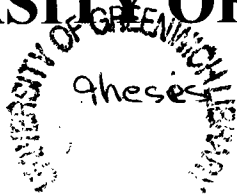


M0012535TP

**Interpreting the Skills Strategy:
discourse in post-16 learning and
workforce development**

GILLIAN LEADER

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH



DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

December 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In producing this thesis, my grateful thanks are due to those people who so generously co-operated and assisted in making it possible:

- to all those connected with the post-16 learning and skills sector, the practitioners, stakeholders and employers, who were kind enough to respond to my request to be interviewed
- to the academic staff in the School of Education and Training, University of Greenwich led by Neil Hall, and in particular to my supervisors, Patrick Ainley and Bill Goddard, for all their support and encouragement

ABSTRACT

Post-16 educational discourse reflects government policy that, as a conceptual framework, it is shaping a new model of learning, skills initiatives and workforce development. This qualitative research examines the debate concerning the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) and impact of 21st century skills on economic and global competitiveness. It draws upon data grounded in a theoretical framework, as well as in the professional experiences of thirteen post-16 stakeholders representing a cross-section of organisations. The research question explores whether the Skills Strategy will be judged a success or failure. Discourse interpretation identifies four principal threads weaving through the thesis. The first considers the Skills Strategy in shaping workforce development and lifelong learning. The second stems from issues of what constitutes skilling. The third originates from the politicisation of learning. The fourth flows from issues of accessibility and widening participation. Research findings suggest that there is an urgent need to contextualise post-16 policy and define a pedagogy appropriate for shaping skills needs at both sub-regional and national level.

The researcher is a manager in the post-16 sector responsible for delivery of a flexible and diverse curriculum, to primarily 19-plus part-time learners, across a range and level of disciplines. Based on the experience of fifteen years teaching and management in Further Education, this study offers an original and significant contribution to knowledge in an academic field identified by government as critical in

giving relevance to PCET. It addresses a specific gap in educational thinking and adds another voice to the learning and skills debate. This provides a powerful tool for reassessing existing professional practice across different contexts. Limitations centre on the practical considerations of undertaking research related to time-bound issues of skills policy implementation. Implications for professional practice emanate from how this research, as a model of critical reflection and part of the process of professional practice, makes its own positive contribution to knowledge and further development of the skills agenda.

GLOSSARY

ALP	Association of Learning Providers
AoC	Association of Colleges
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
ERA	Education Reform Act
FE	Further Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FRESA	Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action
FfA	Framework for Achievement
ITB	Industrial Training Board
JCP	Job Centre Plus
LEA	Local Education Authority
LLSC	Local Learning and Skills Council
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
NTO	National Training Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development

PCET	Post Compulsory Education and Training
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SBC	Small Business Council
SBS	Small Business Sector
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
TUC	Trade Union Congress
TVEI	Training and Vocational Education Initiative
Ufi	University for Industry
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work Based Learning
YOP	Youth Opportunities Programme
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

CONTENTS

PREFACE		1
CHAPTER 1	Introduction	4
CHAPTER 2	The Research	28
CHAPTER 3	Ideologies for Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning	38
CHAPTER 4	The Skills Landscape	62
CHAPTER 5	The Politicisation of Learning - Policy, Partnerships and Provision in the post-16 sector	78
CHAPTER 6	Accessible Learning Pathways	97
CHAPTER 7	Key Findings and Emerging Tensions	120
CHAPTER 8	Conclusion	135
AFTERWORD		146
APPENDICES		150
REFERENCES		154

PREFACE

Professional context of the research

The origins of this thesis reflect the author's experience and involvement as a practitioner in the field of post-16 learning and workforce development. The approach to education and training, particularly among policy-makers, is pre-occupied with the development of a more efficient and flexible skilled workforce. Much of the policy attention is a response to pressures to bring the post-16 system into closer alignment with the needs of employers. The post-16 sector political agenda is driven by white papers such as the national Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) – a mechanism to raise the nation's economic competitiveness through engaging individuals and employers in learning and skills opportunities. The Introduction (Chapter 1) gives a detailed account of the background (including a historical context) to this inquiry. It sets out how government documents, such as the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) are drivers for vocationalism and workforce development, as well as critical in giving meaning to participation in post-16 opportunities and lifelong learning. The remaining seven chapters of this thesis interpret the nature and scope of the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) from within a framework that grounds the research in a wider theoretical perspective. At the same time, reference has been made to texts and papers from academics or other professionals who are involved in debating the practical and conceptual issues raised by problems of post-16 educational, economic and social change. There is a wealth of literature and critical evaluation on policy and practice in response to historic versions of the post-16 argument. However, there appear to have been few attempts to analyse Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) discourse and the assumptions about relations between institutions and the external environment. Contradictory and complex undercurrents pose

intrinsic challenges to understanding the post-compulsory education and training intention of policy-makers.

Aim and objectives of the research

This inquiry is intended to meet one critical aspect of the ideology of the government's agenda for educational change and skills development. The aim of the research is to examine the extent to which the Skills Strategy is embraced within the post-16 sector as a coherent and inclusive framework for engaging adult learners and employers in learning in one sub-regional area of Southeast England. It identifies four specific areas of inquiry or principal research objectives:

- to evaluate the impact of the national Skills Strategy in shaping workforce development and influencing lifelong learning opportunities
- to explore the issues of what constitutes skilling and identify the location of perceived skills deficits
- to assess the politicisation of learning and its juxtaposition to the national Skills Strategy
- to reflect on the positioning of the post-16 sector in delivering learning that addresses issues of accessibility, widening participation and inclusivity

These objectives provide a window through which can be glimpsed the dominant sub-themes that shape and conduct the research. Central to this investigation is how an analysis of the collated data will improve understanding of the principal arguments and meanings concerning the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003).

The research question and capturing narratives

In essence, the research question sets out to determine whether the Skills Strategy will be judged a success or failure. Who controls the skills agenda? And more specifically, will the Skills Strategy end the contested debate surrounding the existence of an academic-vocational divide? Through a process of personal engagement with respondent sample the research data captures narratives from audiotaped, semi-structured interviews with thirteen post-16 practitioners. Within this research setting the author ensured that the views of respondents were authentically represented and interpreted. Therefore, against this background and in a professional context, it is important to clarify the specific criteria for informing the presentation and construction of respondent narratives. The relationship between the author and participants is implicit in the research and to this end, steps have been taken to ensure that respondent anonymity and confidentiality is respected. This assurance had practical benefits for the research as it both protected respondents and more likely produced honest and valid responses to interview questions. Indeed, maintaining professional integrity will justify the protocol governing any future research projects.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTERPRETING THE SKILLS STRATEGY

Development of a sustainable strategic framework to increase the level of workforce skills and to inculcate a workplace culture of lifelong learning is articulated by government in its national Skills Strategy document - *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation* - as a cornerstone of policy in adapting to global economic change and competing effectively in the international arena (DfES 2003). This White Paper sets out the challenge to employers and individuals to increase productivity by focusing on the importance of skills development and the contribution that skills efficiency makes to wealth creation and raising employability levels. It argues for a collective and voluntaristic approach between employers, employees, a plethora of government agencies and quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations), business agencies, intermediaries and trade unions in committing to a range of measures that will stimulate investment and promote engagement in an effective programme of national upskilling.

These reforms appear firmly embedded in workplace skills development. Policy direction pursues a strategy of voluntary and funding partnerships, co-operation and collaboration for creating innovative learning opportunities in a changing labour market. The contemporary realities of shifting social and economic structures, coupled with increased bureaucracy at governmental and institutional level, now raises the issue of a perceived fragmented learning and skills agenda that arguably requires a new understanding to resolve the totality of learning. Inevitably, this complex set of policy arrangements has created new relationships between agencies involved in post-16

learning and the process of skills and workforce development. Past historical accountabilities impact on new forms of agency partnerships, drawing together a range of bodies, not of all of which necessarily share similar goals and aspirations.

Since the notion of workplace participation and collaborative enterprise is integral to policy implementation, any national debate is at risk of polarisation if skill priorities fail to create the dynamism that generates investment in developing the workforce. Or further, fails to embed a positive cultural change in learning as part of an individual's lifecourse. The Skills Strategy, as an instrument of change, puts the demands of employers firmly centre-stage, yet makes no demands on them. This strategic agenda outlines a seemingly different and innovative trend in policy-making and skills and workforce development discourse. Yet, it manifests ideological ambiguity and rhetorical diversion in stating that:

The strategy is not predominantly about new initiatives. It is about making more sense of what is already there, integrating what already exists and focusing it more effectively. (DfES 2003, p.12)

It highlights a low-skills workplace culture that requires flexible and responsive learning opportunities. In essence, the Skills Strategy advocates a radical restructuring of the nation's vocational education and training (VET) system. Colleges and other training providers will be expected to deliver to the needs of the employer demand-led side, rather than deliver what is already being supplied, within funding parameters managed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The political rhetoric is for committed employers to raise the skills levels of their workforce in order to improve and sustain their business outcomes.

The strategic intention of the Skills Strategy is to ensure employers and learners recognise and embrace the benefits of contemporary skills training. It advocates choice

and control for employers in making decisions about learning programmes to support relevant workplace initiatives, whilst there is guaranteed free tuition as a means of engaging learners, assisting individuals in achieving a qualification and providing a foundation for their employability. This free learner entitlement is focused on those adults who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, or on the '*over seven million adults in the workforce who do not have a qualification at Level 2*' (DfES 2003, p60).

The Skills Strategy adds to a growing plethora and convergence of government documents underpinning the move towards improving the learning and skills agenda and, in effect, changing the policy landscape. These texts are now informing and driving vocational education and workforce development targets within the post-16 domain. The recent movement towards reform of the sector was initiated by publication of *Success for All* (DfES 2002) setting out government's intention for Further Education and training provision. The strategy focused on colleges, training providers and implementing targets for the quality of teaching and delivery. At the same time, change mechanisms highlight the expectations that key learning and skills sector stakeholders working in partnership with government agencies will reform the qualifications framework. The proposals set out in the consultation document, *A framework for achievement: Recognising qualifications and skills in the 21st century* (QCA 2004) (FfA) focus on a new credit and unitised system to simplify and rationalise the existing qualification offer. There is an emphasis on the occupational concepts of '*qualified and competent*' to ensure that flexible and responsive achievement opportunities meet the demand of identified skills needs. In essence, the FfA recommends a dual approach to a homogeneous format for credit transfer across both the 14-19 and post-19 adult frameworks. The FfA proposals were developed alongside the *Working Group on 14-19 Reform* (DfES 2004) – the final Tomlinson Report published in October 2004

responsible for reviewing and reforming not only 14-19 learning, but also wider education policy. Subsequent publication in February 2005 of the White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (DfES 2005b) largely rejected the findings of the Tomlinson Group. The opportunity to create a more inclusive and coherent framework has dissipated. The rejection of Tomlinson could, arguably, signal a new tertiary tripartism in the form of academic institutions, specialist colleges or non-academic divisions leading to the end of the Skills Strategy as part of the metaphorical '*seamless web*' (Ainley 2003) of learning provision. The notion of a '*seamless web*' is influenced by policy documents shaping the learning polity of individual pathways, through provision for employment, dovetailed into different institutions and education and training providers for learners aged 14 years and upwards. The original Tomlinson Group implementation plan aimed to position learner and employer needs at the heart of education, yet the new White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (DfES 2005b) threatens to widen rather than bridge the academic and vocational divide. Whilst recognising the issues of the 14-19 agenda, the failure to adopt a unified diploma framework embracing all qualifications will devalue provision and choice in vocational and work-related opportunities for current and future skills requirements of the workplace. Flexible, unitised, bespoke skills delivery is critical to developing the supply of learning and offering choice and quality. As a vehicle for reform, the Tomlinson Group anchored a number of post-16 policy developments focusing on relevant vocational pathways appropriate to adult learners while linking to identified employability needs of the 14 – 19 year old cohort. The White Paper (DfES 2005b) in calling for greater rationalisation to reduce the number of vocational qualifications risks undermining vocationalism as a principal tool for individuals in the transition to work or in demonstrating occupational competence.

