

**Labour's
Policy
Review**

Qualifications matter: improving the curriculum and assessment for all

The third report of the
independent Skills Taskforce

1: Introduction: skills and qualifications

Every economy in the advanced world is increasingly aware of the importance of building a high quality workforce. Every society in the world understands the importance of the education system in shaping life chances. Central to the work of Labour's Skills TaskForce has been the understanding that in the early twenty-first century we need to ensure that as many of our young people as possible build the skills and capabilities they need, not just to enter the labour market but to provide a basis for lifelong skill development. Other countries are already doing much better with much larger proportions of their population than we are: if we cannot do better, we will find it increasingly difficult to compete, and we will face the continuing economic, social and personal costs which will follow.

It is a fact that the countries with the lowest youth unemployment rates have the strongest links between education and work. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that the percentage of pupils in upper secondary education who are taking vocational courses in the United Kingdom is 32 per cent, and the youth unemployment rate is 21 per cent. In the Netherlands the figures are 67 per cent and 10 per cent; in Norway 54 per cent and 9 per cent. There is strong evidence from other youth training systems in Europe to demonstrate that balance and parity in our school system can be achieved. We can do much better. Above all, we need to set much higher aspirations for our system, raising the expectations of employers, providers and young people through arrangements that provide more young people with routes to high quality education. We need to embed skills in our system much more efficiently and effectively than we have done before if we are to deliver opportunities for what Labour has called the 'Forgotten 50 per cent' - those young people who currently do not enjoy a clear, high quality vocational route through education.

In earlier reports, we have explored critical ingredients of an effective training system: a successful apprenticeship system and a refocused further education system. These are indeed important ingredients, but it is also important to explore the place of qualifications and curriculum provision in relation to overall effectiveness of the system. This paper does that. It tries to sketch out a realistic and deliverable strategy for radically improving the efficiency, effectiveness and usability of our 14-19 qualifications and curriculum structure through practical measures that can make a credible and real difference to the quality of provision available to young people. There are many good things about our system. But we do not have a great or reliably effective system because we have not thought hard enough about how the system as a whole works together.

14-19 matters. It matters because it is the phase of education that most clearly addresses critical issues: the transition to adulthood, the transition from school to work, the opportunity to make life-changing choices. In most countries, 14 or 15 to 19 education is treated as a distinct stage - 'upper secondary' education. It is the phase when, within an overall common framework, pathways emerge for learners and they are supported, through the institutional curriculum and qualifications system, to make choices which will enable them to negotiate an ever more complex labour market. We need to do better for learners in upper secondary. We need to offer young people - all young people - a new deal through a qualifications and curriculum system which should have five core elements:

1. High standards and rigour for all
2. Clearly signposted routes to success which allow progression to further study and work
3. Opportunities to experience the world of work
4. Strong vocational and academic pathways that are valued by employers

5. High quality careers information, advice and guidance

2: The case for change

Current practice includes some outstanding qualifications, which are widely respected across the world, command credibility with students, parents, employers and higher education and that are rigorous. 'A'-levels are widely regarded as providing an excellent basis for progression to advanced study in universities, whilst the more recently adopted and developed International Baccalaureate and Pre-U programmes are widely regarded as providing rigorous assessment frameworks which engage, motivate and stretch many able young people. Moreover, recent developments such as the AQA Bacc have demonstrated that it is possible to enrich and extend existing academic qualifications to provide more rounded and coherent learning programmes.

But the real and undeniable strengths should not obscure serious problems in our overall qualifications structure. There are two main problems: the first is that for those young people who do not secure good level 2 [GCSE] qualifications at first sitting, the qualifications framework is confused, fragmented and poorly signposted. For the high academic attainer on what has been called the 'royal route' from GCSE through A-levels to University, progression is clear¹. For almost everyone else - including the 45 per cent of young people who do not get a Grade C or above in Mathematics GCSE - there is simply no clarity and very few clear structures. This cannot be right. It means that far from providing a ladder of opportunity, our qualification system is letting down almost half our young people.

We can and should further drive up success rates at Level 2 at the age of 16, but we should not fool ourselves that this, on its own, will do what is needed: in 1993, 54 per cent of young people did not secure a C or better in GCSE Mathematics. In other words, twenty years of hard work, under three different governments using a range of different strategies, has made only a marginal difference. We need a better approach: an approach which delivers rigour and credibility for all, and not just for higher attainers. Too often in this country, we have assumed that rigour is a characteristic only of academically highly challenging qualifications: it is not. Rigour, quality and standards are important for all learners: a common framework which makes sense for all and to all. The evidence internationally is stark: it is possible to design education systems which provide challenge for all, whether for high attainers or lower attainers, and across academic, general and professional domains. As the OECD's Andreas Schleicher puts it "You have two choices. You can go in to the race to the bottom with China, lowering wages for low-skill jobs. Or you can try to win in innovation and competitiveness."

Secondly, at key decision points in their academic career, young people face "cliff edge" decisions which automatically close off some options for them. The choices young people make at 14, at 16 and at 19 are important for them and it is important that they make the right choices. But because of the poor articulation between different qualifications, the consequences of making a wrong choice - or of changing your mind (something which is endemic amongst teenagers!) - can be devastating for young people. This is expensive and foolish. It is made worse by the ways in which incentive arrangements in schools and colleges can lead them to provide sub-optimal advice to young people: the 11-18 secondary school which is keen to secure the viability of its sixth form rather than to offer the best advice to young people, or the 11-16 secondary school which considers its job is done at the

¹ But even here, our system works on the assumption that the 'royal route' is always the right route for those on it. There are other highly successful systems, such as Switzerland, where advanced vocational routes are the norm for high flyers.

end of Year 11 rather than seeing a continuing responsibility to young people. In all these cases, a system which delivers for some does not deliver for others. Given the challenges we face as a country, we cannot tolerate such a system: our qualifications system must deliver for all.

