly adult and community education to develop facilities jointly that will meet the needs of both the 11 – 16 students which, they're my prime responsibility, but also the adult and community education provision we offer.

(Head Teacher)

In these cases organisations plan together how best to address the issue at hand, and there is usually some agreed way of working together. Such relationships may be ongoing, although may cease to exist once the need has been met or the issue has been resolved. Easen et al (2000) described such joint work as “bounded”, with boundaries to the remit or timescale, for example, of the collaboration.

Further towards the right-hand end of the continuum, **systemic partnership** represents joint work that is more strategic. Some centres reported working with other organisations in a way that has moved on from becoming responsive. Such partnerships are likely to be established in their ways of working together. While they are likely to respond to needs as they arise, the key point is that these centres have well-developed relationships and established ways of working with other centres. Groups of individuals within such partnerships are likely to meet on a regular basis, and often plan strategically as a group, for example around curriculum development or recruitment: the outcomes of such partnerships may be defined by the group itself, rather than imposed externally. Centres who were involved in such activity included local groups of schools or colleges that have come together to determine how they can best work in the interests of their locality:

We are all colleges, relatively small colleges, we're all colleges who set up to have a widening participation agenda, so we have common issues. So we are, we've been working in partnership, in an informal partnership for over a year now, looking at staff development, joint approaches to particular issues in our colleges.

(Head Teacher)

At the far right-hand end of the continuum, **joint venture** illustrates instances where organisations are more formally linked, and in some way operate as a single entity. In some respects this goes beyond mere partnership – many of the problems encountered when bringing two separate organisations together are no longer relevant. In a small number of centres this was evident in their federation with local primary schools, but one centre was also legally linked with other institutions such that they operated as one unit within an area of 14-19 education:

We've created a community interest company or CIC called the Virtual College which has an advisory board which is made up of the Head Teachers and a board, an executive board, made up of representatives from our governing body and we tend actually to meet together as an advisory board and as a full board and that means that we can attract funds, we have a legal entity, we employ staff now whereas in the past it was a bit of pot luck, the people that we wanted to work for us in this collaborative probably were on my books and therefore their legal employment went through the local authority and so on and there were complexities with that. So we've moved from a voluntary collaborative structure, thinking about vocational provision in [this area] to an organisation which is or has a legal entity and we have a wide range of Diplomas being studied across our four schools.

(Head Teacher)

This continuum illustrates the extent to which instances of joint work could be termed “partnership working” – it does not attempt to categorise whole centres. Individual centres carried out different joint work at different points on this continuum simultaneously, working systemically with some organisations, and on an ad-hoc, responsive basis with others for example. Furthermore, joint work does not necessarily fall exactly under one of the four points described on the continuum – these are

not discrete points. Some work might be mainly about trading services, yet there may have been some degree of joint planning. It may also be that joint work starts at one point on the continuum, such as trading services or responsive planning, and then a partnership develops into systemic collaboration or even joint ventures. For example, one centre had started to work with other schools and colleges around the Diploma, but the partnership had developed into a more general collaborative group:

What is its [The Operations Group's] function? That's a very good question. We are desperately trying to move away from talking about Diplomas all the time. There's a feeling one's got a bit tired of it. And to start talking about how do we raise aspirations of participation and results in science. That's what we're trying to do. And so we were in the last meeting looking at some of the local authority targets they have for numbers of level twos completing by 17 and all this sort of stuff. So it's moving much more to that ground. We have in the past shared our approaches to the curriculum and options, and that's been something people have talked about, for looking at foundation learning tier. So it has a function of, an opportunity for the deputies to get together and discuss key issues, such as Diplomas, foundation learning tier, curriculum options, accelerated key stage three, those sorts of things. We're instituting... well I've got the agenda up here. This is our scheme of work for the year for the Ops Group. So you see that we're trying to look at learning some stuff about functional skills, new key stage four apprenticeships, looking at the [city] targets. Need to get organised for this one. Learning more about the OFSTED framework, we've got ICT strategy coming up. In between hand we're trying to do some of these surveys, so we're into this curriculum mapping exercise. I want to set up learning visits where there's a need, or there's a desire within the city to where someone's cracked it, so like [other school] for instance have got exceptional maths results. Why aren't we all learning from that? So let's set up some sort of sharing for that, but what are the protocols for that? So having to work that through. We have a residential in late June, early July, 1st or 2nd of July this year actually, and we will have quite a large conference together.

(Partnership coordinator)

When considering where joint work would sit on the continuum, it must be borne in mind that what is reported from one person's point of view may not present the whole story. For example, one person may describe what appears to be trading services, but this person may not have been aware of preliminary joint planning that has gone into the service delivery. Furthermore, some individuals (and some centres) are better able than others to describe their model of partnership working, and some centres pay more attention than others to the ways in which they engage in joint work.

The ways in which different aspects of the reforms relate to these different types of partnership varies. A-level, GCSE, and the Key Stage 3 curriculum are areas in which centres traditionally work in isolation, and the changes to these have at present resulted in little development of partnership work. In some cases centres spoke in terms of trading services, for example sending students to another centre for a specific A-level course, although this was unrelated to reforms and was more to do with broadening a curriculum offer. Foundation learning and functional skills are relatively recent developments. Examples of partnership work that addressed these specific areas were still rare, although occasionally centres mentioned a relationship along the lines of trading services with some aspects of joint responsive planning, with teachers from one centre supporting another centre in the development or delivery of these areas. This type of teacher support work also was occasionally mentioned with reference to the Diploma. However, these types of partnership were not frequent.

It was more common for centres to work in partnership around Diplomas, although the type of partnership that was linked with Diplomas varied. For starters, as highlighted in Chapter five, the level of engagement with Diplomas varied. At the time of the visits, some centres were not delivering any Diplomas, some had included Diplomas in their offer but with limited take-up, and a few centres were whole-heartedly supportive of the Diplomas with a number of lines being offered. Similarly, the way in which they were delivered across centres varied. Some centres reported little in the way of partnership and tended to deliver mainly to their own students. Other centres, however, had invested more in partnership with students travelling to different institutions for their learning.

In many centres that had engaged with the Diploma at some level, the local authority had suggested or stipulated that centres work in specified consortiums. Some of these centres had little history of working together, and in one notable case had come together very reluctantly. Such partnerships were examples of responsive joint planning – the centres had come together in response to top-down demands (at a national level, in response to the 14-19 entitlement and need to offer Diplomas, and at a local level in response to the Local Authority's requirement that they work together). Their work was focussed on meeting a particular need to deliver the Diploma, which entailed planning transport, timetabling, staffing and other such arrangements. Such partnerships were at different stages: some were still very much in the planning stages, others at the delivery stages. Possibly because such partnerships were in their infancy, many problems were reported in these centres around collaborative work including establishing agreed processes of partnership work, trusting other centres to fulfil their obligations, funding, and logistical issues, as described in the next section.

Other centres, however, developed Diploma delivery within partnerships that already existed – either at the systemic partnership level, or as a joint venture. Such partnerships were not immune from the problems that complicated joint Diploma delivery, but were generally talked about in more positive terms and with more optimism that issues would be overcome than in the less established partnerships. Such centres rarely described a dramatic, direct effect of policy on partnership working: instead they spoke about how the Diplomas fitted in to existing partnerships, or tweaking their existing mechanisms to accommodate new demands from policy.

Centres were generally positive about the idea of apprenticeships, but they reported different levels of success in engaging employers with apprenticeship delivery. Some centres wanted to offer apprenticeships, for example in mechanics or hairdressing, but struggled to recruit employers. Centre staff felt that this had become even more difficult in the current economic recession. Other centres, however, mentioned successful apprenticeship schemes across a range of subject areas. The way in which these relationships worked was not described in depth, however, so it is not possible to describe the type of partnership that characterises apprenticeships.

6.3 The Decision to Collaborate

Hodgson and Spours (2006) suggested that 14-19 partnerships are set up within the context of a “weakly collaborative system”, with few central policy mechanisms that support collaboration, and many that work against it. They propose that the development of “strongly collaborative local learning systems” can be supported by re-organising the structure and roles of different sectors in the education system, and aligning the characteristics of different types of institutions such as FE, sixth form, and different types of schools. Although this is about the environment in which partnerships develop, rather than the internal processes of partnership, it serves as a useful reminder about the importance of context in partnership work. The roles of policy aims and of policy mechanisms which are introduced to bring about change are complex and at times competing. Policy mechanisms in particular are prone to change, which complicates motivational aspects of partnership development (Higham and Yeomans, 2010). Furthermore, as Higham and Yeomans discuss, different institutions can interpret policy differently, which further complicates motivation to collaborate: for example, individual performance tables can lead to competition between institutions, or indirectly to collaboration as a means to engage more learners, so improve an institution’s standing. At a more local level, issues around transport, distance, demography, and the number of local potential partners are all issues to consider when developing partnerships. Within institutions, the nature of the individuals involved and institutional cultures can all impact on how a partnership evolves (DCSF, 2008b; Higham and Yeomans, 2010).

Different centres in the CReSt project took different approaches to partnerships. Some centres reported many instances of joint work, and spoke positively about the advantages of collaboration. These included:

- a wider offer for students (including A levels, Diplomas, and so on)
- increased opportunities for development of apprenticeships
- a greater focus on quality assurance, leading to improved teaching and learning within centres
- access to a wider range of resources and facilities
- a wider network of practitioners to exchange ideas and information with
- fundraising opportunities and financial savings
- increased opportunities for student recruitment

Others reported fewer partnerships and discussed the problems associated with collaborative work. Centres’ discussions on partnerships revealed a variety of different issues that needed to be considered when developing collaborative work. These issues also contributed to the type of partnership that was described: whether centres reported trading services or systemic collaboration for example.

6.3.1 Nature of the work

The nature of the work within a partnership will inevitably impact greatly on how the relationship between centres develops. The types of work that were described as partnership working were diverse, and included:

- delivery of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities
- support service delivery including Aim Higher, Connexions, social care and mental health services
- staff development activities, including teacher training
- work experience and work placement provision
- management support including mentoring
- curriculum development
- strategic development
- business support, such as employee training, technical support, provision of artistic expertise, advice on recruitment
- charitable and voluntary work
- use of resources and equipment

Some of these types of work may lend themselves to a particular point on the continuum of partnership. For example, use of resources and equipment is a relatively straightforward transaction that requires little in the way of joint planning. Some centres commented that other organisations used their sports facilities, or conversely said that they used facilities at other schools and colleges. One centre had particularly impressive drama facilities: this centre included students from a local special school in their drama classes. The Head Teacher here also described a partnership with a local theatre company who used the facilities, and in return allowed students free entry into matinees, as well as running theatre workshops with them. Support services were often described as “partners” but their role varied widely from just taking referrals or delivering onsite (trading services) to being more involved with the centre and other organisations. An example of responsive joint planning was evident in one of the special centres, where Connexions and other support services were particularly involved in students’ reviews:

- Head Teacher:** *And, at the 14 plus transitions review, there's a personalised learning emphasis and several of us have been on courses for personalised transition reviews, so that the whole review meeting is actually held from that young person's point of view, and everybody around the table is introduced to that young person and everybody says what they like about that child, which helps with their self esteem, and they listen to the child. The Connexions advisor interviews them at that stage, finds out what they're interested in doing in the future, if they've got any idea, and they're regularly reviewed.*
- Interviewer:** *And are they always invited to that meeting?*
- Head Teacher:** *Yes, particularly the 14 plus one, particularly that one. And the Connexions advisor attends every review after that.*

Other types of collaborative work, however, are much more likely to involve some kind of joint planning. Diploma delivery across a consortium, for example, requires coordination of timetabling and

transport, and sometimes included joint planning on the way in which individual subjects would be delivered. Curriculum and strategic development were often illustrative of systemic partnership: centres worked together to pursue their own, self-determined agendas and in this way felt more able to meet the challenges of implementing reform.

6.3.2 Opportunity for partnership

Centres frequently spoke about issues that made it easy or hard for them to work with other institutions. All eighteen centres spoke about the relationship between finance or resources, and partnership working. Finance and resources were relevant in many ways. In some cases, centres were keenly aware of the time and costs that went into pursuing collaborative work, and felt that there was no guarantee that partnerships would work well enough to make the initial investment worthwhile:

It costs money to be out of school, it costs money to spend time talking about things we might or might not do collaboratively. And if the work based learning providers are finding it tight and they haven't got the time to engage a meeting which may or may not help them, then we are going to be in exactly the same position in the next 18 months.

(Head Teacher)

Some smaller centres felt that their staff capacity limited the amount of time they could devote to developing and maintaining partnerships. Some centres had concerns that collaborative provision could be financially costly:

If you have three or four students that go to another area because they want to do hair and beauty or something, but they don't all go, of course you still have the same amount of... you make no saving from that, and the difficulty I'm sure with the model of collaborative provision of Diplomas and everything ... is that you don't actually make any saving until you have whole groups leaving your institution entirely, so that you save that teaching hour. Until you get to that point it's all a cost. So all that people see is the cost.

(Partnership coordinator)

When it came to trading services, centres inevitably spoke about the financial cost of buying services, and the financial gains from selling them. The cost of alternative provision, for example, was prohibitive for some centres, and this was recognised even by some students. A larger centre, however, described how their size facilitated their involvement in partnerships, both financially and in terms of their identity:

We are very heavily engaged in basically any type of committee or organisation, we are a very good institution for working in partnerships and we are of a large enough size to be able to use the economies of scale to enable us to have the staff to do that. If we were a smaller college, you wouldn't be able to do as much. If you were too big you lose some of that local identity that you need. So we are heavily engaged in a lot of the economic partnerships and stuff

(Deputy Head Teacher)

While some centres were sceptical about the benefits of collaborative work, other centres were exploring how partnerships could enable them to achieve cost savings, for example through joint commissioning. Some centres also discussed the financial benefits that came from partnership work,

in terms of access to grants and subsidies. Centres mentioned, for example, the financial support available for those running new Diploma lines, and the availability of other grants linked to collaborative work:

One of the schools in the 11 we're in a more concrete relationship by virtue of what's called a Gaining Ground Project. Have you come across this? Its results are below average, our results are above average. The government has given local authorities some money. So it's the next level up from National Challenge. So it's not for the very, the schools that aren't hitting the 30%, it's the schools who are in the 40%, below where they should be. So there's been a little bit of money put in basically for us to help them improve their results. And that's required a bit more formal planning and thinking.

(Deputy Head Teacher)

The link between policy, at a national and at a local level, and partnership working was evident in many discussions, and did not focus solely on financial matters. At the time of the centre visits, a general election was imminent and the uncertainty that this caused was the subject of much discussion – some of it around the potential impact on partnerships. More specifically, some centres described how government policies meant that they had to collaborate:

You aren't even going to get in your commissioning properly from the local authority or LSC as it was, unless you demonstrate collaboration and partnership in the way you start this, because there is no small sixth form that can stand alone, given the entitlement of choice, which youngsters have got these days.

(Head Teacher)

Others spoke about how the requirements for 14-19 partnership enabled other partnerships to be developed:

Well, in the way that 14-19 partnerships that have developed in the context of the 14-19 reforms, and the people in those partnerships are naturally talking about the whole curriculum, not simply about the Diploma aspects of it

(Head Teacher)

On the other side of the coin, a small number of centres described how recent policy initiatives had impeded partnership working, acting against other policies that were intended to encourage it:

If anything has damaged collaboration, and it clearly has, it has to be National Challenge because National Challenge has forced schools back into their silos, back into looking at their students and getting their A star to Cs in English and maths up, and it has really impacted on that whole ability to sort of offer a mix and match curriculum across a consortium.

(Regional 14-19 coordinator)

Some centres spoke about existing links with other organisations supporting their work in the 14-19 arena, or the 14-19 reforms enabling those links to be formalised. This was especially relevant around work placements, apprenticeships and so on:

Partnership coordinator: *So there is a history of collaboration. And the same with the FE college, a lot of schools have sent students to college for*

Increased flexibility of courses, the young apprenticeships programmes...

Interviewer: *So that was already happening?*

Partnership coordinator: *Already in place, and I think 14-19 reforms have kind of formalised that, and are building upon it.*

However, all centres acknowledged the importance of individuals, and personal relationships, in developing and maintaining partnerships:

There's also individuals, partnerships are built on individuals talking and building up good relationships, if one person leaves another one comes in who hasn't necessarily got those views, then that institution can then just be taken straightaway out of the picture.

(Partnership coordinator)

This was illustrated in many different anecdotes: staff acted as governors at other centres; personal links with employers led to work placements; Head Teachers or deputy heads met together on a regular basis and sat on local authority panels.

Location, particularly in relation to other organisations, was mentioned by most centres when discussing partnerships. Those centres in a rural area faced particular problems around transport, in part due to the lack of local infrastructure, and having to fund the cost of transporting students themselves, and in part due to the sheer logistical pressure of transporting students to a number of different venues several miles apart:

Location's an issue for some, so one of the issues and this comes in with Diplomas actually, it's about travel, so we're a fairly rural county, so how people get to where the learning is going to take place is quite an issue that could be an inhibiting factor.

(Project advisor)

Other centres described how close proximity facilitated partnerships with other centres:

Head Teacher: *In reality we work most closely with the 11-16 catholic ethos school sharing post-16 courses.*

Interviewer: *And they're right next door aren't they?*

Head Teacher: *They're right next door and it's really convenient and that's been going for years and years, certainly 10, 11 years.*

Local authority boundaries were a source of frustration for some centres. Some were based in rural areas with widely dispersed institutions; others were close to authority borders and felt that it would be more appropriate to work with institutions in neighbouring authorities:

I've been talking to [city] to see if some of our students got access to Diploma lines in [city] in the neighbouring authority, because it's not going to happen here in [county], it's just not going to happen.

(Deputy Head Teacher)

Some centres, such as the secure unit, an independent girls' school, a school with specialist status, a catholic school, a special school, and sixth-form colleges had existing links and worked in partnership

with similar institutions that were not necessarily local, but had some similarity in ethos or intake. Local networks that were not focused solely on education were also used by centres to develop relationships and partnerships. These included a children's trust, some networks with a focus on community development, and some with a business focus.

The availability of local industry to provide work experience places was referred to by many centres. This was not just an issue for rural centres – some centres in more urban areas also struggled to find work placements and apprenticeship placements for students, due to the current economic climate:

The difficulty of course now is getting employers because of the recession, you know, and that really affects the apprenticeships therefore and that's an issue for the 14 – 19 year olds. Whereas before probably, there would be lots of apprenticeships going in engineering, electrical, building and, you know. It's hard, I think.

(Partnership coordinator)

Many centres, large and small, spoke about the way in which they tried to become more visible in the local community, and use this as a marketing strategy to build links with other organisations:

We want to raise the profile of the school within the community so people understand the gain, partly for reasons of our own, that we want to be able to tap them up for money or resources or so forth. For example, a few years ago, we were at our maximum numbers, we put I think it was 310 students out on work experience in a week. Now you've got to have pretty good links with your business communities to do that... we hope they want to be associated with [this school] and the successes that we've had, and therefore we've got a brand, in marketing terms, which people want to be associated with. The kids are obviously the principal marketing tool as it were.

(Governor)

6.3.3 The Nature of Centres

The way in which centres promoted themselves was, in part, bound up with the extent to which they were involved in partnerships. Some centres were very active in seeking partnership, notably the two special centres and some sixth-form or FE colleges – in some of these centres it was a key part of their strategy:

In terms of [this college] as well though, it's got to mean how we work with partner schools, with local clusters and so on, because that's a pretty key element of what we do and it's a strategic priority especially with our new Principal who has made it such and that's been really, a really good key development.

(Governor)

Centres who described themselves as high-achieving spoke about partnerships that involved them helping other schools, and sharing their expertise. Supporting other schools seemed to fit in with their self-images as successful centres:

So, although we haven't physically offered a Diploma here, we have been involved with working up the local Diploma offer because being involved with Diplomas is not just about offering them at your establishment, it's about being professionally generous and seeing how do we contribute to the area debate.

(Head Teacher)

Although few centres described themselves as not willing to work in partnership with other organisations, many suggested that other centres were unwilling:

The other two schools in the borough are very reluctant to get involved, because they consider themselves to be islands, and are not interested really.

(Governor)

The ethos of the centre, at a more general level, was also a factor in partnerships. Some centres felt able to work together strategically, as they were facing similar issues or had similar missions:

And those five colleges all have very, very similar challenges around those issues of supporting sometimes difficult-to-reach learners. And so we started a project with that a couple of years ago around performance and management of our AS level results and trying to improve those because we all felt we had the same challenges. And that's still going.

(Partnership coordinator)

Other centres, however, felt that they had little in common with potential partners. Differences such as behaviour, uniform, and other expectations were seen as problematic particularly around curriculum delivery. Centres also highlighted the values and aspirations of different organisations as a consideration in partnership work:

And we've tried to collaborate with the college but their whole view of the world is not the same as ours, their values about their youngsters and what they want for their youngsters is not the same as ours. Similarly the rural 11-16 it's a different value set, so even though it might be good for this one child, the notion that you would work more collaboratively for more youngsters, you've got to work out what is the advantage for that student and I think quite often we don't, we just collaborate because it's the right thing to do.

(Head Teacher)

6.3.4 Views on partnerships

Commitment in terms of partnership working in general, or specific partnerships, was mentioned by all centres. Partnership coordinators often employed by or on behalf of a consortium rather than by an individual centre, were well-placed to comment on this. They were often involved in the day-to-day activities of partnerships, and had an overview of how different people from different organisations worked together. The commitment of individuals was seen as an important factor in ensuring that partnerships worked: one partnership coordinator for example described how people "getting behind the vision" enabled partnerships to flourish. Some centres described a frustration with others' reluctance to commit to partnership work. In specific instances, some described situations where not all centres in a consortium made all the Diploma lines available to their students. This then limited the viability of some Diploma lines, due to insufficient numbers of students applying for the course.

Twelve centres expanded their discussion on commitment to partnerships and spoke explicitly about competition between centres. The tension between the need to recruit students within a league table

culture, and the push to work with other institutions was openly acknowledged by many centres:

I don't shrink from the public obligations of accountability but I think there's something increasingly neurotic about the way in which we are performance management and graded and placed in order, and all our stuff... and I did think that the whole collaborative partnership theme of the 14 – 19 Initiative, was something that I was much happier with. But it's no good going round spouting about it, you have to do it... so that's one thing, it is collaborative, it is in partnership, it means you've got to get your staff to work with staff at other institutions. Yes, you've got to move kids around, but if it enhances their learning experience because they're doing something at [this centre] one day a week that they can't do in their own school, then good job, well done.

(Head Teacher)

A couple of centres in different authorities reported historical reasons for particularly competitive cultures between institutions. In these cases local authorities had carried out reviews in recent years which resulted in some school closures, and schools were keen to monitor their teaching and learning closely in order to defend their own future.

In short, there was an acknowledgement that working in partnership did not necessarily come naturally to some centres. As one governor put it, 'Partnership is really hard and it's very hard to do partnership without some loss of autonomy isn't it? And everybody prizes their autonomy.'

6.3.5 Models of collaboration

Centres varied in terms of how clearly and to what extent they conceptualised their partnerships. A lot of interviewees spoke about partnerships at a functional level, in terms of roles and who does what within the partnership, how finances are distributed and so on. Ten of the centres spoke about using, or developing, some kind of formal agreement to outline the ways in which a partnership would work and how different participants would contribute. Generally formal agreements were seen as useful for ensuring clarity and some kind of commitment between participants, which might help prevent partner institutions not delivering on their obligations. Some centres, however, reported successful informal partnerships that were based on good relationships:

But with the college it's been done on quite an informal basis really, we haven't signed any agreements to say who's going to do what or anything like that particularly, it's all been done pretty much on goodwill and building up relationships between the different people in the different centres.

(Partnership coordinator)

Having spoken about the day-to-day operation of partnerships, few people went on to describe the philosophy of a way of working collaboratively. Some, however, had considered this, alongside the implications of partnerships working in certain ways. A deputy head at an FE college, for example, spoke about the need for social responsibility, and how the college supported the whole local community rather than just trying to serve the needs of learners who bring in money. A regional 14-19 coordinator considered a bigger picture, and described how they wanted to develop a coherent plan for provision within their consortium:

A good way of kind of thinking about it is that generally what has tended to happen in the past is that collaboration or the collaborative offer is often just the sum of all the individual parts, and that's the collaborative offer. But actually what it needs to be is a strategy which says, actually, well, you know, we need to understand, based on our needs analysis of young people, how much level one, how much level two, and how much level three provision we need as we move to raising the participation age. What is our cohort looking like? What do we know about their literacy and numeracy skills? So what actually do we need to be putting in place? And who's best placed to do that? And so if we're just basically thinking about our A level provision, I think we're now at a stage where we need to review the current sort of consortium arrangements of young people moving for options, but actually how can we maybe firm it up, looking at, you know, we know what the historical trends are, we know what young people tend to opt for, and plan that more coherently. So the individual institution will say "This is my core offer, but I also want this, this, this. I don't want to offer these A levels, but I want my students to be able to access these A levels," which has happened in the past, but we need to just do it much more systematically and plan for that.

(Regional 14-19 coordinator for Diplomas)

An overview of where an individual partnership sat within a wider context or network was also infrequent, although where centres did discuss this they were clear about the need to link different partnerships together. One Head Teacher, for example, saw the 14-19 agenda as overlapping with the development of the children's trust, and the local children's partnerships, and recognised that the same sets of people were involved in many different collaborations. The need for coherence was also seen as important for students:

And the thing about partnership working, as someone who's been involved with it for about seven years, you can't have a series of discrete projects in a school – you have to see what is coordinated and linked with another, otherwise I think children get quite mixed messages. And I think the impact is greater, the more coherent those partnership workings are.

(Partnership coordinator)

6.4 Conclusions

The types of partnerships that centres reported are extremely diverse, as is the extent to which centres engage in collaborative work. Most centres reported some kind of cross-institutional curriculum delivery, with many centres also describing partnerships with other foci, such as curriculum development, staff development, and support for and from local businesses. The ways in which individual partnerships operated was illustrated along a continuum, from trading services which involved little joint planning, through responsive joint planning, where centres worked together on specific issues such as Diplomas, and systemic partnership, where relationships are ongoing and well-established and partnerships create their own agenda for joint work, to joint venture, where organisations are in some sense a single legal entity and there is little need for negotiation. A single centre may participate in many different partnerships which operate in a variety of ways. The ways in which partnerships developed were influenced by the purpose of the partnership, the opportunities for partnership, the nature of centres, their views on partnerships and their own models of collaborative work. The way in which a partnership operates can evolve over time – some centres reported relationships that had started out as responsive joint planning, for example, and developed into systemic partnership.