The policy context within which the Skills Strategy fits is driven by external constraints forcing the coupling together of economic and social imperatives in learning and workforce development. The emphasis is on making effective links across industry sectors and institutions, weaving reform into the existing organisational infrastructure. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) develops and regulates each Sector Skills Council (SSC), which in turn takes responsibility for evaluating skills needs and analysing data for each sector. In addition, each SSC will develop a Sector Qualification Strategy specifying current and future qualification requirements for their individual sector. Together, the SSDA and SSCs form the Skills for Business Network that acts as the delivery partner and relates occupational standards to the requirements of employers and providers. The emphasis is on improving skills, collating labour market intelligence and establishing sector agreements. A Skills Alliance of national, regional and local stakeholders will underpin the implementation and delivery of the *21st Century Skills Strategy* (Skills Alliance 2004). In this context, it is interesting to note the way in which political and economic momentum is now driving the education sector. The Skills Strategy eroded the original philosophy underlying the creation of the LSC as the main source of referral for education and skills in the FE sector by diminishing its power and shifting the emphasis of VET away from a supply-led to a demand-led system (Hammond 2004). In effect, a new complex multi-layered paradigm currently represents sectoral skills organisation through national, regional and local agencies led by the SSDA. Both the National Skills Alliance and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are accountable to the SSDA, while local LSCs have been relegated to an enabling role with partner agencies at sub-regional level. It is difficult to resist the line of reasoning that the SSC training and skills settlement mirrors old ideas embraced by the former Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC) set up by the Conservative government in 1990 to deliver government-funded training programmes for the unemployed and (primarily)

young people (Wolf 2002). As pointed out by Jones (1999), despite the election in 1997 of a new Labour government committed to ensuring that privatised quangos became more publicly accountable, the TECs, in effect, were excluded from any regulatory framework. The ideological shift between work-based training and welfare reform was seen as a panacea for tackling unemployment. With the implementation of the New Deal and government emphasis on a partnership approach, the TECs operationally and administratively failed to deliver their agenda on VET before their eventual demise in 2001. As the boundaries of responsibility become increasingly ill-defined and interventions create or disengage partnership organisations in a complex politicised landscape, is vocational education once again experiencing a semblance of the onward march of the departed TECs? (Jones, 1999). Without doubt, the language of the Skills Strategy emphasises collaboration between partnerships rather than autonomy. It promotes collaborative arrangements between providers of learning and skills, such as colleges and government agencies, requiring forms of collective activity, whether the mechanism for delivery is in the workplace or training organisations. It postulates the concept of *'learning communities'* (DfES 2003, p105) as a collective base of skills and learning, encouraging connectivity between colleges, schools and community projects to address apathy of individuals towards learning involvement plus community deprivation, through a programme of urban renewal. In much the same way as *'learning communities'*, the concept of the workplace *'learning organisation'* is problematic (Keep 2000). As a viable model for an integrated approach to training and development, it is inhibited by a range of barriers that consign learning opportunities to the immediate task rather than longer-term initiatives to support employability. In effect, employers are reluctant to provide non-job specific training for their employees, perceiving this as the responsibility of government. The number of UK organisations willing to participate in lifelong learning projects and the skilling of their employees is limited. From this

position it would be misleading to assume that a coherent and cohesive model for vocationalism and workforce development can be promulgated once the Skills Strategy is fully implemented. The expeditious imposition of strategic skills reform as a panacea for improving workforce development, coupled with the apparent contradictory nature of current developments in skills flexibility, clearly sets a challenge for creating new competitive approaches.

At issue here, is not just the agenda as set out by the Skills Strategy remit, but also the structural contradiction between a corporate state and the politics of the marketplace in which employers end up in competition for labour and with each other. Essentially, as characterised by Vickerstaff and Sheldrake (1989), policy formation meets economic and market arrangements, rather than constituting any form of corporatist accord, thus increasing both competition and inequality in education. Corporatism as a basis for economic management or public policy negotiation has been limited by a past weak tripartite organisation of state, employer and trade unions (Donald 1979) (Appendix 1). A corporatist framework without policy intervention fails to challenge current economic or political orthodoxy. And it is within the spectrum of learning opportunities that inequity of distribution impacts on across the board provision, underlining how government policy in a voluntaristic market is failing to maximise employer support on skills and training (Keep 2000). In the event, wider links between post-16 sector initiatives and the workforce will make new demands on providers and employers, if the relationship between learning, vocationalism and work is to be more than a pragmatic response to the needs of external agencies. A perceived weakness of current vocational and workplace policies is that they fail to enthuse and inspire the imagination of learners and participants. For example, the integration of imaginative and critical forms of policy and work provision within structural parameters requires solutions that focus on issues

of a diversifying workforce and changing demographic trends, as well as addressing discernible skills deficits and skills gaps. It is not a question of how and when to deliver skills to various sectors, more a redefinition, prioritisation and contextualisation of a changing skills and labour market. What is not yet clear is whether this requirement will be delivered by the Skills Strategy.

THE SKILLS STRATEGY - ITS MEANING FOR THE POST-16 SECTOR, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

As a response to significant changes in policy objectives for the provision of workforce development and in consideration of the nature of skilling, key issues of accessibility to, and the organisation of, learning are now underpinned by the national Skills Strategy. The significance of the White Paper (DfES 2003) is in the ambitious terms of its intended scope. It is designed to engage all stakeholders in a voluntary approach to facilitate the efficient implementation and delivery of workplace learning. And there is little indication of government reviewing its policy of voluntarism to enforce mandatory employer commitment to training and skills development (Taylor 2005). Continuous lifelong learning is viewed as a political imperative for remaining competitive in a global economy. It is also viewed as a means for eradicating the inequalities of existing workplace structures and culture. It would seem that policy makers are tackling skills and workforce development in a way that gives greater political and economic emphasis to reforming the support framework and improving accessibility, matched by less than encouraging strategies for individual learner participation.

Yet the standards by which the Skills Strategy might be judged will depend on meeting the concerns of the agencies involved in delivery. It raises the question of how far, if at all, it is possible to address these concerns. The complexity of structures suggests the

differing interests are irreconcilable. The proliferation of agencies and extent of overlap between different policy makers and partnerships involved in the delivery of learning initiatives has produced competing interests in a bureaucratic minefield. From government departments to learning providers and voluntary bodies, organisations and individuals are experiencing an unforgiving momentum of change (Taylor 2005). What is pivotal is whether the Skills Strategy, as a high profile government objective, will achieve its ideological goals, while at the same time restoring a national sense of confidence in education and skills. The Skills Strategy asserts that increasing skills levels is not only an economic challenge, but also a social one. That improved learning opportunities enable the development of a more inclusive society, in addition to promoting employability. It recognises the problems facing those employees who lack an initial qualification or basic literacy and numeracy skills, thus compounding the consequences of exclusion from a range of work and learning opportunities. However, the workplace as a location for discharging government policy through the learning and skills agenda, potentially sidelines the needs of an extensive cohort of learners in the post-16 arena who risk exclusion from funded initiatives. And the focus of this exclusion discriminates against the already disadvantaged in society including the disabled, women returners, ethnic minorities, jobseekers and asylum seekers (Clayton 1999). The post-16 education and training sector, including Further Education (FE) has had the responsibility for addressing the wider dilemmas of social exclusion thrust upon it. This is typical of a government that has placed the burden of solving social problems on education. The post-16 sector mirrors the profiles of structural change, highlighting a framework of complex innovation and rhetoric in a field of new workplace initiatives and development of a knowledge-driven society. However, developing inclusive learning provision for targeted groups, without constructing practical measures to combat participation issues, can only be detrimental to any attempts at formulation of

meaningful learning pathways across the fractured post-16 educational sector. In the meantime, government, while stating its commitment to the Further Education sector, has commissioned an independent review of colleges led by Sir Andrew Foster (HMSOa 2005). The aim is to evaluate the supply side of education and training as part of the future transformation of the FE sector. In that respect, it is to be hoped that the political narrative in a marketised FE environment, concerning matters of inclusion, exclusion and the wider issues of social cohesion and economic productivity, will advocate the benefits of lifelong learning.

While the Skills Strategy White Paper recognises that current learning opportunities and funding mechanisms differ at a national, regional and local level, it aims through a range of working partnerships:

To develop a consistent, coherent pattern of lifelong learning opportunities in each area across the country. (DfES 2003, p68)

However, the strategic attempts of this policy to encourage adult learners to participate in learning activities do not appear to address the crucial yardstick of maximising financial support for the full range of learner involvement or for ensuring personal and cultural gain for those outside the current parameters.

At the heart of the rhetoric surrounding access to lifelong learning are the political, social, economic and moral dimensions underpinning inclusivity and widening participation. Political discourse emphasises social inclusion and social justice as key drivers of lifelong learning initiatives in the shift towards structuring a new conceptualisation of post-16 sector and skills development. Ethical notions of inclusion and increased access to learning at an institutional level underpin educational objectives embodied by the commitment of policy-makers to engage learner participation in learning opportunities throughout life (Hyland and Musson 2001). Lifelong learning is

now viewed as both a social prerogative and economic necessity (Anderson 1999). Individuals are encouraged to make meaningful choices about their learning and development at different stages of their working lives. Whether enacted in the transition from education to work, during periods of unemployment, or when there is a need to update knowledge and skills, lifelong learning is a multi-faceted, intricate arrangement of trends and developments that can reshape or change occupational structures, shifts in the organisation of employment, or personal values in terms of lifestyle and community (Kivinen and Silvennoinen 2002). Notwithstanding these assertions, Keep (2000) points out that lifelong learning rhetoric has become complicated through assumptions made of its positive links with economic competitiveness and employer enthusiasm for a policy-driven skills development agenda. Employers are the perceived catalysts for delivering learning opportunities to the labour force. Yet it would appear that investment in training of the workforce is *'at best, patchy across the workforce as a whole'* (Keep *ibid*, p5) and that maximising the supply-side low-skills approach will not stimulate the achievement of higher level skills required by industry. Thus, the crux of the problem is that in a voluntaristic skills market place, there is no responsibility or statute imposed on employers to champion or foster lifelong learning or to access learning and skills opportunities. The Skills Strategy relies on employers to deliver it, yet employers fail to take hold of issues of engagement in training.

HISTORICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING CONTEXT

The historical shift in provision since the sixties, together with fragmented strategies for reform and privatisation of the post-16 sector marked recently by publication of the *21st Century Skills Strategy* (DfES 2003), highlights palpable distinctions in the education entitlement. Industrial and educational policies in post-war Britain posed a challenge to the concept of skills training and education. What was clearly lacking in the 1960s and

1970s was cohesive debate about the re-formulation of education policy and re-shaping of the education system. Policy-makers articulated a direct correlation between educational reform and economic prosperity (Chitty 1989). Moderate socialist thinking of the time emphasised a market economy under social and economic control.

The White Paper on Industrial Training in 1962 (Maclure 1979) recognised that left to its own devices industry would fail to meet the challenge of increasing the supply of skilled labour. The result was a new training policy that would link provision to the broader requirements of the economy and technology, while attempting to remove some of the decisions for industrial training from the control of individual companies and trade unions operating schemes such as apprenticeships as a bridge to employment. Declining industrial competitiveness, increasing numbers of school leavers, linked to a growing awareness of skills shortages, spurred government to attempt the reform of training and the apprenticeship system (Finegold and Soskice 1990). Of notable importance was the proposal to establish Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987). On the enactment of the Industrial Training Act in 1964, twenty-four ITBs were set up for various industries, not occupations, representing a considerable increase in government's financial contribution to industrial training (Dale 1989). In what appears to have been an overall radical reassessment of training policy, the possible relocation of responsibility from industry to education caused apprehension in certain sectors of industry. Concerns focused on potential opposition from employers and trade unions that fundamental changes would reduce the power of apprenticeship committees in favour of the ITBs. At the same time, besides criticisms against state intervention, smaller companies disputed the perceived benefits. Quantity rather than quality was advantageous to the interests of larger employers through levy reimbursements.