Currently, too many young people who reach the threshold level of competency in English and Mathematics - in 2013 over 200,000 sixteen year olds secured a GCSE C in Mathematics and the same number in English- do not continue to study Mathematics or English. Their grade C GCSEs probably do not equip them to thrive at A-level, but there are few alternative qualifications. Too many abandon English and Mathematics but their skills are not secure. Given the often confusing labyrinth of qualifications and courses, young people - and perhaps especially those at the lower end of the attainment range - need high quality and effective careers education, counselling and guidance. They do not get it.

At root, the problem is that our system does not signpost success; does not provide effective progression for the majority of young people and only offers rigour and stretch for a higher attaining minority. To be clear: we can and we should raise standards and expectations for those who are currently performing just below threshold levels, but we need something much more ambitious: a qualifications system which delivers progression routes for all and rigour for all. It is all too easy, looking at our present qualifications system, to conclude that the interests of half of our young people, the "forgotten 50 per cent", are neglected by an examination system which focuses on just some of the needs of some young people.

Bob Schwartz, from Harvard's Graduate School of Education captured this well in the Pathways to Prosperity report, which excoriated an American education system which had devoted vast efforts to preparing school leavers for college but had singularly failed to address the real needs of young people and the economy:

"One of the most fundamental obligations of any society is to prepare its adolescents and young adults to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults. This means preparing all young people with a solid enough foundation of literacy, numeracy, and thinking skills for responsible citizenship, career development, and lifelong learning....Yet as we end the first decade of the 21st century, there are profoundly troubling signs that the U.S. is now failing to meet its obligation to prepare millions of young adults. In an era in which education has never been more important to economic success, there is... growing evidence of a "skills gap" in which many young adults lack the skills and work ethic needed for many jobs"².

He could have been writing about England.

3: Learning from experience

The past thirty years are littered with examples of attempts to reform post fourteen qualifications. We have known for a long time about the problems. In different ways and at different times governments have made significant progress. The Government was right to accept recommendations from the 2011 Wolf Report, bringing clarity to many vocational qualifications. But the underlying problems have not been solved. There are many reasons for this. The 14-19 education and training landscape is institutionally complex, with different

² http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/features/2011/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011.pdf

funding and accountability arrangements. We do not have a 14-19 system, and unlike many countries do not have a clearly articulated approach to upper secondary education. The labour and higher education markets into which upper secondary provision feeds are changing very rapidly. The needs of young people are different and varied.

In the past government has tended to see the problem of 14-19 reform as a system reform problem and has sought to design centrally driven solutions to the problem. But this is almost certainly mistaken. Given the complexity, and given the very high degree of institutional autonomy rightly enjoyed by further education institutions and schools, a different approach is needed - one which is more sensitive to the complexity of our system, which recognises the areas of strength which already exist and which has a greater chance of real success. This is the approach we adopt here: not a centralist wholesale reform, but one which encourages innovation and development within a common overall framework for all learners

4: A new deal for qualifications

Bringing about effective change in a complex system with multiple objectives is difficult. It demands two things:

- a clear over-arching vision of what a successful, coherent upper secondary system looks like,
- practical, deliverable steps which will move us, over time and with confidence towards such a vision

The Skills Task Force is clear that the key priority for government is to bring about sustained and effective change which improves the life chances of young people. Our view is that this involves refashioning the system around the real needs of learners in the context of a rapidly changing labour market. Effective change depends on deliverability rather than grand schemes. We therefore outline fifteen specific commitments, in six keys areas, which are realistically achievable within the first term of a new government.

4.1. The Technical Baccalaureate and Qualifications.

At the core of our proposals is a new framework for English qualifications - a genuine baccalaureate structure, which provides an over-arching framework for both recognising and rewarding learner achievement and for improving progression beyond school.

As we have stated, there are good features of the English qualifications regime which meet the needs of some young people and some stakeholders. However, the evidence we have seen suggests that there are also many weaknesses. In 2012 Labour announced plans to introduce a Technical Baccalaureate to provide a structured route for young people pursuing vocational and technical qualifications. The Skills Taskforce was asked to build on those plans and embed them within an enhanced 14-19 system. Since we began work, much has happened. Government has also announced plans for a Tech Bacc and 'Tech Levels'; there has been extensive work on the structure of general qualifications in response to government reform; other groups have explored the idea of a 'Mod Bacc'; the Headteachers' Roundtable has made progress with its work on refashioning the framework of existing qualifications. City and Guilds have developed yet another model, which extends thinking about how

qualifications change might work. All this work enables us to stand back and take a hard look at the idea.

The term 'baccalaureate', although it is becoming more familiar in English education, is not widely recognised or used. In England, school qualifications are taken separately - students complete a GCSE in English, or a BTEC Diploma in Engineering, or an A-level in Mathematics. The qualifications are treated and reported separately. A 'baccalaureate' - which is the norm in many continental countries - is based on a different approach. A 'baccalaureate' combines different elements of learning into a single qualification, which is reported as a single outcome yet profiles the different elements. Although the English approach has great flexibility, a baccalaureate has several advantages: it provides more easily signposted routes through learning and offers a more coherent and balanced route for learners. Choice is exercised within the learning programme rather than between different learning programmes.

Our view is now clear: there is a powerful case to be made for a Technical Baccalaureate to provide overall structure for too often disjointed vocational provision, to ensure breadth and quality in learning programmes and to provide greater visibility and status for the range of learning undertaken. But we would go further. The Technical Baccalaureate should be part of a wider, coherent and flexible framework, which provides a structure for recognising and assuring the learning of all young people. On its own, there is a risk that a Tech Bacc could become disconnected from the wider 14-19 system. As part of a flexible but coherent framework however, the Tech Bacc would provide a way of recognising technical and applied learning.