The continuum of partnership processes echoes the categorisations of partnership purposes developed by Higham and Yeomans (2010), partnership development by Billet et al (2007) and partnership structures by Hodgson and Spours (2006). Structure, purpose, development and process are interlinked aspects of collaborative work: the purpose of a partnership will affect how it develops, how the organisations are linked, and how they work together. Specifically, Higham and Yeoman's idea of committed partnership, where partners have developed ways of working together, aligns with the idea of systemic partnership developed from the CReSt data, and Billet et al. negotiated partnerships, which arise from the need to work together to achieve a particular goal, resonates with responsive joint planning.

Centres tended to speak about systemic partnerships positively, although this may be because a systemic partnership is likely to be in existence precisely because organisations have found that working together is beneficial. Those centres that experience unsuccessful relationships are unlikely to move forward into systemic partnership! Responsive joint planning was not always spoken about with enthusiasm. This echoes McTavish (2006), who found that partnerships in FE colleges between different educational institutions with aims such as increasing access to higher education, and improving liaisons between institutions, were generally seen as effective. Most of these partnerships had agreed and established ways of working, with aligned working patterns and positive regard between members, and systemic support (such as funding, commitment, and compatible objectives) for the work. Those partnerships which were seen as less effective, however, were mostly top-down and responsive with little agreement on ways of working, ideology and support mechanisms.

In this year of the CReSt project, some centres were notably positive and pro-active about partnership work: these included special centres and FE or sixth form colleges. The nature of special centres, in that they are small, offering specific provision, and are therefore limited in what they can provide in-house, evidently contributed to this. Furthermore, learners at special centres are more likely to have a wide variety of multiple needs than those in mainstream provision. This means that they might need support from a range of agencies and professionals – making collaborative work essential to meet their needs. Special centres also spoke about wanting to maintain links with mainstream provision. As well as providing access to equipment and resources, this was seen as helping the visibility of their students, and aiding staff awareness of developments in educational policy and provision. Sixth form and FE colleges operate under different funding conditions to schools, which influences the way in which they are run. FE colleges in particular attract income from many different sources. These colleges appeared to be flexible and responsive to changing requirements in terms of their provision, and this approach was echoed in their partnership work: partnerships were often seen as ways of developing new business opportunities. Furthermore, the size of FE colleges often means that they have the capacity to develop relationships and take partnerships forward.

Partnership working in other schools was more varied. Some schools were actively engaged with networks of other schools, delivering courses together, and some schools were more complacent about partnerships and seemed to work responsively to policy requirements. Others, including an

independent school and some rural schools, were less engaged in partnership work – rural schools struggled with logistics, and the independent school felt that it did not fit with their ethos. The issue around rural schools raises a dilemma around partnership work – smaller, rural schools have less scope for a wide curriculum offer (due to their size), so would benefit from partnerships with other schools. Due to their rurality, however, there are few other schools locally which would be logistically feasible for learners to attend, and due to their size they struggle to provide the personnel and time required to invest in setting up partnerships.

6.5 Implications for policy

DCSF (2008a) outlined that delivery of the entitlement will “require strong institutions working in deeper, broader partnerships” (p.55). There was also an expectation that the changes in IAG provision, with local authorities taking responsibility for IAG delivery, will result in more alignment with other youth support services (DCSF, 2008a). This, however, is not a key part of the policy rhetoric – the main focus on partnerships is around the entitlement, and access to the full range of Diplomas. Nonetheless, as shown in section 5.3.1, the reasons why centres enter into partnership go far beyond curriculum provision and support service delivery. While some partnerships were clearly influenced by policy requirements, others were home-grown initiatives that centres felt were just part of how they worked. The new coalition government appears to be shifting emphasis away from collaborative work across organisations – this is likely to impact on some responsive, joint planning, but some institutions work in partnership because it makes good business sense. Partnerships that focus on staff, curriculum and strategic development may well continue as before in the new policy landscape.

The Academies Act 2010, whereby schools rated as outstanding by Ofsted can apply to become academies, may have implications for partnership work. Academies are free from local authority control, so would not necessarily be required to work in consortiums for the delivery of Diplomas (while these qualifications still exist). They would, however, be expected to support another school in raising attainment: this type of partnership was described by a small number of centres in the CReSt sample. Furthermore, there is a requirement for academies to “promote community cohesion”: whether this results in partnerships between schools and other organisations remains to be seen. The financial independence that will be granted to academies may also result in the kind of partnerships described above: those that happen because they make good business sense.

The creation of free schools is also likely to have implications for partnerships. Such schools will also be exempt from local authority control, and will have similar freedom to academies. The organisations that set up free schools will influence the types of partnerships that develop in these schools. Universities, businesses, and community or faith groups may all set up free schools, and would provide different types of opportunities for cross-organisation working. It may be that free schools set up by groups of individuals (such as parents or teachers, who may not already be operating as an established organisation) would have to work harder to develop partnerships – there may not be the

wealth of ready-made opportunities that would come with having a business or a university as a founding organisation.

Seen from the local authority perspective, the creation of academies and free schools will have a profound effect on local infrastructure and governance, and may reduce the range of organisations within a local authority that are able to be drawn together to form consortiums. Both academies and free schools would, in theory, have more flexibility than traditional schools to work across local authority boundaries when considering delivery-focused partnerships. The CReSt findings suggest that partnerships that arise from a school's own initiative were often seen as more successful than those that were imposed by a local authority. In this respect, we could suggest that free schools and academies will have a wider range of opportunities for partnership than those still under local authority control. Whether they take advantage of these opportunities remains to be seen.

More broadly, the competitive model of education (e.g. Bagley, 2006; Hodgson and Spours, 2006) that is created by the policy levers of inspection, performance tables and funding (Higham and Yeomans, 2010) does not encourage or facilitate partnership working. The mosaic approach to education, with cross-institution curriculum delivery, does not sit well in this system (Pring et al., 2009). Yet the CReSt project has shown that there is much support for partnership working in many centres – partnerships exist and in some cases flourish. The mosaic approach is probably necessary for the 14-19 entitlement to be reached, and for all students to have local access to appropriate progression routes. For a single centre to cater for every “type” of learner in the area – to provide academic and vocational pathways at all levels from foundation learning to higher education – would result in unfeasibly large organisations losing the specialist expertise and environments that are currently provided. To corral learners into single institutions would mean that learners would not always be able to “play to their strengths” and access a profile of educational provision that was most appropriate to them. Put simply, learners need a variety of provision to meet their educational requirements.

Some 14-19 partnerships were described by centres as particularly successful. These were often those which had arisen from, or built on, previous relationships. Any partnership takes time to develop and establish ways of working, so if existing relationships can be used when implementing reforms that require partnership, this may well smooth the path of implementation.

6.6 Implications for future research

The opportunity to talk with a variety of respondents from centres at some depth specifically about partnerships yielded some rich data. However, the constraints of the project meant that we only spoke to people from the project centres, and occasionally a local partnership manager, or a connexions advisor or similar. We were not able to explore partnerships from the point of view of all participating organisations, or to document fully the history and development of a partnership. This often led to one-sided perspectives of the ways in which partnerships work – which provides some insight but an

incomplete picture. To explore the processes of partnership working more fully, we would want to work with all organisations in a network or partnership.

Within centres, the people who spoke at length about partnerships (Head Teachers, governors, partnership managers) were generally those in management positions. These people tended to be able to provide a clear overview of the structure and purpose of partnerships, and the ways in which they were supposed to work, but did not always have experience of the day-to-day interactions. This again led to an incomplete picture – although one might argue that, with limited resources, it is better to have an overview perspective than an on-the-ground perspective which could lead to a very bounded view of a partnership. Again, to explore partnerships in more detail we would want to talk to those involved at all levels, strategic and actual delivery or implementation, and find out what the partnership meant to those different individuals.

Of key importance, and something which this data does not pick up to a great extent, is the impact that educational partnerships have on students. Partnerships are sometimes implicitly seen as “a good thing” but we need more evidence of their effect on outcomes. Some partnerships clearly result in a wider range of learning opportunities, but the extent to which these are taken up by students appeared to be low. Furthermore, and as stated at the start of this chapter, partnerships do not exist in isolation so their impact would be hard to untangle, particularly in terms of student outcomes. But that does not mean it is not worth trying!

7 Student Perspectives on Education in the Context of the 14-19 Educational Reforms

7.1 Policy Context: student voice and perspectives on education

One of the key aspects identified for strengthening collaboration generally and for successful delivery of the 14-19 reforms was that of the inclusion of 'student voice'. Here, government suggested that the inclusion of students' voice on policies and decision-making around 14-19 provision was crucial if real success was to be achieved:

“There is no group whose view is more important in terms of the 14-19 reform programme than the young people themselves. That is why it is critical that the student voice is heard, at both local and national level, and that the planning and delivery of 14-19 reforms can respond to the ideas and energy of 14-19 year olds.” (DCSF, 2008a: 61, para 4.26).

The promotion of the inclusion of students' voice was presented as representing good practice as well as meeting quality standards for the provision of individual advice and guidance to students. This policy drive to include students' voices in decision-making reflects wider educational practice of consulting children and young people more generally about their schooling (Osler, 2010). While the 14-19 entitlement framework strengthens the requirement for consortia to demonstrate interaction with young people and to show how the student voice is helping to shape the planned delivery of 14-19 reforms across the board, Lundy (2007) suggests that consulting children and young people in general should be seen as more than just good practice in policy formation and development. She reminds us that it is a legally binding obligation on government to consult children on all matters that affect them, including educational provision. Lundy (2007) is particular in suggesting that the inclusion of student voice, while moving a step further towards fully embracing children and young people as key stakeholders in their educational experience and provision, is rarely positioned by government in terms of children's rights. Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC), not only must the government consult children and young people in all matters that affect them (including education), they must also support children's contribution to decision making as well as listen to their views in constructive ways. The CReSt study included students' voices at the heart of its design. It was interested in students' perspectives on their educational experience, but also it was keen to map out whether students were being consulted more generally about educational provision and policy, as good practice might dictate. If students were being consulted, the study was interested in what they were being consulted about (or not) and whether this was reflected in any influence they might have on the development and planning of 14-19 reforms in their institutions. A further interest for the study was students' views on the 14-19 entitlement and the perceived impact of the reforms on them and their lives more generally. The study was also keen to reflect the spirit of the work of Lundy (2007). So, while the design was not wholly within a children's rights framework, it set out to consult students about their experiences of educational provision, to support them in being able to contribute their views to the debates in focus and to feed back to policy makers, through the research process, their perspectives on the 14-19 reform programme.

7.1.1 Student Consultation and Participation: making it meaningful

The policy context of including the 'student voice' in developing and planning 14-19 educational reforms ultimately stems from the legal obligation to consult children and young people. However, there has also been a growing acceptance over recent years, both nationally and internationally that it is good practice in policy formation to have children and young people more involved in making decisions that affect them (Sinclair, 2004). Children and young people are now regularly consulted by local and national government bodies and the four nations of the UK, have developed national strategies for children, all of which highlight the involvement of children and young people in implementation and delivery (Elwood and Lundy, 2010). Consultation of children and their participation in decision-making is undertaken for many different purposes and reasons, and can be immensely effective in bringing about significant changes to their environment, learning and well-being. However, like any effective mechanism or policy driver for bringing about required change, children's and young people's consultation and participation are complex and problematic in many ways, not least in determining what these activities mean in relation to children and young people, and the ways in which engagement with children and young people suffers the same limitations and difficulties as similar processes with adults.

The 14-19 educational entitlement does not especially promote any one process of consulting with students'; it is non-committal in outlining ways in which student voice can be integrated, just that it should be included and that good practice should be followed. However, as has been shown from research, there are real concerns about the effectiveness of consultation and participation processes generally (Cook, 2002) but specifically those that include children and young people (Lansdowne 2001)) Lundy, 2007; Osler, 2010; Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Sinclair, 2004). As Cook (2002) argues, consultation has recently seen to be crucial to policy making yet it is deeply problematic. Often, the model implemented is characterised as tokenistic, unrepresentative and not engaging. She goes on to suggest that consultation ends up being a series of 'comments, compliments and complaints' (p.521) on or about practices that already exist rather than constructive engagement about new directions. Tisdall and Davis (2004) outline concerns about the effectiveness of participation processes as they become more prevalent, arguing that that they fail to fully achieve tangible outcomes and have the impact on policy making initially envisaged. Sinclair (2004) suggests that such failure has most likely come about because of the over-simplification of a quite complex process and confusions around a number of elements: the clarity of purpose; how to effectively interpret outcomes; not fully aligning children's and young people's views alongside those of other key stakeholders; and not making consultation and participation more meaningful to those involved. To get the best out of the 'student voice', Sinclair suggests that we need to move beyond 'one-off or isolated consultations' to a position where students' participation is 'firmly embedded within organisational cultures and structures for decision-making' (2004: 116).

7.1.2 Students' perspectives on education

There has been significant academic interest in the concept of student voice and in practices that enable children and young people to participate in, and be consulted on, various aspects of their

education, from learning and teaching, to their well-being, and the built environments within which they experience their education (Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Kilkelly et al. 2005; Leitch et al. 2008; Noyes 2005, Osler 2010). From this research, significant aspects of learners' experience emerge that help us better understand areas of importance to pupils and students within their day-to-day lives as well as sites of struggles and areas where support is needed. The work by Flutter and Rudduck (2004) was a significant contribution to research within the UK that consulted pupils and students about teaching and learning. Children and young people highlighted the following as significant factors in their educational experiences:

- time – the management of time within lessons, the structure of their day, the cycle of learning across the academic year and 'the making up for lost time' (p.81);
- understanding assessment – not seeing it wholly as supportive or learning but as a way of measuring their abilities and potential, assessment as a set of activities that can give rise to anxiety and stress, and not always understanding what it means to work harder or do better work (p.101);
- the impact of friendships on learning – the social aspects of learning being immensely important and peer relationships exerting a powerful influence on pupils' sense of self-worth, notions of identity and on learning and performance (p.102);
- sustaining pupils' engagement with learning - through variety of activities, with students being able to make choices, having a sense of ownership of their work and subjects and topics having everyday relevance.

Flutter and Rudduck (2004) acknowledge that the aspects that shape and form young people's positive identities as learners and achievers are complex and are formed as much from their lived experiences outside of the school environment as from within. However, exploring with pupils their perspectives on experiences that make a significant difference to them can become a valuable tool for educational institutions in identifying and addressing key issues affecting learning and progress.

In one of the most recent studies to have been published with regard to understanding students' perspectives on schooling, Osler (2010) has also identified several key themes that emerged from consultations with students as to how they could become more 'effective, successful learners and how could school be made more enjoyable' (p.76) (see below):

- Learning and enjoyment –which were inextricably linked;
- Concerns about their future and that learning is relevant to plans and aspirations;
- A recognition of their own personal responsibility for learning
- A desire to be more active at school and to have supplementary learning activities available to all not just the high achievers;
- The pressure students feel as they prepare for examinations and complete assessed coursework;
- Concerns that their identities be recognised and respected by the adults at school
- Teachers to be more innovative and engaging in their teaching styles

- A strong desire to be listened to and respected by their teachers; and
- Aware of the wider political context of learning and the pressures on schools and teachers to achieve

While Osler's participants were mostly older than those of Flutter and Rudduck (mostly Year 10 students, age 14-15), it is interesting to note the significant similarities that exist between the factors that students from both studies see as important: enjoying learning; learning being relevant to them and their aspirations; teachers using variety and innovation in teaching; the pressures they feel around assessment and examinations; and concerns about identity and this being recognized as integral to them as individuals and as learners. A notable exception is the emphasis, by Osler's students, on the desire to be listened to and to have their views respected by teachers. This may well reflect the shift, over more recent times, in the degree to which student consultation is built into school activities, evaluation schemes as well as inspection criteria. Of further interest is the importance that students have given to an awareness of the wider political contexts in which they, their teachers and their educational institutions must operate.

7.1.3 Student perspectives – The CReSt Study

The CReSt study was designed in such a way that students were considered as key stakeholders in the educational institutions participating in the research. As such, they were part of the main data collection activities. Forty-five focus groups were conducted across eighteen centres with a total of 243 young people taking part. Focus groups were conducted with Year 11 students (9) and Year 13 students (11), students who were considered to be disengaged from learning (15) (See chapter 9) and Y10 and Y12 students (10) if the institution was either 11-16 only or post-16/FE college. Given that research has informed us about the complexities of consultation and participation with students, a deliberate, three fold methodological stance was taken with the focus: (i) to seek data in relation to the specific inclusion of the student voice – thus to ascertain to what degree students are being consulted by their institutions and if so, what aspects of their educational experiences were they consulted on and what not; (ii) to ask students about particular aspects of their educational experience that are rarely discussed with young people – whether they are involved in consultations on school policies that directly affected them such as curriculum and assessment policies and (iii) to specifically consult with young people and seek their views on the 14-19 reforms, to obtain their perspectives on this significant government policy initiative in order to feed back into policy arenas through the research process. The outcomes of the focus groups are detailed in the sections that follow as well as in Chapter 9.

7.2 Consulting students

Students were asked if their teachers or school managers ever consulted them about their centres' policies and practices and what form this consultation took. Overall, responses to the question showed that yes, students generally were consulted at some level by teachers and managers in their schools in one form or another. The issues they were consulted about were variable, contextually

driven and student-led. These then became part of wider student consultations in order to get more views and opinions as to whether change was required. When this issue was explored in more detail, it became clear that, while students were positive about being able to 'have a say' regarding decisions affecting them, they were concerned at what they saw as the limitations of some of these consultations. There was a sense that their institutions only 'pretend to listen but don't really' and that students, don't really have the 'power to change things'. In reflecting the work of Cook (2002), students suggested that consultation, at times, seemed like 'lip service, to keep students happy', to enable them to have a say but not a very influential one:

Interviewer:	<i>So can I ask you does [your centre] ever consult you on its policies?</i>
Male Student1:	<i>Probably more than some</i>
Male Student2:	<i>They kind of pretend to listen but half the time they say they're going to listen to the students but they don't.</i>
Male Student3:	<i>They don't do it as much as they put across they will.</i>
Female Student:	<i>Yeah it's that thing of like, 'Yeah we've got a student council' ... student council's being re-organised so it includes all the years now and that's better and everything but it's kind of like actually you want our opinion and we do these things but we don't have that much power and it's more just to keep us happy and they want us to organise certain things like say the common room for instance, is a total mess but it's the student council's responsibility to re-do it all whenever it's any other part of the school then it would be the school responsibility to do that and not ours and it's not right and I just don't like how they place the blame for stuff like that.</i>

(Year 11 Focus Group)

In the sections that follow, we explore the issue of consultation in more detail, both the positive ways in which student consultation has supported change for the better and also the limitations of consultation as students see it. They see many of the issues they are consulted about as significant and important, but there are still key areas that they consider crucial to their success in school/college but yet are rarely consulted about in relation to decisions taken on their behalf

7.2.1 Ways of being consulted

Students reported that as a consequence of student representation and consultation, a variety of changes had occurred in their institutions. Changes, for the better, were identified across a number of activities that were significant to them, for example: their end-of-school proms; variety shows and performances for parents and families; the reduction of litter around the school/college, the introduction of better, cheaper and healthier food menus (although they were keen to suggest that having pizza or pies on one day a week would not break a healthy approach to food!); the adaptation of school rules which included their views and concerns; the introduction of school uniform which improved their image of themselves and their institution; improved access for disabled students; cleaner and better spaces for them to congregate which improved their sense of their day-today environment

I think you have got quite a lot of influence because now we have got these golden groups meetings, like controlled groups of like 6 pupils to one teacher out of the lesson talking through what we need help with, like revision but also asking like questions about how are

teachers helping you guys out? And so that kind of, we can report it to our teacher who is in charge of our group and then that information then can get passed around teachers so it's in little select groups with people mixed up, but it kind of allows everyone to pass information along the chain and it does get our views across.

(Male Student Year 11 Focus Group)

Participants seemed quite content knowing that they can feed back their views to teachers but that this does not automatically mean that changes will take place. They recognise that their centres cannot do all that they would wish them to do, but that they will do the best they can and students would rather be consulted than not:

- Interviewer:** *And do you feel that the things that you bring to that forum, do you think that solutions are offered by the college? That the college recognises –*
- Male Student1:** *I would say they make an effort to but I think students have to make an effort too.*
- Male Student2:** *There's a lot of things that they can't do as well though isn't there?*
- Male Student1:** *Yeah exactly.*

(Year 12 Focus Group)

An interesting issue was raised about student councils or groups being only effective on one level ('just what happens in schools') but less effective on issues of 'real decision making'. Students identified these latter issues as: aspects of governance of their institutions; what was taught and what was available to them; the curriculum offer, options and qualifications; how their learning was structured. They felt these were bigger issues and would welcome opportunities to discuss these with teachers and others in their centres (see Section 3 below). Students were also interested in discussing how their peers were elected or selected to student councils and the mechanisms for feedback to all students of areas/ideas discussed and decisions taken:

- Interviewer:** *Do you feel that the school consults you and talks to you about other things, and where you can help make the decision in what happens in school?*
- Male Student:** *But if they're going to change something about the school or something, they've got the council to discuss it with, so it doesn't really get to everyone, it's just a few opinions.*
- Female Student:** *Like everyone finds out the gossip from the people in the school council.*
- Male Student:** *We only get it from people passing it round. So yeah, I think they should. And in assemblies they don't really announce it that much, so I think they need to announce it more.*

(Year 10 Focus Group)

Areas of teaching and learning were also aspects of school life that students were consulted about. Participants indicated a number of ways in which their views were gathered on classroom practice, new approaches to teaching, ways in which they liked to learn and what teaching practices they preferred. Students reported how they are often required to complete evaluations of teaching and learning at certain times during the year, either at the end of a module or course. The focus of these evaluations tend to consider types of teaching, learning and learning styles, enjoyment of learning,

resources, etc. They tend to be issued either by curriculum managers or gathered and collated by their peers through the student consultative groups. These evaluations, questionnaires, feedback sessions were seen as constructive activities by students. However, such activities were also seen as vehicles for monitoring teachers by senior members of staff rather than genuine ways of considering what students think is best for them:

- Interviewer:** *Does [this centre] consult you on any aspects of your teaching and learning? Do they ask you what way do you like to be taught best, how you like to learn best and so on?*
- Male Student1:** *Yes I think they [teachers] all ask and then we have those questionnaires at the end of term but they don't always make changes to them.*
- Female Student1:** *We get them like every term, your lessons ... multiple choice questions.*
- Interviewer:** *What kind of things about your lessons do they ask?*
- Female Student1:** *Like, do you like the way the teachers teach*
- Female Student2:** *And how often they mark your work and stuff like that. How often they check your work.*
- Male Student2:** *I think it is more to monitor the teachers than seeing what we think is best.*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

Students also considered whether their educational institutions, teachers and other managers are perhaps going through the motions of consultation and that they are not really listening or asking views about significant changes that students experience – a sense of telling rather than discussing. Such views were further compounded by a sense of not knowing how their opinions are used, whether their feedback has made any difference and whether teachers' are actually interested in what students have to say. There were not always clear mechanisms in place for showing students how and when their feedback had been discussed and to what extent it had been valuable to the decision making process:

- Interviewer:** *What do you bring up in the school council?*
- Female Student:** *I think the school council does do a good job – we just don't hear about what they're doing as much as I would like to, because some of the projects that they do, we don't find out until they put them in action, and we don't really have much of a say. But the things that the council have done for the school have been really good and worthwhile.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

These last points resonate with work of Cook (2002) and Lundy (2007) outlined above. Cook has argued that even though policy initiatives around consultation have increased (with either adults or children), the models on which consultation practices are based are often static and end up being characterised as tokenistic, not engaging and do not move decision-making processes any further forward. Furthermore, Lundy (2007) is critical of those practices which, under the banner of 'student voice' actually only provide minimal opportunities for young people's views to be taken into consideration. From a children's rights position, she argues that new models of consultation and participation for children and young people, must have clear mechanisms that provide them with the opportunity to express their views, support them in order to form and give their views, that their views

are listened too and that action is taken, as appropriate. The students in the CReSt focus groups understand they cannot change everything in their institutions, nor that their views be taken above those of others, but they did reflect Lundy's call to be listened to in constructive ways and that they are informed as to how their views have been listened to and acted upon.

7.2.2 Student consultation – making a difference

Students reported that as a consequence of student representation and consultation, a variety of changes had occurred in their institutions. Changes, for the better, were identified across a number of activities that were significant to them, for example: their end-of-school proms; variety shows and performances for parents and families; the reduction of litter around the school/college, the introduction of better, cheaper and healthier food menus (although they were keen to suggest that having pizza or pies on one day a week would not break a healthy approach to food!); the adaptation of school rules which included their views and concerns; the introduction of school uniform which improved their image of themselves and their institution; improved access for disabled students; cleaner and better spaces for them to congregate which improved their sense of their day-to-day environment:

- Male Student1:** *It's mainly like improvements we can make. We get – via the council, we can make suggested improvements to try and make the school better. It's more things that benefit us though than the teachers or anything. So like we never used to have rugby posts or anything, so we said that not long ago and it's been put up, and re-laying the Astroturf in the tennis courts and that's all been done. It used to look like – they were scruffy, like the fencing, and now it's quite smart, to be proud of, not...*
- Interviewer:** *Is that important?*
- All:** *Yeah.*
- Interviewer:** *Why is that important?*
- Male Student2:** *Because we spend our out-of-lesson time there, so we want it to be – look good and to get the most out of it. We don't want it to be old and outdated.*
- Male Student3:** *It's got to be something that appeals to you and makes you like want to get out of bed in the morning, so to speak. You're not going to want to turn up if it's all like freezing cold classrooms and tables are falling apart.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

As mentioned above, students also indicated that their views are now sought, as a matter of course, by individual teachers regarding the use of new teaching methods and/or strategies for learning. Students welcomed being involved in their teachers' evaluations and development of their own practice and regarded such consultation as highly positive.