The Newsom Report of 1963 (Maclure 1979) identified social divisiveness as a factor in educational performance with little evidence of innovation in education to meet the requirements of the less academic learner. According to Chandler and Wallace (1990), while public debate eroded the notion of selective education, there remained the problem of alienation, lack of social mobility and educational opportunity for the majority of learners. A similar emphasis on education's shortcomings is prescribed in the Russell Report of 1973 (Maclure 1979) set up to review adult education and its relationship with industry, the opportunities for adults to enter further and higher education and to access qualifications. The focus on non-vocational pathways proved a major limitation in progressing the recommendations of the Report. Research suggests that the link between social class and school background in school to work transitions during this period determined the work pathways available to individuals in a '*fluid and differentiated youth labour market*' (Vickerstaff 2003, p14). However, the 1970s heralded a shift in industrial development and occupational structure as the post-war economic boom gave way to global economic crisis and recession. In 1973, as the economy increasingly faltered, the Conservative government announced proposals for its counter inflationary policy. A state of emergency was called to deal with the miners' pay dispute. Stringent measures were imposed to conserve electricity and a two-day working week was proposed (The National Archives 2005). With increasing criticism of cutbacks in education and as unemployment began to rise, the Conservative government was compelled to take positive steps to address the issues of future workplace training. It was perceived that the labour force needed a statutory structure for training workers as an industrial remedy to meet new technological demands. The enactment of the 1973 Employment and Training Act constituted a mechanism for redressing the balance in favour of employer training arrangements. Further, it established a government quango,

the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in 1974, coupling training for the workplace to job creation and in the process making a profound impact on education and employment (Cantor and Roberts 1986, Ainley 1993). Under this new Act, training evolved as a dichotomy between the competing demands of the MSC, its corporatist management role on the one hand, and the MSC function to monitor the levy/grant exemption system administered through the ITBs on the other. Introduction of this exemption scheme modified redistribution of financial support but to many employers it represented an unacceptable level of government interference. Evans (1997) contends that employers have a history of subverting training policy to deal with the problems of unemployment. Undoubtedly, the schemes set up by the MSC became a vehicle for compensating for the disadvantages experienced by the young unemployed. But arguably, the multiplicity and diversity of measures devised to instigate effective training gave focus to post-16 development opportunities. Policy-making was effectively integrated by the MSC and Department of Employment into various initiatives, creating not only job opportunities for young people, but disguising a politically and socially unacceptable level of youth unemployment. Nevertheless, the rationale for the MSC's existence and remit to manage unemployment and the process of structured change resulted in a change of direction and acceptance of joblessness as a permanent feature of the work landscape (Benn and Fairley 1986). It became a watershed in the function of the MSC as a public service. Labour governments from 1974 –1979 were *'thrown off any socialist course by successive crises'* (Benn and Fairley 1986, p4) as uncertainty grew about the policy direction of the MSC in the creation of work and a national training strategy to match individual job roles. Failure by the MSC to provide skills training or new jobs raises the question of the validity of political measures implemented to deal with unemployment during periods of recession. The real polemic then became whether directing recruitment into training schemes as a barrier against future shortfalls

of skilled labour (so-called 'counter cyclical training'), in fact supports the long-term needs of young people.

The Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) introduced in 1978, and subsequently absorbed into the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in 1983 (Gleeson 1990), was set up following an MSC inquiry into, and evaluation of, existing schemes which ostensibly dealt with the problems of youth unemployment. However, it was the publication of the Holland Report, *Young People and Work*, in 1977 that provided the framework and structure to handle the inherent flaws in existing provision (Cantor and Roberts 1986). The Report claimed that factors of employment supply and demand, unequal labour supply and lack of cohesion in MSC strategies had contributed to the current failure in provision. With the later demise of the MSC in 1988, it could be argued that the success or otherwise of work-related initiatives, became an issue of how to control employment trends rather than an investment for a future labour force. On the return of Labour to power in 1974 and by the time of the succession of Prime Minister Callaghan in 1976, education had become a major focus of government concern (Chitty 1989). Progressive educational trends in schools, an alleged teacher-dominated system and a perceived crisis in curriculum standards exerted a powerful influence on political and educational opinion (Dale 1989, Education Group II, Department of Cultural Studies 1991). More specifically, the education system was allegedly failing to halt the UK's economic decline with an over-emphasis on the academic and neglect of the vocational aspects of education. Discernible tensions between educationists and industry led to the initiation of public debate culminating in the Ruskin speech and the Great Debate of 1976/77 (Dale 1989). This political intervention defined the nation's economic weaknesses as a cultural problem requiring reorientation of educational endeavour. Industry claimed that poor economic performance was a result of an education system failing to link training

as pivotal in the skills for industry paradigm. Without doubt, the main significance of the Ruskin speech is that the Labour government of the day prioritised the economic purpose of education through establishing an absolute connection between education and economic success (Esland 2000), while redefining and restructuring education policy (Donald 1979).

In politicising training for industry, it was clear that government priorities neglected other workers such as the unemployed or those who required retraining as many traditional employments declined. As suggested by Evans (1997), policy-making in that era reflected ideological differences between the two main political parties in proposing either a wholly *'free market or statist strategy'* as an approach to training. Until the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) and its focus on a both ends approach, training in Britain maintained a recurrent pattern of voluntarist, followed by interventionist, strategies. And the framework of voluntarism in respect to skills training and vocational education predominated until the formation of the ITBs. In a sense, the subsequent implementation of an interventionist policy, until the ultimate demise of the Manpower Services Commission in the 1980s, acknowledged that training arrangements were too important to remain with either the vagaries of the market place or without the support of public funding (Chitty 1989, Evans 1997). The significance of a free-market model of funding for training under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sanctioned employers to maintain financial constraints on skills workplace programmes, meeting only short-term economic needs and resulting in short-term profits. In this case the market provides less training than is actually required leading to a constant skills shortage. State intervention as a means of encouraging higher levels of participation in training than offered by a free market then steps into the breach. However, interventionism, unless efficiently and adequately organised and implemented, can be costly and ineffective. Yet again,

ambiguity in training policy highlights the failure to move work-related learning and skills development in the desired direction. The role of central government was to facilitate, but the role of education was subordinated to this. Clearly, the failure to invest in training was a result of industry's negativity, evoking concerns as to industry's response to the wider issues and interpretation of the '*needs emphasis*', determined by changes in the demand for occupational skills linked to de-industrialisation of the economy (Chapman 1993).

According to Chitty (1989), cross-Party educational consensus established by the Labour government continued to influence educational policy-making following the election of a Conservative government in 1979. There was little evidence of innovative educational thinking in spite of political rhetoric embracing Thatcherite New Right monetarist values, until a policy change in direction ten years later at the end of the eighties. This was marked by a radical transformation in education policy from a third term Conservative government. Notions of market forces, parental choice, differentiation and competition would be established to replace comprehensivisation and to reduce the power of local authorities. This approach to privatisation of the education system represented a key shift in Conservative thinking. Private capital sponsors to contribute to funding new City Technology Colleges (Chitty 1989), private providers to deliver youth training and the expansion of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) (Dale 1989, Education Group II, Department of Cultural Studies 1991) to stimulate work-related education promulgated the principle of vocationalism from 1976. Further, the implementation of the Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988) created a statutory framework enabling measures for later all-out privatisation. Paradoxically, while the ERA devolved power to schools and parents from central government, thereby opening up education to competitive forces and opt-out choices in a free market state,

new curriculum arrangements focused on a national rationalisation through the auspices of central government. These measures were indicative of the Tory trend towards privatisation of education, including FE colleges. In this way, it could be argued that privatising education is a commitment to dismantling the state system, while central government retains both a stake in controlling the free market element and competes for local involvement in education matters. In other words, the education system shifts from a national system locally administered to a national system nationally administered (Ainley 2001). Undoubtedly, these historical associations help explain the strength of existing semi-privatisation ideology in the debate surrounding the relationship between learning and work and the relevance of each to the demands of a modern industrial society. Thus, despite the current Labour government articulations regarding skills shortages and learner development to meet national requirements, the reality points to a post-16 agenda driven by the semi-privatisation of education and training.

In the meantime, Skills Strategy rhetoric emphasises New Labour expectations for the private sector to meet funding shortfalls, with the emphasis on employers and learners paying for non-statutory learning opportunities. There is a presumption by government that while it will retain supply-side training up to a Level 2 entitlement, it is intent on eschewing high spending commitments utilising a competitive market place, rather than a statutory framework of provision in the delivery of skills training. It surely follows that training policy must be assessed against a realistic appraisal of needs, as to retain the status quo validates the resistance to change. Predictably, the ideological complexion of the Skills Strategy assumes that employers will judge the reality of workplace needs. However, without the commitment of employers to invest in a sustainable and effective skills policy, it can be argued that the Skills Strategy will not produce the radical transformation envisaged by government.

FRAMING THE RESEARCH

This thesis draws together existing knowledge about the national Skills Strategy and its progress towards implementation. In doing so it establishes whether New Labour workforce development strategies, lifelong learning and the current post-16 policy context are mitigated by both the macro- and micro-political agenda. The macro-level focuses on the key theme of policy and practice in the workplace, as a reaction to raising the skills base and increasing employability levels of the workforce. This macro-dimension involves an analysis of the context within which the Skills Strategy is situated, particularly in relation to concepts of skill development, widening participation and lifelong learning. It considers central government policy processes located between policy-makers and government through reviewing some of the literature and documents designed to give shape to practice in the post-16 sector since the sixties. The micro-policy perspective highlights the changes that impact on local practitioners and deliverers of post-16 learning. At this micro-level some of the challenges facing Further Education in constructing an effective and vocational paradigm for lifelong learning are explored. From this exploration discursive perspectives are reflected in the interpretations and practices of thirteen interviewees connected with the delivery of the Skills Strategy. The principal strands of these narratives are brought together within a framework of eight chapters.

Chapter

- 1) provides an introduction to contemporary thinking on skills development, highlighting tensions that exist in the post-16 learning domain
- 2) describes the research methodology

- 3) evaluates the impact of the Skills Strategy in shaping workforce development and the influence of VET strategies on lifelong learning opportunities
- 4) explores the issues of what constitutes skilling and identifies location of perceived skills deficits
- 5) assesses the politicisation of learning, its juxtaposition to the economy and the impact of the Skills Strategy on qualification reform
- 6) reflects on the positioning of the post-16 sector in delivering learning that addresses issues of accessibility, widening participation and inclusivity
- 7) outlines the findings of different discourses on the Skills Strategy
- 8) draws together the conclusions from the research

Within these chapters, four principal research objectives or sub-themes have been identified to underpin this thesis:

- the impact of the Skills Strategy in shaping workforce development and influencing lifelong learning opportunities
- issues of what constitutes skilling and identification of the location of perceived skills deficits
- the politicisation of learning and its juxtaposition to the Skills Strategy
- the positioning of the post-16 sector in delivering learning that addresses issues of accessibility, widening participation and inclusivity

These sub-themes are embraced in Chapters 3 to 6 and integrated within two levels of evaluation. The first level of evaluation will introduce and review selective literature that underpins evidence of government policy-making and post-16 initiatives. This provides a grounding in issues related to the policy arena. The thesis will then provide a second level summary of participant narratives, in order to critically examine workforce

development trends and to assess arrangements for meeting the national skills agenda. Within this second level, the author interweaves respondent readings of the Skills Strategy with contrasting discourses from the Skills Strategy. These discourses are subsequently analysed to encapsulate the essence of participant narratives.