The Tech Bacc should therefore be part of a wider framework of skills, knowledge and experience; a new 'National Baccalaureate' which all young people should undertake and which recognises learning and progression across the 14-19 phase. Gold standard technical Learning for students not pursuing an academic A level route should be accredited and integrated with a common core of skills and extra-curricular activity also undertaken by young people studying A levels. This shared, flexible framework would provide a new rigorous and comprehensive overall structure for all learners, more coherent qualifications for employers and be easier for schools and colleges to manage.

Our vision is compelling and simple, but a good deal flows from it. We believe that an aspirational qualifications system should encourage and drive all young people to continue to achieve and build on their skills throughout their upper secondary education and it should reward real success.

The components of the National Bacc framework therefore need to be based on some strong design principles:

- It should be inclusive - so that all, or almost all, have a realistic chance of achieving at some level.
- It should be rigorous and stretching at all levels - whether for the highest attainers, or for those who struggle.
- It should provide clearly articulated routes into further study or work - employer 'buy-in' to this framework is therefore crucial, we need to ensure it is easily understood by employers and that they are engaged in its design.
- It should be flexible, allowing schools to shape the framework to suit the needs of their pupils, the local labour market and the wider community.

Too often, recent developments in vocational education have not had these characteristics. As a result, both employers and learners have been short changed.

These are tough challenges to meet. Over the last three years, however, a number of providers and groups have begun to develop a range of models. They include the AQA bacc, which wraps around conventional A-levels, the City and Guilds tecbac, the Welsh bac, the DFE TechBacc performance measure, the Headteachers' Roundtable Bacc, the Mod bacc, the IBCC and the Sixth form College Bacc. We draw several conclusions from this: first, the *idea* of an overarching baccalaureate is now centre stage in upper secondary policy development. This is a good thing - and relatively new. Secondly, that there are models and structures out in the field and in a devolved and autonomous education system this is to be welcomed. We now need to ensure that there are common standards and common language across all routes so all young people receive the benefit. We believe that a 14-19 framework should encompass four elements which all young people would undertake:

1. Core learning, including GCSEs, A 'levels and accredited vocational qualifications	2. Mathematics and English
3. Personal Skills Development	4. An extended study or project

We believe that these four ingredients provide a simple and compelling structure for the over-arching baccalaureate at all levels for all students; those on academic and vocational tracks, high achievers and those needing extra support. This framework would ensure all young people undertake accredited qualifications offering progression into further study, an apprenticeship or employment. It would involve all young people continuing to study English and Maths, regardless of their prior achievement; all young people developing their character, personal development and employability skills; and all young people undertaking an extended programme, in line with the International Bacc and the upper secondary experience offered by independent schools. This extended programme would demonstrate the analytical, team working and creativity skills, desired by all good universities and employers.

So a student might undertake core learning made up of 3 A-levels, advanced study in Mathematics and English - which for some students may be embedded in the core learning qualifications, e.g. in a physics A' Level - a personal development programme which could include community service, digital literacy and work related learning, and an extended personal study. Another student may undertake core learning in a vocational programme, for example a BTEC in Engineering, in which the Mathematics might be embedded but the English provided separately, a personal development programme and an extended workplace study. The National Baccalaureate should provide an entitlement for all: a universal framework for upper secondary education.

Rigour and clarity are important. We believe that some current baccalaureate models now being used by a number of state and private schools, including the Government's proposed Tech Bacc performance measure lack ambition, and are too narrow. They do not have the range which the four component structure sketched above has and will therefore not adequately meet the challenges of the modern labour market nor ensure we improve and modernise our education system to compete with the best systems in the world. We should resist baccalaureate models which lack ambition and cater for minimum expectations. Such models will fall into the all-too-frequent trap of vocational education in this country. Instead we need to extend the possibilities available to young people and raise their aspirations.

For this reason we outline some clear design expectations for our National Baccalaureate. On our model, the National Bacc would be available in two versions - a general baccalaureate

or a technical baccalaureate. The National Bacc would be awarded to learners at 18 - that is, it would recognise and accredit a range of skills, knowledge and extra-curricular learning achieved up to the age of 18. Under Labour's Raising the Participation Age legislation all young people should stay in education or training up to 18 by 2015, so this proposal will ensure this extra time spent learning will be meaningful. Our expectation is that the National Baccalaureate would be a Level 3 qualification - so encompassing a core learning component equivalent to three A-levels, or to 1080 hours of guided learning developed through a robust vocational or technical qualification.

However, we recognise that not all 18 year olds would achieve at a level 3. For these young people their achievement could be assessed against the elements required to achieve a full baccalaureate at age 18 and a restricted or intermediate baccalaureate could be awarded to those achieving at level 2 (GCSE standard). These young people would have achieved many things - and these could be recorded in a transcript, but they would not have achieved the requirements for the full National Bacc. They would, if they or their employers or training providers wish, be able to continue with further training or study for subsequent assessment against the baccalaureate requirements. The baccalaureate would thus be an exit qualification for all from upper secondary education and training.

The baccalaureate would be scored: that is, students would emerge with a grade or mark. It will be for providers, regulated by OFQUAL, to set out their approach to grading, though we have a strong preference for an agreed national approach: GCSE assessment has gained currency because all providers are required to assess against common grades, so that an A from one awarding body is equivalent to an A from another awarding body.