One further area of interest that emerged was Individual Advice and Guidance (IAG) policies in centres being seen as consultation about individual goals and aspirations. This was an interesting position to take on such programmes, which could also be seen as more of the monitoring practices described earlier. However, students suggested that IAG programmes were consultation with them, by their teachers, on a one-to-one basis about their learning, their aspirations and personal targets.

IAG programmes were seen as constructive opportunities to sit and talk with an individual member of staff about progress and development:

- Female Student:** *We've got our own profile page [on an individual learning plan programme] so ... it tells you everything... your grades at the moment, predicted grades, everything...*
- Male Student1:** *Which keeps you updated with how you're working, and what you need to improve on. ... So you've got your original targets, and where you are right now, and why you're there.*
- Interviewer:** *And do you get a chance to comment on those targets and things like that?*
- Male Student1:** *Yes, It's great. Because it's like... it gives you a chance to be honest with yourself and I think it's a great thing because you know where you are as a person, and getting feedback from your tutor, the person who knows you well... it's like, yes, it's good.*

(Year 12 Disengaged Focus Group)

Thus, the high level of positive response from student participants across the forty-five focus groups indicates a significant degree of consultation of young people's views and opinions about structural aspects of their educational experience (e.g. their physical and social environment) as well as involvement in some aspects of decision-making around issues that affect them directly (e.g. institutional rules and regulations, ways in which they like to learn and pedagogical changes, uniforms, menus, social activities). However, there are clear areas of school/college life in which students are not consulted and it is to these areas that we turn next.

7.2.3 Student consultation - limitations and boundaries

Recent discussion around children's rights and assessment more generally (Elwood and Lundy, 2010) has emphasised that assessment, examinations, qualifications etc. and issues associated with students' achievements and how they are assessed seem to be the last bastion of school/college life where student opinion or contribution to decision making is considered. The data from the students involved in the eighteen case studies support this view.

When students were asked if they were specifically consulted on policy issues and choices made around assessment, qualifications and or specifications, the general response was no. Participants were quite clear that they had 'no say' when it came to curriculum policy or practice and were never consulted on areas of assessment policy, how they were assessed and how qualifications and/or specifications were chosen:

- Interviewer:** *And so the school or college, they don't talk to you about ways that they should assess you or anything like that?*
- Male Student:** *I think that's the only thing that we don't really get a say in.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

Participants indicated that in areas such as assessment, examinations and/or qualifications, the tendency was for them to be told what was happening, when changes had been made or decisions taken. Generally they do not get a chance to share opinions or 'any chance to contribute' to the

choices made for them. Examples that emerged from the focus groups centred around not being consulted about syllabuses being studied or examination boards chosen as well as not being consulted about sets or teaching groups. There was a sense that choices were not available for students in these areas and that decisions were fixed:

- Female Student1:** *Teachers tell us after the change has been made...they told us how they will raise the thing to A-star or something like that, and they changed the specification. Well they didn't tell us, they told us after.*
- Female Student2:** *But we didn't even have a choice.*
- Female Student3:** *We don't even get an opinion.*
- Female Student4:** *I think they [teachers] discuss it between themselves. I think they should bring in more student opinion... I find it kind of dread, because it's not them who's doing exams it's us who's doing exams, they should get more opinion from us than between themselves, but did we have a choice to like change it back to the old specification?*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

Reasons offered as to why they were excluded from decision-making in this area particularly were varied. The age and maturity of students was raised as possibly having an influence with perhaps key aspects of curriculum and assessment policies being more constructively shared with older students. Respondents also considered whether students were best placed to have an input into these areas or contribute to such decisions, which were seen as 'higher level' decisions than perhaps other aspects of school/college life. Furthermore, students considered that perhaps teachers might think they (students) would want things to be easier and if they had an input into these areas they might be seen as 'dropping the bar'.

Thus, students were clear that they had significant views to offer about assessments and qualifications. A significant aspect to emerge from the CReSt data is that students considered that they could be supported, by their teachers, in voicing their views on examinations and qualifications to those whose responsibility it is to develop and deliver them (e.g. the unitary awarding bodies across the UK). Students suggested teachers could be 'enablers of students' voices', to support their views being heard by significant stakeholders on issues of concern, such as, the structures within examinations and the availability of different types of assessments. However, students did recognise that changes to specifications and syllabuses etc. are as hard for teachers to understand and implement as they are for students - that everyone (students and their teachers) are 'learning in the dark'. Students greatly appreciated what their teachers do for them. However, there was a sense of disappointment that they are always told about changes to syllabuses, specifications, qualifications; they are never discussed.

7.3 Curriculum and Assessment: changes and pressures

7.3.1 Education: what is important

One of the main areas of focus in discussions with students was their views on what they considered to be the most important thing about education. Without exception, across all the ? focus groups,

students suggested that examinations, qualifications and getting good grades were one of the most important aspects of being in education. It was clear from responses that assessments and examinations tend to dominate students' lives in school/college and that, to a certain extent, they did not blame their teachers or the systems for this, but recognised for themselves the pressure they were under and how well they would have to achieve to reach their own goals and meet personal aspirations:

- Interviewer:** *Okay, what do you think are the most important things that young people are concerned about regarding their education?*
- Male Student1:** *Grades.*
- Interviewer:** *Why do you say grades?*
- Male Student2:** *Everyone worries about grades, just worried if you don't get the right grades you're not going to get far.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

Students linked their attitudes to grades and achievement to future aspirations for university places, jobs and/or vocational training with employment. They considered the difficulties they might encounter in relation to opportunities for employment because of the recession as well as fewer opportunities for university places given the cuts in funding and the implementation of higher offers to deal with increased competition. They considered particular economic circumstances would make it even more significant to be successful in their choice of qualifications and educational pathways. Thus qualifications were presented as a commodity or currency which young people needed to obtain in order to move on to the more important aspects of life such as work and higher education but also to widen their choices and to maximise their opportunities within these new arenas.

7.3.2 Qualifications and examinations: view and perceptions

Participants were asked about the qualifications and examinations they were preparing for and their views on these. There were very strong opinions expressed in reply to this enquiry, both in seeing what was good about the assessment systems that students encounter as well as the limitations. In support of external qualifications, examinations were seen as important and to a certain degree enjoyable if one was well-prepared and confident. Students talked of examinations having an influence on their learning in a positive way; they demanded the 'paying [of] keener attention' in class. Examinations, as components of qualifications, were seen as a good way of showing one's abilities, as offering neutral opportunities for students to show what they could do without having to be assessed by their teachers. Thus external examinations provided outside assessors that students themselves could influence and not their teachers:

- Male Student1:** *I think exams are very good things... How else are you going to grade every student ... because teachers can't really grade, they can grade good but some people might surprise because I know someone who's good at PE but their teacher didn't realise it.*
- Male Student2:** *And he'd mark him down but, because people who have set thoughts on people but I think exams are good because it's kind of like you're the only one who can influence it.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

Students also considered that increased effort would be reflected in improved results in their examinations (and vice versa); the better the grades obtained then the better one's opportunities were for accessing further or higher education and/or employment. This point was elaborated on, specifically in relation to the modularisation of qualifications. Students generally welcomed the modular structure qualifications, as modules 'take the stress off' and give students an indication of progress and where effort should be placed in order to improve:

- Male Student:** *Yeah, I like the fact that there's two exam dates, because, like, the January ones can give you a good indication of... because with January you put in not 100% effort, it's like a half arsed attempt, or you don't revise specifically for something, and then you get your grade and it's like, oh right, that's what I got with not doing much work, I'll retake that and I'll work really hard and I know what kind of grade I can get, so it gives you a good indication of, like, where you are.*
- Interviewer:** *So what do other people think about exams that you have?*
- Female Student:** *I think they kind of show you, like, where you stand, if you've been putting in effort if you get an exam, you'll be happy to get a good grade, whereas, like, if you haven't been putting in effort it kind of reflects on your exam results and that motivates you to do even more work so that you can get a better grade.*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

Participants also welcomed having a choice of both examinations and coursework. They recognised that some assessment techniques were better for some students. Choice was therefore important and moreover, students talked about such choice in terms of fairness in qualifications to enable all students to have opportunities to show themselves to good effect. Furthermore, students suggested that tests and examinations were credible ways of assessing what you know, especially for those students who do not like coursework. They suggested that examinations also 'make you deal with pressure' and that thus performing under pressure was key, not only for success in school or college but for continued success in the world of higher education or employment:

I think exams are designed to push you to the limit, and show you what you can do under extreme pressure even though it has no relevance apart from the fact that pressure is key.

(Male Student Year 11 Focus Group)

Concerns were voiced, however, at what students articulated as moves to make examinations harder. They expressed unease at the thought that this generation of young people were experiencing some of the most extensive changes in examinations and qualifications, as they saw it, make it harder to obtain good grades. Yet, this was not their experience of preparing for, and participating in, these qualifications. They expressed concern at perhaps being the victims of 'grade inflation'. While examinations were seen as fair, students considered it unfair to have to work even harder than previous students to obtain similar goals:

Female Student1: *I think they're [examinations] a good thing but I think they should stop making them too hard.*

Female Student2: *Yeah I just think...exams are a good thing because it's good to assess how you're doing ... but they continue with like oh they're getting easier, the marks are getting higher, let's make them harder, but it's not that they're getting easier it's that people are working harder and generally becoming more clever ...*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

When considering more negative aspects of assessment and examinations, students suggested that they were a 'nightmare' or that they were one of the most 'daunting' things that they had to do in school. It was suggested that examinations and assessments 'take over your life' and that it is 'hammered' into students at an early stage that getting good results is one of the most important things that they need to attend to in their educational lives:

Female Student1: *exams ... because it's obviously hammered into us and our whole life seems to be dictated by exams. You have to get this grade to get into this school-*

Male Student: *Otherwise you'll live in a gutter.*

Female Student2: *And otherwise you know it's just not good enough and I think that's not the school's fault it's just the whole government and the whole thing is our whole life is around these exams ...*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

Such responses were contextualised around discussions about the amount of assessment students had experienced through their educational careers, as well as the pressure they felt under to succeed. Students were concerned that the amount of assessment and testing they had to go through had increased significantly since they had started secondary education. So, not only were examinations getting harder, and good grades more difficult to obtain, the amount of assessment and examinations dictated everything that they did; for this generation of students there was 'pressure from word go':

Female Student1: *Also especially with a lot of GCSE subjects becoming modular, from about year 10 you're doing exams January, June, January, June, January, June. I've got a lot of family out in Holland and they do not understand how we're doing exams for 4 years straight from the age of 14. I think it's also the way that we have exams here that you get into uni based on a conditional offer, where in America and places it's all done on unconditionals because you've already got your results. I think it would make it a lot less stressful.*

Female Student2: *There's no quality of life. I know it sounds really strange, I don't feel I'm middle aged, but I feel at 17 and 18 it is a really stressful time because I don't really know where I'm going, sometimes 'I'm depressed!'. It's really weird to feel like your last couple of years of childhood just based on exams and a lot of my out of school stuff is just dropped.*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

Participants were also conscious that too much focus on examinations meant that extra-curricular activities were put on hold, such as sport, music, community work, drama and the arts, etc. Moreover, this also conflicted with the idea that universities were looking for 'balanced individuals',

who need to provide evidence of being 'involved citizens'. Students suggested that not only did examinations tend to take over their lives but that preparation for them tended to make teachers stick to a more narrow curriculum with 'no room for imagination' and that all they did was work 'towards meaningless tests'. Furthermore, they reported that you were not always tested on all that you had learnt, that 'not all your revision ends up being useful'. Coursework was seen to actually help with this situation as it tended to assess 'all your knowledge' rather than the narrow amount of knowledge that tests covered. Moreover, it was considered that most examinations did not actually reflect how students would be expected to work when employed. Qualifications such as BTECs, the Diploma, or extended projects were considered exceptions, as ways of working towards these goals (e.g. working in teams, research-type activities) reflected tasks of the work place.

7.3.3 Assessment: pressures, relationships and changes

As indicated above, the word 'pressure' came up often in relation to qualifications and examinations. Students, like many adults, seem to use the word as an encapsulating term to describe feelings, emotions and reactions to the situations that are important to them and to the effects that significant events have on them. They see qualifications as important and the taking of examinations as significant events. Thus they talk about the stress that is associated with them and the pressure they feel under to do well. They indicated a number of areas where they see significant pressure and stress around examinations and assessment:

- getting A*s at GCSEs and A level and the currency that such grades, especially at A level, will start to have in future years;
- that not all qualifications are of the same worth or currency and the impact that this has on their chances of future success;
- repetition from teachers of how much 'doing well' is worth to young people;
- the timing of examination deadlines and submission dates;
- revision and getting the syllabuses finished on time;
- seeing teachers stressed about getting syllabuses finished on time;
- constantly taking examinations and having to submit pieces of coursework;
- the reputation of the school/college and league table performance and the subsequent pressures that are fed down to students;
- the currency of certain subjects over others in relation to what has colloquially been called 'hard' and 'soft' subjects and the value of these when making applications to higher education institutions.

All these factors are significant in their own way but when experienced together they tend to help create situations where examinations and qualifications become the most important things that happen to students at this stage of education. They see the differential value and currency of different qualifications and are keen to optimise their opportunities in taking the 'best' qualifications they can. However, they are concerned that the wash back from a culture of undermining the value of qualifications will mean that they have to do even better than their predecessors, creating in their

view, an uneven playing field. There is tension, as they see it, with policy makers, exam developers, etc., seeking to make examinations and assessments harder and with students finding the present demands hard enough.

A further issue that came to light, in this context, was the impact of assessment on students' relationships with teachers and how their successes, or otherwise, could be affected by these relationships. Students felt their teachers had a lot of power over their assessment results with certain factors within teacher-student relationships affecting coursework grades. They did not see the way in which teachers have an input into final grades as being wholly neutral, nor totally without teacher influence. In this context, they were clear about the need for both examinations and/or coursework depending on their choice or preference. This would provide opportunities for some students not to be assessed by their teachers if they felt their relationships with them were not constructive or positive. External examinations provided opportunities to achieve better grades out of situations where relationships with teachers were not straightforward. There was a sense that teachers had 'set thoughts on people' in terms of what they could or could not achieve:

I think the testing system here at the moment, the mixture of exams and coursework, works. I think there should be more opportunity within subjects for you to choose whether you want part of it to be coursework or, like, all exam or coursework or whatever, because some people work better with coursework, some people work that, or some kind of like... I don't know, some teacher input into your overall final grade, but then the problem would be if a teacher didn't like you and they gave you a bad grade, when you're actually good at the subject.

(Male student Year 13 Focus Group)

A final area of concern that was raised was the issue of new examinations being introduced during their time in education and the impact of this on their success. Students raised the issue of mistakes that had been found with examination papers. These faults were laid clearly at the door of the examination boards; they were not theirs or their teachers. However, students felt that they then bore the brunt of these mistakes and that future successes could be 'messed up' by such faults. Students speculated that the examination boards 'did not seem to care'. Yet the impact of such faults on individuals could be considerable and mean the difference between a grade or two overall and affect university selection. There was a very clear message that examinations needed to be piloted and tested before they are rolled out live to students:

Male Student1:

I think the exam system we've got works reasonably well for most people, but there seems to be some testing level in between writing the exams and finishing them that doesn't always get done. For example, the syllabus changed on my physics course recently, and we were the first year to do this, and since the exam board has made a formal apology that they haven't written the exam papers properly, and there was a huge drop-out rate last year because of this. And I've got friends who got Us, even though they should have got Ds or Cs, and they can't do anything to go back and change that now and they're completely put off of physics for the rest of their lives.

Male Student2:

It's like the biology paper that was released in the January exams...it was because it was a new exam specification, and I've got close friends that sat that paper and they come away... with Ds and Es. It's really messed up their whole future now. Because of those

exams, they now can't become a doctor or whatever it is they wanted to do. So the exams can... need to be tested before they're put out.
(Year 13 Focus Group)

7.4 Views on 14-19 Reforms

7.4.1 Raising the participation age

Students saw this as a significant reform, yet were in agreement that this reform was 'not for everyone'; being in education until you were 18 would not suit all students. While the policy around raising the participation age forefronts alternative education and training routes as well as maintaining choice in the range of institutions that provide this, students' perception of the policy was quite different. It was referred to colloquially as 'raising the school leaving age' and students suggested that there would have to be clear alternative, vocational training pathways for those who did not enjoy academic studies. Students were conscious that for some of their peers, starting work at 16 was a clear goal and so therefore education up to 18 was not suitable for all:

Interviewer: *And then what about...making the leaving age 18?*
Male Student: *I don't see that as a bad thing, but then I think you do have people that... they're not book smart, they're street smart in some ways ...they don't get much from opening a textbook. They need to be out in the real world. So they need to do Apprenticeships and stuff. So I think that should be allowed for them.*

Further concerns were raised about the disruption that might be caused by those students who had to stay on in education, but who did not want to be there. Respondents considered that there would be more problems for teachers, students and schools/colleges with higher proportions of young people in post-16 classrooms who did not want to be there. This, students suggested, would have significant consequences for them and other students who would have their education affected:

I kind of feel quite strongly about it. I really, really disagree with it, I think it's a ridiculous rule to bring in, because I think one of the things that started to put me off secondary school education was the amount of people at the secondary school who didn't want to be there, the people, because they didn't want to be there, they wouldn't just sit quietly in the corner and let the rest get on with it, they'd disrupt the class. And I really found that, not necessarily me as such, but other people had their education affected by the students that didn't want to be in the school being forced into school. It's all well and good keeping them on to GCSE level, but one of the things I've enjoyed about college is the people that are at college want to be here, you're in a classroom with people learning that want to learn, so you don't have people time wasting, you don't have people messing about. I think, if you raised the leaving age, they're just going to increase the amount of students that disrupt. It may give them an education, an extra two years of education, but it's going to affect more than just one person's education for each student that stays on.

(Male Student Year 13 Focus Group)

Indeed, the issue was discussed in terms of 'students' rights', with participants arguing that staying on to 18 should not be 'just a given', but that students must decide for themselves whether they think it is a good thing for them or not; that it should not be a law but an individual choice:

Male Student: *If it's going to give people an opportunity to do what they want to do, then do it, it's good. Can't see what's bad from it really if it's doing that.*

Female Student: *But I think there should be an outing kind of policy where it's not illegal to leave like it is with high school and primary school. Like I think maybe make three or four months of it compulsory and if you despise it or you want to change, there's the option to do that ... I think you'd have to be careful how you set that up.*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

However, despite these concerns, participants articulated clear arguments for why staying in education and/or training until 18 would be a positive initiative for young people. They welcomed any concerted move by the government to make sure that young people would not be dependent on benefits. Some students considered that 16 is 'too young to just go off and get a job'; too early a cutting-off point to 'just go off and be your own person'. Obtaining a better education and leaving with better grades and qualifications would provide young people with the best opportunities to obtain good jobs and university places.

Students agreed that having the choice of different institutions as well as different learning pathways and qualifications provided new opportunities for them. Any move to require young people to be in education until they were 18 must not bring any 'slimming down of choice', nor 'concrete set-ups', but flexible pathways (academic and vocational, especially including apprenticeships) and more choice of qualifications that included alternative assessment structures and modes:

And I think if people are going to have to stay in education until they are 18 there should be more choice of doing coursework, because obviously people who can't do exams very well, or don't do very well in education, would probably prefer vocational coursework and stuff like that more, because they are really like forced, well not forced, but they have to stay in education now.

(Female student Year 13 Focus Group)

7.4.2 A levels and GCSEs

Students were aware of the introduction to the A* grade at A level, the change of modules from 6 to 4 and the removal of coursework in some modules. The A* grade tended to exercise the Year 13 students considerably. They reported that they felt under real pressure to perform now that this new grade had been introduced having thought they 'had escaped A* at A level' and only had to deal with it at GCSE. Generally they were concerned at the amount of competition for university places they were up against and only saw this as getting worse for them and their younger peers. Thus, it was suggested that the new grade might not, in the long term, be a good thing as it was putting more pressure on them than they were already under at present. Moreover, they had no knowledge as to how these A* grades were going to work out in practice and what the consequences would be for the majority of students if only a few students were supposed to achieve these top grades:

I think it depends though as well because I don't know how many people in our year have been asked but I've been asked for an A at A level ... They haven't specified, they've just*

said A* and 2 As for the offer. But because there's so few places at uni this year for the amount of applicants, I think we were under pressure to get the grades anyway and I think that A* is starting to freak me out big style, but obviously in years to come when people have grasped what it actually is I don't think it will be that big of a change really. But it's just for our year because it's totally new and no-one really knows how it's going to work.

(Female student Year 13 Focus Group)

As mentioned earlier, there was general concern amongst students about continuing debates around A levels being too easy. They suggested that the introduction of the A* grade would only exacerbate these difficulties for them, especially if other grades were then 'down-graded' in the process:

Female Student 1: *Because they keep saying it's easy, it's easy, but it's not. Maybe people are just working harder to get that A, and now they're introducing that A star level it means they're making it harder. So is it that they don't want us to get the A or what? Because when more people get the A, it seems they just want to make it harder so less people get the A, and so now there's A star. So if you get A star, what will happen, A star star?*

Male Student: *And people work so hard to get to a B, and now there's going to be a shift in grade boundaries, so they're going to go back to a C.*

Female Student 2: *People are still going to work really hard, and the cleverer people will obviously still get the higher grade. They just keep shifting the less clever people lower and lower. That's not fair.*

(Year 12 Disengaged Focus Group)

In relation to changes at GCSEs, Year 11 students were also exercised about debates that considered GCSEs too easy and that such examinations would need to get harder. Again, like their A level peers, Y11 students did not agree with these views and suggested that obtaining good grades at GCSE was tough in the present climate, and that they had to do even better to go on to advanced level study. The pressure on them to achieve good grades was always being 'rehearsed' by their teachers. However, they highlighted the conflicting pressures coinciding from different subjects and having to prioritise their efforts as well as teachers being mostly interested in results in their own subjects; students showed frustration at teachers not having the overview that the students had.

As highlighted earlier, there was a definite preference for wanting to have both coursework and examinations available as part of GCSE requirements, as well as modular courses with re-sits (see 3.2 above). Students saw this as the providing fair opportunities to achieve in the best way they could. However, a further concern was voiced as to why institutions were beginning to start GCSE in Year 9 now that KS3 SATS had been abolished. Students reflected on how GCSEs were starting earlier and that this meant much more assessment (and pressure for them) across the three years, rather than having it focused in the last year of KS4. One interesting example was of students talking of re-sitting GCSE modules with their Y9 peers who were taking their examinations for the first time:

Year 7's have to stay on in education till they're 18 now don't they? And the year 9's don't have SATs anymore, but they start their GCSEs a year earlier. So the year 9s, when we did our science re-takes they had their exams.

(Male Student Year 11 Focus Group)

7.4.3 Diplomas and BTECs

For some students, the curriculum and examination provision offered to them in their institutions included a broader range of qualifications than other centres. When asked about the 14-19 Reforms and new qualifications being introduced, they reflected on their experiences of the 'new' Diploma, BTEC diplomas and other qualifications, as well as experience of preparing for functional skills qualifications.

Students, who had some direct experience of the Diploma, considered that they, and many of their peers, found the associated work and assessment harder than they had thought. They enjoyed the portfolio approach to the assessment of the Diploma and saw it as an improvement on previous qualifications. However, there was an uncertainty as to how it would all work out and how they would get the equivalent of the GCSEs they needed to move into advanced level courses. While one student considered the diploma to be 'fantastic', there was also concern about a lack of flexibility within the diploma course, especially in relation to options, and a consideration that perhaps their teachers had decided to choose only certain modules and not others in order for the Diploma to be delivered in the time available. In one centre in particular, students suggested that their teachers had 'sold it' to them as a good course, but that now they were experiencing difficulties in terms of how their work was marked (no information from their teachers), leaving students not knowing what was really going on:

The diploma ... they didn't say how it was going to be marked, they said "ah, this is a fantastic course, whatever you want to do if it's creative you can do it and you can get GCSEs out of it", and you get 7, you get loads of GCSEs, and they sold it off and of course you got some people who you can clearly see just took it as a slackers option, you know, so then when the actual work comes down you've got people that are saying "oh, but this is a rubbish course and it was meant to be really easy", and I think that's really putting people off actually taking the Diploma. I think that's a real shame because I think it's a great course but it's a changing course, it changes so much in such a short amount of time, ... but the question that all the Diploma students are answering is "what on earth's going on? What are we going to get out of this course?" no one has any idea what's going on, we're just doing the work.

(Male student Year 11 Focus Group)

The functional skills element of the Diploma was seen to be harder than other aspects of the qualification and required different skills to those needed for maths GCSE (see also Chapter 5). In one of the more negative comments about the Diploma, it was suggested that, 'besides succeeding in functional skills', students did not have to be 'academically' brilliant to get a good grade in this course'.

With BTEC national diplomas, students tended to like the way in which they were assessed and also that BTECs offered a 'different way of doing things', opened-up more opportunities for students and allowed for a more vocational element in their learning. However, concerns were voiced about how BTECs were understood by employers – some students felt that they weren't understood well-enough, whereas others thought they were becoming more recognisable, especially if more schools

and colleges were using them. There was also a concern about the value of qualifications that were wholly coursework-based.