A MATTER OF TERMINOLOGY

The approach to textual and discourse analysis for this inquiry has drawn specifically on locating and contextualising discursive practice. Part of the contextualisation, contained in Chapter 3 to Chapter 6, is to establish the political, economic and social imperatives of the Skills Strategy. These interventions address issues such as low-skills development in the labour market, a lack of economic competitiveness, social exclusion, widening participation and the effect of policy initiatives on lifelong learning. Thus, the bringing together of narratives through a discourse in post-16 learning and workforce development aims to channel connections that might not be feasible through other types of investigation. What counts as narratives between various interest groups concerned with the wider enterprise of education is contained in policies for Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET), the post-16 sector, the 14-19 agenda and lifelong learning. Interchangeable terminology is used to reflect its relationship and contiguity with regard to the subject matter. However, within the scope of this research, it is not possible to divorce the concept of post-16 learning from its role in the structure of either the 14-19 agenda or lifelong learning policies. Or further, to disconnect workforce development from political and economic exigencies. While post-16 learning refers to the curriculum and pedagogy offered to learners in institutions or trainees in employment, workforce development pertains to the relationship between employer, employee or trainees, including apprentices, in the workplace. Similarly, workplace refers to any location, across all sectors, where individuals work together. And in the

case of workplace learning, this encompasses all modes of learning related to job role. A plethora of terminology has emerged with the development of work-related learning stratifying industry liaison and occupational training – learner, student, graduate, apprentice, trainee, etc. Likewise, in the acquisition of skills or vocational qualifications, a range of education institutions, which vary in title depending on their origins, provide learning opportunities. These include Further Education (FE) colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, Tertiary colleges, universities, etc. Historically, the tendency has been for industry to look towards colleges to provide the theoretical or academic component for job-related training. For this reason, the educational element complements the industry-related practical constituent of training.

The concept of skill adopted for this thesis is defined according to different kinds of occupations in different industries or employments (Warhurst et al 2004). Skills can be differentiated between traditional skill patterns and new generic skills required by advanced technologies. Historically, long-established practices enabled craft workers to acquire the skills concerned with a particular task or activity in a specific trade. With industrial modernisation, new technologies, new processes and new machinery involved companies in specialist methods of production. For the most part, the level of skill could be distinguished not only between specific tasks in one company, but between these same operations in different companies within the same industry. One impact of post-industrial progress has been the increasing requirement for high-skill employees, thus breaking down traditional skills barriers. Although craft workers were highly skilled within their area of occupation, the expanding spectrum of skill encompassing higher level analytical and technical skills moves beyond former practical tasks of manual dexterity. Definitions of skill have changed and continue to change, highlighting the limitations and complexities of clear definition in the way work is defined and controlled

(Payne 1999). Skills training should offer transferable and flexible skills within a variety of jobs, relevant to the application of competences and suitable for employment in a competitive and productive workforce. Various skilling and de-skilling processes develop and expand within the labour force as new technologies are introduced. From enskilling, to re-skilling, to multi-skilling and de-skilling (Ainley 1990) the concept of skill formation is held to be essential for all in the workplace. It is the demands made by new technologies and automation, which necessitate a multi-skilled workforce to perform a range of new and flexible tasks. The effect has been to deskill peripheral workers in a declining manufacturing sector of industry, while enhancing new technological skills for a core of workers in the mainly service sector. For alongside the changing nature of occupational skill, generic, basic and attitudinal 'skills' are required to support an increasingly multi-faceted and integrated labour force, as well as to act as a mechanism for unifying VET skills development. Significantly, the trend towards skill polarisation is emerging once again as increases in worker skills are not being matched by increases in demand (Warhurst et al 2004). The outcome is upskilling for the high-skilled top end of the labour market, while low-skilled workers at the bottom end of the market are liable to deskilling or stagnation. Similarly, terminology associated with vocationalism can cause confusion not only in policy-making but also in debate around provision available in the post-16 sector (Brown et al 2004). Definitions of vocationalism encompass a range of activities from full-time programmes offering relevant industry-related components, to off-site training in the workplace, to VET that can link apprenticeship training to occupational qualifications.

This introductory chapter provided an overview of post-16 learning and workforce development issues, identifying how government policy, past and present, figures significantly in the changing context of VET reform and labour market training. It

focused on the debate concerning the UK's poor level of skills in comparison to other global economies and the publication of the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003) as a barometer by which to measure future workforce skills transformation. The next chapter outlines the research methodology, the research sample on which the thesis is based and the importance of the author's professional experience in exercising judgements as a basis of appraising practice.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach adopted for this qualitative inquiry aimed to explore emerging educational, political, economic and social dimensions of issues relating to participation and accessibility to post-16 learning opportunities within the context of government's Skills Strategy. The discourse or data was collected as narratives producing an *'epistemology concerned with the status of knowledge'* (Wetherell et al 2001, p 11) or ways of understanding how knowledge can be produced. The research used an interpretative paradigm within which the narratives relating to the learning and skills agenda set out in the government's national Skills Strategy are unpacked and reconstituted. Narrativity in this research aims to analyse the meanings and arguments emanating from interpretation of the Skills Strategy policy document through a discourse approach in which language shapes context. As a conduit for transmission, narrativity depicts and describes the processes involved in post-16 policy formulation, as well as opening pathways for evaluation of the Skills Strategy as an ongoing working document (Lemke 2004, Fairclough 2003). It embodies making meaning of data derived from analysis of interview transcripts and presentation of narrative material, as well as for reading the policy document.

Utilising discourse as a methodology allows interrogation and communication of qualitative research as texts as well as emphasising the scholarship that underpins qualitative research (Cheek 2004). Cousins and Hussain (1984) view discourses as texts that should be interpreted for their content and what they really mean. As discourse in this research conveys meaning through text and narrative forms, it is more than a set of interviewee statements. It describes and identifies how key concepts in the Skills

Strategy document are reported by respondents. It is a way of determining what narratives do and what consequences they have, as a method of recollecting and interpreting the meanings of respondent experiences (Bochner 2001). Individual narratives articulate or give voice to one or more viewpoints (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Introducing multiple voices as part of this research gave new understanding and meaning to the Skills Strategy. It allowed participating interviewees to voice how the currently defined focal point of local and regional competition for work-related learning, employer liaison and limited learner entitlement poses a real threat to learner engagement. The discourse genre embodied within the Skills Strategy delivers contextualised statements that stakeholders in the vocational education and training arena are compelled to consider and expected to conform to. The Skills Strategy is perceived by policy-makers as the solution for national and sectoral workforce skills deficits. This in turn raises the question of what are the current problems in skilling and how have they been identified? The rationale for identifying skills problems is based on government's assessment that employers are unable to recruit individuals with the right skills (Skills Strategy 2003). This highlights a mismatch between what employers and individuals want from post-16 provision in terms of qualifications or learning initiatives. Through enabling interpretation and interrogation of the official Skills Strategy text, the research aims to provide a critical commentary from an interviewee-specific exposition of individual post-16 sector experiences, expertise and understanding of government's political position.

Using this model of narrative form as a research methodology has a bearing on the organisation of the research generally. Evaluation requires a different kind of inquiry in relation to the mode of discourse and the way in which the discourse is produced. The interaction is between the research itself and different participant practices impacting on

the research outcomes. It is this methodological framework, within the limited timeframe of this inquiry, that provides for the structure and complexity of the research question of whether the Skills Strategy will be judged a success or failure. Is its repetitiveness and reiteration part of the Skills Strategy rhetoric? Who controls the skills agenda? In particular, will the Skills Strategy end the polemic surrounding the academic-vocational divide that constrains industrial productivity in a competitive global economy? Or, does it merely paper over the cracks following rejection of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Working Group (DfES 2004), as indicated in Chapter 1?

RESEARCH SAMPLE

In addition to the detailed textual analysis of the document itself, research instrumentation was based on data gathered and collated from semi-structured, audiotaped (with permission), face-to-face interviews with thirteen participants involved in post-16 sector policy and practice. The sample selected was chosen to represent the range of issues facing the post-16 sector. In determining the criteria for selection, it was important that each respondent contributed a discrete experience and individual knowledge of the field. When collated and interpreted the data enabled a holistic yet wide-ranging set of views to emerge. The participants represented a cross-section of thirteen different organisations, partnerships or agencies involved in the post-16 sector and/or workforce development arena. All respondents were connected with the Southeast region through their job role and responsibilities, even where they operated at a national level. The principle of confidentiality was established to ensure trust is maintained between author and participants.

RESPONDENT	REPRESENTING	PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT/LINK TO SECTOR
Respondent A	Further Education	Workforce development in Kent Thameside involved in engagement of employers in learning and identification of funding opportunities
Respondent B	Higher Education	HE, FE and Adult Education specialist in Lifelong Learning partnerships and regeneration projects
Respondent C	Learning and Skills Partnership	Project responsibility for learning and skills needs in Thames Gateway, supported by ODPM
Respondent D	Employer	Company trainer in low skill service sector facilities management organisation based in North Kent
Respondent E	Employer	Company trainer specialising in direct marketing and financial services sector with links to distribution operations in North Kent
Respondent F	Sector Skills Council	Retail Sector Skills Council responsibility set up by government to identify skills needs and secure funding in retail industry
Respondent G	Awarding Body	Provider of vocational qualifications assessing skills in workplace with particular focus on bite-size learning – national and regional focus

Respondent H	FE colleges representative body	Development role within organisation that develops policy and lobbies on behalf of college providers in post-16 sector
Respondent J	Trade Union	Union representative in organisation comprising local student members in colleges and universities
Respondent K	Trade Union	Representative of independent union for individuals working in media sector
Respondent L	PCET	Academic researcher/consultant with research & development and policy expertise
Respondent M	PCET	Academic researcher/consultant in PCET with funding in HE expertise
Respondent N	QCA	Specialist in developing qualifications and national occupational standards that map directly to sector skills needs

As a result, the sample provided interview data from:

- Five directors or academic senior managers, two respondents with national responsibility within their organisations and the remaining respondents spanned an array of senior job titles.
- The determinant of thirteen as a sample size ensured extrapolation of a range and sufficiency of data concerning the effect and consequence of the skills agenda on post-16 learning and workforce development. The interviews elicited valid and cogent information as a number of patterns emerged to provide a range of relevant and salient phenomena or episodes.

Interview design and format elicited thirteen individual accounts or narratives of respondent understanding of the skills policy in terms of grounding and context.

- The sample outcomes reflect a spread of interests and expertise from those interviewees who equate the skills agenda with a body of knowledge through workforce development, to those who emphasise skills in the context of learning. In hooking onto the meaning of skill, interviewees interpreted the Skills Strategy to fit their stakeholder remit.

Following the interviews, the qualitative data were transcribed by word processing the verbal text. The word count for the transcribed data from the thirteen respondents totalled approximately twenty-six thousand words. The next stage of transcription involved dividing the data into meaningful segments and colour coding the text with highlighter pens to signify particular segments emanating from the responses to each question. The colour codes were added, as and when the data were coded, or reapplied to new segments of data each time an appropriate segment was identified. As patterns emerged, an alpha abbreviated descriptive code was used, where relevant, to enable clustering of data. Applying codes or labels, in this way, allowed the voices of research

participants to be identified in order to illustrate points and build up themes. This process of transcription created a framework for the categorisation and analysis of interview data into the four emerging clusters or sub-themes underpinning the thesis, as a method of generating meaning from the original interviews and presenting the findings for this inquiry. The same process of analysis was applied to the Skills Strategy itself through reading and deconstructing the document in order to provide a context for understanding its relevance and meaning.

By combining direct interviewing with the underpinning narrative from the Skills Strategy document, it has been possible to build a more comprehensive discursive form of analysis compared to one source alone (Potter and Wetherell, 2004). Further, the sample represents the range of pedagogic and official agencies. It is acknowledged that collaborative partnerships developed between organisations such as government agencies, Further Education colleges, Sector Skills Councils, QCA, Awarding Bodies, practitioners, employers and trade unions for the delivery of a skills agenda reflect an existing connectivity and stratified cross section of key players in the sector. The schedule of prescribed questions (Appendix 4), determined in advance, was asked in the same order, allowing participants to focus on the central themes of employee skills development, national economic competitiveness and barriers to participation and inclusivity in post-16 learning. Interviewees were able to reply to questions about their perceptions of the Skills Strategy as linked to the distinctiveness of their work role. This modus operandi as a facet of qualitative inquiry *'presupposes the existence of multiple, constructed realities rather than a single objective reality'* (Brubacher et al 1994, p39). In essence, each participant is engaged in constructing a separate reality in terms of the skills agenda, which will be open to scrutiny and evaluation. However, they are also representative of their interests in the Skills Strategy. Thus through the construction of

individual narratives, the inquiry has sought to collect insights of representative stakeholders with respect to their experiences of roles, connections and realities of operating in post-16 educational settings. The technique allowed coverage under a broad range of headings related to the capacity of a new government policy initiative to address perceived national and sectoral skill deficits.

IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND JUDGEMENTS

This research is an outcome of the study undertaken for the author's Doctorate in Education thesis. The initial investigative activity started a process of exploring the many challenges facing the post-16 sector in addressing the Skills Strategy agenda. Apart from personal academic interest and relevance to job role, the Doctoral inquiry continues to generate a vast amount of policy material and relevant literature, enhancing the findings from the research. Gaining personal knowledge is important over the longer term and has clear advantages for the author's current professional development. In particular, undertaking research and exercising judgement based on policy is a positive approach to evaluating practice. As a future project, the author intends to employ the findings from this thesis, as a basis of what follows on from the Skills Strategy and the impact on post-16 learning and workforce development. The rationale for utilising a discourse approach is based upon the professional values that underpin the author's reflective self-positioning within the discursive model as a practitioner. As an epistemological approach, it is concerned with contextualising knowledge and the status of the author's value system in analysing the content of interviews and narrative, as well as having the ability and self-awareness to step back from influencing the interview situation. The interview is perceived as conversation analysis – a technique that allows diversity and variety in response to researcher questions that are active and functional. Conversation analysis explicates the fundamental understanding of participant

interaction *'that has the potential to illuminate a wide range of research questions'* (Potter, 1996, p7). In contrast, the process of interpreting the Skills Strategy document relies on the author's own reading and understanding of the document.

The professional commitment to maintaining academic integrity is balanced by the need for providing evidence of rigour in driving forward the skills agenda through this inquiry. The aim is to communicate how a transforming post-16 sector is reflected generically in difference and interpretation with respect to government policy texts through the author's professional knowledge and pedagogical practice. Each concept elicits a different kind of professional experience and values a different kind of knowledge. These shape, and are shaped by, different post-16 contexts. The New Labour government has established an agenda for driving forward a *'14-19 opportunity and excellence'* strategy in response to a *'weak and undervalued vocational offer'* (DfES, 2003b) that aims to transform the way in which the education and training system remedies perceived historical weaknesses in the structure of 14-19 learning. In addition, centrality of learner needs and motivations provided the rhetoric for the implementation of government's 14-19 policy to enhance the learning and skills sector through *Success for All* (2002). While at the same time, the Tomlinson *Working Group Report on 14-19 Reform* (2004) considered the long-term picture by making recommendations for a unified framework of qualifications (subsequently rejected on publication of the White paper *14-19 education and skills* (DfES 2005b) to provide a rationale for reform of this cohort of learners. Taken together, these government strategies provide a recent and consistent representation of how the future post-16 environment will be structured. However, this structure should not go unchallenged and as a reflective practitioner, it offers the author an opportunity to contest and critique this particular New Labour narrative. Discourse involves broad cross-agency participation.

It reflects not only the thematic approach for making regional or local comparisons in the field of skills and workforce development policy, but also manifests how it impacts on institutions and education systems. The advantage of the author's professional involvement vis-à-vis occupational practice is paralleled by personal understanding of government skills initiatives. The author's research is, therefore, a potent tool for reconceptualising existing practices within a range of contexts.

CHAPTER 3

IDEOLOGIES FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

This chapter is concerned with a range of perspectives on workforce development and lifelong learning across the post-16 sector. A more important aim, however, is to provide a discourse that goes beyond a critique of the Skills Strategy, exploring alternative possibilities for change in vocationalism, skills acquisition and learning strategies, necessary to implement real and lasting reform. It seeks to identify how key socio-economic and labour market factors are likely to influence learning and skills innovation in the future. And for this reason, it draws on a selection of comparative post-16 discourses aimed at providing an insight into the issues involved.

THE SHAPING OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Current government rhetoric reinforces the notion that the UK is falling behind its global competitors as a result of an inadequately skilled and trained workforce. Policymakers cite the relationship between skills and productivity as a key factor for poor performance. Failings in the current system require significant changes in *'cultural attitudes to the demand for, and delivery of, workforce development'* (Cabinet Office PIU 2001, Cabinet Office SU 2002). Workforce development is perceived as the panacea for the UK to improve its share of the international marketplace, raise economic prosperity and ensure effective positioning of both individuals and organisations in stimulating demand in the arena of new global technologies (Strategy Unit *ibid*). This policy agenda argues, on the one hand, that a shift in emphasis towards a demand-led system of provision to meet employer needs is pivotal for raising the skills levels of low-skilled employees, reforming funding methodologies and building capacity for

responsive provision in a flexible market. On the other, it recognises that an effective supply-side strategy is essential for funding and innovation to sustain learning and development provision:

Raising demand needs to ensure that the supply side, including a large amount of publicly-funded provision, is responsive to demand. (SU 2002, p.33)

Similarly, government and its agencies contend that:

Provision of learning and development must meet the needs of employers and individuals rather than being formulated and delivered at the convenience of the provider. (PIU 2001, p.60)

Policy-makers' demands for economic and industrial change stress how retraining and lifelong learning are key drivers of employability and career progression. The focus is on autonomous and self-motivated employees accessing relevant learning and skills programmes as a response to a national workforce development strategy (PIU, *ibid*). Such new strategies and forms of learning at work require equally effective and potent structures in both the workplace and at institutional level. Unwin and Fuller (2003) claim that while the interests of government lie with national welfare, the focus of employers is on the success and business fit of the organisation. This underscores the point of difference between policy-maker demands and employer needs. While achievement of workplace involvement can be determined by government's ability to influence the supply of funding for learning opportunities, cultural reform in organisations is essential to ensure active participation for responsible development of the labour force. Yet arguably, change in culture and adaptation to innovation is not necessarily how employers perceive workplace learning as a contribution to future benefits. The saliency and extent of participation in workplace activity and factors that influence learning through work relies on how individuals interpret whether what is being offered meets their needs. As put forward by Billett (2003) in his discussion on the dichotomy of workplace pedagogic practices:

On the one hand, is how workplaces afford opportunities for individuals

to participate in the workplace and interactions, from which they initially learn, refine and extend what they have learn ... On the other hand, is the degree by which individuals elect to engage in the workplace and learn. (Billett 2003, p.1)

Undoubtedly, the differentiation of contested workplace opportunities is distributed in ways that reflect workplace relationships and situations that are in constant transformation. Development of individuals is reliant on their understanding of the benefits of learning and how they view themselves in relation to structured workplace activity and involvement in new tasks or training. Unwin and Fuller reinforce this notion:

When employees are offered training and development opportunities, they will be construed positively or negatively depending on the nature of the workplace itself. (Unwin & Fuller 2003, p.8)

Clearly, workplace development should be perceived as a mutual and valued opportunity for championing individual capability and improving performance. It should follow that where learning and development needs are reciprocated between employer and employee then cogent methods of delivery and support for learning result in improved all-round status and acquisition of an upskilled workforce. Notwithstanding the complexities of engaging the workforce in development, convincing employers of occupational competence and accessing appropriate funding requires that the advantages be seen as a balance of benefits. Choice and diversity is exhorted by government as a vehicle for change. The measurement of benefits for workforce development is for employees a reduced risk of unemployment and for companies the opportunity to improve the knowledge and skills of its staff.

DISCOURSES ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The emphasis on workforce development strikes a dual note in the Skills Strategy. It is used in combination with skills development to reinforce what is regarded as desirable and ideal for sustaining a productive and competitive economy.

We must raise ambition in the demand for skills. We will only achieve increased productivity and competitiveness if more employers and more employees are encouraged and supported to make the necessary investment in skills. (DfES 2003, p8)

A better skilled workforce is a more productive workforce. We must improve our productivity, and our ability to support sustainable development, if we are to compete in today's global market (ibid, p17)

Current skills policy discourse asserts that changes in economic globalisation demand a deeper knowledge base and a greater flexibility in skills. Moreover, that the workplace is dependent on upskilled employees who can market transferable work-related skills. It appears that there are historical weaknesses in the UK's ability to perform effectively in a global marketplace to meet the demands of the economy that it is expected to achieve (Tapper and Salter 1978). As a consequence, a significant ongoing failure to match training to available employment has resulted in a lack of supply of specialist occupational skills that have been created, bringing about disillusionment among both the unemployed or those employed in low-grade work (Avis et al 1996). At the same time, the impact on skills requirements suggests that UK employer demand for skills is relatively low compared with its industrialised competitors (Mason 2004). The link between skills levels and economic performance indicates that companies following a 'low value-added strategy' (ibid p4) could enhance their competitiveness by shifting towards new strands of skills training policy. Arguably, it is the political unwillingness to acknowledge and address this national economic under-performance that has brought about the formation of a workforce with fewer opportunities for meaningful employment. In the drive to meet government-set targets for employability and skills-

centred training, the notion of workforce development appears ambiguous and subject to sometimes competing and divergent meanings. On the one hand, workforce development could be understood as it is implied in the Skills Strategy document as a way of identifying shifting points in a constantly changing field of post-16 sector tensions, whilst on the other, it could be interpreted as a question of who owns the problem. The broad tenor of this argument is that employers who are ostensibly responsible for the development of their labour force are resistant to government policy designed to encourage improvements in skills and economic performance. As expressed by Respondent A representing a view from within the FE sector:

...for employers in particular they don't really understand what the skills strategy is, or don't really understand why a particular strategy should be put in place ... You'll find that most employers will go for a set route and not even worry about the government strategy ... all they want is trained people in the workforce. They're not even particularly concerned about what types of skills as long as they've got the right attitudes. I think it's a question of taking a step back ... employers will say 'it's a problem but not our problem – why should we pay for our employees to be further trained in basic skills or whatever', because to their minds if they're trained they'll leave anyway. The counter argument of that is ... if you don't train them they're going to leave or you're productivity isn't going to increase.

The framework of this interviewee narrative emphasises the problematising aspects of workforce development. It is at the heart of an inherent skills dilemma. Employers are reluctant to take ownership for training their employees. Accordingly, low-skill strategies are often firmly entrenched in organisations resulting in the government, education or bureaucratic substitution of employers. At the same time employers expect government to compensate for the failings of the global marketplace. More critically, employers are demanding 'attitudinal skills' in defining the right skills set for guaranteeing individuals employment (Lafer 2004, Warhurst et al 2004). The tendency to label employee traits in terms of attitudes is concerned with redefining identifiable, practical skills for employability as personal attitudes that offer limited opportunity for

upward progression in technology driven workplace occupations. Increasingly, generic personal qualities are perceived by both policy makers and employers as essential facets of skills development in the context of vocational education and training. While government policy settings integrate government and employer ideas of what it means to be skilled, the broadening of meaning must allow for contested views of skill as a current and sustainable reality (Buchanan et al 2004). This participant discourse is not homogeneous. It is varied and shifting (Fairclough 2003). Within the context of the Skills Strategy, the essential point of difference is the dichotomous relationship demonstrated between industry sector demands of the SSCs on employers to train the workforce and state demands on the learning and skills sector for vocational provision. Significantly, this dichotomy does not reflect what employers necessarily demand in terms of training arrangements, or how they reconcile their investment in skills with strategies for competing in a global market place. Notwithstanding the question of employer demand for skills, the anticipated outcome of skills transformation is a responsive and flexible work environment *'which appears to be taking from progressive pedagogy, an emphasis on practical, investigative and collaborative styles of learning because these are now seen to be required by the culture of modern industry'* (Edwards 1995, p117). Yet is there a measure of resonance and consensus between the fundamental concepts at issue? As a social imperative, improving workplace skills is an issue of cultural specificity, inviting comparison between the quality of academic provision while deferring workforce training to a specific organisation in which the individual is eventually employed. Any agreement determined by UK policy-makers to raise labour productivity papers over the resistance conveyed by employers to differing approaches to workforce development and competitive pressures. Thus, the reliance on government policy intervention becomes a potentially nuisance factor in the delivery of

improved skills or productivity, as employers will have minimal reason to change direction or redefine objectives (Warhurst et al 2004, p 11).