We believe that a sensible approach would be to profile separately against the four elements and to combine into a single over-arching grade. Advice we have received from awarding bodies is that aggregation of grades would need to be modelled correctly but we believe that properly done such an approach to grading could rapidly produce a simple and understandable approach to recognising achievement. Selective universities would be able to specify performance in some of the four elements of the National Baccalaureate, and selective employers might specify particular minimum scores.

We recognise that in an autonomous and devolved education system, in which developmental resources are constrained, implementing a baccalaureate structure is not straightforward. We believe, however, that a clear and coherent structure set out nationally could and would incentivise the recent positive developments. We would expect that, as a condition of public funding, all providers should be required to work towards providing a baccalaureate for their learners against the four design components set out above, leading to level 3 achievement. They would be at liberty to choose their baccalaureate provider from the models currently under development - provided the models met the simple design principles.

We recommend that

- (1) An exit qualification for all learners from upper secondary education be developed as a National Baccalaureate available as either a technical baccalaureate or a general baccalaureate.
- (2) The National Baccalaureate be based on four learning domains: core learning (qualifications such as A' levels or accredited vocational qualifications), Mathematics and English, a personal skills development programme and an extended project

- (3) All schools and colleges should be required to offer a National Baccalaureate which conforms to agreed design principles
- (4) The National Baccalaureate should be a formal award at level 3 for young people to take on to universities, an apprenticeship or into employment. It will not simply be a performance or league table measure
- (5) An intermediate level baccalaureate will be available for young people achieving at level 2 which will demonstrate skills and learning to employers and allow for later progression to level 3

4.2: Helping young people make the right choices and ensuring they progress.

At the moment, put at its simplest, the students with the lowest level of resources (in all senses) have the most complicated routes to navigate in terms of education leading to employment. This is both unjust and unsustainable. It is imperative that government plans for more effective transitions and helps learners and institutions navigate their way through course structures, provider partnerships and qualifications systems. A key priority - which is identified as a marker of good and effective upper secondary systems by the OECD - is to establish a robust, independent framework for Information, Advice and Guidance. Schools themselves are simply unable to provide the sort of guidance which young people need, and given the other pressures on them are never likely to give it the priority it needs.

In our work we have been struck by the massive unanimity around the importance of Information, Advice and Guidance. The consensus is overwhelming: good, effective, independent advice and guidance is essential. OECD reaches the same view, and goes further. Their argument is that given the massive complexity of the contemporary labour market, no upper secondary system can be truly effective without an independent advice and guidance function, staffed by appropriately trained professionals.

There is good evidence that employers can play a strong role in careers advice - City and Guilds found that 88 per cent of 16-19 year olds believed that employers were the most useful source of careers advice, and there is every reason to suppose that technology can supplement good careers advice. However, none of this should detract from the core issue: that high quality, independent careers advice by appropriately trained professionals is critical in helping young people, and particularly those at risk, in negotiating the transition from education to work.

We believe that the most effective way of securing such advice is to commission Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to ensure local delivery of an advice service against a set of coherent national standards. LEPs should make plain the responsibilities of education providers and employers locally in the provision of effective careers education, advice and guidance. LEPs understand their local labour market and we would encourage them, working with education providers locally, to share that knowledge with schools and to ensure all young people have access to quality, independent advice on the options open to them, including apprenticeships. This will require LEPs and schools to build strong relationships so they can work together to commission good IAG services for their area and so employers can access schools to offer advice, mentoring and to generate more opportunities for workplace learning. Schools, working in clusters, should inform the LEP of the support they need to offer balanced IAG to their students and the LEP should then take the lead in helping to source and deliver that.

We anticipate that some, but certainly not all, of the demand for IAG can be met by effective use of information technology packages, and, of course, young people routinely source information from the web and social media. But we should not under-estimate the task facing young people who are negotiating entry to the labour market or choosing further study. The needs of many young people cannot be met simply by sourcing information electronically. Although the information component of IAG can to some extent be provided through effective technology packages, we do not believe that advice and certainly not guidance can be so provided. The National Careers Service should be refocused to play a much bigger role in advice for young people - focusing almost completely on adults is missing an opportunity to set young people on the right career track early in their lives. The National Careers Service should therefore be charged with setting out an over-arching framework for 14-19 IAG, which allows for local variation, is underpinned by local delivery and which sets out what a good IAG offer for young people looks like.

Subscription to the local IAG service could either be compulsory as a condition of operating as a 14-19 provider of education, or could be provided on an opt-out basis so that individual schools or colleges could opt out if they wished. Our view is that provided the service is properly structured, with strong employer engagement, and its advisers properly trained with a relevant professional qualification, then schools and others will wish to buy into it.

We are keenly aware however, of the pressures on public funding. We believe that the pattern of need and demand for effective IAG will vary between different learning providers, with those schools with higher incidences of NEETs in their area more in need of intensive careers advice and guidance for students. We also believe that there is a need for schools and colleges to take seriously their long term responsibilities to learners - what happens to them once they have made their choices. These two issues are clearly linked - good IAG can be a very effective way to reduce the numbers of NEETs. We have a problem with the numbers of NEETs in this country, with over a million young people not in education, employment or training. This amounts to a national crisis and is storing up huge problems for the future.

We therefore recommend that there should be an obligation on schools to track the destinations of their students until they are 'handed over' to another provider: another school, a college, a training provider, an employer or a university. This obligation should be statutory, but it should be given practical force through an element of funding for pupils in year 11 being conditional on young people being registered for the next stage of their learning. We understand that some schools will fight shy of such an obligation, but we believe that all schools have a moral obligation not just to prepare students for the next stage of their lives, but actively to hold responsibility for them.