- Male Student1:** *Because when we did our options early we were told we were going to do GCSE PE, but they changed it after a couple of months because BTEC was so much easier for the school to do. And a lot of the other subjects that we're doing now is going to change to BTEC when we leave.*
- Female Student1:** *Yeah, we've got a few BTECS, in ICT in PE, but in the year below us there's a lot more BTECs than what we have.*
- Female Student2:** *But I feel it's easier from what it was to start with. Because when it was just GCSEs, when they announced that BTEC was coming, it opened up more options.*
- Male Student2:** *Yeah, I prefer the BTEC to the GCSE.*
- Female Student3:** *I think it's a bit misleading, because changing GCSEs to BTECs, most employers prefer GCSEs. And so people have now got lots of BTECs. I'm the only one doing GCSE PE, instead of changing to BTEC, and I chose to keep GCSE because employers prefer those.*
- Female Student4:** *I don't think we were really told the whole ins and outs. We were told all the positive aspects ... but not what could limit you.*

(Year 10 Focus Group)

7.4.4 General views on the reforms

Students also discussed the reforms in general terms and their possible impact on them and their peers. Participants welcomed the greater variety of opportunities at this stage in their education as well as a choice of qualifications with different component types, realising that they and their peers liked to work in different ways and are 'good at different things'. A diverse range of qualifications were seen as 'pathways to the future' and that the move by government to enable young people to achieve of their best was constructive, as getting qualifications and 'setting yourself up' for later life were seen as worthwhile goals. The issue of the number of reforms that seemed to be happening all at once was raised, alongside the speed at which they were being implemented. Students also reported being somewhat confused about all the different titles of qualifications that were available (GCSEs, A levels, functional skills, BTECs, the Diploma, extended projects, etc.). This confusion led into a more general concern about the currency of all these qualifications, their equivalencies and what were the best ones to take:

- Male Student 1:** *I also think all the different titles like Diplomas, BTECs, functional skills, A levels – you'll get a bit confused ... because like people are used to the traditional A levels, it's easy to understand and easier for colleges, but when you're applying to go to a college, it might say, 'GCSE grade B required, but BTEC grade C' or something ... what's the difference, kind of thing.*
- Male Student 2:** *In a way, that could be attractive to some people though, because they're thinking, 'Oh, I've got loads of different types of qualifications'.*
- Male Student 1:** *But some jobs might carry on to look at just A levels and GCSEs and not BTECs, because that's what I've been told.*

(Year 11 Focus Group)

Students acknowledged that examinations and qualifications would always be needed. They understood that any government would not really take examinations away for good; 'what else is

there' to provide the mechanisms by which they and their peers would be selected for higher education and/or jobs:

- Male Student:** *I don't think what the government is doing is actually going to help.*
- Female Student 1:** *I don't think they'll make a change, I don't think they'll actually change it.*
- Female Student 2:** *The thing is, you can't take exams away because then what do you have to assess you and test you about it? I would love for them to say 'Yeah, no exams' and then take it away, but then what will they do?*

(Year 13 Focus Group)

Students spoke at one level of a sense of fairness with regard to examinations and working towards qualifications and were clear about the link between qualifications, achieving well and obtaining self-directed goals. However, students were concerned about those things they could not control (e.g. numbers of jobs, university places, opportunities post full-time education) and that would affect what happened to them whether they had good grades or not. This was especially raised with regard to funding cuts aligned to university places and how these would affect young people and their futures. Students suggested that everything was much harder for them in the present climate and that they would have to work twice as hard and perhaps not even get the same opportunities as others who had gone before them:

- Female Student:** *Everything's so much harder because they have less spaces for university, so now they have A* which I suppose helps them choose*
- Female Student:** *Even when I applied for [University], I asked them why they rejected me and they told me that I had everything that they wanted but there were 407 people and only 32 places for that course and they underestimated how many people would apply*
- Female Student:** *I think if they raise the leaving age to 18 then I think they need to take the pressure off the younger students and only concentrate on students when they're older. People don't know what they want to for the rest of their life when they're 14. For their GCSE choices they need to take the pressure of then and make sure it's concentrated in upper years. You are only going to start to realise when you've been out in the world what it is you want to do –*

(Year 12/13 Disengaged Focus Group)

7.5 Conclusions

The CReSt data indicates that centres generally have systems in place for consulting students about a wide range of issues and activities that are of significance to them and which relate directly to the quality of their educational experience. Students reported positive ways in which they had influenced decisions about their physical and social environments. However, they did not feel empowered in relation to influencing other significant areas of their educational experience such as institutional policy formation around curriculum and assessment provision and the qualifications that were available to them. When asked about these issues specifically, an optimum model emerged for qualifications and examinations systems that focused on fairness and opportunity through the provision of different assessment components, modular structures of delivery and a variety of types of

qualifications available. However, such a model was in tension with considerations about the amount of assessment that young people experience in their education life-times, the currency of different qualifications and their usefulness in the university and job market places and the relevance of what they are doing in this phase of education to their own aspirations and educational goals.

Assessments and qualifications play a considerable role in students' lives and more could be achieved in supporting young people in voicing their views and perspectives on these key areas to those whose responsibility it is to develop and deliver them (e.g. the unitary awarding bodies across the UK. Ofqual, DfE, etc.). Furthermore, students suggested teachers could be 'enablers of students' voices', to support them in their views being heard by significant stakeholders in qualification policy arena as well as broader educational issues of concern in the 14-19 phase.

7.6 Implications for policy

Over recent years the devolved governments of the UK have increasingly taken steps to ensure that the principles of the UNCRC are applied across government departments and public agencies which have manifested most notably in the raft of legal obligations, policy documents and guidance on the participation of children in decision-making processes (Harris 2009). However, education has been one of the slowest areas of children's services to engage in this way (Elwood and Lundy, 2010). Thus, while the 'student voice' was clearly emphasised within the Labour government's 14-19 reform programme, it was non-committal in outlining ways in which institutions and educational organisations should go about engaging with students. Persuading institutions to engage meaningfully with students is one possible way to reduce adult concerns about the degree to which their students have the capacity to have considered input into policies and practices at the institutional level. The provision of good practice materials (e.g. McBeath et al, 2003) and the sharing of positive case studies around participation and self-advocacy studies (e.g. Tisdall and Davis, 2004) will perhaps go some distance to convincing school/college managers of the benefits of active, constructive participation and not tokenistic consultation.

At the national level, the challenge will be for the new coalition government to meet its legal obligations in consulting children and young people in constructive ways about all matters of policy that affect them directly; the arena of education must not be slow to respond to these obligations. Thus, consideration must be given to how policy makers move beyond one-off or isolated consultations to a "position where children's participation is firmly embedded within organisational cultures and structures for decision making" (Sinclair, 2004: 116). Building students' perspectives into the formation of emerging policies, especially those that focus on qualifications systems will enable quality educational provision to be realised. It is at the 14-19 phase of education that assessment and qualifications becomes most intense for young people and is most critical in its impact. To get it right, policy decision-making must include their perspectives; not that their testimony will be privileged over that of others, but it will provide significant evidence that may help to sustain more effective qualification systems over time.

7.7 Implications for future research

Students across the 18 case studies included in this research will be progressing through their 14-19 phase of education within a new context of change and uncertainty. Students in Year 13 that we spoke to will have moved on and will be navigating the worlds of work and higher education, feeling the impact of funding decisions, economic vagaries and grade inflation. An interesting area of research would be to consider the impact of decisions made by these young people and the value of the qualifications they offered beyond school and college. The significance of the 14-19 phase of education for young people will continue as will the importance of appropriate qualification systems. How those responsible for qualification development and implementation effectively incorporate the views of all stakeholders, but especially young people will provide rich opportunities further research. The challenges for the research community in how they engage young people in research will continue to exist. Effective designs that embrace consultative, participatory and/or self-advocacy positions with children will provide different types of impact but will demand very different relationships with the children and young people involved. Attempts within policy research adopt these different positions and to gauge their impact would be an interesting topic for future research.

8 Student Aspiration

8.1 Educational reforms and student aspiration

The Labour government's interest in educational aspirations stemmed from the belief that educational attainment will produce economic productivity. That is, we need high quality human capital to compete in the knowledge economy. Pring et al. (2009, 140-141) contest this view, arguing that a more realistic view of the labour market has to be taken: one which recognises the reduction in middle-range jobs accompanied by growth in top and bottom end occupational categories in recent years. Their point is essentially that in these times there is rarely a ladder available to support progression within a career. The need to raise human capital, however, brought about a policy response from the Labour government of setting targets for the education system. These were around level of attainment, participation and progression, such as a rate of 50% of young people going to university.

As well as these policy levers, the Labour government claimed that a raft of policies was related to improving and supporting aspiration, as well as removing barriers (Figure 7). The Social Exclusions Task Force report on aspiration and attainment in deprived areas in England (2008: 28) states that parents and families are the largest influence upon aspiration, but recognises the effects of the individual and communities. Whilst it could be argued that The Social Exclusions' Task Force has been overly inclusive in claiming a link between all of the policies identified in Figure 7 and young people's aspirations (e.g. parent governors), the report demonstrates both an overview of the extensive reforms and explicitly recognises the structural effects that society can have upon individuals' aspirations. Further, drawing upon a review of the literature on determinants of aspiration (Gutman and Akerman, 2008), the report concludes that it is difficult to establish the causal direction between aspiration and attainment.

Curiously, the 'Raising Participation Age' (RPA) policy is not mentioned anywhere in the document as a current or future initiative relating to aspiration. In a separate study of aspirations of 12-year-olds in England conducted for DCSF, Atherton et al. (2009) identified RPA as a policy relating to educational aspiration and asked about students' views of the policy.

Current Interventions	Community	Parent and family	Individual young person
	Building pride, self efficacy, optimism, expectations, bridging social capital	Improve home learning environment, raise aspirations, increase value on education, self-efficacy, broaden horizons	Raise aspirations, self esteem, self-efficacy, broaden horizons
Human capabilities Building up the skills and confidence of young people, their parents and the wider community	Extended Schools; Sure Start; Narrowing the Gap; Community development learning; Communities for Health; Skills for Health; Working Neighbourhoods; NRF; NDC; Digital Inclusion; Grassroots Grants;	Parenting Experts; Respect Parenting Practitioners; Family Intervention Projects; Parenting Early Intervention Projects; Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy; English for Speakers of Other Languages; Money Guidance Pathfinder; Financial Inclusion Champions; Tax Credit Advice in SSOCs; Informal adult learning; Multi Systemic Therapy; Family Nurse Partnership	City Challenge; Gifted and Talented; Raising Attainment of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish Heritage Pupils; Raising Attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils; New Arrivals Excellence Programme; Extended Schools Every Child a Reader and Every Child a Writer; PSHE; 14-19 Diplomas; Aim Higher; In Harmony; Recruit into Coaching; Positive Futures; My Money; Creative Partnerships
Physical and economic regeneration Raising community pride and confidence through improvements to buildings, environment and economic outlook.	Working Neighbourhoods; NRF; NDC; Local Enterprise Growth Initiative; City Strategies; Cleaner, Safer, Greener; Digital Inclusion; Rural Development for England; Community Assets; Grassroots Grants;	Decent Homes programme	Building Schools for the Future; Primary Capital Programme; MyPlace
Providing incentives and removing financial barriers enable and encourage people in deprived communities to access opportunities and develop higher aspirations.	Grassroots grants; Community Chest	Childcare element of Working Tax Credit; Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit; Child Development Grants; Childcare Affordability Pilots; Incentives for parents in London to return to work; in work credit for additional earners and partners for JSA claimants; Better off in work credit; Rent deposit scheme	Education Maintenance Allowance;
Empowerment Enabling local people to take more control of services and community assets.	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders; Take Part Local Pathfinders; Community Pledge banks; Empowerment Fund; Community Builders Fund;	Parent governors	National Body for Youth Leadership; Young Advisors; Youth Councils; School Councils
Information and inspiration Making people aware of opportunities and showing them they can achieve		Work focused services in Children's Centres; Parenting Experts	Reach; Connexions; Youth Mentoring Initiative (Media Trust); Respect Athlete Mentoring Scheme; Positive Futures; Creative Partnerships;

Figure 7: Government policy related to aspiration - Social Exclusions Taskforce (2008)

8.2 Learner perspectives

As discussed in Chapter seven, there has been a growing acceptance over recent years, both in research and policy activity, that it is good practice to consult young people about decisions across a range of services that affect them (Sinclair, 2004). Through questionnaires to Year 11 (approximate age 15/16) and Year 13 students (approximate age 17/18), the CReSt project investigated a range of issues that might reflect notions of young people's educational aspirations such as their goals, hopes, plans and dreams within the context of policy reform to enhance attainments and success at the 14-19 phase (see Appendix F). In this chapter, we look specifically at the data on young people's aspirations. Here, the focus was on how educational goals and provision reflects what is relevant to students and what they want to gain from their educational experiences. Theories of aspiration and motivation were important to this aspect of the study, as well as theories of identity. For reasons explained below, theories of aspiration and motivation were too limiting to address young peoples' perspectives entirely. Each of these areas is outlined briefly, before we turn to our data.

8.2.1 Aspiration

In a research review for DfES, Payne (2003) characterises models of aspiration in the literature as

- Structuralist, where choice is seen as a function of socioeconomic, gender, ethnic and cultural background;
- Economic, where choice is a rational evaluation of the costs and benefits of investment of time and effort and;

- Pragmatic rationality, which attempts to integrate the facts that young people make choices that also include some consideration of costs and benefits, but are also heavily influenced by their backgrounds.

These distinctions are useful because they capture the opposing underlying assumptions of free will and determinism that appear in research and policy. Our approach is one of pragmatic rationality, which links clearly with Gottfredson's (2002) circumscription and compromise theory of career choice development.

Gottfredson (2002) has suggested that career choice has four developmental stages. She argues that people approach the task of selecting their occupational futures by ruling out careers that they see as unsuitable for people like them. The first, rudimentary stage (ages 3 to 5) involves categorising those that we see around us as big and powerful versus small and weak. In the initial years of primary school (ages 6 to 8), her argument is that gendered aspects of choice dominate children's thinking. Although still influenced by gendered roles through ages 9 to 13, she goes on to suggest that prestige also begins to affect children's views of careers. Young people take stock of the likely chance of success and the anticipated effort of reaching certain career goals. They then compromise on their choices, selecting options that are reasonable expectations for people like themselves. This results in a zone of acceptable alternatives in opposition to those that are deemed as the wrong gender role, too low in prestige and too difficult to achieve. Finally, from age 14 onwards, these choices become more conscious and explicit than they were in previous stages. We begin to match career choices with the kinds of people we see ourselves as. Such characteristics might include realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional, according to Holland's (1996) typology of personality and work. These decisions may go beyond our career interests, to include issues such as family plans. Our research related to this final phase, from age 14, so we suggest that students' career aspirations would be linked with gender, prestige and views of self.

8.2.2 Motivation

As Gottfredson proposes, high hopes are tempered by the lived experiences of young people, including a realisation of the effort required to attain some of their aspirations. Learner motivation, in terms of attitude and behaviour, is then crucial to students achieving their aspirations.

Self determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985) proposes that social environments affect levels of motivation in response to how much they fulfil three basic needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. Deci and Ryan (1985) argued that disaffection is not a natural state but, rather, results from these basic needs not being met. Motivation that stems from our own interest in an activity that we find inherently satisfying (intrinsic) is seen as optimal – meeting these basic needs and resulting in increased well-being, higher levels of interest and perseverance with activities (Deci and Ryan, 2008). In contrast, motivation that derives from sources outside oneself (extrinsic) does not support need fulfilment and may have negative effects including disaffection. Deci and Ryan distinguish between

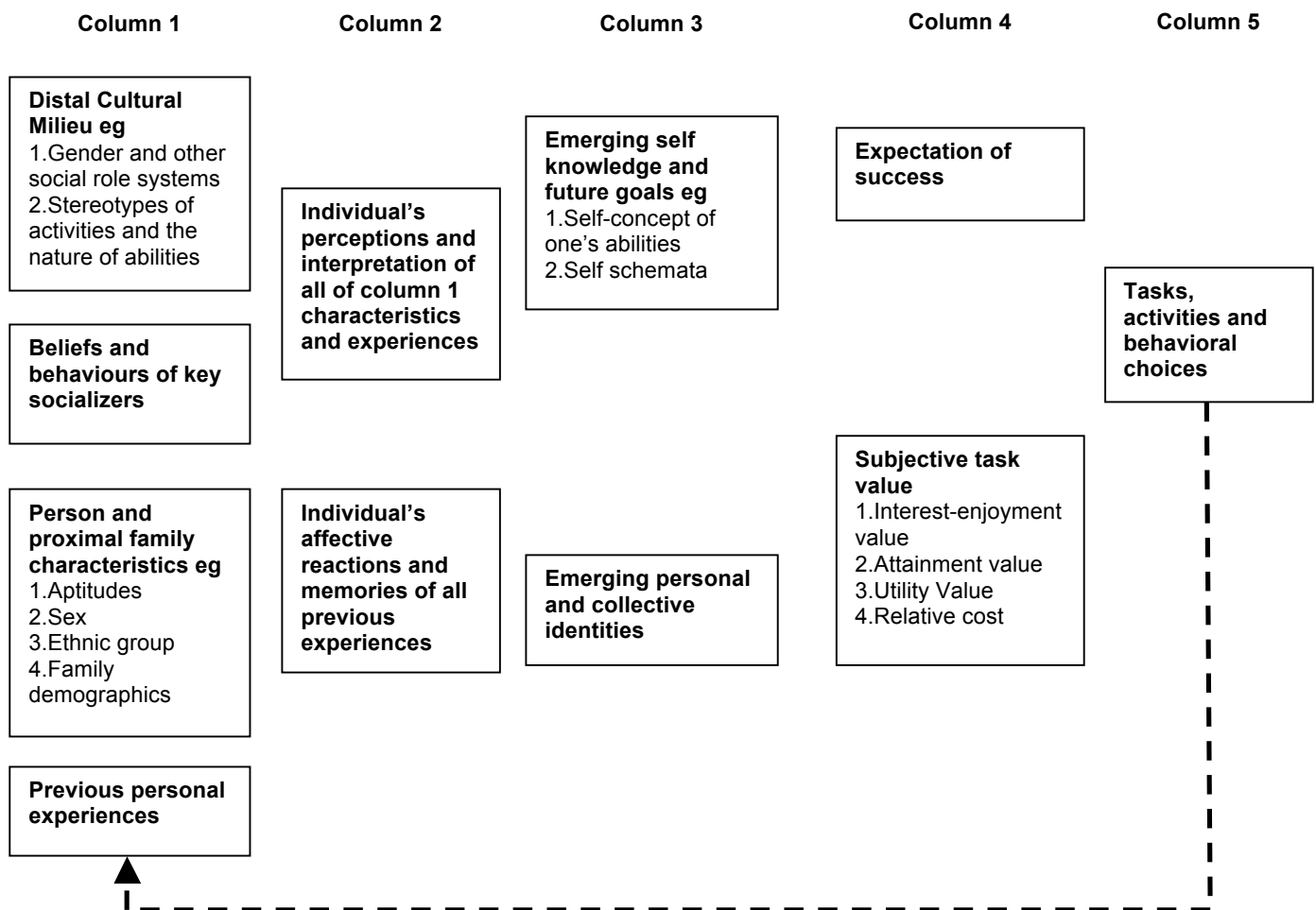
autonomy (intrinsic motivation) and controlled (extrinsic motivation) environments, arguing that humans have better levels of well-being and drive under conditions of autonomy. Niemiec et al (2009) investigated the differential consequences of achieving intrinsic versus extrinsic goals for college students. Intrinsic goals involve mastering new tasks (competence), are internally controlled (autonomy) and enable bonds with others (relatedness, through reducing competition). As predicted, fulfilment of intrinsic aspirations (such as personal growth) resulted in higher levels of well-being, while extrinsic goals (such as expensive possessions) failed to increase levels of well-being and led to higher levels of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, Hustinx et al (2009) found that intrinsic motivation predicted later academic achievement and attainment.

A different theory, proposed by Dweck (1975), suggests that motivation is affected by people's implicit theories of intelligence. Some people believe that intelligence is malleable (incremental theorists) and, as a result, approach difficult tasks as opportunities to learn new skills or improve their abilities (as a learning goal). These learners are 'mastery oriented' and have been shown to have higher levels of performance in tasks as well as increased well-being (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Other learners (entity theorists) see intelligence as fixed and so approach difficult tasks as though they are insurmountable due to their own levels of intelligence, believing that if they can't do something it's because they don't have the skill. These 'helpless' learners see difficult tasks as tests of their ability (performance goals) and failure to achieve leads to negative effect. Ahmavaara and Houston (2007) investigated the differential effect of these implicit theories on future aspirations with regard to students in selective schooling. Incremental theorists were found to have higher levels of aspirations while entity theorists limited their options in line with their view of their intelligence.

8.2.3 Identity

Eccles' (2009) Expectancy Values Model of motivated behavioural choice presents an alternative view of motivation. Eccles emphasises the relationship between motivation, aspiration and identity. Individuals' expectations for success (and the importance they place on these) are based on self-perceptions related to ability and self-efficacy as well as to personal values and goals. Her complex model incorporates many of the features discussed in previous models of motivation and aspiration, including structural effects upon behaviour choice, as well as gendered and other group identity and perception characteristics (see Figure 8).

These theories formed the background to the research, with the questionnaire item on students' goals, hopes, plans and dreams being provided by Jacquelynne Eccles (personal communication). Our coding of the responses to that item was based upon Deci and Ryan's theory of motivation; specifically derived from Kasser and Ryan's (1996) Aspirations Index.



Note: The number items within several of the boxes are just examples. Boxes represent large categories of constructs at the same theoretical level. Causal influences is assumed to go predominantly from left to right. The arrows have been removed for simplicity. By and large, constructs within a column influence each other reciprocally. Since the model plays out over time, I have included one arrow to illustrate the fact that today's choices become part of tomorrow's history of experience. This arrow includes the agentic effects of individual's choices on subsequent behaviours of socializers and the larger cultural milieu. Taken from Eccles (2009).

Figure 8: Simplified version of the Eccles et al. Expectancy Value Model of Motivated Behavioural Choice

8.3 Method

8.3.1 Participants and Sampling

A national sample of 52 institutions involved in the delivery of 14-19 learning was selected by the CReSt baseline research team. These included a range of schools (Table 14 and Table 15) as well as sixth form and general FE colleges (Gorard et al., 2008). Seven of the case institutions provided special education. The sample was chosen to be representative in terms of the range and frequency of educational institutions in England, taking into account 'location, deprivation, size, intake, outcomes, denomination, and subject specialism' (Gorard et al., 2008: 3). Questionnaires were delivered electronically to project advisors at case institutions in the form of an email containing a link to the survey. Instructions requested that advisors choose a mixed ability sample of 50 Year 11

and/or Year 13 students to complete the survey, depending upon institution type with the suggestion that tutor groups were used to provide a range of ability.

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
	Centres	Centres	Students
11-16 school	9	7	239
11-18 school	24	17	521
Special Education centre	7	2	13
Total	40	26	773

Table 14: CReSt project centres and responses for Year 11 questionnaires

Centre type	Number in CReSt study sample	Responses	
	Centres	Centres	Students
11-18 school	24	15	328
6 th form college	5	3	247
FE college	7	6	339
Special Education centre	7	2	14
Total	43	26	928

Table 15: CReSt project centres and responses for Year 13 questionnaires

However, some institutions chose to send out an email inviting all students in the year group to take part. As a result, differing numbers of students from each institution responded to the survey ranging from 5 to 66 respondents for the Year 11 survey and 5 to 134 respondents for the Year 13 survey (Table 16). The sampling method used raises questions about the representativeness of the results, certainly for some of the centres, and checks will need to be made in subsequent work on the representativeness of the sample nationally in terms of prior educational attainment.

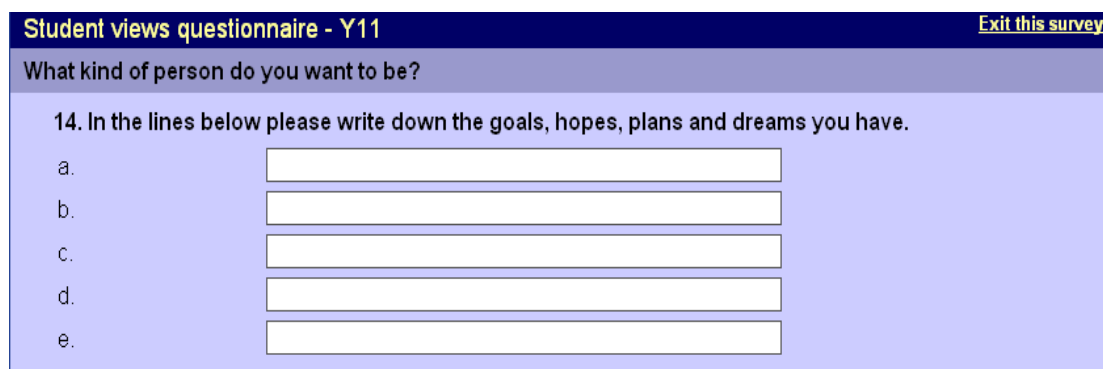
Responses per centre	Year 11	Year 13
Mean	29.7	35.7
Standard Deviation	16.0	34.7
Minimum - Maximum	5 - 66	5 - 134

Table 16: CReSt project centres and responses for Year 13 questionnaires

8.3.2 Measures

The questionnaire incorporated measures used in previously published studies. Analysis of the questions related to aspiration is presented here (the full questionnaire is given in Appendix E). The survey itself was colourful and accessible. To encourage completion a progress bar was included at the bottom of each screen to show participants how much of the survey had been filled in. At the end of the survey participants clicked a button to submit their responses, which should have resulted in

few surveys being submitted prior to completion. Question 14 asked participants to outline their goals, hopes and plans. The question was an open-ended, short-answer question enabling flexibility in student response (See figure 9).



The image shows a screenshot of a survey interface. At the top, there is a dark blue header with the text "Student views questionnaire - Y11" on the left and "Exit this survey" on the right. Below the header, the question "What kind of person do you want to be?" is displayed. The main content area has a light blue background and contains the question "14. In the lines below please write down the goals, hopes, plans and dreams you have." followed by five numbered input boxes labeled a, b, c, d, and e.

Figure 9: Questionnaire item on goals, hopes, plans and dreams

Relatedly, students were asked whether their school or college supported them to be the kind of person that they wanted to be ('not at all, 'a little' or 'very much') and to tell us the ways in which their education had helped and not helped them to be the kind of person they wanted to be. They were asked what they wanted to do when they left school or college and what kind of job they wanted to do in the future. Jobs were classified in the manner used by the baseline team (see career code in Figure 10).

8.3.3 Procedures

The survey was administered online using SurveyMonkey. The survey requests student names: the reason for this (in order to match responses with national attainment data) was explained to participants to avoid resultant lower levels of disclosure. To avoid a skewing of the sample due to multiple submissions, responses which duplicated name and date of birth were removed from the sample, leaving only the final response with those details.