Ideological shifts by policy-makers since 1997 reflects a growing demand for vocationalism (Fieldhouse 1998). Much of post-16 learning is embraced within the Skills Strategy and located in the workplace domain. Sector-based employers and vocational education and training opportunities lie at the intersection of economic and market considerations highlighting policy emphasis towards employee skills acquisition.

It is a view endorsed by Respondent H, a key player representing FE sector strategy:

... government's vocational education and training (VET) strategy comes within the political context ... and when Charles Clarke became the Minister at the end of 2002 one of the questions he asked was 'we're an education and skills department, do we have a skills strategy?' I believe that is one of the reasons a Skills Strategy was initiated, and then it acquired a momentum of its own. There's also a set of reforms that were in place from 2002, which was creating the Sector Skills Councils (SSC) and rationalising the employer side of the equation, so making the employers organisations more effective by rationalising the combination of training organisations. There was also considerable interest in skills from the Treasury in terms of narrowing the productivity gap between the UK and EU countries in terms of skills that might be one of the things that might improve productivity, which might then improve economic growth, which might then make the country richer. So in a sense the Skills Strategy didn't come out of nowhere as there were already a number of different strategies and developments in progress.

In the discourse expressed in this extract, the Skills Strategy is perceived as a verifiable solid and certain construct. The familiarity and influence of the word 'skills' provides an accepted feature and its implications appear legitimate. The point of government's skills agenda is, according to this insider account of the information, not to coerce employers into acquiescence. It is, rather, a question of establishing an exchange between primary stakeholders the state, employers and employees. A co-responsibility in which each party builds on the assumption that skilling the workforce should respect the contribution of each individual, employer organisation or agency

body. Rhetorically, it should be possible for stakeholders to make this decision. Yet in reforming skills formation, employers while perceived to be involved in the rationalisation of the former training organisations do not own the SSCs and appear ineffectual in the decision-making process within the SSCs. Further, that regulation of the training market will not mean government can intervene along the lines of former levy arrangements to compel employers to participate. The blunt conclusion is that employers have repeatedly called governments' bluff by their reluctant approach to voluntarily investing in training, thus leading to the debate concerning the deficit in workforce skills. However, is government as a regime of power, being reactive in shaping its skills policy within an objectives-driven and results-orientated system? Is it providing more of the same, or is the Skills Strategy delivering something different?

Again, Respondent H:

The Skills Strategy talks about three parties, so the state does its bit, employers do their bit and individuals do their bit ... What the Skills Strategy doesn't have is a particular mechanism for achieving that. Politically the Labour government has rejected more compulsion in saying that there could be a licence to practice or to extend the levy arrangement that exists in construction and engineering. It says effectively to employers that this is your last chance - if you don't do your bit then we may consider that in future. Whether these are words to keep people in the Labour movement who want that compulsion or not is unclear. So in a sense the Skills Strategy has a strong focus on employee skills development in that it says that government needs to do its bit, particularly targeted towards lower skilled workers. Employers should do their bit through the SSCs and make the system more responsive to employer need. Individuals should do their bit in terms of taking skills more seriously. What in a sense is less clear is whether there's the real will or the real tools to make it happen. Because at the same time that government published its Skills Strategy and then announced its various plans to make it happen, it's got bigger reforms in progress which actually mean that skills take second or back seat. There's the HE strategy about reforming university fees, the 14-19 strategy which is partly about skills, but is also about improving A levels and access to university, also there's the continuing focus on schools generally, in the primary and secondary school reform.

Skills development as a concept is constructed by this interviewee to have a detrimental impact on the post-16 sector. The cogency of this assertion is that state, employer or individual contribution to skills development is a key signifier that cuts across the spectrum of working life. It is portrayed as the acknowledged road to future employment – that workforce skills must improve for the sake of individual development. In the political arena, skilling the workforce has become a manifestation of the educational mission statement and yet academic knowledge defines educational and career pathways rather than vocationalism and skill. The solution to the shortcomings of an apparent national skills deficiency is held within the current thinking of a politically sanctioned, mantra-like consensus. The message appears to be that if the language of the strategy is potent and persuasive enough, success in delivering the skills agenda will be forthcoming. Arguably, what is witnessed here a post-modern discourse-driven approach to reality. To put it another way, this discourse revolves around an underlying assumption that skills are exempt from the context in which they need to operate; that models of workforce development can flourish without being disordered by industrial routine or a less than dynamic learning and skills sector. Yet significantly, while the Skills Strategy is viewed as an important reform for post-16 institutions in responding to learners, employers and community, *‘what these groups say they want and what they’re prepared to pay for and attend, isn’t necessarily cascading down from national government’* (Respondent H).

The debate here is whether the standards applied by the Skills Strategy for the purposes and goals of delivering policies affecting skills performance and productivity will positively enable the desired outcome of increasing influence with education and training partners. The employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) suggest a polarity of focus. In collaboration with trade unions and business sectors with economic or

strategic influence, SSCs are tasked to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their individual sectors (Skills for Business 2004). Through the SSCs, there is an expectation that Sector Skills Agreements will be drawn up and implemented to enable industry, in partnership with employers and unions, to address skill shortages (LSC 2004a). In addition, government supports brokering collaborative and voluntary action in the majority of industries (DfES 2003). Given the dominance that SSCs are generating in the workplace, interviewee responses relating to employer activity and participation in different sectors demonstrate a level of ambiguity between voluntaristic arrangements. For example, as Respondent J a trade union representative explains it:

... I mean, when the Skills Strategy was published, there was a ministerial announcement of it at the time – ‘this is the last chance saloon for employer voluntarism’ ... and yes it does smack of the eighties. If we made a song and dance about the two areas where there is a sector skills agreement, where there is public funding and which is based on levy systems – which is the construction industry and the electrical installation civil engineering part of that industry. You don’t have to worry about marketing and learner inducements. Everybody knows that there’s training opportunities in the construction industry. You don’t have to have a particularly good academic education at school to know that if you can get a pick and shovel job in the construction industry, then you can get subsidised training. And that’s because it’s public and it’s corporate, because there’s a balance between the partners which is a fair one ... although the organisation doesn’t think the balance here is a particularly good one ... we’re not in favour of voluntaristic arrangements. They didn’t work with the Training and Enterprise Councils ... there wasn’t enough learner involvement in any of those.

In the abstract above, discourses are woven around voluntarism, with a focus on economic matters and how far the state should cover the cost of training by statutory means. Reflecting a view of voluntaristic arrangements as central in workplace training reform, there is an emphasis, in this discourse, on rationalisation across sector-training boundaries, as industry remains vested with a more weakened form of training responsibility that is minimalist in approach. A declining numbers of employers who invest in training, coupled with poor skills training will only endorse the inadequacy of a workforce ill-equipped to operate in a flexible labour market. Given the prominence of

economic challenges in the discourse of workforce development, it is important to consider the context in which the language of skills has gained momentum. Are skills unbalancing the world of work, or as suggested by Field (2000 p100), is the polemic misleading and *'a new learning economy is expressed most crudely in the straightforward demand that employees start to acquire new skills and mentalities so as to become more adaptable and mobile'*? In other words, given current discourse concerning a new learning economy, are the drivers for change to do with upskilling, multi-skilling and employability, or from changes in the wider context in which individuals acquire new skills sets that employers are seeking? The shift in the nature of flexible and transferable skills is not unconnected to the shift from manufacturing to service sector in which employers prize soft skills and social attributes. However, qualification outcomes as a dominant performance indicator of VET for government are not valued to the same extent by employers (Keep 2004).

Respondent K illustrates another trade union point of view:

... There's differential access to training as there is everywhere ... Now the SSC and previously the National Training Organisation (NTO) had a policy of getting money from the industry having, if you like, ... raising a tax on the industry, such as you would pay for training as a levy. As a voluntary levy ... then made that mandatory as a consultation going through the DfES ... and going back to the old levies of the seventies and eighties ... we had to set up an Industrial Training Board (ITB) because that's the only legislation that allows that. That's just for part of our industry, not for the whole of it. So basically big companies would end up being a training supplier for the industry ... So there is a good strategy. But there's not a very good means for freelancers ... or the qualifications being relevant ... our industry tends to be a graduate entrance industry ... one initiative that my union is a partner in, with the SSC and the Employers Association, is freelance training ... We raise money from the industry, the SSC, to basically have an apprenticeship scheme ... It's small scale, but a lot of people coming in to the industry don't have the skills, whether they're graduates or not.

In the same vein Respondent L, an education consultant, is of the view that:

... There is an issue with VET strategy as to whether it is simply concerned with publicly funded initiatives of supporting skills development, or whether it actually should support the whole range

of employee work aimed at employee skills, including the path of undertaking work on employer premises with their own staff ... it is difficult for the government as their main policy lever is funding. So it can only directly put into publicly funded skills training. We do not have a statutory system since the demise of the ITBs back in the eighties. It's unlikely that will be on the agenda any time soon. Nor is it necessarily the answer to the issue of improved skills training. It isn't clear ... from Modern Apprenticeships through to Level 3 and a whole range of training not linked to qualifications which employers need ... There may be some evidence for the work of the SSCs – they can bring pressure to bear in their sectors ... employers and their sectors, but I don't think government actions alone will influence it.

The following discursive extract with Respondent N from the QCA provides a view of the perceived significance of building relationships between the SSCs and Awarding Bodies:

... I think that what the government's done in terms of developing the new network of SSCs will probably take on board how workforce development is going to address the gaps in skills and probably the lack of skills, which have been identified in the Skills Strategy ... which predominate really around the Level 2 and basic skills and which we really need to identify ... so that it is not just the vertical progressions that you're catering for, but the horizontal progressions as well. So I think from a strategic point of view most of the SSCs are taking that on board ... In terms of the SSCs each one of those, we will be working with them, it's a partnership, it has to be. We can't afford otherwise, we're developing Sector Qualification Strategies. So the SQSs are the core, fundamental paradigm of how we're going to achieve this. When we get the SQSs in place ... all the Awarding Bodies will have signed up to this strategy. They will know in very broad brush principles, this is what the strategy says, therefore this is what we need to develop. If you've all signed up to that, the early dialogue becomes almost superfluous at that stage ... so for each sector and each SSC we have now just started up ... someone from outside who champions, someone from outside who can articulate for their sector. Unless we get everyone to sign up, it's going to be very difficult.

The discourse of respondents reflects the key role that employer engagement plays in determining skills for productivity. To an extent, the credibility and reliability of their narrative relies on their role and function in the post-16 arena to recount what is their experience. Making a skills case has become the dominant government rhetoric for promoting the engagement of employers and individuals in workforce development.

Despite the socio-economic and political dimensions that define workplace initiatives, the stated government commitment (DfES 2003) to an integrated vision for creating an interface of synergy between employers and training continues, to say the least, to challenge VET practitioners. In determining the scope of VET activity, there is an added risk that post-16 curriculum reforms will both fail to meet the demand of employers and fail to increase the level of participation in PCET.

A RATIONALE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Insofar as workforce development features in lifelong learning debates, it tends to do so in the context of interventions designed to improve the skills and flexibility of the labour force. Economic drivers are strong in forcing more attention on skills development. It is not simply a matter of engaging employers and employees in the notion of employability as a pillar of government policy. Rather, in driving change, the significance of knowledge is an attempt to ensure that the impact of new and different technologies, and their application to the workplace, reflect the agenda for lifelong learning (Field 2000). The engagement of learners is at the heart of government's agenda for establishing a skills and knowledge-driven society and a sustainable culture of lifelong learning. However, lifelong learning tends towards the position of an emergent construct rather than a specific policy, such as the Skills Strategy. It unites different stakeholders in a response to current challenges and shifts in both education and employability. It embraces the notion of a learning society in which the underpinning assumption is that the provision of educational opportunities and skills development to meet a national learning agenda will permeate all levels of the community. According to Peterson et al (1979) lifelong learning offers the vision of a learning order that engages individuals and forges a synthesis that will advance the benefits of learning communities, providing linkages between government, employers and learners. As Tuckett (1997, p.24) puts it:

... at the heart of a learning society are learners and potential learners and the communities in which they live.