The funding withheld from schools which do not successfully progress a pupil on to their next step should be reallocated to support the IAG service for that school. At the local level, the LEP should be required to work with schools and employers to invest that retained portion of per pupil funding on delivering an enhanced IAG offer to the school. This would act as a preventative measure to help reduce the numbers of NEETs coming out of that school - giving young people better advice will help them make the right choices and continue to progress in education and training. There is a considerable volume of evidence to suggest that good IAG is linked to lower numbers of NEETS, including from the Work Foundation³ and the OECD.

³ <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports/320/Raising-aspirations-and-smoothing-transitions>

Schools are rightly proud of the successes of their former students. They understandably celebrate and publicise the successes of former students who go on to achieve great things academically at university or on the sports field. But too little attention is paid to those who are less successful and therefore need extra support. In too many cases, their destinations may be unknown and these young people are vulnerable to becoming NEET. It is unacceptable that students get lost in the system and that it is no-one's responsibility when a student leaves school but doesn't turn up somewhere else.

There should not be an additional burden on schools to collect destination data as the existing Key Stage 4 destination measure provides data on the destinations of young people in the year following compulsory schooling. Data linkage between the National Pupil Database, the Individual Learner Record, the National Client Caseload Information Systems and the Higher Education Statistics Agency enables government to identify the trajectories of young people.

The purpose of making a proportion of per pupil funding conditional is simply to reward schools for the successful transfer of their Year 11 students into education or training and flag that schools' responsibilities do not cease on the last day of term. We believe that such an obligation in itself would incentivise collaboration between schools and colleges in the interests of young people. Our proposal would be to set the level of withheld funding at a level which drives institutional behaviour so we suggest an approach based on withholding 10 per cent of per pupil funding for every young person who fails to secure a next step, but this proportion will need testing and modelling.

One feature of our proposal is that, of course, any withheld funding is withheld in arrears. However, this is already a feature of post-16 funding and it is, therefore, not new: schools and colleges are already familiar with the principle. It would also ensure that where a problem with NEETs is identified in a school, it is hopefully not repeated as the pupils the following year will have access to better IAG due to the funding being withheld and then re-allocated to it. The effects of this measure should be monitored to ensure young people are placed on courses appropriate to their needs. If evidence emerges that this is, in some cases, not happening then government should examine a subsequent measure based on withholding funding from post-16 providers where a young person does not complete their course and drops out of education and training before they turn 19.

Upper secondary education - 14-19 provision - is institutionally extremely complex, and it is becoming more complex as university technical colleges and studio schools develop and as further education colleges consider provision for 14-16 year olds. There is widespread concern that institutional complexity will be socially regressive and will embed what are often social distinctions between providers, with a perceived hierarchy from most to least prestigious. We recognise this danger. However, we have also been struck by examples of local innovation and high quality, notably in some of the early university technical colleges where imaginative curriculum design, highly applied pedagogy and challenging real world assessment tasks have motivated learners, producing good or outstanding results and low levels of drop out.

Our view is that institutional competition can drive innovation and diversity and should be a feature of a strategically planned local education and training infrastructure. However, we have also seen evidence of the downsides of local competition: pointlessly replicated provision, inefficient deployment of resources, over-supply of some core provision and gaps in specialist provision. We believe that government has a role in securing the local educational infrastructure which delivers for young people. For this reason, we recommend that government introduce a statutory responsibility on all education and training providers

in receipt of public funds to collaborate in course provision and the presentation of information in the best interests of children and young people.

Labour has announced its intention to introduce a new middle tier in the education system to oversee standards and intervene in underperformance. We therefore recommend that a core function of this middle tier should be to support and where schools are not doing so organically, to broker collaboration between and within schools and colleges to ensure that schools are fulfilling their duty in this regard.

In summary, then, we propose:

- (6) A responsibility on schools to track the destinations of all students, and an element funding conditional on passing learners onto the next stage of their education or training post-16
- (7) LEPS to broker high quality and independent Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) locally, working with schools and employers, supported by funding withheld from schools who fail to secure a next step in education or training for their pupils
- (8) A new statutory responsibility for schools and colleges to collaborate with one another to share resources, build opportunities for young people and deliver a comprehensive upper secondary framework, including a Tech Bacc for vocational learners.

4.3. Mathematics and English to 18

Success in literacy and numeracy are key predictors for future success. Our current record is very poor indeed: of those young people who fail to secure Level 2 in English or Mathematics at the age of 16, only about one in seven will go on to secure it by the age of 18. Moreover, Professor Jeremy Hodgen's study for the Nuffield Foundation was sobering in its findings. In the 24 countries studied,

"England, Wales and Northern Ireland had the lowest levels of participation in upper secondary Mathematics. They were the only countries in which fewer than 20 per cent of upper secondary students study maths. In the majority of countries surveyed (18 out of 24), at least 50 per cent of upper secondary students study maths.... England, Wales and Northern Ireland also have comparatively low rates of participation in advanced Mathematics (equivalent to AS Level). England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are four of only six countries that do not require compulsory participation in Mathematics at upper secondary for any students".

Hodgen found that Mathematics is compulsory in all other countries surveyed for at least some students in general or vocational education. Internationally, our track record at the age of 16 is not especially poor. But what makes the difference between England and higher performing jurisdictions is the effectiveness with which other systems ensure that almost all learners reach the equivalent of high school graduation levels in English and Mathematics by the age of 19.

The complexity of our qualifications structure exacerbates difficulties. The Royal Academy of Engineering's analysis of FE and Skill sector STEM data in 2011 found that "some learners may be taking qualifications below the level they have already achieved whilst others are taking no Mathematics or numeracy beyond 16". They also found that, the number of

qualifications fluctuates very significantly from year to year suggesting that provision is particularly responsive to institutional factors, other than student demand or need (e.g. funding, targets or league tables).

