

A review of the vocational pathway in England



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Background paper



Towards a new VET

Cambridge Assessment 2013

This presentation



Using international comparisons to understand the strengths and weaknesses of arrangements in England

Determining the scope and focus of reform - radically reappraising the necessary scope of reform and the need for adjuvant policy – eg on labour market regulation, industrial strategy etc

Some system characteristics (indicators?)

- 1 buoyancy in the labour market for young people in their late teens, until the recent recession
- 2 a high level of 'lifelong learning' after cessation of compulsory schooling
- 3 decline in employer use of FE relative to the volume of employer-funded training
- 4 accompanying high flexibility in the structure and content of FE provision
- 5 persistence in structural skill shortages
- 6 collapse in provision of 'classical apprenticeship'
- 7 the use of imported labour in skilled segments of the economy
- 8 partial success in the attempt to use HE as a dominant VET route (including variability in return)
- 9 poor resilience and responsive in the system in respect of offering places during a period of recession and high youth unemployment

Qualifications reform as a principal focus



Schools

Known locations of learning (schools)

Relatively easy to govern

Ownership clear – although parental/state responsibility an issue

Clear populations and cohorts

Legal obligation to attend

Solid research on pedagogy

Powerful instruments of curriculum control

VET (note HE VET ambiguity)

Diverse and shifting locations of learning (workplaces, colleges, PTPs)

Difficult to control, governance institutions unclear

Ownership of/responsibility totally unclear – employers, State, individual

Constantly shifting participation patterns

Complex patterns of requirements and incentives regarding participation

Very little work on workplace pedagogy

So qualifications reform will fix it? Unlikely

Conceptual ground-clearing 1

The term ‘system’ – as in ‘education and training system’ is a metaphor

‘Systems-analysis’ is a theoretical and practical means of understanding the overall operation and affects of a diverse set of education and training arrangements

Should we aspire to manage these arrangements as a system – do we have the theoretical and practical tools to do this? Are we prepared for the constitutional consequences of a ‘systems management’ approach?

‘System’ as metaphor

Towards a universal upper secondary education system in England
Spours K and Hodgson A 2012

‘A unified curriculum based on the baccalaureate approach that includes a stronger role for vocational education’.

‘At the root of the problem is the absence of any consensus about what secondary education is actually for...is it to select people for higher education for higher education and the best jobs? Or is it a preparation for work and adult life? We argue for the latter.

...the persisting dominance of GCSEs and A level....’

IoE 2012

The implications of ‘systems-thinking’

Singapore and Korea – the characteristics of modern industrial strategy

UK attitude to industrial strategy

With the race for international investment going global, how should Britain address its manufacturing sector in order to boost the economy? And how much is this the government’s responsibility, rather than that of industry and businesses? Industrial strategy has been considered an unfashionable term in the past, with some unable to see beyond British industry being in a slow decline since the 1980s. This view could hamper the focus of policy-makers on manufacturing as crucial to better-balanced growth. Coupled with a devastating manufacturing skills gap, this should be carefully considered in the lead-up to the Budget.

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...routes and 'the system' - 1

In general education

-levels of attainment

-variation in the quality of provision within and between institutions; a chronic problem in England

-subject choice

-tiered assessment, with evidence of 'stacking' at grade C

-qualifications which are designed for 'access' but which are too limited to allow progression to Higher Education (eg integrated science GCSEs)

...routes and 'the system' - 2

Even in a putative 'unified' system there would be

- option choices
- subject choices
- differences in balances of assessment methods and approaches
- different learning modes
- specialist providers
- different labour market linkages, impacting on opportunity and motivation

Conceptual ground-clearing 2

Implicit routes exist in seemingly ‘unified’ systems – you need to make choices of subject and focus

(eg the Cambridge research on IB Parks G 2012; requirement = two 7s in higher subjects, 39 in science, and 42 in arts and social sciences)

Seemingly ‘routed’ systems possess different levels of **real flexibility** – issues of outcomes (attainments), destinations and switching between routes

(eg inter-occupational mobility at the end of Dual System Apprenticeship in Germany and bridging between the academic and vocational routes BIBB referent country report n7 2009)