Little is known about the administration of the surveys within the case institutions. Project advisors were advised on the importance of confidentiality. However, it is possible that teachers were present while surveys were administered in some cases but not in others. Despite reassurance about confidentiality, having teachers present could have impacted upon student response rates. Similarly, due to the sampling methods used by some institutions, some surveys may have been filled in while with friends. As such, social desirability may have affected student response leading participants to respond in ways that create a positive social image (Coolican, 1999). Depending on the setting, this could have meant giving answers they felt their friends would approve of (relating to image for example) or answers they felt the teachers may deem positive (about educational goals).

8.4 Coding of data

Codes of the “goals, hopes, plans and dreams” responses were developed from both theory and data, using Kasser and Ryan’s Aspiration index (1996) as a starting point. The original index was altered by adding to, expanding, and collapsing different items in response to the data. (For full details of the coding frame development see Chapter 3). The coding frame that was used (see Figure 10), included broad first-level codes of education, career, lifestyle, relationships, wealth, community, health, image, and personal growth, Many of these were expanded into second level codes to distinguish between underlying messages in the data.

Level 1 code	Level 2 code	Description
Career	C	Non-specific job / ‘good job’,
	C1	Fitness instructor, postal worker, factory worker, hairdresser etc
	C2	Well paid / Professional job – Doctor, scientist, accountant, teacher, sports player/coach, games designer, ‘promotion’
	C3	Police officer, builder, childminder, armed forces
	C4	Own business
Community	Comm	Community – helping others, charity work
Education	E1	Higher Education (look at end goal e.g. ‘get A grades so I can go to uni’ = E1)
	E2	Other educational goal – finish course, pass A levels (no mention of HE), Apprenticeship
Health	H1	Health, wanting to be fit, to live long
Image	I	Image – fame/reference to famous people, admiration of others, beautiful wife, ASBOs
Lifestyle	L1	Travel – Holidays (including space), work abroad, gap year
	L2	Sex
	L3	Own home, Independence
	L4	Work/life balance and Retirement
Personal Growth	PG	Personal growth – Be happy, wanting to better themselves, driving test, excel at chosen sport (if professionally C2), write a book/play, gaming achievements
Relationships	R1	Family (including wanting to do well to please family, wanting to buy things for family)
	R2	Pets
	R3	Friendships
Wealth	W1	Money – to be comfortable, have enough
	W2	Expensive possessions – cars etc, Not own home unless they specify ‘mansion’, ‘huge house’
	W3	To be rich, loads of money, wealthy
	Blank	No response
	Spoof	Silly answers
	None	No aspirations

Figure 10: Coding of students' stated goals, hopes, plans and dreams

For the questions on the ways in which educational institutions either helped or did not help students to become the person that they wanted to be codes were purely data-driven (see Tables 17 and 18).

Code	Examples
Personal qualities	Helped me to be more independent, confident, responsible, determined, self-disciplined, motivated, intelligent, organized, mature, improved my fitness
Qualifications	Helped me to gain qualifications (perhaps explicitly for a future job or course)
Career help	Help to get a future job or career path
Relationships	Friendships, teaching staff or general social skills development
Learning	Educated, life skills, broadened horizons
Extra provision	Extra things offered by school have helped. E.g. Connexions, careers days, Duke of Edinburgh, Army days, Golden group meetings.
Curriculum provision	References to how the courses offered have helped e.g. 'they let me do Art' or 'I had a good range of course options'.
Focus on Education	School has supported students to achieve E.g. 'they've pushed me to work harder', 'they've shown me how important it is to work hard', 'kept me on the right path'
Don't know	I don't know / I'm not sure
SpooF	Joke / unintelligible responses

Table 17: Coding of statements regarding institutional support

Code	Examples
Attitude	Made me bored, stressed, angry, lacked concentration
Learning	Lack of learning, resources, school policies, too focused upon academic success, too much work, no free time, not related to the real world
Relationships	With peers and/or teachers poor
Identity	Did not understand me, cannot be the person I want to be, not interested in individualism, personal issues
Career	Lack of career support
General	Institution did not help
None	There were no ways in which the school/college did not help
Don't know	I don't know / I'm not sure
SpooF	Joke / unintelligible responses

Table 18: Coding of statements regarding LACK OF institutional support

8.5 Results and discussion

Overwhelmingly, when asked for their goals, hopes, plans and dreams, students gave educational and career goals and together those categories accounted for 59% of all Year 11 and 51% of Year 13 aspirations. Approximately 10% of all aspirations related to personal growth, relationships and lifestyle for each year group, although the proportions were slightly higher in Year 13 for personal growth (13%) and lifestyle (12%). Extrinsic goals (image and wealth) jointly accounted for under 10%

of all stated aspirations. The least popular categories for each age group were image (1-2%), community (1-2%) and health (approximately 0.5%). We might have expected higher rates of extrinsically-motivated aspirations, particularly from the Year 11 age group, but these were low. Equally, there were few grand statements about contributions to community, although there were some commitments given to world peace and so on. Whilst it is possible that the educational environment in which the survey was administered led to the high rates of educational and career goals, these findings are consistent with our qualitative data (see Chapters 7 and 9) and findings from other research (e.g. Payne, 2003; Stand and Winston, 2008) As also found from the qualitative data from focus groups (see Chapter 7 for detail), young people prioritise the obtaining of qualifications with good grades in order to secure good job prospects and to have positive impact upon their general life chances. It is however, also worth noting that, 31% of each age group did not list an educational aspiration at all.

Approximately a quarter of each age group did not list any aspiration (n=256, 22% of Year 11; n=168, 28% of Year 13). Very few spoof responses were given (2.3% and 3.3% for Years 11 and 13 respectively). Participants could list up to five aspirations. Overall 1,659 blank responses were recorded for the Year 11 questionnaire (43%) and 2,227 blank responses for the Year 13 questionnaire (48%). Most of these occurred in the later columns.

Progressing to Higher Education was the most frequent aspiration for Year 13 students. For Year 11 it was going on to some form of educational aspiration other than HE, such as A-levels (Table 19). For both year groups, the second most popular aspiration was a well-paid, professional job. This is in keeping with findings from Atherton et al. (2009) who investigated the career aspirations of 610 twelve-year olds. In Atherton et al.'s study, 80% of pupils had high status occupational aspirations and this was not related to socioeconomic status. Worryingly, the labour market might not support such high levels of career aspiration. In response to the question asking directly about career aspirations, half of the Year 11 and 62% of the Year 13 students indicated that they would like a professional job. The similarity in the profiles of aspirations between these two year groups is striking.

First level codes	Second level codes	Year 11		Year 13	
		Total	%	Total	%
Career	C - general	114	5.4	150	6.5
	C1 - manual	25	1.2	8	0.3
	C2 - professional	309	14.8	346	14.9
	C3 - skilled	99	4.7	84	3.6
	C4 – own business	31	1.5	31	1.3
<i>Career Total</i>		578	27.6	619	26.3
Community	Comm - community	22	1.1	44	1.9
Education	E1 - HE	209	10.0	400	17.2
	E2 - other	450	21.5	186	8.0
	<i>Education total</i>	659	31.5	586	25.3
Health	H1	10	0.3	14	0.6
Image	I	47	1.2	43	1.9
Lifestyle	L1 - travel	143	6.8	194	8.4
	L2 – sex	3	0.1	9	0.4
	L3 – own home	61	2.9	74	3.2
	L4 – work-life balance	5	0.2	9	0.4
	<i>Lifestyle total</i>	212	10.1	286	12.3
Personal growth	PG	213	10.2	315	13.6
Relationships	R1 - family	180	8.6	208	9.0
	R2 - pets	11	0.5	9	0.4
	R3 - friends	21	1.0	15	0.7
	<i>Relationships total</i>	212	10.1	232	10.0
Wealth	W1 - enough money	43	2.1	64	2.8
	W2 - possessions	50	2.4	59	2.5
	W3 - rich	49	2.3	58	2.5
	<i>Wealth total</i>	142	6.8	181	7.8
Total		2095	100	2320	100

Table 19: Second level codes Year 11 and Year 13 students' aspirations

Educational goals were mentioned in the first box frequently by both age groups (E and E1 in Figure 11 and Figure 12). Family and marital relationships (R1) were rarely mentioned first, but were more frequently stated later in students' lists. For Year 13, travel (L1) and personal growth (PG) were mentioned in later columns. Again, we do not have longitudinal data, but it is possible that by age 18, young people have a clearer idea of what else they might want to do with their lives. Further, the ordering of the Year 13 aspirations in particular could be seen as a narrative response to the questionnaire item. Aspirations might occur to young people in the order of their planned life plan trajectory: get an education, get a good job, have a family and travel.

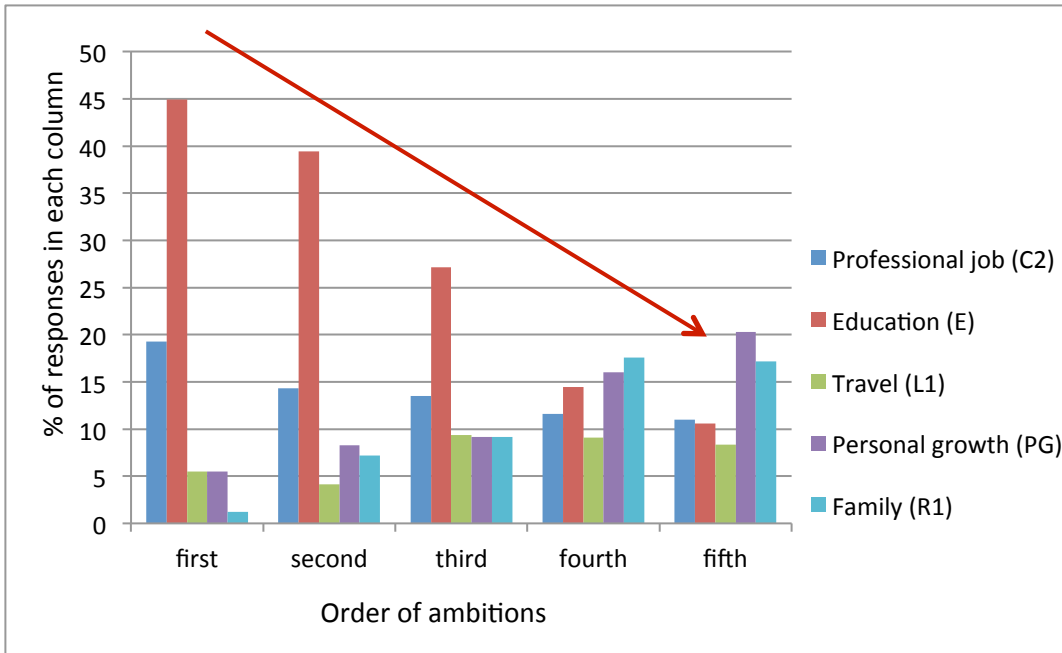


Figure 11: Order of listing of aspirations – Year 11

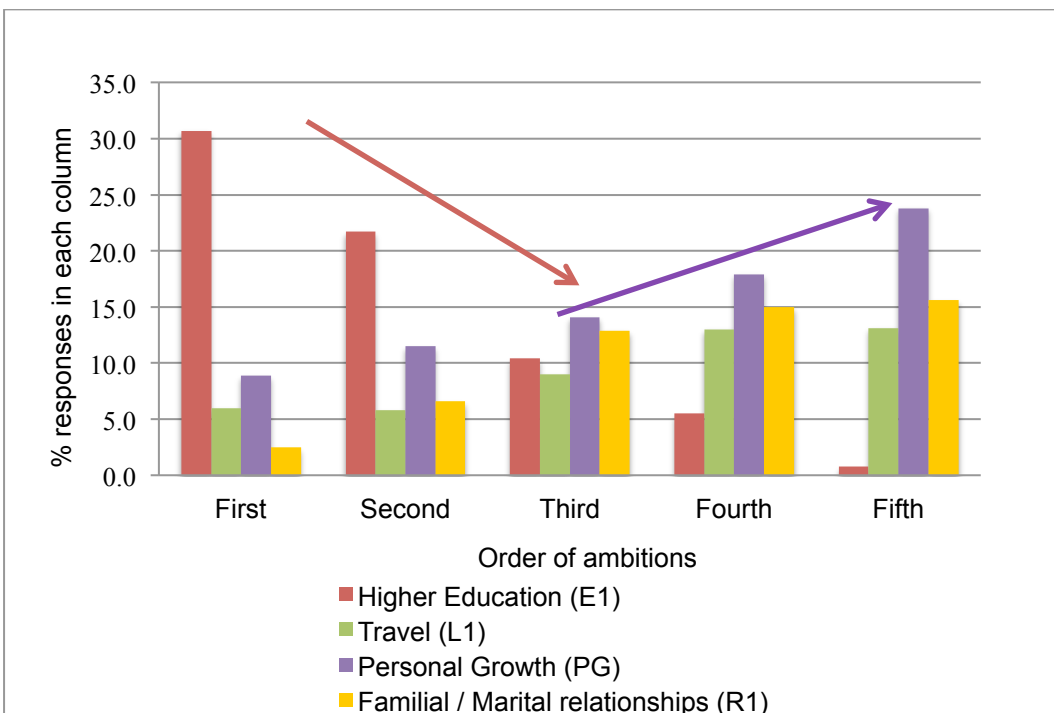


Figure 12: Order of listing of aspirations – Year 13

The majority of students felt that their education had helped them to become the person that they wanted to be, with only approximately one quarter of each age group feeling that they were not at all supported or leaving their response blank (Figure 13). Interestingly, a higher proportion of Year 13 students felt that their education had supported them very much. Further work will investigate whether this varies by institution type, as it could reflect the choice of institution available to post-16 students, with some students having a better fit with organisations other than their 11-16 school. Analysis by institution type is outside the scope of the current report, although comparisons of

aspirations and well-being have been conducted between Year 13 respondents from Further Education colleges and other Year 13 students (McWhirter, 2010). For these samples at least, young people perceive educational institutions as largely supporting them to develop in a broad manner into the kind of people that they aspire to be.

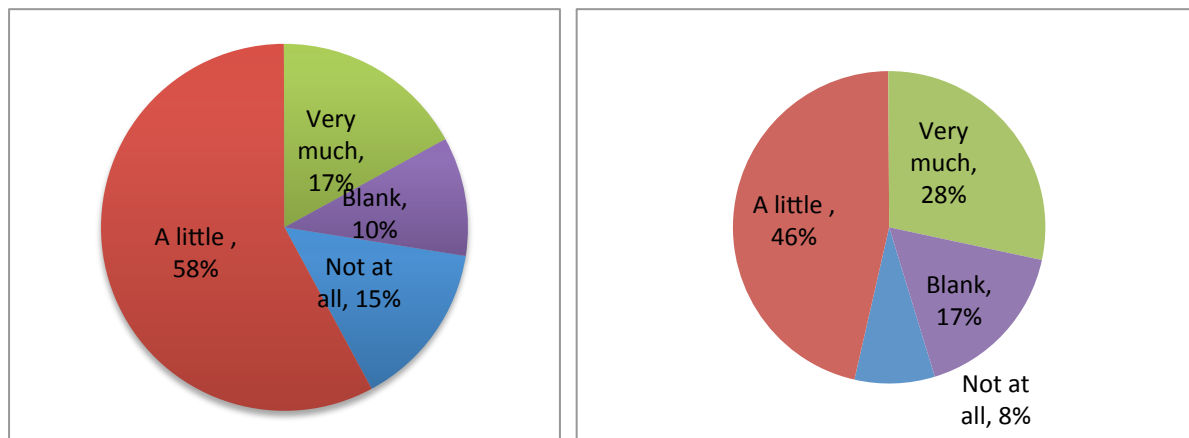


Figure 13: School or college help and support to be the kind of person you want to be (Year 11 and Year 13 respectively)

Approximately 60% of students in each year group commented upon how the school had helped them to be the person they wanted to be. Statements were complex and therefore multiply coded (up to three categories for an individual statement). Codes were aggregated to cover personal, learning and career themes (Figure 14). Educational institutions were considered by these students to have supported them to develop as people (e.g. *‘Taught me the ways and manners you need in life’*) as well as to gain qualifications (e.g. *‘Given me the qualifications to go on to bigger and better things’*) and have worthwhile learning experiences (e.g. *‘It helps me gaining the skills and knowledge required for having a successful business’*). They also provided career guidance (e.g. *‘My college careers base has helped me make my decision and are helping me get information and helping get in contacts with the right people’*) and comments on career support were more prevalent for the Year 13 group. Approximately 40% of students in each year group commented upon the ways in which the school or college had not helped them to be the person they wanted to be. When experiences with the institution had not been so positive, issues surrounded problems with relationships (e.g. *‘My peers I am with aren’t very nice and I don’t get on at school’*), attitude (e.g. *‘Pressure, nothing is spaced out, makes you feel stressed’*) and lack of freedom to be themselves (e.g. *‘The school has not helped me achieve my full potential, I have not been encouraged to be who I want to be, school has only tried to encourage what they want me to be’*) (Figure 15). Problems with learning experiences were also cited (e.g. *‘I spend too much time outside school doing school work rather than working towards my goals’*), as well as lack of support for career planning (e.g. *‘it hasn’t helped me choose what I want to do. I don’t want to do anything with my course now’*) and there were a range of specific issues given (e.g. *‘it hasn’t helped me with my personality, but surely school life can’t’*). These comments showed that educational institutions are expected to, and do, engage with development of young people in a broad sense. Personal development, as well as academic and career development is important to young people. However, many comments were balanced about the extent to which the individual and the

institution could contribute to personal development. Some young people commented that they were being bullied or were unhappy with the social dynamics in the institution.

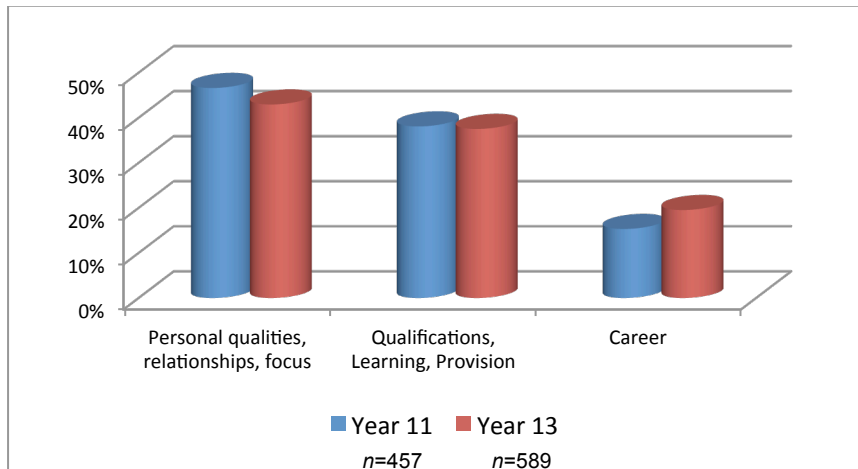


Figure 14: Ways in which institutions HELP young people to be the person they want to be

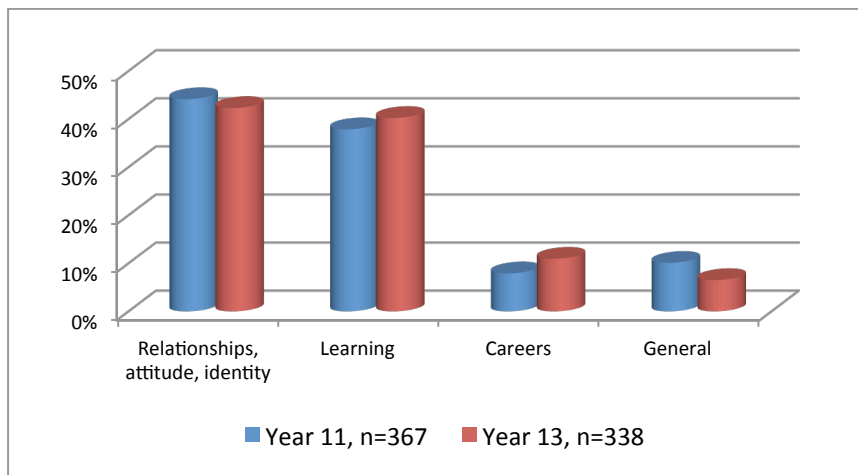


Figure 15: Ways in which institutions DO NOT HELP young people to be the person they want to be

8.6 Conclusions

When asked about their aspirations, many learners described their desire to do well in their education and career. Aspirations in these areas were relatively high, with a large proportion of responses in these categories referring to university and professional careers. We do not yet know whether these students will have the opportunity to fulfil these aspirations. Firstly students will need to achieve the qualifications and have the skills required for entry into such professions. Students who succeed at this then need to find such jobs. It is possible that the training and labour market in these professions may not be able to meet the demand for places, even from those students who possess the necessary attributes and level of prior achievement. Aspiration should not be considered in isolation: we also need to consider the opportunities available to students in existing labour markets.

It may be that these aspirations reflect the nature of a high-achieving sample who might be more likely to go to university and then into a professional career. Or as Strand and Winston (2008) have indicated, high aspirations may not always be aligned with high attainment. By the time learners reach the 14-19 phase, according to Gottfredson (2002), career goals are likely to take into account the amount of effort required and likelihood of attaining them. Alternatively, if this sample is more representative of the population, these aspirations could be seen as unrealistically high. In an economic climate that is reducing the number of higher education and jobs available to young people, students may well be aspiring to university and professional careers, in a shifting and uncertain landscape that may not be able to accommodate their aspirations (regardless of level of attainment). This may well then wash back on IAG and other support and create new problems for the raising of attainment in line with government goals. This would link to Atherton et al (2009), who found that students were more likely to associate success with academic pathways and high-status jobs than with vocational pathways.

Many of the goals that students described were around education and career. A difficulty arose in categorising educational and career goals as intrinsically or extrinsically-driven, as it is highly likely that many of these aspirations would be multiply-caused. Careers and education can involve a degree of intrinsic personal satisfaction but could also be seen as extrinsically driven (e.g. wanting a job for the money or wanting to get good results for status). However, more than 30% of goals were classified as intrinsically motivated, and around 10% as extrinsically motivated. According to Neimiec et al (2009), achieving intrinsic goals supports well-being, so we would hope that students would hold intrinsic goals and be supported in achieving them. However, the types of intrinsic goals described by students are not a major feature of the policy landscape, where drivers and levers relate mainly to education and career.

When we look at what students say about how their school helps (or does not help) them to be the kind of person they want to be, most responses referred to personal and inter-personal issues, such as relationships, personal qualities, and attitudes. This suggests that learners value the personal development that schools can provide. The focus groups with Years 11 and 13 also reflected this; with many students describing relationships as an important aspect of school or college (see Chapters 7 and 9). Issues around learning and qualifications are also clearly important for learners: more than 30% of responses to this question referred to this topic. This balance between the personal and educational aspects of attending school or college is not matched by the focus of government targets being mainly on qualifications and attainment.

These findings raise questions about the role of education and schooling in society, and the degree to which there should be a balance on personal development as well as qualifications. Problems arise here, because personal development is harder to measure and therefore it is difficult to communicate the impact that a school or college has. The introduction of citizenship into the English curriculum in 2002 aimed, in part, to support personal and community development. The survey responses showed that many learners felt that their school was helping them to develop personally – we do not know

whether this is through deliberate curricular mechanisms or through incidental mechanisms – but on the other side of the coin a large proportion of learners felt that their school created problems for them around relationships, attitudes and identity. The role of these inter- and intra-personal factors in the development of aspiration was also highlighted by Eccles (2009). When this is taken alongside the contributions from schools in terms of qualifications and career guidance that were also described in the student's surveys, it is evident that students' educational experiences can affect their aspirations in many ways.

8.7 Implications for policy

Mikelson (1990) presents an 'attainment aspirations' paradox where educational aspirations may be high but educational attainment does not reflect this and is lower than the aspirations may indicate. The students in the CReSt study could see the benefits of policies such as raising the school leaving age, providing a range of qualifications for all students to engage with given their preferences, improving personal learning programmes and alternative pathways for learning across the phase of 14-19 such as foundation learning and vocational, as well as academic pathways. However, as Stand and Winston (2008) have indicated it may well be that students welcome such initiatives simply because there is knowledge about the greater risk of unemployment and lack of higher education places if students do not have qualifications to trade in the job and university market places. Thus any link between aspirations and the impact of reforms at this phase of education must be seen in the context of the actual raising of attainment levels and concrete attitudes towards the realities of the employment opportunities for young people as well as higher educational aspirations.

Raising the aspirations of young people across the 14-19 educational phase will no doubt continue to be a key aim of current government policy and reform. As this research, along with other studies has shown, young people's aspirations are associated with influences and attitudes, not all of which are formed within educational settings. Influences in their wider social and cultural contexts may well impact positively or negatively with young people's views of themselves as learners and achievers and the degree to which their home background and peer support feed into young people's educational identities is also crucial. At the institutional level, there is a significant role to be played by the school or college that students attend to facilitate their capacity to aspire. As has been shown by the CReSt research (see Chapter 4), schools and colleges mediate policy reform in light of their own local and particular contexts. It is essential then that student aspirations are also considered within these contexts as well as being developed within an understanding of students lived experiences.

8.8 Implications for future research

Use of an online survey for this type of research has methodological advantages and disadvantages, as discussed in the method. For this research, the key issue was the response rate in each centre. We had asked for a mixed-ability sample of 50 students in each of Year 11 and Year 13. However, some centres did not respond at all, and many had a lower response rate than 50 students. We will be investigating how representative the sample is, compared to the national population, in terms of

prior attainment. The responses, however, have not given us a good cross-section from across all the types of institution which comprise the CReSt centres. It may be that hard copies of the survey would provide a better response rate, particularly if administered at the same time as a visit to the centre.

In order to understand more about aspiration and motivation, particularly with reference to the theoretical perspectives described in the introduction, we need more information about what lies behind education and career goals. The nature of a questionnaire means that it is possible to access the general aspirations of a large number of students, but not to understand these aspirations to a great depth, in terms of the motivation behind aspirations and what or who inspires them. To consider this in more depth would require a different method and would undoubtedly result in a smaller sample.

Further analysis of the data would enable us to look at the patterns of responses across different institutions, and to consider relationships between aspirations and how students believe the school helps them to be who they want to be.