Labour announced in 2012 that it wanted all young people to undertake English and Maths to 18. The terms of reference for the Skills Task Force were clear that we should recommend how best to implement this policy. We wholeheartedly endorse this proposition and we are also clear that attainment at Level 2 - the current GCSE Grade C - should not be regarded as a satisfactory terminal achievement in Mathematics, which, once attained, allows young people to drop Mathematics. If this is the approach taken, we will devise bad policy. It is one unsatisfactory feature of current policy that the rhetoric is all too often focused on the argument that learners must continue to study Mathematics and English until they have gained at least Level 2 (GCSE C). But this argument simply fails to engage with the complexity of the evidence: a majority of young people do achieve Mathematics at level 2, and of those a majority drop it at sixteen. Ceasing to study Mathematics and English once a level 2 has been achieved will not deliver the standards of core skills our labour market requires - we need these young people to continue to build these skills.

The large *minority* of young people who do *not* get level 2 are unlikely to be strongly motivated by the requirement to do well in a subject they have hitherto struggled with. Jeremy Hodgen's follow up research was clear: high levels of participation in Mathematics are not simply driven by compulsion. Other factors, he argues, such as providing appropriate options for all students and the breadth of the post-16 curriculum in general, are associated with high levels of participation. A further feature of the national debate is the tendency for discussion to conflate 'numeracy' with 'Mathematics'. Our view is that the obligation nationally should be on Mathematics, not numeracy: it is important that learners continue to engage with Mathematics, its application and with Mathematical thinking if they are to remain, or to become, adept users of Mathematics.

Other countries have made a difference, albeit more at the upper levels of the attainment distribution. In Singapore, participation has increased following a requirement for students to choose a contrasting subject equivalent in size to an AS level, so arts and humanities students must take a science or Mathematics option and vice versa. New Zealand has increased participation by offering students an alternative Mathematics option focused on fluency, statistics and the application of Mathematics. This contrasts with England, where although other qualifications exist, the only widely available option is AS which is not the most appropriate route for all students. We need to change this so that there are English and Maths options available to complement a student's core qualifications up to 18 and form one of the four components of our National Baccalaureate as described in section one above. Our assumption is that the introduction of the requirement will produce new level 3 English and Mathematics programmes, slim and designed for National Baccalaureate delivery so we do not expect a reduction in time for core learning.

There will be a cost to providing English and Mathematics for all through to 18. However, we should be realistic about what can be achieved. We recognise that it will be easier for providers to deliver entitlement English and Mathematics to age 18 for students who are already above level 2 thresholds, and we recognise that some existing qualifications deliver sufficient Mathematics or English as a routine part of their provision - so the requirement to continue to study English and Mathematics should not involve new provision in all settings for all learners as some will already be studying these core subjects. Indeed, guidance to OFQUAL on qualification development could be used further to develop the Mathematical and English component of existing qualifications. However, over time, and as resources

allow, awarding bodies and training providers should work towards ensuring that all young people continue Mathematics and English to 18. For those who achieve Level 2 before they are 18, further study should be at level 3; for those who do not we should expect that level 2 attainment will be demonstrated in an appropriate applied context.

We recommend that

- (9) We should expect all learners to continue to study English and Mathematics throughout their education participation, up to 18, as one of the four components of our National Baccalaureate. This will make significant contributions to progression opportunities as these skills are needed in all careers and in further study and training.
- (10) Government should commission alternative Mathematics programmes at Levels 2 and 3 which focus on using and applying Mathematics, so that students are extending their learning in Mathematics but in contextual and real world of work settings.

4.4. Building wider skills - the Personal Development programme

One of the key functions of upper secondary education is to attend to young people's wider personal development as well as their academic development. In most other countries, training providers in whatever context - including in workplace settings - are required to supplement skills training with a wider educational programme. Wider skills matter: Angela Duckworth, from the University of Pennsylvania, stresses the importance of 'grit' and 'resilience' in driving success for learners in any setting.

In preparation for the development of new 14-19 programme, City and Guilds have conducted extensive research with employers, HE and FE providers and learners which has reinforced the importance of this wider learning to a young person's preparedness for employment and their success in the workplace. The result is a clear need for our National Baccalaureate programme to engage in additional skills including self-organisation, working with others, commercial awareness, digital literacy and thinking skills. The programme should also include a requirement to take part in a work or community placement.

It is our view that transition to adulthood, and transition to employment, require attention to personal development as well as to skills and academic development. We argue, therefore, that within any provision, wherever it is located, all learners should have opportunities for personal development. What this means, in practice, is that all learners on applied or vocational programmes should not only undertake core learning in specialised areas related to their specialism, and continue to study Mathematics and English but should also have access to a wider programme which includes access to IAG, digital literacy, physical and/or outdoor education, community service and/or work based learning.

'Work experience' has a mixed record. In the recent Making Education Work Report, a City and Guilds survey reported that 71 per cent of over 1000 employers surveyed believed that work experience should be compulsory for 6-19 year olds. Over three quarters said they believed that work experience made young people more employable and over half said that they had given a young person full time employment following a work experience placement. In the long run, we will not address our deep seated issues about the status of vocational and applied learning without a coherent and thorough approach to work based learning. In

practice, however, the evidence is not strong on the quality of work experience placements, nor their real usefulness in programmes of study.

Too often, work experience has been tacked on, poorly followed up and the learning ill-developed. We can do better. We believe that we can begin by changing the way we think about what is intended. Work experience should be replaced by workplace learning as an entitlement for all young people between 14-19: the focus should be on what is to be learnt, not what is to be experienced. Workplace learning could be acquired in a range of ways - through a short and intensive placement or through extended or regular placements. Either way there must be flexibility to meet the needs of the young person and to make the most of opportunities created locally. There are many different schemes which can provide access to workplace learning, such as opportunities presented by the Duke of Edinburgh award schemes and Young Enterprise programmes.