Conceptual ground-clearing 3



Attending to deeper realities in arrangements: proportions on 'routes'

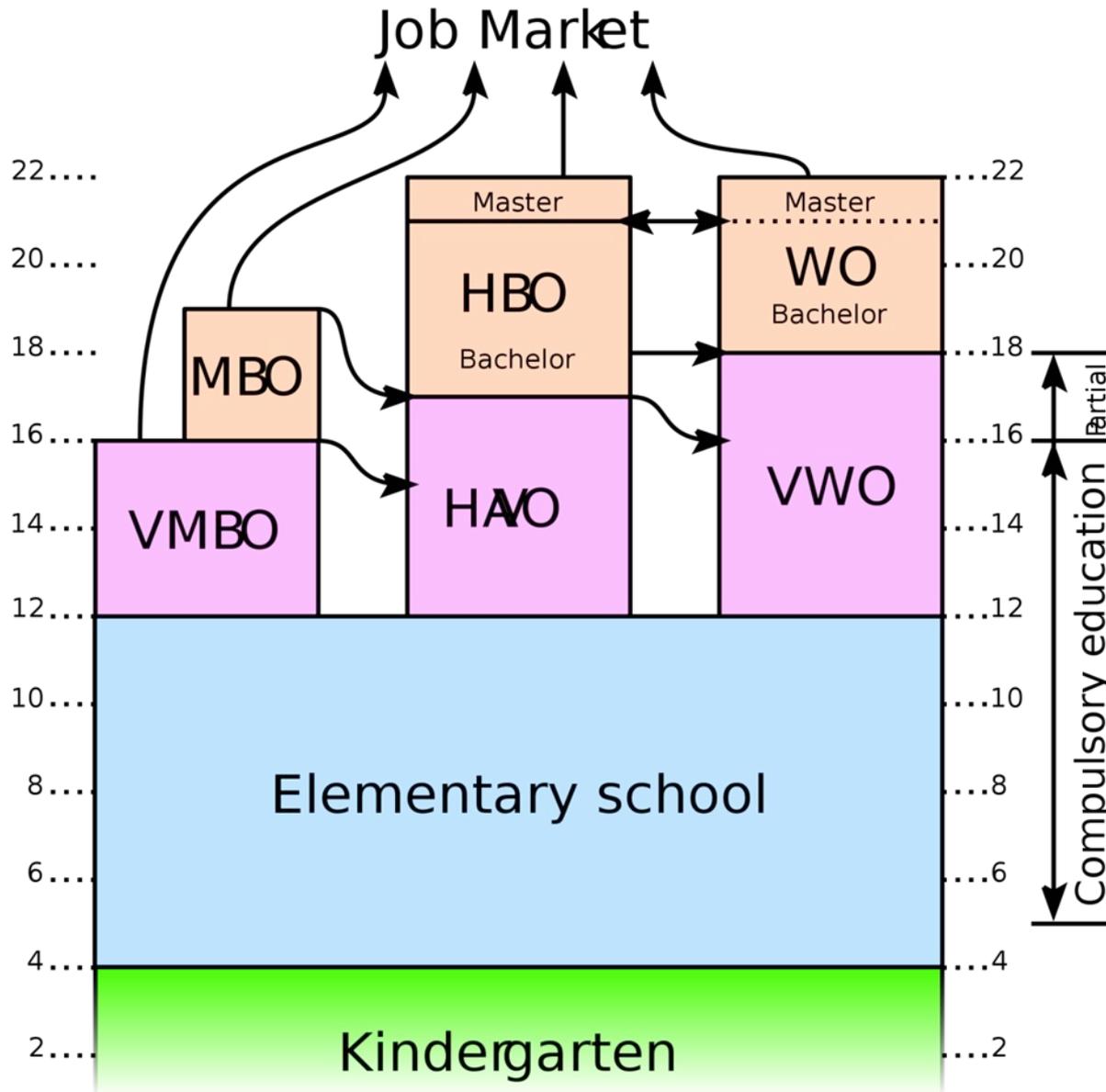
Finland – vocational system from 16 – around 40% - vocational system does allow access to university – 8.1% below level 2 at 15, high gender imbalances in attainment (OECD)