9 The Perspectives of Disengaged Students

9.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents data collected from fifteen focus groups of students identified as disengaged, and concentrates on four areas: (i) how 14-19 reforms address engagement/disengagement; (ii) how research demonstrates that the definition of disengagement is problematic; (iii) disengaged students' awareness of the 14-19 reforms and (iv) students reflections on their engagement in terms of barriers and motivations to learn. The findings from the first year of the CReSt project suggest a somewhat limited awareness amongst students of the extent of the 14-19 reforms but salient themes around RPA do emerge. Additionally data also augments messages emanating from research literature in that the definition of educational engagement is complicated and multi-faceted (Gibbs and Poskitt, 2010). The findings demonstrate that not all students engage or disengage for the same reasons; levels of engagement depend upon a range of factors including: their relationships with teachers and peers; the quality of teaching and learning methodologies; the atmosphere in the classroom and the behaviour of peers. The concept of engagement is further problematised because while students talked about levels of disengagement, at the same time they also talked about how much they valued their education in terms of wanting to achieve good grades, skills and qualifications. Students were positively aspirational overall and talked about wanting to go on to further and higher education or pursue particular career pathways.

The data also reveals that there is a level of correspondence or synergy in relation to policy intentions around engagement and the perspectives of disengaged students. In short, plans to raise the participation age have been met with enthusiasm by some students, some young people highlight that an engaging curriculum, diverse teaching styles, opportunities to learn outside of the traditional classroom and in different settings help motivate and engage. However young people reveal a number of themes that currently have no home in policy. The following is intended to represent the views of disengaged students in order to make an impact on 14-19 policy that focused on engagement.

9.2 Policy Context

The following sections look at the recent Labour government's educational policy and reforms from 2005 to 2010 in the context of educational engagement. The writing of this report takes place shortly after the new coalition Government has been established. Therefore any discussion of policy acknowledges recent political change and the fluid interim period where much of the existing policy may be subject to future changes.

Arguably, the single most cited 14-19 reform designed to address engagement, is RPA. A significant part of the rationale behind RPA is the targeting of those young people considered to be not in education, employment or training or [NEET]. The DCSF (2008d: 3) described young people in this

predicament as 'an enormous waste of potential'. Chapter five demonstrates how almost 10% of all young people between 16 and 18 were not in education, employment or training by the end of 2009 (DCSF 2010), although this population fluctuates and many remain in this situation for only short periods of time, (Wolf, 2007). The state proposes that if young people remain in education and training this is more likely to improve the quality of their lives, maintain a highly skilled workforce, help the country compete at an international level in terms of demonstrating higher educational participation rates as well as be able to respond to and compete in a changing global economy (DCSF, 2009d). The aims of the Labour government's Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007b) set out to ensure that all children and young people could achieve in education irrespective of their personal, social or economic backgrounds. In order to realise this, the current coalition Government has confirmed their commitment to raise the participation age to 18 by 2015. The rationale for this appears to involve a concerted effort to lower educational disengagement generally but also to target and support those young people who may be at risk of disengaging entirely from education, employment or training. However, the NEET population represents just one end of an engagement spectrum and there are young people along this spectrum who are not entirely disengaged and remain in education, these young people are the focus of this chapter.

The policy aspirations laid out in the Children's Plan, the Raising Expectations Green Paper (2007) and the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper (2005) set out a variety of proposals, which relate specifically to student engagement namely: better identification and intervention with those struggling with engagement; ensuring that all young people secure basic functional skills; providing opportunities to enjoy new styles of learning; opportunities to learn in different settings and more opportunities for applied and practical learning. Young people will also be able to pursue qualifications that are most appropriate for their needs and aspirations. The 14-19 reform programme responds to this policy imperative via enhancing the curriculum and increasing the number of qualification pathways available to students. In doing so, the curriculum is intended to be more innovative (QCDA, 2009), flexible, more relevant to learner needs, be motivating and also enjoyable.

9.3 Defining Educational Disengagement

Prior to commencing research in centres, in October 2009 at a project conference, CReSt researchers and representatives from the centres formulated a working definition of disengagement. To inform this process, a review of literature on educational engagement/disengagement was carried out. It is apparent based on this review that the definitions of disengagement over-lap (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010), they are complex and there is no agreed definition. Some of this research focuses on the idea of 'switching off', 'drifting' (McGrath, 2009) or a lack of attentiveness (Rock 2005). A number of researchers (Fredricks et al. 2004; Martin & Dowson, 2009 Montalvo *et al.* 2007; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009; Hughes and Kwok 2006), concentrate on teacher-student relationships and relatedness and how these factors impact upon engagement and motivation. Literature in this area is particularly relevant in the following sections. Further definitions focus on the idea of students not participating in the classroom and school as a whole (Sandford, Armour and Warmington, 2006), again particularly

relevant in the following sections. While others focus on more familiar factors such as: truancy, misbehaviour and exclusion (Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver, 2007; Sandford, Armour and Warmington, 2006; Kinder, 2002). Attainment and grades are also often used as indicators of either engagement or disengagement (Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver, 2007; Sandford, Armour and Warmington, 2006; Mac Donald and Marsh, 2004). Research also highlights that for some, educational disengagement can be exacerbated by factors other than school, (Daniels *et al.*, 2003; Visser *et al.* 2005; Sutherland and Purdy, 2006; Broadhurst *et al.* 2005).

It is becoming more widely recognised that there is a need to accept that a working definition of engagement/disengagement should accommodate a variety of perspectives. Ross (2009) argues that in defining engagement one may have to settle on a complex multi-dimensional concept. Gibbs and Poskitt (2010: 10), in a similar vein to Fredricks *et al.* (2004) argue that a definition needs to be holistic, that accounts for a 'complex interplay between students' emotional states, their behavioural engagement, and the way they learn academically' Not only should the definition of disengagement be multi-dimensional but students labelled as such are by no means an homogenous group (Ross, 2009; EdComs 2007). Based on a sample of young people between years 9 and 11 from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England [LSYPE], Ross (2009) argues that *the disengaged* could be broken into four different groups: 'engaged' young people who were highly engaged and aspirational; young people who were disengaged from school not education, but remained aspirational; those disengaged from school but not further education and yet remained aspirational and those who were more fully disengaged, with much lower aspirations than the rest. Research (Callanan *et al.*, 2009) indicates that engagement or disengagement does not appear to be static and students move between levels of engagement, (Gibbs and Poskitt 2010: 11). This is also particularly salient in the following sections.

From the outset this review identified that an agreed working definition of disengagement would have to be complex. The following definition, agreed at the conference, reflects aspects of this complexity:

'disengaged' includes those excluded permanently from school, those who have left school at leaving age, those still in school who cause disruption, experience a sense failure or feel that the curriculum is pointless as well as those who despite succeeding in school lack interest in deep learning. Thus, disengagement would refer to lack of involvement in academic, social or extracurricular activity or poor conduct in these contexts.

Applying this definition, centres were asked to approach students whom they considered to be struggling with engagement in various ways, to take part in the research. As well as focus groups with Years 11 and 13 students, distinct focus groups of students struggling with engagement were also formed and a number of themes around engagement were explored, namely: what motivates students to learn, what stops students from learning, what are their relationships like with teaching staff and what do they think of the quality of teaching and learning they experience. Students were also asked about their aspirations and plans for the future after school and college.

The following sections examine the data emerging from the focus groups, firstly looking at the students' awareness of the reform programme, then the barriers and motivators to learn and lastly educational values and aspirations.

9.4 Disengaged student's awareness of the 14-19 reforms

In focus groups with disengaged students, participants were not able to identify all specific 14-19 reforms without being prompted. However, after seeing a prompt, which outlined a summary of the reforms, many became much more involved in discussion (see Appendix D1:10). For the most part, a variety of students in different focus groups, demonstrated that they were at least familiar with or had heard off a number of the reforms; disengaged students typically identified: changes to GCSEs and A' Levels; functional skills; the introduction of Diplomas; and plans to raise the participation age (RPA). In terms of the Diploma, many of the students claimed to be aware of the introduction of Diplomas but only a minority of the students reflected on them. Uptake of Diplomas was low as was enthusiasm for the qualification (see Chapter 5). Students in one focus group explained that they had started a Diploma in Creative Media but dropped out, instead favouring GCSEs or BTECs. One student explained: *I quit because it were rubbish*, and another said: *it was hard, boring and packed with a load of stuff that takes up loads of GCSEs*. Another student in the same focus group suggested: *you should have taken up a BTEC*, and another explained: *I did BTEC because it is easier*.

While Chapters 5 and 7 both discuss students' perspectives on RPA, the following concentrates on the perspectives disengaged students. Significantly, disengaged students were most animated about this reform over all others. Chapter 7 reveals that RPA was 'not for everyone', the same findings emerged from disengaged students who typically offered a variety of either supportive or critical comments. In general, this reform was perceived by or misunderstood by students as, having to stay in school or college until 18 and not so much about the idea of participation or the options to undertake a variety of educational pursuits outside of the traditional classroom environment, such as apprenticeships. It is not surprising then, given the level of disengagement described that they were not keen on staying on at school or college. One student said: *who wants to be here until they are 18?* Students appeared to be more concerned about not being able to choose whether to stay on in education and rejected the idea of RPA being mandatory. A student suggested that they should not be *forced* to stay on, he indicated: *some people aren't academic and would rather work*. A female student said:

some people don't like college, like I got here and I absolutely hated it and I considered dropping out so many times and people who are put through that, [RPA] it's just not fair.

(Year 13 Female Student)

A male student from a secure setting suggested that staying on in education: *depends on whether they like or dislike school. If you don't like it then they'll be really annoyed because they've got to do longer*. Other students in a different focus group debated with one another about if they could afford to stay on in education after 16. A student suggested that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

should be increased to compensate for the fact that they would not be earning a wage, as a consequence of being required to remain in education. At the time of writing the DfE announced plans to halt new applications for EMA from January 2011. Instead learner support funds will be made available from schools, colleges and training providers for those students most in need.

There were students who were much more positive about the plans to raise the participation age, one student described the plans as: *pretty sensible*. Another student in the same focus group agreed commenting: *Exactly, because people don't do anything from 16 then a lot of people just don't do anything [they] go on the dole*. Similarly a student in another focus group suggested RPA was: *a good idea. It's better for your future, for your jobs and such*. When asked why the government would want to introduce RPA, a student in the secure setting suggested that staying on would help them learn more, *get further in life and get better jobs*.

9.5 Barriers to learning

9.5.1 Relationships with Teachers

In focus groups, students were asked about those things that put them off their learning. One of the most frequently cited themes identified by student participants was how poor relationships with teachers put them off learning. Montalvo *et al.* (2007: 144) argue that there is 'little doubt that teachers influence student motivation and achievement' Levels of engagement and motivation for many students, can be dependent on whether they like or dislike their teachers. According to the students, the degree to which they engaged in a lesson depended on '*how down to earth the teachers are*'. Elaborating in focus groups, students talked about feeling that at times teachers disrespected them and treated them '*like kids*'. One student argued '*they look down at you*'. The following focus group extract provides an example of how students felt disrespected. The student talks about being ignored, being shouted at, not being able to go to the toilet:

I got sent to isolation for asking to go to toilet and she wouldn't let us, right, so I like asked loads and she was just ignoring us and walking around the class and ... So I just got up and I went like to the toilet, I was absolutely bursting. I came back and she went, "Get out my lesson" and I went to put my book on my desk and she hoyed it off, us so I hoyed it back off her and I walked out and she was like, "Go to your Head of Year". So I went to the head of year and I got put in isolation and I wasn't allowed back in her lesson for like two weeks or something. But, like, I hadn't even done nothing wrong, I only went for a wee. But, like I was outside that lesson for ten minutes or something before I got sent to Miss [name] and then she went, and my friend came out and I went, "Where are you going?" and she went, "Oh, I'm going to the toilet". She just wouldn't let me go to the toilet, but she let [student name] go [...]

(Year 11 Female Student)

Students described distinct tensions between themselves and some of their subject teachers. Some of what students talked about tended to reflect an imbalance of power whereby others argued that teachers could be '*cheeky*' or say things to them that they were not happy with. In turn, they described a sense of powerlessness at not being able to be '*cheeky back*'. In detail, learners talked about being '*shouted at*' or even '*screamed at*' and that teachers could be inflexible. It was suggested that poor

relationships with teachers tended to have a disrupting effect on lessons and thus learning opportunities. One learner said: *'say that teacher's done something to you, then you won't do the work in their lesson. You just don't want to be in their lesson'*. Students also argued that poor relationships with teachers increased the chances of them being sanctioned often leading to exclusion from the classroom. This appeared to be one the most widely used strategies to deal with disruptive behaviours or tensions between teachers and learners. It was argued that being excluded from lessons often had the effect of disrupting learning opportunities and making it difficult to reintegrate into lessons. A student argued *'you don't really learn nothing. I'd rather be sitting in isolation at least doing something than just standing outside like doing nothing'* and another student indicated: *'if you've not got a good relationship with them, they'll scream and shout at you and send you out the lesson and then you're not learning anything'*.

While the previous theme explored student-teacher relationships, the next two themes focus on peer relationships.

9.5.2 Feeling labelled and a sense of belonging

Willms (2003: 8) argues disengagement can manifest as students experiencing a 'reduced sense of belonging' to the school/college as a whole. The data shows that students saw themselves as a distinct group of students outside of the main body of *'good students'*. Perhaps to compensate, the students in this particular focus group drew support and a sense of belonging from their peers who may also struggle with engagement. Students talked frequently about feeling labelled as the *'trouble makers'*, *'rebels'* and *'not the good students'*. Arguably the students were complicit in assigning and reinforcing these labels to themselves and others. In one focus group, the students enquired why they had been chosen to take part in the research and proceeded to laugh at being referred to as disengaged. One student reinforced this by indicating *'were not the good students.'* Students in the groups were pleased at being identified as disengaged. In trying to assign their own identity the group preferred to see themselves as a group who were *'not scared to tell you all the bad things'*. One student described the group as *'not expected to reach their intellectual ability'*. In conclusion the group settled on describing themselves as students who still *'try hard' but 'like to have fun at the same time'*.

Students interviewed in focus groups tended to create a dichotomy between themselves and other students. These *'good students'* were often referred to as the *'nerds'*, the teachers' *'favourites'* or *'pets'*, the *'smart ones'*, the *'stuck up ones'* and the *'library people'*. Students argued that teachers could be preferential towards the *'smart ones'*, they sanctioned these students less, provided them with more attention in the classroom and generally maintained much more positive relationships with them. A Year 11 student reinforces the dichotomy of students:

It's like in my health and social, like we've only got 12 people in our class and there's two different groups, and if the whole class will be sitting talking we're the ones getting shouted at and getting told to work. But we might have just done the same amount of work as the other group but they won't even get looked at or anything.

(Year 11 Female Student)

Similarly another group of students argued:

Female Speaker 1: *Yeah. Because some of the teachers will sit there and they'll pick certain students and they'll only pick them students.*

Female Speaker 2: *Every lesson.*

Female Speaker 1: *Yeah, it's the same lesson that they'll pick the same person to do it, answer it.*

Female Speaker 2: *They've got favouritism, every lesson.*

9.5.3 Relationships with peers

Students explained that their relationships with their peers in classrooms were another factor that had the potential to put them off learning. Young people described how other students, often their friends, could be distracting or disruptive around them thus interrupting lessons and opportunities to learn. Consider the following from a Year 11 student:

I'm trying to pass my GCSE's but I can't when all these boys are messing around being completely stupid and immature idiots and lobbing each other off chairs and stuff and punching each other. It's like why don't you just stay quietly for an hour and do your work and then mess around out of school.

(Year 11 Female Student)

Others described tensions in classrooms between themselves and groups of students previously discussed as the 'good students'. As the year 11 student explained how a row can develop between a 'good student' and himself, he pointed to such a student who passed by the classroom where the focus group took place:

*So say if you get some little, I don't know, some nerd goes up to you or whatever, right? If they say to you, "why are you messing around", when you are just having a little laugh, then that gets me more provoked to turn round and tell them to do one, and then you start kicking off with them. That's when the teachers like look at the best ones who have got like records of perfect, got like A stars. They look [the teacher] at the ones who have not got a perfect record... Just like that t**t outside. Look at him!*

(Year 11 Male Student)

Not all of the discussions around peer relationships in the classroom focused on behaviour and disruptions. Students described feeling left out of lessons because some of their peers could 'take over' the class. Again these students were referred to as the 'know it alls'. Participants argued that it was difficult to try to compete with the 'know it alls' and instead they felt 'put down'. Others described not feeling confident to speak or talk out in large classes. One student explained that she did not feel comfortable talking in a large group because she did not have a good relationship with all of the students. Moreover, students argued that a good class with learning opportunities could depend on what mood the teacher and the students were in. One student explained that he often sat back and observed lessons and reported that at times some in the class could be 'very childish' but other times 'quite mature'.

The previous themes have explored student-teacher and peer relationships. The following theme continues to look at the immediate classroom context and focuses on students' perspectives on the quality of teaching and learning.

9.5.4 The quality of teaching

Another theme cited by disengaged students that put them off learning, was the quality of teaching. The following Year 11 students complained that they worked out of textbooks too much and this was de-motivating.

Female Speaker 1: *Well, in maths you copy from a textbook every lesson.*

Female Speaker 2: *I think that's stupid doing that, you're copying.*

Female Speaker 1: *You copy from the same textbook every lesson. I didn't learn anything last term.*

Female Speaker 2: *I don't learn anything from mine, I want extra maths, that's what I want.*

Similarly, it was highlighted that they 'copied off the board' too often and there were complaints that lessons lacked diversity or that teachers rarely employed different methodologies or approaches:

if you just sit there copying stuff from the board and that, you're going to be bored you're not really going to get anything out of it. But if it's fun and you're doing work then you'll get more out of it.

(Year 11 Male Student)

It was suggested that it was off-putting to have a teacher 'who takes a whole lesson to explain things'. Participants also talked about becoming restless or fidgety in classes where teachers tended to be overly explanatory, leaving little time for student input during a lesson. A group of students discussed this:

Interviewer: *And what's the longest you reckon you can listen to a teacher before you start getting edgy?*

Male Speaker 1: *The reason I quit art as well, was because Mr [name] talks for like an hour, non-stop.*

Male Speaker 2: *I know, in electronics...*

Male Speaker 1: *Is it to do with what your age is, that's how long you should listen?*

Male Speaker 2: *Oh right, 15 minutes?*

Male Speaker 1: *I reckon I can listen to a teacher for about 20 minutes and then after that I just lose it.*

It was also stated that lessons bored them or did not capture their interest. Some teachers were accused of 'not putting in enough enthusiasm'. In coping with boredom or a lack of interest students identified that they were likely to become disruptive, citing examples such as talking and bantering with other students, walking around or even out of classrooms and texting their friends. A variety of students in focus groups highlighted that they struggled to understand the teacher and in particular were not clear as to the lesson objectives and learning intentions. A student said 'she thinks she's explained it to you but you don't have a clue what's going on'.

9.6 What Motivates Learners?

When students talked about what motivated them to learn they discussed similar broad themes within the classroom context as those considered as barriers to learning, namely: relationships with their teachers and how they are taught.

9.6.1 Relationships with teachers

Students identified that having positive relationships with teachers acted as a significant motivator. A student explained: *'I probably work better when you get on with them and you talk to them'*. According to students, having a positive relationship with a teacher made lessons more engaging, positive, fun and even entertaining. Participants across the focus groups suggested that teachers should be more *laid back*, be willing to give *second chances*, be *calm*, *don't scream their heads off*, have the ability to calm students down, be more approachable and take more time to listen to them. Evidence from focus groups suggests that students were more willing to engage in learning when they felt that the relationship between them and the teacher is warm, caring, respectful and positive. This is in keeping with the literature (Niemic and Ryan, 2009). As an example, a student who attended a unit to help with learning needs explained that he appreciated being treated like an adult, being able to talk to his teachers and being able to have a laugh. He explained that such a relationship made him feel respected, supported and understood. Other members of the same focus group agreed:

Female Speaker: *Aha, the teachers they're not like a teacher, they're more like your mate, they'll sit and banter around with you and then help you, so you don't feel like, oh my god what the hell am I doing.*

Male Speaker: *It is not just work, work, work, all the time, it's like craic, work, little bit of craic, work[...]*

Similarly other students said:

Female Speaker 1: *Yes. Someone who has a laugh with you, but you still do your work but they let you talk and sit with your friends as well. When you're with them it makes you want to do your work.*

Female Speaker 2: *I like that English teacher because she talks to you as if ... but then she'll also tells you about the work. I learn more in English than I've ever learned because the teacher's being nice to you and treats you nicely.*

Furthermore students explained that they responded well to teachers who complimented them or were enthusiastic about their work. This had a motivating effect. A student explained: *'It makes you respect them and want to do good work for them'* and *you feel good about yourself if someone's telling you that's good'*.

Students across all focus groups argued that those teachers who they got on best with were the ones who were less *'stressed'* or *'uptight'*. It was argued that some teachers could be inconsistent and intolerant in terms of how they responded to disruption in the classroom. Moreover, they argued that they could be *'sent out for the tiniest little thing'*. By contrast the students suggested that they

responded best to those teachers who could take a joke, who were more flexible and less 'stressy'. A student said 'some teachers let you off with stuff' but then went further to argue that he did not expect to be 'let off with everything'. Students tended to indicate that when teachers were positive in the classroom they learned best and engaged more:

When you've got a positive role model, like a positive teacher who is not strict and that, and doesn't tell you what to do, but can have a laugh with you and that, but helps you learn in a way that you want to learn instead of pushing you to the abilities that you can't learn at. So you've got to be positive yourself and you've got to have a positive teacher as well, 'cause if you haven't got a positive teacher you're going to get nowhere.

(Disengaged Female Student from a special school setting)

Students suggested that being able to listen to music on the proviso that they demonstrated being able to complete tasks might prove helpful. One focus group of students talked about a teacher allowing them to sit with peers and at times be able to talk quietly in class:

So if we got a supply teacher you can do your work ... listen to your ipods and talk so long as you do your work and you can sit where you want. So there are a couple of desks just spare and there'll be a big group round a couple of tables listening to ipods and doing your work, but we will do the work.

(Year 11 Male Student)

Again students suggested it was off putting to have a stressful or strict classroom. One student argued that he preferred working in a 'quiet stress free' area where 'teachers were not yelling' or 'kids shouting'

9.6.2 Active Participation

By far, one of the most common responses from disengaged students with regards to what motivated them to learn, was opportunities to participate in lessons, which one student referred to as 'getting involved'. Students frequently talked about being put off by too much tutor input and preferred lessons where teachers used a variety of approaches. The issue of enjoying opportunities to engage in whole class and group discussions, large and small group work, working in pairs and being able to move around the classroom were raised. One focus group of students from a learning support unit commented:

Interviewer: *What things when you're working in class, what kind of things help you to learn?*
Female Speaker 1: *Group discussions.*
Female Speaker 2: *That helps me.*

Another example of 'getting involved' is discussed in the following focus group transcript:

Interviewer: *Okay, great, thank you. What do you think helps you learn best? It's another broad question.*
Female Speaker: *Doing different stuff. Like doing the same stuff all the time doesn't help you at all. Like if you do like sit there in the*

classroom and then doing like group work and stuff and like walking around [...]

Interviewer: *What makes a lesson fun? Or a classroom fun?*

Female Speaker: *When you get involved and you like ... I don't know ... like if you've got to do like ... in science we do this thing where you get a picture on the computer screen and, like, you're in a group of four or five and you've got to remember little bits that they try and draw on your bit of paper and it's like just stuff like that*

However not all students argued that active methodologies motivated them or helped them learn best. Instead it was suggested that being able to work quietly or independently would sometimes be preferred. One student commented: *'some lessons I just find it hard to concentrate and I prefer to just sit there with my music and just get on and do it, but you are not really allowed'*. For some, attending classes with a small number of other students was most preferable as this provided them with a quieter independent space with opportunity to talk to and get help from their teacher. Smaller class sizes offered an opportunity for more personal attention from the teacher where, they felt more comfortable than having to get involved in whole class discussion or debates. The counter-argument was that when they worked alone they 'got loads done' but working with friends could be distracting.

9.6.3 Being Practical

The idea of *being practical* was discussed frequently by a number of disengaged students. Students argued that they enjoyed learning whenever they could engage in hands on, practical or vocational activity. They often made a distinction between being practical and being academic. One student explained that they *loved* their Sport BTEC course because they did a lot of practical work and got to play sports as opposed to *'being stuck in the classroom'*, *'listening to the teacher jabber on and on'*. Collectively they talked of being more engaged in lessons or courses that did not mean having to spend time in the traditional classroom – indeed being involved in practical or vocational activities was more engaging because they could see how such activity could be of use to them after school:

Male Speaker 1: *Construction things really, like plumbing and bricklaying. You learn more in them than you do more or less in the lessons really because it's something you can do when you go from here.*

Interviewer: *Right. Is it the idea that you want to take that and maybe get a job from that or something?*

Male Speaker 2: *Well that's what I want to do with the plumbing part. I'm doing the bricklaying while I'm,[here] it's just something better than sitting in the classroom.*

9.7 Educational Values and Aspirations

Despite being identified as disengaged the vast majority of students thought of education as valuable and important and an essential currency required for further or higher education, getting job and as a means of improving their quality of life generally. For most of the students, being at school and college helped them develop as people and showed that they were as aspirational as other students involved in the study.