All the components of a personal development programme should be cast in terms of the skills they foster, and the ways in which they complement and extend the specialist learning which underpins the student's programme: a personal development programme for a student on an advanced humanities programme leading to A-levels will look different from a personal development programme for a student on an applied digital technology programme. The ways in which these should be offered will be a matter for the provider, but we are clear that all providers must deliver a personal development programme of quality, subject to inspection by OFSTED.

We recommend that

- (11) All learners should have an entitlement to an appropriately planned and designed personal skills development programme. The quality of these programmes should be inspected by Ofsted.
- (12) Workplace learning should be an integral component of such a programme

4.5. KS4 Accountability Measures.

There is strong evidence that accountability drives behaviour in schools and colleges. There is therefore also strong evidence that changes to accountability regimes drive changes which impact on children and young people. Over the last twenty-five years, the deployment of accountability measures across the school system has made managers much more aware of their performance in relation to young people's outcomes. There is a widespread view that accountability measures have often had the perverse effect of narrowing the of focus of managers so that they focus on what can be measured rather than what is important: our view is that what is important is that education providers, and the system in which they operate, have a moral, social and economic obligation to prepare young people with a rounded set of skills and attributes which prepares them to enter adult life as confident, articulate, responsible young citizens. The most recent changes to the Key Stage 4 accountability system are a step in the right direction and may eliminate some of the perverse incentives in the conventional 5A-C model. We believe that Labour should seek to avoid further changes to accountability and performance measures regarding qualifications at KS4 or KS5, in order to allow schools and colleges to plan on the basis of stability.

Recent changes to the accountability system, and especially the Progress 8 measure have revealed weaknesses in other elements of the accountability system, and especially the EBacc measure. The EBacc has never, in the technical sense been a baccalaureate. However, as a fundamental point of curriculum principle, we believe that it is strongly in the

interests of young people, of employers and of society to embed in the accountability system a strong commitment to a balanced curriculum. The UK has an exceptional reputation in arts, culture and digital media. It makes good economic sense - as well as good educational sense - to align our education system with what works for Britain. Schools and colleges can and should have a strong arts curriculum, and the accountability framework should positively incentivise them to do so. We recommend that Labour should therefore monitor schools response to the new Progress 8 measure and the continuing existence of the EBacc and track the effect on take up of the arts and vocational qualifications.

High quality post-16 provision is currently under threat from funding changes which will impact from 2015 onwards. The Government has adopted one sensible innovation - the progressive equalisation of funding between different providers - but used it to drive down the price of provision. The consequence is that many non-standard programmes which meet student needs will become unaffordable for post-16 providers. These include the International baccalaureate and extended A-level programmes which provide opportunities for the highest attainers to study more than three A-levels. Minority or specialist provision in post-16 will become increasingly unaffordable. Curriculum breadth and richness will become the preserve of either the private sector or for those parents able or willing to pay. Money is tight. However, government needs to commit to preserve specialist and advanced provision where it is of high quality. It needs to do this by requiring providers of post-16 education and training to collaborate to produce efficiencies in the provision of specialist programmes, with a small, targeted central fund to which consortia could submit bids for non-standard programmes.

We recommend that

- (13) Labour should seek to avoid further changes to accountability measures at KS4 or KS5 for the next five years.
- (14) Labour should withhold some funding to support schools and colleges collaborating to maintain specialist post-16 provision for high achievers. This should be provided efficiently by sharing resources between education providers at the local level.

4.6. Improving the machinery of government.

Government has always struggled with skills. They sit at the intersection of education, training and employment. John Major's Government merged the Department of Education and the Department of Employment. In 1997, New Labour largely accepted the arrangement and then, in 2001 renamed the Department the Department for Education and Skills. The DFES oversaw all education, training and skills including early years, schools, further education and higher education. In 2007, Gordon Brown revamped the department, emphasising social policy relationships for schools in the Department of Children, Schools and Families, but removing higher education and skills to the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills. DIUS was subsequently merged into the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, a merger which the coalition has accepted.

These are difficult areas for public policy. Under the current machinery of government arrangements, skills are separated from mainstream education. There are enormous advantages to having business, universities and science as the concern of a single government department, but there are downsides too: the skills and universities components of BIS are relatively small in relation to the department's wider focus on business, competitiveness and regulation. At the same time, further education sits

uncomfortably between DfE and BIS. Universities have been explicit that they see advantages in locating advanced skill formation and research in a context which in theory allows it to be articulated with industrial and regional policy. But the separation of skills from qualifications oversight and the supply chain from schools seems to us to be a matter of serious concern.

We believe that government needs to address this as a matter of urgency in planning for the machinery of government after the next election. We accept that there are arguments against structural reform of government - few re-arrangements are effective. We believe that any incoming government should reflect carefully on the optimum arrangements to meet multiple goals - but it needs to be realistic that the current machinery of government is not optimal for embedding high level skill development across government. For this reason, and accepting the strong arguments in favour of current arrangements, we believe that government should make a cabinet level appointment to skills operating between the two existing departments, with a much higher status in both departments. A cabinet minister for skills and qualifications would give a very strong message across government that skills matter.

We recommend that

- (15) If the current machinery of government is retained, a single cabinet level appointment for skills and qualifications reform should be made

5. Conclusion: a system for all learners

This is our third, and final, report. Over the course of our three reports we have set out a comprehensive programme of proposals which will improve the quality and range of education and training provision for all young people. Our concern has principally been with the "forgotten 50 per cent", the biggest educational challenge we currently face, but our proposals have led us to pose questions, and suggest practical policy interventions which will improve the quality of learning and the outcomes for all. This matters. It matters because the quality of education and training we offer to young people as they make the transition from education to employment will affect their lives. It matters because at the moment we waste far too much talent - talent we can ill afford to waste. It matters because the economy of the future depends on the skills preparation we can offer today.