Singapore – vocational provision from 16 – around 25% into VTE segment, polytechnic 40% - improved equity outcomes in vocational track (Sakelleriou C 2006)

Germany – Dual System from 16, 64.7% (2008 – BIBB)– relatively high inequalities at 15 (OECD)

Netherlands – 60% into the VMBO general vocational system at 12 – 14.3 scoring below level 2 (similar to NZ) – low relative risk of scoring below level 2, high equity scores (OECD)

England – Upper secondary level: 65% on route other than A levels – close to average on inequality (OECD) – 19/33 – on OECD average 2012



Conceptual ground-clearing 4

The vocational character of Higher Education

- over 50% of HE is directly vocational in character
- standards in much of this provision are determined through external validation
- high return on tightly linked degree courses

- highly variable labour market linkage

- psychological and implicit contract very different to that within classical apprenticeship which impacts on quality, motivation, signalling and opportunity

Are A levels really that unique?

Direct analogues exist in many systems

Singapore – A levels

USA – Advanced Placement – 3 or 4 examinations

Finland – Abitur- typically 4 examinations

Germany – Abitur – 3 or 4 examinations

Failure of curriculum thinking rather than a failure of qualifications

‘It is a cherry-picking myth to see A levels as peculiarly English. Abandoning specialist examinations at 18 would be moving out of step with international evidence, not moving towards it’ (Oates T 2013)



...routes and 'the system' - 3

Nascent system characteristics – working back from high quality undergraduate provision in Higher Education

The international attractiveness of high intensity short duration first cycle HE

- Three year short duration, high intensity, high standards
- Specialised assessment and certification in the 16-19 phase
- Retention of general education to 16

Higher standards and greater equity in outcomes at the age of 11

'Villianisation' of A level is a failure of objectification

The shift of 'school leaving' and ambiguous choice to 17

The illusory nature of 'raising the age of participation'

The need for maths and foreign language within 16-19 phase

The need for stronger signalling in the system

Key elements of history in the vocational track



From the 1940s to the present

Failure of the third track in the 1944 Act

Decay in the classical apprenticeship route

Provision and removal of ITBs

TVEI and the NTI – dominance of NTI2

Provision and removal of TECs

Removal of binary line

Development of CTCs and then move from technical ed to gen ed

Switch to outcomes-based approaches

Dearing Review of 14-19 qualifications

Work experience as entitlement at KS4

Wide use of apprenticeship as 'credentialising' label

Foundation Degrees and UTCs

Recognition of merits of classical apprenticeship

The changing face of FE?



The rise and rise of substitution

2002 – Ruth Lea IoD declaration of udi – employers NOT considered to be responsible for the education and training of young people (initial VET), unemployed adults, or those made redundant in industrial restructuring.

From 2000 to 2005, declared training spend by employers increased from 23.5 billion to 33.3 billion (UKCES) – fees paid to colleges went from 2.6 billion to 2.4 billion.

Those most likely to be in receipt of training are those with an existing high level of qualification (DfE, UKCES, LSE CEP)

Massive substitution under ‘train to gain’ (Audit Commission) and more recently under short duration ‘apprenticeship’ for older workers (Ofsted, Audit Commission)

Successive failure of the structural form of Government-funded training – substitution, a cycle of increasing bureaucracy to prevent abuse, and indirect subsidy to wages via tax credits

Building problems – and addressing them

Widening scope of the concept and label of ‘apprenticeship’

Increasing bureaucracy in order to reduce substitution

Bureaucracy as a disincentive, especially in innovative employment sectors

Reducing direct experience, amongst employers, of classical apprenticeship

Failure to explain internal economics of classical apprenticeship

Shift of initial training from employers to private training providers

Clear articulation of the roles of the State, employers and VET providers

‘An increase in employers’ propensity to train, and a genuine shift back to true employment-based training CAN be effected – both for initial and continuing VET – but requires multi-faceted policy, where strategy directly focussed on VET must be linked with policy on regulation, wage rates, licence to practice...there should be common understanding of the social and economic ‘deal’ (Oates T 2013)

The classical apprenticeship model

Still relevant in a modern economy? Richards Review, Germany.