9.8 Educational Values and philosophy

Students were asked a variety of questions with the aim of capturing insight into their values surrounding schooling and broader ideas about learning. These were questions such as: *what's the most important thing about coming to school or college* or *what do think school or college is about* or *what concerns students the most about school/college?* Pupils gave a variety of responses but by far the most common were: school/college is about 'learning', 'getting exams' or 'qualifications', about socialising or 'being with friends' and a preparation or as some students referred to it as a 'stepping stone' before going onto further/higher education or getting a job. It was argued that school/college was a means to an end and a 'necessary evil'. The following reflects these common themes:

Interviewer:	<i>What do you think college is about?</i>
Female Speaker 1:	<i>Learning.</i>
Female Speaker 2:	<i>Socialising.</i>
Male Speaker 3:	<i>Stepping stone.</i>
Interviewer:	<i>Stepping stone?</i>
Male Speaker 3:	<i>Aha.</i>
Interviewer:	<i>To where? Why?</i>
Male Speaker 3:	<i>To other places.</i>
Male Speaker 2:	<i>The big wide world.</i>
Male Speaker 1:	<i>Working, university and all that.</i>

An additional but related question asked learners if they felt that *school/college was helping them develop as people*. Most of the students felt that that school/college was helping them develop. Students also argued that, since primary school, or having left school to come to college that they had grown in confidence, grown up and matured. One student who had left school to come college commented: *'Coming here has made me realise how hard it is to get a job and everything, so you just put your head down so you can have a good chance there'*. Clearer ideas were being developed about what they wanted to do in life. Senior students in school/college talked about coming to important transformative realisations. One student commented:

At first I didn't realise it was going to be that important but like now since I've got a bit older I perceive it will actually help me later on

(Male student in a secure setting)

Students also talked about coming to the realisation that their education was important, that they needed qualifications to get jobs and that they had reached a point where they realised that their attitude to life needed to change. One student described how college had helped her realise what she wanted to do after school and that *'you can't always mess around in school, you've got to do your education'*. In some cases a number of students who had left school to attend other colleges or sixth forms described making such a change and adjusting to their new educational environments as developmental. One young person argued:

I think it's the whole environment, the college and sixth form... you're in a place where there's different types of things going at the same time, so you've got to adapt to everything. And that helps you as a person to learn how to work with different things with different people and to adjust to different lifestyles.

(Year 13 Male Student)

By contrast students also considered that they were being *sheltered* and '*bottle-fed*' by their centre. Some argued that they felt isolated and '*enclosed*'. They argued that while they were still being pushed (academically) they did not have the opportunity of being pushed socially, '*in a world way*'. This group of students argued that the schooling environment in which they came from many of the students remained narrow minded and ignorant of the world around them.

9.9 Aspirations

It is interesting to note that students from the disengaged focus groups were, on the whole, generally aspirational (see Chapter 8). This is significant considering that the students have been identified as struggling with engagement. From the focus group interviews, it was clear that immediate aspirations involved attaining qualifications and good grades. From here students then frequently talked about wanting to go to college after school or getting the right grades to progress to university. In particular, the picking of certain subjects and striving to get the right grades so that students could follow a pathway that led to a university degree and then a career was considered. Aspiration was towards a broad spectrum of career pathways including: medicine, law, plumbing, sports, mechanics, engineering, armed forces, police, public and social services, hair and beauty, construction and teaching. However, aspirations were not always so definite about what students wanted to do after school/college. Nonetheless, the idea of improving their quality of life and progressing remained:

I want to do well in life, really. Like I said, I've got a lot of regret from school that I wasn't happy with, and I just want to try and turn it around really and make something of my life, do something a bit better. But then again I always get confused as to what I want to do. I don't want to go ahead and jump straight into something and then be like, 'Oh my God, this isn't what I want to do for the rest of my life at all'. And like be stuck with it.

(Male Student)

There was also worry expressed about futures after school/college. Students talked about not being able to get jobs because of the economic down turn or because they felt there was too much competition for jobs in the market place:

Female Speaker: *There's no jobs so you're worrying about getting a job all the time, well I am.*

Male Speaker: *What it will be like in the future, if you're going to be a bum, if you're going to be rich, it's a big worry like you know.*

9.10 Conclusions

Despite struggling with engagement the data shows that students, for the most part, remained aspirational. This corroborates findings in the research literature (Ross, 2009). Many of the young people intended to continue their education at further and higher levels and many also talked about their future career plans. Overall students recognised that their education played an important role in

meeting these goals. Based on this, students were not entirely disengaged but displayed various levels of disengagement, though these levels were by no means fixed. Students appeared to move up and down a scale or continuum of engagement depending on a range of factors which included: interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers; the quality of teaching and the immediate context of the classroom. At times these factors could determine whether young people engaged more or less. The findings from the first year of the study highlight that students are more engaged when:

- they can relate to and have positive relationships with teachers
- teachers are less stressed and more flexible
- lessons are varied and variety of approaches/methodologies are employed
- teachers don't dominate the learning opportunities in the classroom with too much tutor input
- there are opportunities for active participation, movement in the room and group work
- there is for some, the opportunity to be hands on or involved in practical/vocational subjects outside of the traditional classroom

9.11 Implications for policy

The most immediate implication for educational engagement policy is to recognise that at the research level, the definition of engagement/disengagement is complicated and multi-layered. There is a responsibility upon researchers to see that this multi-dimensionality (Ross, 2009) is represented in future policies which focus on engagement/disengagement. Gibbs and Poskitt (2010) argue that if engagement/disengagement remains an ill defined concept, this may complicate how practitioners identify young people as disengaged and similarly how they respond to and support them.

It is not surprising that proposals to raise the participation age would bring young people who are NEET or at risk of disengaging entirely under the policy spotlight. However this may have the effect of narrowing the policy focus. Wolf (2007) argues that current policy dwells too much in this area. However, adopting a much broader definition of engagement/disengagement allows policy makers and practitioners to adopt a much more holistic approach. As such policy makers can focus on young people all the way along the engagement continuum, such as the students in this study who did not for the most part pose a risk of entirely disengaging from education but did reveal levels of disengagement.

Aspects of the 14-19 reforms are impacting upon some students. It is clear that for some young people, enhancing the curriculum and offering additional qualification pathways has the potential to impact upon disengagement. Alongside enhancing the curriculum, there is scope for policy makers to consider the impact of teaching and learning methodologies on engagement. There is evidence based on the data collected in the first year of the CReSt study, that what motivates and engages students is in line with many of the policies which address engagement. Offering young people a much more innovative and flexible curriculum as well as different qualification pathways, may actualise as a prudent and preventative strategy aimed at encouraging young people to stay in school or college;

this should assist in the implementation of RPA. Some students saw value in this, in terms of opportunity for skill development in preparation for employment. Such perspectives distinctly align with policy intention. Furthermore a number of young people emphasised how they were de-motivated by the traditional classroom context and instead preferred opportunities for a more practical, hands on approach to learning. New qualification routes and improved opportunities for applied and practical learning as proposed in the Raising Expectations Green Paper (2007) and the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper (2005) may cater for these students. Policy-makers should also be heartened that, despite struggling with engagement, the vast majority of young people, termed disengaged who took part in this research, remained aspirational, still valued their education and were in the broadest sense still very much engaged.

Currently under-developed in policy is the impact of teacher - student relationships on engagement and disengagement.

9.12 Implications for the CReSt research programme

The teacher's perspective on engagement is not presented in this chapter and was not a theme explored directly with teachers during centre research visits. This chapter has focused entirely on the student point of view and as such does not provide a balanced account of engagement that takes both students' and teachers' perspectives into account.

While the current working definition of disengagement agreed by centres and CReSt researchers does acknowledge that disengagement is complex and multi-dimensional, it does however rely on indicators that render student disengagement as static; whereas the messages in the chapter demonstrate that students' levels of engagement shift and change, depending on a range of factors. In this sense it is useful to think of engagement as a continuum. While the definition may help identify students who are disengaged it does not allow for students to change, to re-engage or to be disengaged in some circumstances but not others. Nor does it take into account that the majority of the students remained aspirational and continued to recognise the value of education. Furthermore the current definition does not account for how the school or college can contribute to students' disengagement. Instead there is a concern that students become typified and disengagement becomes thought of as solely an individual trait. The findings in this chapter demonstrate that disengagement is more complicated than this. Students argued that they could be put off learning depending on how they were taught or how teachers approached lessons. Students also explained that how they were treated and perceived by teachers and other students had a bearing on well they engaged.

10 Teachers' Views of 14-19 Education and the Impact of the Reforms

10.1 Introduction

The following chapter concentrates on the perspectives of teachers who took part in the first year of the research. For the most part the chapter utilises data emerging from the teacher's survey. However, qualitative data, based on the teacher focus group, is also used to augment the survey data which concentrates on the impact of the 14-19 reforms on teaching and learning. The teacher focus group instrument sought to collect information from teachers on a number of themes, two of which were: teacher's experiences of the reforms and teacher's perceptions of the impact of the reforms.

The survey's specific focus on the experiences of teachers in relation to the impact 14-19 reforms distinguished it from more general surveys which covered both primary and secondary phases (Day et al. 2007) and the GTC Teacher Surveys (2004-2009) which have been thematic, covering topics such as perceptions of accountability (2009), career plans (2007) and continuing professional development (CPD) (2006). There have been some thematic overlaps, for example, pupil achievement, which can be compared with the CReSt survey

The teacher survey (see Appendix F) consisted of six main sections. The first collected information about the respondents' background and expertise. The second asked about teaching experience in the current year with Years 9-14. This led into items about teaching priorities. This was followed by sections on work pressures and on the impact of 14-19 changes on the teacher's school or college. The final section enquired about cooperation with other centres and places of work.

The aim of the survey was to provide a more general and quantitative picture of attitudes and practices across the centres in the project. The original intention had been to distribute the survey during each of the four years of the project and to monitor changes in attitudes and practice. Instead the survey will now provide a snapshot of teachers' responses in the early stages of the reform process.

The 883 teachers who responded were broadly typical of the secondary teaching force, with a gender balance of 38% males to 62% females⁸. There were relatively fewer teachers with 0-4 years experience in the survey, 21% against 31% nationally, and correspondingly more with over 10 years experience (57%:48%). Over half the respondents had been in their present school for less than five years.

⁸ The national distribution is 41% male to 59% female (DCSF: School Workforce in England (including Local Authority level figures), January 2009 (Revised))

10.2 Current teaching practices

The survey asked a series of questions about classroom teaching practices. Over 90 % agreed that their teaching regularly involved whole class teaching, small group work and formative assessment. This proportion of teachers also reported using some form of technology. Whole class teaching had the largest percentage of 'strongly agree' responses (65%). Within this context, most teachers (88%) agreed that their teaching regularly involved personalised teaching and a learner-centred approach (87%). What was much less frequent was involvement in team teaching, with a third of teachers disagreeing it was a regular practice and only one in six teachers strongly agreeing it was. However, two-thirds of teachers reported being involved in developing the skills of other teachers. Peer-led teaching was a regular classroom practice for just over half the teachers.

In contrast, 82 % of teachers reported being regularly involved in preparing for exams, with over half strongly agreeing. Three-quarters regularly taught exam technique. As might be expected from this, far fewer teachers regularly taught outside the classroom. While three-quarters of the teachers reported regular use of practical work, only a third of teachers reported regularly teaching in real work settings and having regular links with employers and places of work. Just over half were regularly involved in visits and field trips.

10.3 Work pressures

The survey asked a series of questions about classroom teaching practices. Over 90 % agreed that their teaching regularly involved whole class teaching, small group work and formative assessment. This proportion of teachers also reported using some form of technology. Whole class teaching had the largest percentage of 'strongly agree' responses (65%). Within this context, most teachers (88%) agreed that their teaching regularly involved personalised teaching and a learner-centred approach (87%). What was much less frequent was involvement in team teaching, with a third of teachers disagreeing it was a regular practice and only one in six teachers strongly agreeing it was. However, two-thirds of teachers reported being involved in developing the skills of other teachers. Peer-led teaching was a regular classroom practice for just over half the teachers.

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10.4 Teachers and their students

When asked about their priorities in relation to their students, the highest were to help their students to get good results and to raise their students' aspirations. Seventy percent of the teachers rated

achieving good results as a very high priority, with a further 28 % seeing it as high priority. This was a much higher proportion than that reported in the 2009 GTC Survey, which had only 33 % of secondary teachers responding that the statement 'good results in key stage subject and skill areas that are nationally tested' reflects their views 'quite closely'. Raising the aspirations of their students was a high priority for 65 % of the teachers, with another third rating it as high priority. Other social priorities such as narrowing the gap between disadvantaged students and others and helping students to be better citizens were given high priority by over 85 % of the teachers, but only around four out of ten teachers saw them as very high priority. This was also the case for encouraging students to continue studying and increasing students' generic and study skills.

The items which were given lower priorities were those involving work or increasing the numbers going to university. So while over 90 % of teachers rated 'encourage students to continue studying' as high priority, including 39 % rating it as a very high priority, only 22 % saw increasing the numbers going to university as a very high priority,. There were similar distributions in the very high priority category for 'encourage vocational routes' and 'encourage students to find suitable employment'. Work-based options were an even lower priority, with only 12 % of teachers seeing 'get students to consider work-based training or apprenticeships' as a very high priority with a further 37 % rating it as high priority. One in ten teachers saw it as a very low priority.

10.5 Pressure from students

The greatest pressure from students that teachers reported was not from disruptive students but from unmotivated ones. While 31 % of teachers saw unmotivated students as a source of very high pressure, the figure was down to 20 % for disruptive students. And while a further 40 percent saw lack of motivation a source of high pressure, the corresponding figure was only 29 % for disruption.

Around a third of teachers experienced high pressure from students they considered to be on the wrong courses. Slightly more, 42 %, reported high pressure from students with special or particular needs. The disruption caused by mobility between schools and colleges was rated as low pressure by over half the teachers, for only one in nine teachers was it a source of high pressure.

10.6 The Impact of 14-19 changes

The following section utilises data from the teacher's survey and teacher's focus groups. Both instruments asked a series of questions about whether the 14-19 Reforms had begun to impact on their work. The following is organised around the themes of *choice and support; teaching and learning; cooperation* and *teacher's concerns about the reforms*.

An overview of the qualitative data reveals a variety of perspectives in relation to the impact of the reforms. Some of these perspectives are positive, seeing them as a way forward. Other comments are more cautious, adopting a wait and see approach, with others distinctly apprehensive of how the

reforms would impact upon their practice. Given some of the reforms, particular in relation to GCE and GCSE, were only just beginning in 2009-10 some teachers reported no impact as of yet.

10.6.1 Choice and support

Based on the teacher survey, the picture which emerged was of a limited impact at this stage in relation to offering students more curricular choice. In general there was a neutral response from over a third of the respondents. Only around one in ten teachers strongly agreed that there had been impact, for example, that the reforms had led to a more flexible curriculum. Just over half agreed there had been some impact, for example, on offering a wider curriculum choice for students and from offering better information about choices for students. This was borne out in some of the focus groups with teachers. Centres offered a breadth of examples on how students were prepared and supported for making choices and transition but much of these examples appeared to reflect practice that exists irrespective of the reforms. A variety of teachers across the focus groups talked about their centres offering information evenings for students and their parents, interviewing and advising students individually, using choices booklets and bringing in guest speakers from other schools, colleges, universities and businesses. One teacher commented:

It's a fairly lengthy process from them getting information, from them hearing about what the courses are, they sometimes sample bits of lessons and things. So by the time they eventually choose what they're going to do, there's been the opportunity for a significant amount of consultation now, because not all students make use of that opportunity and not all parents make full use of it, but the overwhelming majority by the time they choose, which in our case is next week, have had a process that started when, [name] - near Christmas, two or three months ago?

(Teacher)

There was some evidence in the focus groups of teachers recognising the potential offered by the reforms but in the case of the following example, the impact on students was being hampered by a lack vision about how *everything fits together* and some concerns about a lack information and training for teachers:

I think there's a good range now available to all students, but I think, listening to what everyone's saying here, what hasn't been well thought out is how everything knits together, and I think that's the biggest issue. Yeah fantastic, this 14-19 reform has opened the door to many students who otherwise, before that, would have no access to gaining skills anywhere else apart from going out and getting a job and learning it on the job. But it's quite clear that we are, as educational establishments, we're struggling to knit it all together, and that's because we're being forced to do it in such a timeframe and, you know, with lack of sufficient information [...] it's not necessarily educational establishments' faults, it's more about the lack of information and training as to how we can get it all knitted and all working together successfully for each student.

(Teacher)

According to the survey less than half of teachers thought there were now clearer progression paths from 14 to 19 and that more use was being made of the new qualification routes. The lowest levels of agreement about choice and support were around perceptions of students' satisfaction with the choices available and the support teachers received for providing new courses. In each case there

were only 6 % of teachers who strongly agreed and only a third agreed, with over 40 % neutral ('neither' agree/disagree). In the case of support for new courses there were nearly as many teachers who strongly disagreed than as strongly agreed.

10.6.2 Teaching and learning

The picture was more positive in relation to changes in teaching and learning. Around 60 % of the teachers reported offering more diversity in their teaching styles, greater sensitivity to individual learners and better recognition of student learning. Around a third of teachers remained neutral about the impact on these. Just above half reported more confidence in assessing progress in learning, though 36 % were neutral about this.

Evidence from the teacher focus groups supports these findings. An overview of the data reveals that teachers frequently talked about change and transition in terms of teaching, learning and overall classroom practice. Much of this came from a wider range of policy initiatives but amongst these were a variety of specific reflections on the impact of the 14-19 reforms. As an example a teacher in a secure setting explained:

I think that the government and people realised that there was a big gap and there were a lot of kids with a lot of skills that weren't particularly academic and so they've built something around for people with lots of skills, like in [Name] lesson, and mine – hairdressing and beauty – and they've sort of brought that up and raised it and, for me, ... They were listening to us, they were listening to the way the young people were changing, and what we needed to do to respond to their needs. That's how I thought.

(Teacher)

A number of teachers indicated that they were now employing a broader variety of teaching and learning strategies in the classroom. A female teacher explained:

Interviewer: *Have the 14 – 19 reforms changed your classroom practice in any way?*
Teacher: *For me personally, yes they did. As the Key Stage 4 stopped coming in, but yes, much more practical, very vocational, particularly for the younger age range. The 16 and 19s, again, it's influenced that I do more practical and the learning styles, in a much more, I hope, interesting way. (Laughs)*

Similarly a science teacher explained that the reforms have had a big impact on her teaching style and suggested, with some humour, that there was now a greater emphasis on applied learning, developing practical skills and more variety to lessons:

I wear wellies now, on some days. And I've caught ringworm for the first time in my life... So yeah, it's changed an awful lot, I spend a lot more time out of the classroom, a lot more time on trips, arranging applied learning trips for kids, and I quite enjoy it because you're not doing the same thing day in and day out.

(Teacher)

In one case, in a special setting, a female teacher argued that the reforms themselves were not necessarily having an impact on teaching practices but instead legitimised existing practice:

Interviewer: *The next question is about the way you teach. Have 14 – 19 reforms changed your teaching practice?*

Teacher: *No.*

All: *[Laugh]*

Teacher: *Did you hear? No!*

All: *[Laugh]*

Interviewer: *Why are you so definite about that?*

Teacher: *If you're talking about practice in the classroom and the things that we'd organised I think most of the links, particularly from a science point of view I've had links with the high school for the last 7 years and we have been going across there and so this hasn't made any difference. But it ticks – what we're doing already ticks the boxes.*

Interviewer: *Okay and you said it legitimises what you've been doing before, is that right? It's a recognition that what you've been doing before is appropriate?*

Teacher: *Yes and also in terms of the curriculum on paper then it really defines what we're doing whereas before they could just say, 'Well you're not actually coming on at key stage ...' So I feel now it actually – it hasn't altered our practice but it does give legitimacy to what we were doing.*

A number of teachers talked about not having enough time to adequately adjust to the impact that the reforms were having on their teaching practice. A number of teachers talked about the pressures to cope with a raft of new reforms alongside existing initiatives. Others talked about not enough time between reforms and initiatives for anything to properly embed, before moving onto new reforms or initiatives, others talked about trying to maintain a balance between old and new: The following example illustrates some of these transition pressures:

So I think we'll have a bit of mopping up to do next year, but it's all a learning curve, and I guess we're going to have those bits where it's a bit difficult until we get our heads round the best way to do it.... But it's quite tough, it's tough to go in and teach a subject that's completely different and try and approach it from an English teaching point of view, and teaching PE or business or... So I think that's going to be a steep learning curve for us all there, more collaboration across the departments, and that's hard, because we're all doing different things at different times. I think that's the problem, isn't it?

(Teacher)

Returning to the survey, the most limited impact appears to be around enjoyment and creativity in teaching and learning. Fewer than half the teachers believed they had more freedom to be creative, with one in five reporting less freedom. Less than 40 % of teachers thought it had led to more students who enjoy learning with some 20 % disagreeing. There was a similar division around whether students were experiencing more curriculum activities.

10.6.3 Co-operation

The survey revealed that there was only limited agreement when teachers were asked whether the 14-19 Reforms had led to more cooperation with other schools and colleges and with employers. Only 40 % agreed that there had been more cooperation with other centres and only 27 % about more cooperation with employers, with half the respondents seeing no change and a fifth disagreeing. Data from the focus groups corroborates these findings (see Chapter 7). Some teachers welcomed the

opportunity to forge links with other schools colleges and businesses. A teacher suggested: *I think it's encouraged other providers to work with us, whereas maybe they wouldn't have in the past.* It was not always evident from focus groups that the reforms had led to more cooperation between centres. In some focus groups there was genuine support for partnership and collaborative arrangements with other centres: One teacher indicated:

I'm an absolute advocate of partnership working because we do have huge benefits here and I can identify a list of benefits that have come from this school by working with a school that was in special measures and another school that's needing some degree of support.

(Teacher)

In a number of cases teachers talked about pre-existing partnership arrangements. Some described pre-existing informal arrangements and others similarly talked about how the emphasis on partnerships emanating from the reforms had resulted in informal partnerships becoming more formalised and in some cases forming legal entities. Others were more cautious about the potential benefits of collaborative or co-operative work with other centres. Some identified logistical problems such as: travel, co-ordinating the movement of students to and from centres, support mechanisms for students who attended other centres, integrating students from other centres and teachers not being able to adequately monitor their students who attended other centres. A teacher explained:

we have tried it in the past, we've had teachers going from here into schools and pupils coming here as well and all the ones involved are finding it quite a harrowing process.

(Teacher)

Another teacher explained that partnerships involve:

...having time for the staff to actually visit, and monitor, make the phone calls, check whether the kids are there, follow it up if the kids haven't been there, let them know if the students are not coming that day.

(Teacher)

The survey then asked a series of more specific questions about what teachers considered important for cooperating with other centres and places of work. Three features about cooperation commanded the most widespread agreement, with around eighty five percent of teachers agreeing. These were that the cooperation:

1. Had to be of clear mutual benefit to all organisations involved;
2. Have agreed common objectives;
3. Needed the students to be willing to attend.

Features which can be seen as key practical requirements for effective cooperation when students were required to travel elsewhere also had strong support from around three-quarters of the teachers. These were the need for geographical proximity, compatible timetables and local transport, themes which resonate with discussions of the Diploma in chapter six.

Some managerial issues were also rated as important. Leadership of the collaborative process was seen as important by three-quarters of the teachers, slightly more than the need for an agreed funding mechanism and for quality assurance process. What seemed to be less important to teachers is whether those they were collaborating with offered similar educational experiences to their students. The lowest level of support was the need for 'compatible cultures' – with only 11 % strongly agreeing and just less than half agreeing. This left 28 % neutral and 11 % disagreeing. 'Similar approaches to teaching and learning' prompted very similar responses, with only 13 % strongly agreeing and 51 % agreeing. Even less important was the need for a history of working together with the others, about which only 7 % strongly agreed and 31 percent agreed – leaving 45 % neutral and 18 % disagreeing.

Some managerial functions were seen as relatively less important, for example school accountability processes. Less than 20 % rated these as strongly agree, less than those who were neutral. Just less than half agreed they were important. Two thirds of teachers thought maintaining school autonomy and independence were important. A similar proportion agreed that supportive local and national policies were important for cooperation, though a quarter of the teachers rated themselves a neutral on this.

10.6.4 Reform Apprehension

A theme common in a variety focus groups was apprehension around the likely impact of the reforms. In some cases, the data reveal teachers' apprehensions about the potential impact, whereas others discussed actual concerns and criticisms as the reforms began to impact upon their practice.

If I'm asked to do something else like a Diploma, which we haven't been at the moment, how is that then going to affect us [...] how are we going to then integrate it and how is it going to affect our other classes? I mean I'm presuming, from what I understand of it, they go out for a day or half a day and do something, whether it's in the business school or the food or whatever, all the different Diplomas that they've got, and they go out and do it. How is that going to affect our timetable and does that mean we're not going to have the 14-19s in for a certain day in a week?

(Teacher)

A number of teachers in different centres described uneasiness around the size and scale of the reforms. One teacher likened the reforms to a *huge, lumbering animal*, others suggested that there were *too many reforms* coming at the same time and as a consequence, they appeared *bitty* and *confusing*:

To me, it's almost kind of another thing that's going on that I need to kind of get my head round. Maybe that's one of the problems, it's not... There's not one single thing directing where the school's going or where the government's going with education, there's lots and lots of little bitty kind of reforms and changes and no doubt, in three years time, there'll be other different... We'll do different GCSE syllabuses. There's far too much change. So it's kind of one of a number of things that I'm... It's a bit confusing.

(Teacher)

Many teachers commented on the impact of Diplomas (see Chapter 5). Some argued that Diplomas meant having to *squash timetables and compress lessons* to accommodate small numbers of students.

Well I am not going to write a timetable around a Diploma course for 3 students, so change ... do they need to be there on this date so I don't want it to cut across English and Maths, Science and Core and their other options. So re-arrange the entire ... well I am not going to do that so if we do send anybody to do these things, which is a possibility, then it will just cut across what they do, so it won't fit at all and that might be the way we do it until Diplomas get bigger but until we change things, Diplomas won't get bigger.

(Teacher)

Others argued that students coming from other centres to do a Diploma in their centre could affect the centre's ethos. The following transcript extract demonstrates how a teacher was concerned that visiting students may increase class sizes in some cases. The teacher explains that one of the selling points of the centre is their commitment to individual support, with swelling class sizes, the teacher is concerned that this selling point will be undermined:

We're reaching the point now where even the tutor groups are typically containing 30 students. A lot of the strengths that we would loudly sell from here are the individual care, well once you start getting above certain numbers of students that individual bit becomes harder and harder to sustain, and much more demanding on the staff.

(Teacher)

10.7 Summary

The survey responses and data from focus groups suggest that the impact of the 14-19 Reforms by March 2010 varied across teachers and centres. The survey data in particular demonstrated that for many there had been only a limited impact on their classroom practices. The picture was one of whole class teaching with a strong emphasis on preparing for examinations and improving examination results. Linked to this was the goal of raising student aspirations and to encourage lifelong learning. While still a high priority, teachers reported being less directly involved in the routes their students took for their subsequent educational development.