The weaknesses in our upper secondary education system are not of recent origin. They have deep-seated economic, educational, institutional and cultural roots. We have set out practical and deliverable steps which will make a real difference - a difference to the economy; a difference to society, and, above all, a difference to young people

Summary of recommendations

The Skills Taskforce recommends that:

- (1) An exit qualification for all learners from upper secondary education be developed as a National Bacculaureate available as either a technical bacculaureate or a general bacculaureate.
- (2) The National Bacculaureate be based on four learning domains: core learning (qualifications such as A' levels or accredited vocational qualifications), Mathematics and English, a personal skills development programme and an extended project
- (3) All schools and colleges should be required to offer a National Bacculaureate which conforms to agreed design principles
- (4) The National Bacculaureate should be a formal award at level 3 for young people to take on to universities, an apprenticeship or into employment. It will not simply be a performance or league table measure
- (5) An intermediate level bacculaureate will be available for young people achieving at level 2 which will demonstrate skills and learning to employers and allow for later progression to level 3
- (6) A responsibility on schools to track the destinations of all students, and an element funding conditional on passing learners onto the next stage of their education or training post-16
- (7) LEPS to broker high quality and independent Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) locally, working with schools and employers, supported by funding withheld from schools who fail to secure a next step in education or training for their pupils
- (8) A new statutory responsibility for schools and colleges to collaborate with one another to share resources, build opportunities for young people and deliver a comprehensive upper secondary framework, including a Tech Bacc for vocational learners.
- (9) We should expect all learners to continue to study English and Mathematics throughout their education participation, up to 18, as one of the four components of our National Bacculaureate. This will make significant contributions to progression opportunities as these skills are needed in all careers and in further study and training.
- (10) Government should commission alternative Mathematics programmes at Levels 2 and 3 which focus on using and applying Mathematics, so that students are extending their learning in Mathematics but in contextual and real world of work settings.
- (11) All learners should have an entitlement to an appropriately planned and designed personal skills development programme. The quality of these programmes should be inspected by Ofsted.
- (12) Workplace learning should be an integral component of such a programme
- (13) Labour should seek to avoid further changes to accountability measures at KS4 or KS5 for the next five years.
- (14) Labour should withhold some funding to support schools and colleges collaborating to maintain specialist post-16 provision for high achievers. This should be provided efficiently by sharing resources between education providers at the local level.
- (15) If the current machinery of government is retained, a single cabinet level appointment for skills and qualifications reform should be made

Annex A

Membership of the Skills Taskforce

- **Professor Chris Husbands (Chair):** Professor Husbands became Director of the Institute of Education in January 2011. He has directed numerous research projects, including the National Evaluation of Children's Trusts (2004-2009) and the evaluation of the leadership development programme for Directors of Children's Services (2009-2010), as well as a comparative study of high performing education systems for the UK Government. Before his appointment as Director of the Institute he led large schools of education at the Universities of Warwick and East Anglia.

- **Tom Sherrington:** Tom is Headteacher at King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford, member of the Headteachers' Roundtable and Chair of the Vision 2040 Redesigning Schooling Group for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

- **Stephen Alambritis:** Stephen is the Leader of the Council at the London Borough of Merton. Formerly Head of Public Affairs at the Federation of Small Businesses, he is currently a member having set up his own successful small business in the property sector. He is also a Commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission and is also on the Board of the London Pension's Fund Authority. He was formerly a member of the Better Regulation Task Force and was also Chair of Enterprise UK.

- **Graham Cole:** In 2011 Graham became Chairman of AgustaWestland Ltd and was also appointed to the Board of the parent Company Finmeccanica UK. Graham is also Chairman of Vix UK Limited and a member of their global board. In 2012, Graham was appointed Chairman of the CBI South West and he is also President of The West of England Aerospace Forum and a member of the Ministerial Aerospace Committee.

- **Jacqui Henderson CBE:** Jacqui is Managing Director of Creative Leadership and Skills Ltd, a consultancy and project management company. She was previously Chief Executive of Tec National Council and UK Skills and Regional Director of The Learning and Skills Council in London. Jacqui was awarded the CBE in January 2001 for services to Education and Training. She is Vice Chair of Newcastle University and was until March 2012 Chair of Northumberland Care Trust.

- **Dr Ann Limb OBE DL:** A former FE College Principal, Anne is Chair of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership and she has worked in the private sector for the last 8 years. Following her successful career in the FE sector, Ann was responsible for implementation of the UK Government's flagship e-learning initiative learndirect and was a member of the Government's Digital Inclusion Panel. In the 2011 Queen's Birthday Honours list, Ann was appointed an OBE for her services to education.

- **Bill Thomas:** Bill is a former Senior Vice-President and General Manager of EMEA at Hewlett-Packard. He is the Proprietor of Hopton Estates, and holds nonexecutive directorships of Xchanging plc; and of GFI Software Sarl, a leading supplier of software to the SME market. He chairs the International Advisory Board at the Cranfield School of Management and sits on the Advisory Board of Leeds University Business School. He was formerly Executive Vice-President at EDS.

- **Tom Wilson:** Tom was appointed Director of unionlearn - the learning and skills

organisation of the TUC - in July 2009. Prior to that, Tom had been Head of the Organisation and Services Department at the TUC. He was previously head of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education's Universities Department for five years and Assistant General Secretary at the Association of University Teachers from 1988.