Highly beneficial internal economics

Through immersion and formation, development of work process skills (Boreham N 2000), socialisation into work (James S 2009) and wider capitals and skills (Reuling J 1998, Unwin L and Fuller A 2008)

Dual system of apprenticeship cited as an element of resilience in the German system

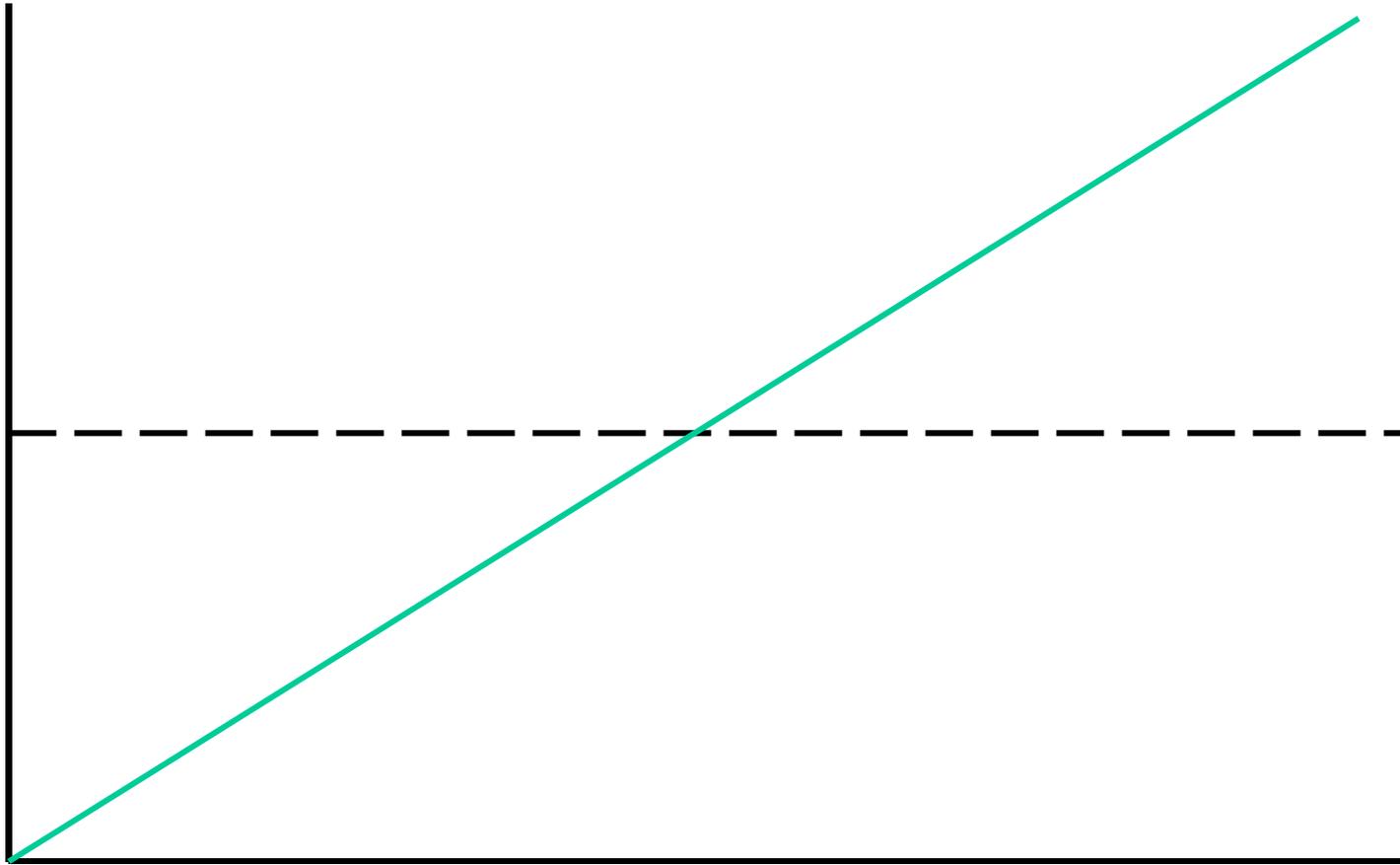
Long duration (3-4 years), high level (level 3-4), strong psychological contract, principal relation between individual and employer, with State in a secondary role