Yet within these communities the coherence and quality of provision can fluctuate as social and economic factors impact on attempts to build an integrated and cohesive approach to learning. The definition of 'learning' as a process in which individuals participate in everyday life is put forward by Rogers (1996, p.30). He perceives lifelong learning as continuing education or *education permanente* in which the achievement of tasks is:

... education as built into the process of living rather than as separated into a range of special activities.

However, Long (1990) in his review of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 1973 report on *Recurrent Education* contends that there is a distinction between recurrent education (*education permanente*) and lifelong learning. While recurrent education is perceived as delivery from within an existing formal educational framework, lifelong learning can take place outside of these parameters. In essence, lifelong learning is an active process, integrating learning into experience, yet paradoxically entrenched in an agenda of economic competitiveness and cultural policy. Green (2000) explains that a learning society implies demands for learning at different stages of the lifecourse. Central to his discussion for achieving a learning society is the diversity of approach within a market-driven national economy and the consequent effect on organisations of under-investment in skills training. As new technologies increasingly inform different arrangements for economic activity, there is an impact on both the learning agenda and strategies that promote learning. Tuckett (*ibid*) argues that investment in learner opportunity and the development of a culture of lifelong learning is critical to maintaining economic growth and diversity in employment. But is this assertion valid? As reinforced by Keep (2000), the continuing dual track of skills development vindicates the low-skills route as a viable approach by some companies. It

is evident that despite the rhetoric concerning the upskilling of the labour force, many employers still restrict limited skills training for their employees. This assumption of low-skill development can only lead to low-skill employment, thus excluding opportunities for high-skill progression for the majority of the workforce. Inevitably, the trend towards upskilling strategies accessed only by the few will create low-skills trajectories for the many through a process of skill polarisation.

Again the traditional view of equating adult education with lifelong learning was challenged by the publication of two nineties White Papers – *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998) and *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE 1999). The focus was on learning as pivotal to national success in a global marketplace. Both documents characteristically emphasised the need for economic competitiveness through learner participation in initiatives such as the New Deal Welfare to Work programme. This signalled the New Labour government's intent to be radically different to past legacies of socio-economic policies and to prioritise co-operation through public-private partnerships and inclusion for all in a learning society. There is a commitment to eradicate:

... the learning divide between those who have benefited from education and training and those who have not. (DfEE 1998, p. 11)

The Learning Age (1998) identified that 30 per cent of young people fail to reach Level 2 by the age of nineteen years and twenty-one million adults had not achieved a Level 3 qualification. It argued that a culture of learning contributes to social cohesion, a vibrant economy and an inclusive society. Government policies aim to provide the potential for local partnerships through organisations such as FE colleges, Higher Education, Jobcentre Plus, employers, trade unions, community bodies, training agencies and Connexions to work together to enhance the notion of vocationalism and raise the status of lifelong learning. The fundamental purpose for local and national arrangements

as set out by the erstwhile Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in its response to the 'review of local and national arrangements for 'lifelong learning, skills and workforce development agenda', states that:

Future post-16 arrangements should aim to deliver government's key objectives for lifelong learning more effectively than at present. (FEFC 1999, p.5)

In other words, the key objectives are whatever government say they are. Explicitly, the FE sector through the FEFC was dependent on government funding, but employers were not. This proposed model for delivering learning and skills with improved rigour and flexibility focused on the management of funding streams, quality assurance, participation and local partnerships which should take responsibility for 'assessing adequacy and sufficiency of provision in a local area.' The genesis of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2001 appeared to justify the FEFC mantle that the views of learners, employers and the community are central to the process of identifying skills gaps and responding to national targets through local flexibility.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its report on *Lifelong Learning for All (1996)* endorsed this sentiment. It acknowledged that the current rigidity of learning opportunities experienced in the transition from learning to work, as well as lifelong learning pathway provision in the work environment itself, can inhibit access to those who are already disadvantaged. The report focused on making lifelong learning a reality for all. It saw factors such as the allocation of funding and cost-effective strategies to identify knowledge and competency requirements as essential to extend and diversify the range of learning opportunities outside of the formal education framework. These should not only enable the individual to participate in learning across the lifecourse whether young or old, following a vocational or academic

pathway, but also offer the challenges and incentives to achieve the skills and qualifications necessary for employment.

Lifelong learning is now understood to mean the continuation of conscious learning throughout the life span, as opposed to the notion that learning stops at 16, 18 or 21. (OECD 1996, p. 89)

Contemporary debate surrounding a culture of lifelong learning and established within a learning society supports a commitment by government to the vision of a high-skills and knowledge-driven economy as part of a flexible workforce (Lloyd and Payne 2004). Yet discussion around the political economy of low or high-skilled employment raises issues of limits and the unlikelihood of New Labour investing in revived policies of labour market regulation or collective bargaining. Government's current consensus concerning a flexible workforce and voluntaristic training opportunities is a political panacea for dealing with global competition. By contrast, glaring weaknesses of inherent short-termism and social inequality impact on a national skills market as well as central policy on lifelong learning. Any transformation in post-16 sector skills development should therefore provide the lever for policy change in the construction of a relevant and vocational national paradigm for lifelong learning. Yet given the current situation, inequitable distribution of learning opportunities and skills-specific training appears to exacerbate an already low level of work-related provision (Keep and Mayhew 2001). It is within this environment that the fundamental dilemma is posed of whether there is potential for current post-16 discourse to effectively influence policy and practice, as a means of meeting the realities of a flexible and shifting labour market in the new learning and skills arena. It can be argued that there is a segment of the adult population who do not value cultural activities in the form of reading, discussion and reflection in a personal search for meaning and knowledge. Moreover, that they have doubts that commitment to lifelong learning can lead to social and economic transformation. However, social exclusion from these strategies effectively creates an underclass (Field

2000). It risks creating a sub-group of individuals detached from the labour market and any opportunity for learning. Relations between lifelong learning and inequality impact on wider socio-economic issues and areas of reform. Significantly, supporting the acquisition of knowledge and skills touches on aspects of individual work roles in a knowledge-driven economy, thereby addressing both reality and aspirations of adults in the post-16 sector.

DISCOURSES ON LIFELONG LEARNING

The Skills Strategy stand on lifelong learning has its origins in government's vision of transforming the national investment in vocational skills throughout the working lives of individuals, arguably to influence an increase in demand from employers. As a means of raising demand from employees and justifying the expansion of post-16 learning, overstated expectations of the role of skills in generating strong economic performance can only constitute failure in the absence of positive incentives for learner participation. A discursive shift towards a national culture of lifelong learning is perceived as a major contributor in the delivery of a range of social and economic aims (Fullick 2004). At the heart of this contribution is the focus on economic effectiveness and social cohesiveness.

The recent Treasury assessment of the five economic tests for membership of the European single currency noted that a highly educated workforce with a culture of lifelong learning is more likely to adapt to economic change.
(DfES 2003, p12)

A genuine shift in culture clearly requires pragmatic steps to encourage individuals to participate in any learning activity. As argued by Smith and Spurling (2001), a change in government policy and practice is needed alongside specific workplace and institutional motivators for the development of its lifelong learning concept. The influence of employers located within a globalised, economic and competitive structure favours workers who are able to adapt to the unprecedented pace of change, while post-16

institutions are subject to increasingly invidious and complex funding strategies as a mechanism for delivering workforce learning opportunities. Thus the fundamental challenge set out in the Skills Strategy is to ensure that employers have access to the right skills to support the success of their business, while individuals have the necessary skills needed to be both employable and achieve personal fulfilment. This claim assumes that as a demand-side solution, employers looking for skilled labour would employ individuals with skills allowing for elasticity of demand in the labour force. Changes in the nature and organisation of work oblige employers to deliberate on the upskilling of workers. However, for many companies deskilling on economic grounds is a more attractive option (Field 2000). Meanwhile, as political pressure grows on employers to invest in training for the longer term, the debate around reform in post-16 and adult learning appears chameleon-like across the policy agenda. While policy-makers continue to problematise the notion of lifelong learning, there is undoubtedly a continued and contiguous changing balance between the demand for job-related delivery across industry on the one hand, or life skills as a driver for personal development on the other. As a result:

The range of lifelong learning opportunities still varies enormously across the country. (DfES 2003, p68)

And,

In each local area, the LSC will be responsible for securing the range of lifelong learning opportunities for adults suitable to meet local needs, as part of its overarching duty to secure learning and skills for young people and adults (ibid, p69)

While,

Over 7 million adults in the workforce do not have a qualification at Level 2. Those people are more likely to lack a skills foundation for employability and lifelong learning, and are less likely to get a secure, well paid job (ibid, p60).

The language of policy, as articulated in these extracts from the Skills Strategy, points to the politics of discourse around policy issues. Weaving these texts into the following interviewee extracts presents a range of discursive views on whether current learning strategies are responsive in terms of skills development in providing opportunities for delivery of government's declared policy for a lifelong learning culture. For instance, Respondent B provides a HE perspective:

I'm thinking of Adult Education where we often get people coming in for a range of initiatives, informal education ... we can't get it together to acknowledge and support these programmes and turn them into the stepping stones they provide ... we are not acknowledging those kinds of qualifications as being a meeting point for people to come back in, pick up and progress with. The fact that we can't contemplate deviating for a second from LSC forms, which are required to capture information ... we are not flexible enough to adjust ... we're inflexible at every level ... we're inflexible in terms of funding and qualifications.

(And in response to a question on the impact on the lifelong learning agenda)

... it just makes it more difficult ... By flexibility I mean we need to look at every level including intellectual level as well as the qualifications themselves ... Our inflexibility is about a stock response, meeting bureaucratic aims, not having flexibility to meet the impasse. It's about the kind of instrumentalism that we have to have someone thinking about x, y, z, course rather than thinking about another which may actually be more appropriate and better quality.

This passage reflects the viewpoint of providers as Respondent B discloses some of the conflict experienced in delivering relevant learning programmes within a straightjacket of inflexibility. The overriding theme in this narrative is the sense of 'barriers' that learners need to cross and the seemingly impossibility of responding to a lifelong learning agenda in a bureaucratic environment. Within one voice, there are two discrete articulations competing for influence. Firstly, the portrayal of inflexibility as an obstacle to active learning and the implications of that rigidity on pedagogic relations. And secondly, the positioning of lifelong learning in the transformation of a reconstituted post-16 sector to more imaginative and flexible vocational arrangements. It is now well documented that the failure of past policies to match the persistent problems of VET

(Hyland and Merrill 2003) relate to a mismatch between vocational programmes and employers' skills needs, as government policy-making is interpreted in economic and employment terms in a global market place.

From a contrasting qualifications authority perspective Respondent N believes that:

... People don't like spending money on training or education in an organisation as it takes so long to translate that into your net profit which is what's driving management most of the time ... Something I'm passionate about is how is this going to offer a better way and improve your lifestyle. How is this going to make your lifestyle better. Not future education or stimulating you to lifelong learning. How are you going to benefit now? I don't think the message is there at all. It's not there at all.

By utilising this discursive approach, Respondent N is depicted as a practitioner speaking from the perspective of intimate involvement and 'passion', and to an extent, at variance with the professional distance expected from practitioners. However, without involvement there is no commitment. Dickinson and Erben (1995) argue that a narrative explains the meanings of events and places them into a social or moral framework. Narrativity is temporal, linking past, present and future. Most crucial in this narrative, is that education and skills practitioners are enabled to find their own voices, a way of making sense of the process of communication and experience.