Both the survey and the focus groups demonstrate that teachers were aware of the reforms' intention to offer a broader range of curriculum choices and of ways of teaching and learning. Over half reported some modifications to their teaching styles, for example, offering more diversity in their approach, though for only a small minority was this a high priority. Similarly only half the teachers thought that at this stage the 14-19 curriculum had become more flexible, with less than 40 % believing that it had led to students being more satisfied with the choices available.

The focus group data augment the survey data and reveal that some teachers were enthusiastic and welcomed the potential the reforms offered. Others adopted a cautious approach. Some talked about

the reforms from the perspective of actual experience and impact while others only talked about potential impact.

When teachers reported on the pressures they were under it was time pressures combined with administrative and assessment demands that dominated. Few reported that it was the classroom teaching load or having to cover for other staff that put them under high pressure. A speculation is that it is the demands outside the classroom that are perceived as the major sources of pressure. Inside the classroom the greatest pressure came from unmotivated students. There was less pressure from disruptive students, though for half the teachers these were a source of pressure. Only a minority found student mobility between schools, or students who had been put on the wrong course, sources of high pressure.

One of the aims of the 14-19 reforms was to develop collaborations across centres which would offer students a broader range of curriculum choices. When asked about collaboration, teachers overwhelmingly agreed that any collaboration should be one of shared goals and benefits and have the support of students involved. Important to the latter were effective practical arrangements around travel and timetable. Teachers were willing to work with new partners and were less concerned about differences in teaching and learning styles and in accountability systems than they were in clarity of purposes and leadership. In all this there was a substantial minority who saw themselves as neutral. This may partly be result of them not being actively involved at this stage in active collaboration.

11 Parents

11.1 Introduction

Parents play an important role in children's learning and adjustment, and a strongly emphasised theme within UK education policy is the importance of schools engaging effectively with parents (DCSF, 2009e). This stems in part from the view that parental involvement raises students' academic achievement. The link between parental involvement and educational achievement has been explored by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003). These authors conducted a wide-ranging review of the literature and a key finding is that children's academic achievement is significantly influenced by a form of spontaneous parental involvement termed 'at-home good parenting'. This is defined as the provision of a settled and secure home environment, an atmosphere where learning and enquiry are stimulated, parents upholding positive social and educational principles and the setting of high expectations regarding personal fulfilment. Other research indicates that the level of parental engagement varies considerably and is strongly associated with parents' socio-economic status and to their own experiences of education (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Variations in parents' engagement with schools have been explored in the literature on social capital, focusing on the range of social contacts, knowledge and attitudes developed by families (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 2000; Putnam, 2000). This literature highlights the impact of differing levels of social capital and suggests that this is one of the most powerful factors in explaining many of the dissimilarities between families' engagement with schools, and the fact that low parental engagement probably reflects a lack of confidence rather than a lack of interest. It is worth noting that where schools make determined attempts to engage parents viewed as 'hard to reach', there is evidence that the effect on student learning is positive (Feiler, 2010).

There are indications that UK schools' current approaches to parental engagement are generally sound. A recent Ofsted survey found that all participating schools valued the involvement of parents and carers and the great majority of schools were rated by Ofsted inspectors as good or outstanding at involving parents (Ofsted, 2007). Furthermore, research in the UK on parents' perspectives of their involvement in education indicates that their viewpoints are broadly positive and that there has been a continuing rise in parents' perceived level of their own involvement. Peters et al. (2008) sought parental views during a telephone survey and found that the proportion of parents who reported that they feel very involved in their child's school life has increased significantly over the last few years: from 29% in 2001, 38% in 2004, to 51% in 2007. Furthermore, it was found that a higher proportion of parents are more likely to regard their child's education as mainly or wholly their responsibility (28%). This marks a change from previous years, when more parents were more likely to view education as the school's responsibility.

The finding that parents' involvement in education may contribute to student achievement and that schools and parents alike tend to value this form of engagement provide convincing grounds for including a focus on this area in the CReSt research. Another reason relates to changes in policy over

the last decade in relation to parental choice and the 'marketisation' of secondary schools. Bagley (2006) notes that during the 1980s and 1990s market theories dominated public service policy and there was an assumption that by giving consumers more choice, competition would drive up standards - within the sphere of education it was supposed that parental choice would spur on school performance. Bagley argues that despite the change of government in 1997 and the corresponding policy shift towards raising standards through inter-school collaboration and partnership, there is some evidence that pressures on schools currently continue to result in a strongly competitive environment: 'The findings reveal a stronger 'parent as consumer' marketing orientation and responsiveness on behalf of schools and an environment in which competition and rivalry has intensified and continues to discursively predominate.' (Bagley, 2006: 347). So this field forms the third strand in the rationale for exploring centres' perspectives on parental engagement.

It should be noted that in the current study all respondents were asked during interviews to comment on parents' engagement in education. Although parents themselves were interviewed, because of the small size of this sample and the selection process (one parent per centre, identified by the project advisor or another member of staff) the following commentary is based predominantly on interviews with centre staff, students and governors. Four main themes on parental engagement emerged from these interviews and these related to the significant impact that parents exert on student learning and curriculum choice; the importance of communicating with parents; variations in the amount of parental engagement across centres; and parental concerns about the equivalence of the new qualifications. These core themes are discussed below.

11.2 Parents have a significant impact on student learning and curriculum choice

The key role played by parents in influencing student learning and curriculum choice was a strongly recurrent theme raised by students and centre staff. A teacher in a specialist college noted parents' influence in swaying student decision-making:

... you asked us the question who influences our pupils most, and we said our parents, didn't we. I think if you are really going to get this off the ground in a major way [the 14-19 curriculum reforms], then you've got to get parents to be more informed about what's going on, and for them really to understand how education is changing ...

(Teacher, specialist college)

Centre staff considered that it is important to liaise with parents about the curriculum reforms because there is a view that parental involvement can raise student motivation and learning. A teacher in a secondary school asserted that where parents are 'on the side' of the school, this has an impact on student learning:

[We] benefit from quite a very positive group of parents that generally in the community around us, and our intake, support the children in what they're doing, and try and push them forwards. And most of the time [they] will be on the side of agreeing that the school is doing

the best for them, and therefore work with us to get the most out of the children. So if you've got an attitude that's helping at home as well, it does help with the pupils.

(Teacher, Specialist Science College)

A teacher from a secondary school similarly felt that parents need information, advice and guidance (IAG) about the reforms because their views can impact strongly on students:

I think it's not just the students that need the IAG I think it is the parents. I think, because students do still listen very much to parents, even if it's just to rebel against what parents say, they still listen ...

(Teacher, secondary school)

Comments from a governor in one of the special schools underlined that staff strongly valued parents' input and it was recognised that where parents and the school and collaborate, student learning is enhanced:

I think we're beginning to do quite a lot working with parents as well. We have parents support groups, so that the attitudes that we're trying to instil we help the parents to follow those up at home and again giving them opportunities to, as I say, it's been mainly post-16 up till now, but opportunities to develop their life skills.

(Governor, special school)

The notion that parents have a strong influence on subject selection and career aspirations also emerged strongly from interviews with the students, many of whom commented that parental advice was pivotal in the decisions that they took. For example, when Year 11 students from a specialist school were asked who helped them to make decisions about curriculum choices, the following comments were made:

Male student: *My parents.*

Female student: *The thing I would say is – my parents – they wanted me to make the decision that was right for me ...*

A student from a 'disengaged' group commented about the value he placed on his parents' opinions:

I don't speak to the teachers because they give you different points, but with your mum and dad at least you're like ... you can be sat there on a night and talking about what you want to do and stuff. Like the teachers you can't really talk to them because you're not really that close to them.

(Disengaged student)

Although it was generally acknowledged that parents play an important role in advising their children about subject and career choice, this perspective was not shared by all respondents. As indicated in one of the comments above, a secondary teacher noted that while some students may take on board advice from their parents, others may react against it; and comments from a student from another school exemplified such a response:

... [my mother] told me what I should really be doing, and ... I did the opposite of what she said. So now she's like, 'Oh well, you're going to have to do really well in it and get an A to

prove yourself.' And it's like, well really I tried to do what I wanted to do, but then I had teachers and people at home saying, 'You've got to do this, you should be doing this.'

(Disengaged student)

Furthermore, a caveat expressed by a project advisor centred on concerns that parental advice may not always be pitched at an appropriate level:

We ... have a very high amount of Asian girls who are very, very clear from their parents the expectations are that they go on to a traditional career for a bright girl. So it will be medicine, law - or pharmacy if they can't get into medicine. So that's something we have to work very hard with because sometimes the girls just aren't quite academic enough to do that and it's very, very hard for them.

(Project advisor, secondary school)

In a special school, commentary about school/family links similarly focused on the centre's role in ensuring that parents have realistic expectations about their child's skills and development, and a governor considered that school staff could usefully contribute to parental understanding:

Some parents, perhaps, have unrealistic hopes for their youngsters and I think we gently have to show them that, 'No, university is probably not going to [be possible], but there are college courses which your child can be ..' And on the other side of it, some parents think, 'My child's not going to be able to do anything', and we don't want to pass that on to the child. So we then have to educate the parents ... I think that's probably a big thing in the future, to get everybody working together to see what the right path is and involving the child and parents as much possible.

(Governor, special school)

11.3 The importance of communicating with parents

In view of the teachers' emphasis on the role played by parents in influencing their child's learning and curriculum choices, unsurprisingly many of the centres commented on the importance of establishing good communication with parents. Various communication approaches were noted, and these included parents' evenings, emails, information packs, an options booklet, parent and student surveys, presentations to students and parents, and a career fair during which employers met with students and parents. Centres emphasised that parents' knowledge about the reforms is often insufficient, and teachers tended to view it as their responsibility to inform and educate parents about these developments. The direction of the flow of information was predominantly from centres to parents – there was little evidence of centres seeking information from parents.

When teachers in a secondary school were asked about parental understanding of the reforms, their responses indicated that parents often struggle with this – one teacher commented:

'I think they [parents] place an awful lot of trust in us because they don't know [about the curriculum reforms].'

(Teacher, secondary school)

A teacher in another secondary school remarked:

... 14–19 reform as a phrase wouldn't mean anything to anybody, not in education. But we tell parents very regularly that education is changing. As I say we had Year 8 parents' evening the other night. Every parent that came through left with a pack about Diplomas

(Teacher, secondary school)

The sheer complexity of the reforms and the difficulty parents experienced in understanding what choices are available was a recurrent topic. For example a secondary school teacher noted:

... it's a very different world for parents, isn't it? Because when the parents were at school, it was probably GCSEs - for some of them it would have been O-Levels. To suddenly have kids coming home and talking about BTECs, about HSEs and GNVQs, the world of qualifications seems so huge, and parents would like a really simple [explanation] like, 'That's what the exam is.'

(Teacher, secondary school)

Comments from the mother of a student from a secondary school reflected the confusion she felt about the reforms:

... I think parents may find it more and more confusing, what the options are at 14, or bewildered by the array of things, because I know year on year from what [son's name] had on offer increased the year after, and the year after that and the year after that and they roll out with Diplomas and everything. I think how that information is sold to parents is going to be very important. I think it's going to be very important that parents actually really understand the differences and the routes that their kids can go, and I think there can be a danger that parents will stick with GCSEs because they know about that.

(Mother of secondary school student)

A Year 11 student similarly echoed concern about curriculum complexity – she commented that her parents found it difficult to make sense of the information provided by the centre:

We did have, like, an options evening, didn't we? But that was like one night and it was all very rushed ... It was just too much to take in, I think, for my mum and dad. Because they're like – they want what's best for me, but they just don't know what would be best for me.

(Year 11 student)

Staff frequently referred to the need to inform parents about curriculum changes in order to help parents when they discussed subject choices with their child:

... I think parents as well have a role to play in helping them make the right decisions. I suppose it's our role and the schools' and colleges' role to get that message across to parents as well about what is available.

(Connexions service staff member, College of Further Education)

The notion that schools have a responsibility to educate parents about the curriculum reforms was also reflected in the comments made by a partnership coordinator from a specialist secondary school who emphasised the importance of involving parents when careers advice is given:

So, in terms of careers ... it's not just 14-19, we're actually starting as far back as Key Stage 2. And some of that is about helping pupils but it's helping parents, working with the parents as well.

(Partnership coordinator, specialist secondary school)

As well as providing information about the reforms teachers remarked on the importance of enthusing parents and a partnership coordinator commented:

... we've had a lot of work to ... put in with our parents, to get them on board and to get them excited about these qualifications.

(Partnership coordinator, College of Further Education)

For parents to help their children at home with learning they need some understanding of the curriculum and how it is taught in school. Parents may feel unconfident about subjects such as science and mathematics, and in one secondary school an innovative approach to informing parents about curriculum development was adopted – the students became the teachers:

... we run parents and children workshops for Year 5 and 6 ... our children demonstrate science activities, so the children are the teachers in the evening. So we invite parents of children in Year 5 and 6... [For] a lot of parents, the curriculum is completely different so we start right down as far as 5 and 6 and we do a programme – we did it last year – 'How to help your child with science'. We were inundated; we had to turn some people away, so we had to do a second session. And the feedback from the parents was that this was fantastic but we'd like more, we'd like 'How to help your child with Maths'. So, this year, we've developed that.

(Partnership coordinator, secondary school)

Although parents may support and motivate students, the important role that centres can play in raising aspirations was vividly portrayed in a comment made by a Year 13 student. He acknowledged that although parental support and expectation may exert an influence in motivating some students, his sixth form college played an enormously important part in encouraging her to aim high:

... I look back, and out of our student group from my school, quite a lot of them have ended up in prison or pregnant, with children at this age ... There's quite a low aspiration within my school, and [this college] really changed that around for me now ... I mean, I'm truly jealous of the people that have had high aspirations handed to them. I mean, it may be a question of parents, it may be a question of the schools they went to, I don't know. But I didn't ever have that idea that the sky's the limit. I mean, my limit was always, at school it was kind of like, 'Yeah, you're going to end up at a job you hate and probably just going to chug along. You'll have a kid and you'll get in a lot of debt, you might go on a couple of nice holidays, and then you'll die and that's about it.' It was just going to be one of those chug along lives that means nothing, whereas [this college] has genuinely changed that. Yeah, I love [this college].

(Year 13 student, sixth form college)

11.4 Variation in levels of parental engagement

As mentioned above, communicating with parents seemed to be partly driven by centres' acknowledgement of the role played by parents in supporting their child, as well as by centres' awareness of parents' need for clear information about curriculum developments. Another factor that prompted some centres to take account of parental views was the perspective that 'marketplace'

competitive elements require schools to be responsive to parental expectations. For example, a governor referred to his school's aim of having an 'open door policy' with parents, noting that parents often expected to be able to make direct contact with the Head Teacher 'with relative ease', and that this approach to parents was driven by, '... a combination of the marketplace, the size of the school, and just the way we wanted to be ...' There was an implication that at times parental interest and pressure on school staff could be too high:

... the nature of an independent school these days is that you're serving the needs of actually quite a demanding section of the public. And certainly we think that there's no point in sending your daughter to [this school] unless you're prepared to view it as a partnership between the school and home, and so there has to be that support from home. So I would say we have quite strong links with our parents, perhaps too often and too strong sometimes.

(Governor, secondary school)

The topic of the 'marketplace' was also raised by the Principal of a sixth form college who commented on the role that parental aspirations about achievement have had on developing links between the sixth form and other schools. She was concerned that if academic standards in the city continued to be low, parents would carry on sending their children elsewhere, resulting in poor recruitment at her own college:

... it's been the ambition of parents who have high aspirations ... to get their kids out of [this city] for their education ... if I don't work with schools in such a way that they improve their performance in GCSEs and Key Stage 3, and thereby improve their reputation and thereby encourage people to keep their kids in the city, they won't progress to my college. And there are three colleges just outside the boundaries of the city who will love taking certainly the top end of ability of kids from the city...

(Principal, sixth form college)

However, there were significant variations across the centres in levels of parental engagement. Not all centres experienced pressure from parents to achieve high academic standards, and the partnership coordinator in one school commented on a seeming lack of interest shown by parents:

I don't think we've got the sorts of parents now who will say, 'Hang on a minute, what are all these BTECs? I didn't sign up for this.' I think they'll just, 'Yes, well, whatever' ... So I mean that's, they're not people who are going to be, touch wood, they're not people that are going to start pulling things apart. They'll take what's there.

(Partnership coordinator, secondary school)

The disparity in levels of parental engagement was reflected in the tenor of remarks from some parents and students. On the one hand, a parent openly acknowledged that she was forceful both with the school and her daughter in order to boost academic achievement:

...she [daughter] works better under pressure. She's like me, she's got pressure on top of her and she just works so hard ... We are pushy parents, but we don't just push the school, we push our children as well. And we back off when needs be, but it's their education, it's very important. I mean, we want them all to do well.

(Parent)

Conversely, a 'disengaged' student stated that her mother paid relatively little attention to a report from school about her academic performance:

My mum didn't read it mine [tutor review report] ... My mum kind of picked it up, looked at it and put it back down and it stayed in the same place. She didn't pay attention to it at all. She only looked at the grades she thinks I'm going to get, she doesn't care what the teachers think of me

(Disengaged student)

11.5 Parental concerns about the equivalence and permanence of the new qualifications

Linked to the emphasis placed by centres on the importance of providing parents with clear information about curriculum reforms, a number of teachers and other respondents commented that parents may not be convinced about the value of some of the new qualifications, particularly Diplomas. Teachers commented that when parents were students themselves they generally took GCSEs, and that this generation of parents may not be convinced that the new qualifications are as academically rigorous. There was a sense that parents' misgivings may stem from a concern that the new qualifications do not yet have an established track record - a teacher from a sixth form college commented:

If they [parents] hear vocational and if they hear Diploma, they're going to think vocational, they're not going to want their kids doing that programme ... until it's tried and tested and gone through a few years there's actually not going to be enough evidence for parents to say, 'Oh yeah, my child can invest two years on this Diploma.'

(Teacher, sixth form college)

A partnership coordinator similarly recognised the uncertainty that parents may have about the value of certain qualifications:

Parent confidence in a new programme [is an issue] and, you know, being perhaps acutely aware, you know: is it going to be recognised? We've heard about new programmes before that come and go and come and go ... and I think the term 'Diploma' is awful because there are so many Mickey Mouse diplomas for all sorts of things, you know. And I think there's a confusion out there ...

(Partnership coordinator, College of Further Education)

Disquiet about the longevity of certain curriculum developments was expressed by a member of staff in a special school who commented that parents need reassuring on this point:

And then what happens next year? We've got all publicity in the media that all these courses are on offer to all these children, and what do we say to parents if they then come and say, you know, they've read something that's being produced by the government and they think we're accessing it and maybe we can't for next year because we haven't got the funding.

(Teacher, special school)

Another issue related to the equivalence of the new qualifications. A secondary school teacher noted that local parents generally have high expectations about progression to university, and she shared the reservations expressed by some parents about academic rigour, commenting that some qualifications do not seem suitable for high-achieving students:

High academic achievement, A to Cs and going off to university ... that's what the parents in the area tend to want, that's what the students strive for, and I think that's the way the school kind of goes ... To be honest, looking at them now [curriculum reforms], some of these things you think are for the naughty kids who are going to fail most subjects.

(Teacher, secondary school)

A project advisor from another secondary (who is also a parent of a Year 10 student) school likewise questioned the value of Diplomas, referring to a 'distrust of the unknown':

I don't think [the Diploma pathway] has the status within, amongst parents and I say that with a parental head on, with a daughter who is in Year 10 in a different school. They are a little bit of an experiment still, people don't quite know what they are ... I think it's distrust of the unknown, doubts about the academic status of it and also the problem, you know, if you do that you can't do anything else.

(Project advisor, secondary school)

Many teachers commenting on this area, however, did not share parents' reservations about equivalence, and tended to express frustration at parents' lack of confidence in the reforms. For example, a member of staff from a secondary school commented:

We had somebody from university come and help us with the post-16 evening we had with parents. University of [name of university] Art Department, direct question, 'Will you take somebody who's done a Diploma?'. Direct answer, 'We don't care what qualification they've done, we want to see their portfolio.' I don't know what else we can do. But there are parents that are really hung up on this idea that, 'Ooh, it's new, it's frightening, it won't last.'

(Teacher, secondary school)

Similarly, a partnership coordinator commented that GCSEs and A levels still tend to be promoted as the 'gold standard' and that it is an uphill struggle to convince parents that alternative qualifications should be considered:

... [parents have] preconceptions really ... they think that because GCSEs are held up as the gold standard, that that's the only thing that young people should be doing. Whereas in actual fact we only get what 40/50% of our young people through those, so they're not successful for 50/60% of young people, so we should be trying new things. But because all you hear is GCSE and all your point scores and everything is GCSE point scores, A Level point scores, then it doesn't make [it] easy for other things to come through.

(Teacher, Further Education College)

The Head Teacher of a secondary school felt that parents' misgivings about Diplomas are to some extent fuelled by negative reports in the press:

But I have to say we're really struggling this year with parental, sort of, not backlash is the wrong word but the lack of parental sort of engagement. And I really don't think we're being

helped by the press. You know, you get articles on the weekend, like, 'Diplomas don't stretch the most able students', they're just headlines that don't help ...

(Head Teacher, secondary school)

Nevertheless there were some indications in the same secondary school that efforts to inform parents about the curriculum reforms are beginning to have an effect. A teacher commented that compared to some years ago parents were starting to be won over and to accept that the new curriculum options may be advantageous for their child:

They're willing to listen to the school explain the options, whereas certainly where I worked fifteen years ago that would have been a real hard sell ... there's been a bit of chipping away, a gradual informing of what could be available.

(Teacher, secondary school)

11.6 Conclusion

Four core themes emerged from the interviews with respondents about parents' role in relation to the curriculum reforms and these are summarised below. *Parents have a significant impact on student learning and curriculum choice:* Although concern was expressed that some parents may have inappropriate expectations about their child's academic potential and that some students may do the opposite of what their parents advise, the general perception in centres was that parents exert a significant and positive influence on student learning and choice. This is in line with findings from Desforges and Abouchar (2003) and Harris and Goodall (2007) who conclude that student achievement in school is strongly influenced by parental engagement (particularly support for learning at home); and by Alexander (2010) who similarly underlines the link that exists between parental engagement and student learning: 'Schools need to aim to ensure parents feel respected, capable, involved and empowered. Because then parents will inspire those same feelings in their children.' (Alexander, 2010: 88). What is striking about the current finding is the extent to which parents seem to exert an influence not only on students' general learning but specifically on their curriculum choices and career aspirations. This echoes research reported by Atherton et al. (2009) who found that Year 7 students ranked parents as having the most important influence on their views of the future (compared with teachers, siblings and others). The authors emphasise that students' comments suggest that rather than parents necessarily having a direct influence on students' career aspirations (telling children what to do), '... it was the support and backing of parents that were most important to the young people: the view 'that their parents were behind them' (Atherton et al., 2009: 41).

The importance of communicating with parents: In line with the acknowledgement of the role played by parents in influencing student learning and choice, centres tended to place a high value on communicating effectively with parents. It is encouraging that centres used a range of strategies for communicating with parents – we know from previous research that 'one size does not fit all', and that home-school contacts are more effective when tailored to the characteristics of the particular communities served by individual schools (Feiler et al., 2006). The complexity of the curriculum reforms was often raised by staff, who underlined that parents can struggle to make sense of these

changes and the choices that students need to make. This chimes with a view expressed by Kelly (2009) who argues that parents (as well as students) should be empowered to negotiate and participate in decisions about the curriculum – providing parents with clear information about the curriculum framework is an important element in such participation.

Variation in levels of parental engagement: The amount of parental interest in the curriculum reforms and parental engagement differed across centres. It is likely that this variation reflected social background factors as well as differences in parents' levels of social capital. This in turn is likely to have an impact on student choices and expectations. For example, where parents' own education experiences are positive, and where they have developed extensive social contacts and networks, it is more likely that they will be better positioned to support and advise their children as they navigate their way through the curriculum and make subject and career choices. It is also worth bearing in mind that research by Harris and Goodall (2007) indicates that although parental engagement is strongly linked to parents' socio-economic status, when schools take active steps to engage parents viewed as 'hard to reach', student learning and behaviour improve.

Parental concerns about the equivalence of the new qualifications: Many parents have misgivings about the new qualifications and are not convinced that there is equivalence between Diplomas and GCSEs. Respondents felt that parental doubts partly reflect a lack of familiarity with the new qualifications together with concerns about their longevity and future funding. It is worth bearing mind that a lack of take-up of vocational routes has been a feature of UK education for some years. Wolf (2002) notes that vocational education is 'a great idea for other people's children', and that during the 1990s students' resistance to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and to Youth Training Schemes (YTS) was based partly on a perception that their currency in comparison to academic qualification was not high: 'They [teenagers] knew a low-prestige, low-return option when they saw it ...' (p.77).

11.7 Implications for policy

- During the process of developing and marketing/promoting new qualifications, parents' strong interest in and influence on student learning and subject choice needs to be borne in mind and addressed. It is worth noting that traditionally the flow of information between schools and parents tends to be one-way – from the schools to homes (Hughes and Greenhough, 2006). There is scope for centres to find out more about students' out of school lives, and to ask parents about their views and needs in relation to their (parents') role in discussing subject and career choices with their children.
- In order to help parents make an informed contribution to their child's learning, schools need access to centrally-provided, clear information on the curriculum reforms specifically devised for parents (e.g. leaflets; videos; websites; Powerpoint presentations).

- Parental interest in the curriculum reforms varies across centres. Research evidence from previous studies indicates that a positive impact can be achieved where schools adopt determined, tenacious strategies to encourage parental engagement.
- Many parents need reassurance about the equivalence and longevity of the new reforms if their support is to be secured.

11.8 Implications for future research

- Should the teacher and student questionnaires include items on parental engagement? The inclusion of such items could provide a fuller picture of centres' perspectives on levels and types of parental involvement.
- Is there a need to re-consider the selection and size of the parent sample? More parents across all centres, randomly selected, would provide a more representative perspective. Alternatively, a small sample of centres could be approached about randomly assigning a larger sample of parents for interviewing (a strategy which has been raised previously).

12 References

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