The classical apprenticeship model



A high trainee-worker differential wage rate, combined with a three-year training programme – and not ‘leaving at the point of minimum competence’ - achieves the following:

- it incentivises employers to be interested in the training curriculum, since once a person has qualified, employers have to pay more, and thus requires demonstrable value-added
- it incentivises learners to learn, since without qualification they cannot access the higher wage rate
- it re-establishes the internal economics of long-duration apprenticeship and can play a major role in shifting responsibility for training to employers (and from the State), since the latter half of the training (where a person is productive yet being paid a trainee rate and thus creates additional surplus value) pays for the first half of the training (where the person is not yet productive and thus consumes resources)



Internal economics of classical apprenticeship (LSE CEP)



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The classical apprenticeship model

The irony...

The habit of Government of combining ‘seeding funding’ with pressure to reduce the duration of initial training (in the name of apparent ‘efficiency’ and thus reduce the burden on the public purse actually condemns the system to ***ever-increasing levels of public funding***, since the internal economics of short duration training provide absolutely no incentive for employers to take on ownership of the apprenticeship schemes (employers increasingly refuse to take on apprentices without high levels of public funding – and even then we are seeing a shortage of places) (Oates T 2013)

There is high demand from young people – eg a 600-place scheme recently attracted 27,000 applicants.

Reducing a bloated middle layer

Reinstating the State’s legitimate interest in wider capitals

Policy distractions – a ‘tidy system’

The NQF distraction

Another version of qualifications-led reform

The mysterious figure of ‘20,000 qualifications’ – in 2005 VQs equivalent in number to Germany

Pre-NQF: 1,000 general quals, 7,150 other (2006/07 Ofqual)

Post-NQF: 1,350 general qualifications 16,750 (2010/11 Ofqual)

QCF qualifications over this period from 150 to 9,700 (Ofqual)

A reductive framework



QCF

- Notional learning time (size and weight)
- Level
- Sector

Rationale

- Reduction in number of qualifications
- Rationalisation of elements; new combination of common elements

Stimulated explosion in qualifications

Qualifications supply and combination

QCF implied combination and saliency

Policy maker 'There are hundreds which are not used...'

Me 'So what?...they're not used...'

Policy maker 'Remove all with fewer than 500 candidates...'

Me 'what about the 50 who qualified in bomb disposal?...and...''

QCF lacked principles of combination

QCF lacked criteria of need (utility and saliency)

Material impediments to shared units

Neurotic obsession with system tidiness.

Conclusions



Defining the scope of action

Wholesale 'system' revision does not appear necessary

'Curriculum thinking' needs to be re-instated in the academic route

Quality, fundamental relations, drivers and incentives require attention in respect of a true vocational route at 16

Forms of regulation and restriction need to be reconsidered, including industrial strategy

Classical apprenticeship



Internal economics of classical apprenticeship

Merits of long duration

Formation through long duration

Formation as a removal of the need to specify and assess externally

Material efficiency of inflexibilities

Re-establishing curriculum thinking in general education as well as VET



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A focus on the middle route

School based VET (including work experience) as a component of compulsory general education

Initial VET in a full-time educational setting

Employment-based VET for young entrants to the labour market – focused VET for comprehensive labour market preparation

Continuing VET for employed adult workers

VET for unemployed adults

The differentiation in this – and vocational HE, and gen ed – suggest detailed strategic development outside a ‘unified system’ paradigm

...this focussed effort requires

Simple promotion of the internal economics of apprenticeship

Feedback on returns

Clarity in roles and responsibilities of actors and agents (cf Singaporean retention of Polytechnics)

A move from reductivist policy which relies on reform of qualifications

An emphasis on the development of high-quality VET provision

Far from a 'unified system', this analysis suggests complex management of diverse policy, which includes action focussed on optimising both the elements of, and drivers affecting, diverse provision in diverse routes