Similarly, Respondent K the union representative makes the important point:

I say it has to be a statutory right to be paid time off to study. And I think that applies to everybody – not Level 2, Level 3 or Level 1, but everybody. Because a successful organisation is a learning organisation. A learning organisation makes provision for learning. Not just learning by doing, but formal interaction and structured learning ... That means in the learning organisation - there has to be a lot more democracy, accountability and openness in the working environment. As I see it, the government buys into the idea of the life cycle hypothesis, which is about your lifetime earnings being improved with learning. But the problem is that at Level 2 they can only talk about 'returns to learning'? There's so many returns over a lifetime at A Levels, Level 3 or Level 4, but there are no returns to Level 2. If you don't have a level 2 qualification and then you gain one, there's no difference in lifetime income. So there's no incentive for people to study at Level 2 ...

There is no advantage at Level 2 for investing in own education. Therefore the state has to make up for that market failure.

Respondent A from FE agrees, pointing out that:

Generally speaking a lot of adults who are below level 2 are only going to go into some sort of learning if they see it's going to be of benefit to them in the long run. And by that, most people who go into learning go into it recognising the need to develop their skills to move on, so that they can actually become employable.

These discursive views, from Respondent K articulating a union voice and Respondent A from FE, demonstrate the relationship between state and education through the integration of skills and workforce development.

In framing the Skills Strategy, what is at stake is not just the discourse of the skills agenda, but also the interaction of power that legitimises or blurs the space between social boundaries and discursive representation. Textual data or discourse plays a role in social construction (Fairclough 2003). The relationship between social construction and what is possible differs according to social events or practices. Social practices can be networked together to define specific ways of acting. Further, individuals as social agents characterise texts, setting up relations between elements of text. Thus, the meaning of text is determined by the agency of individuals or actors represented in events. The educational sociology of Bernstein (1990) captures this in his explanation of the principles regulating education practice and the structuring of pedagogic discourse that require strong '*insulation*' between boundaries:

Different degrees of insulation between categories create different principles of the relations between categories ... Any attempt to change the classification necessarily involves a change in the degree of insulation between categories, which in itself will provoke the insulation maintainers ...
(Bernstein 1990, p24)

From this point of view, the Skills Strategy can be seen to be based on a new set of policy interventions within which the work of agencies (or insulation maintainers) such

as FE institutions, the LSC and SSCs can be achieved. And it is within the sites of these agencies that the articulation of power and creation of new education and skills narratives can occur. Further, from a Bernsteinian point of view, it can be argued that operating between these discourse boundaries is at the heart of interpreting the Skills Strategy. For example, participant discourses on funding strategies suggest the impact is a different experience for employers and individuals. As a form of discourse, each of the interviewee narratives suggests meaningful interconnected episodes. The participant ability to create personal accounts that coalesce past and present is an assumed outcome of their post-16 professional experiences. Inflexibility in the system and stimulating lifelong learning reveal a pattern of complexity and contrast, eloquently put forward through individual oral discourse.

Different texts within the same chain of events or which are located in relation to the same (network of) social practices, and which represent broadly the same aspects of the world differ in the discourses upon which they draw.
(Fairclough 2004, p127)

There are clear messages in the participant narratives of academic professionals and practitioners, who articulate their concerns about the more dysfunctional aspects of both the intransigence of current skills strategies and their disillusion with government policy. Increased demands from multiple stakeholders appear to be creating a cumulative effect of pressure on the post-16 sector. What leverage do external groups exert on FE institutions? Indeed, what arrangements are there for institutions to influence decisions on the adult learning environment, the local labour market or business community in the face of ongoing inconsistent policy interventions? The significance of such discursive shifts will be considered further in Chapter 5.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to draw together complementary and contrasting discourses within the context of the Skills Strategy. It reflected on the socio-economic and developmental dimensions of workplace development, which can be understood in the discourse of the needs of a knowledge economy and lifelong learning. Drawing on the discourse material of respondents, insights were offered into the challenges posed by divisive vocational and skills development strategies that are increasingly characterising post-16 provision. Assumptions concerning training in the workplace highlight how employees do not perceive the acquisition of skills as critical for employment. Employers are thwarted by skills shortages and post-16 providers feel undermined in their attempts to develop meaningful vocationally led provision. What is even more apparent is that government, notwithstanding its rhetoric, is unable to impose change on employers or influence them to move positively in the direction of training the labour force. In neglecting the contribution of vocationalism and skills provision as a valid form of workforce development, the author argues that to encourage participation in the notion of lifelong learning and practice requires a culture shift by individuals and employers in work-related or lifetime learning activities. It follows from this, that it is crucial to maximise the scope and capacity of the workforce in contributing to a knowledge-driven economy through remedying the vacuum in employer training and implementing effective and achievable policy reform. The next chapter discusses how the nature of the relationship between state, industry and post-16 institutions is instrumental in defining and reproducing skills needs and whether government can do anything useful about the perceived under-investment in training.

CHAPTER 4

THE SKILLS LANDSCAPE

The focus in this chapter is on how the current rise in skills development issues is a response to economic and political imperatives that go beyond the confines of government education and training policy. It explores the way in which the Skills Strategy articulates the demand for skills. Central to this discourse is how the economy is characterised by a 'skills mismatch', how the existing low-skills trajectory can be shifted towards a high-skill approach and how an underlying scepticism of skills formation is determined by employer and worker perceptions of labour market requirements. In moving the skills paradigm beyond government policy, the skills priorities of the workplace would need to be not simply limited to the question of how to deliver skills but changed to redefine skills for flexible employments.

THE SKILLS MISMATCH - 'GAPS' AND 'DEFICITS'

The skills landscape is one of growing fluctuation as government policy focuses on improving competitiveness through reform of its economic agenda and expansion of education to address productivity concerns. The context is disparate with the blurring of skills gaps between individuals, sectors and countries (Lindsay 2004). There is a mismatch between the skills available in the labour force and the skills that industry says it needs. Twelve million adults without any qualification are disproportionately located in under-performing regions in England (ODPM 2005). Government in partnership with the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been charged with reducing the under performance and skills gaps in these areas to a level which matches the better performing Southeast. The ODPM Report suggests that as the demand for skills intensifies adaptation to change is essential for improving regional economic

performance through workforce development. Part of the requirement for future national prosperity are Skills Strategy objectives that focus on improved and sustained *'foundation skills for employability'* and *'advanced skills and training'* (DfES 2003). In support of the Skills Strategy, the National Employment Panel (NEP) Skills Advisory Board believes that the skills issue is fundamental to the broader welfare reform agenda and warrants a target of *'reducing by 40% the number of adults who lack a Level 2 by 2010'* (NEP 2004, p1). It has identified that some training fails to give individuals the employability skills needed for sustainable work resulting in a low rate of return on Level 2 vocational qualifications. Further, the NEP argues that changes in policy and delivery of the agenda are required to achieve a step-change in the prospects for skilled workers and the system that delivers employment and training.

At the same time, the complexity and diversity of shifting patterns of employment and the transformation of traditional organisational structures to service occupations has led to skills deficits or shortages where the workforce lack specific occupational skills and qualifications, as well as skills gaps where employees lack the skills needed to meet company objectives. Skills deficits impact on national performance as companies experience difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff as young people leaving education do not possess the skills needed for employability (Westwood 2004). One of the primary reasons for skills gaps is the failure of firms to train and develop their employees. Research undertaken by the National Employer Skills Survey 2004 for the Skills in England 2004 Report (LSC 2005b) shows that of approximately 620,000 vacancies, just over one-third were proving hard to fill and just under one-half were classified as skill-shortages. And for skills gaps, approximately one-fifth of employers reported staff as not fully proficient to meet the requirements of their employment. The Report argues that a productivity gap remains due in part to the UK's failure to produce enough goods

and services at the higher value-added end of the market. Research undertaken by Jenkins and Wolf (2004) indicates that local and regional conditions affect the way individuals engage in skills updating or opportunities for lifelong learning. Employer Skills Survey 1999 data suggest that skills shortages (20%) and skills gaps (18%) in the Southeast rank among the three highest areas in the country (Jenkins and Wolf 2004). Yet the most skilled job roles, measured by qualification to do the job, were also to be found in the Southeast. This uneasy co-existence between skills mismatches and occupational trends can be gauged in terms of the apparent dereliction of the worth of skills by employers.

Historically, both government and industry have singularly underrated the value of workforce development. Yet how important is it to maintain an adequate level of training and why is it needed? Clearly, a poorly skilled labour force contributes to a progressively weakened economy. The pace of technological and economic change places emphasis on new skills to adapt to new employment processes. Hence the need for a skilled workforce is a prerequisite for economic survival in a globally competitive market place. In former times, the tradition of employer-led training allowed industrialists to decide policy on whether to train or not, according to individual company demands. Industrial training and workforce development relied on short-term expediencies rather than long-term investment in craft-based transferable skills. Successive governments acceded to this ideology of voluntarism by assuming that industry was responsible for national training policies. Hence there has been no statutory obligation on employers to train. Inconsistencies created dissension and divergences between industry, state and education promulgating a continuing and inherent lack of a national cohesive and sustainable learning and skills culture. Furthermore, divided and conflicting VET policies reinforced the education perspective

that views the workplace-training paradigm as inferior in comparison to the value of an academic pathway. Ainley (1990) argued for a unified system of VET in which *'formal and academic study related with practical and applied learning'* (p125). The centrality of this model was the aspiration for a socially just pedagogy to eliminate the divisiveness of class barriers and to contribute to a revitalised economy. While Prais (1989) noted that too much emphasis was being placed on employers' immediate needs and too little on the longer-term needs of the economy, particularly in regard to the narrowness of skills required for qualifications. A key objective of the early nineties' promotion of competence based national vocational qualification structure was to improve the working of the labour market for skills. According to Prais (1993) in his paper on economic performance and education, NVQ implementation led to lower reliability and lower marketability of vocationally relevant work qualifications rather than the hoped for balance between the academic and vocational, or between the theoretical and practical aspects of knowledge and skills acquisition.

HIGH SKILL? LOW SKILL?

The impact of structural change in the context of the labour market has been a decline of employment in traditional industry sectors. In some regions this has resulted in a divesting of skills content, producing jobless growth. This transformation in occupational structure has been accompanied by a diminution of low-skilled manual jobs (Ashton et al 1990). The loss of low-skilled occupation is an outcome, in part, of the overall effect of the demands made by larger companies for a more automated and highly skilled workforce. By shifting the skills trajectory in this way, industry applied new technology to de-skill the many and upskill the few. Thus the decline of low-skill employees has had a polarising effect of increasing the requirement for a more highly trained and skilled elite for technology-orientated employment. However, a major effect

in recent decades of unemployment and recession has been the exclusion of the youth labour market as demands for high-calibre skilled employees replaced opportunities in training and apprenticeship schemes. Inevitably, the majority of young trainees are then increasingly shifted into contracting, low-skilled sectors of employment. New Labour's recent document *'Skills in the global economy'* (HM Treasury 2004), argues that previous solutions to eradicate the problems of a low-skills economy have failed. A poor skills mix has resulted in a polarised skills distribution with *'around 7.8 million people of working age in the UK have either low or no skills'* (HM Treasury 2004, p 3). A key part of achieving a high-skill economy is the availability of transferable, flexible training for updating the low-skilled between firms and sectors. The LSC in its paper *'The Skills we need: Annual Statement of Priorities'* (LSC 2004a) posits that the characteristics of the skills market are *'changing dramatically'* (p3). Yet paradoxically, it loosely states that the proportion of adults receiving a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification *'is rising, though further strong growth is needed'* (p5). Further, in its consultation paper *'Investing in Skills: Taking forward the Skills Strategy'* (2004b) the LSC claims to recognise the value of investment in training and skills and that gaining a Level 2 qualification *'represents a significant step in employment rates'* (p5), a claim yet to be proven. Nonetheless, it is doing this by maintaining that turning the Skills Strategy vision into reality requires a shift in expectation and practice of *'who pays for what'* (p3).

Keep and Mayhew (2001) examine the notion of formation of skills as critical to economic success and essential for long-term global competitive advantage. They assert that a high performance, high-skill paradigm of workplace skills development is difficult to cultivate within the UK economic and business-management practice of de-regulated labour markets and weak links for training personnel. Shifting a deeply embedded

national management culture that enables firms to pursue a low-skill strategy is not necessarily a positive catalyst for change. The failure of firms to adopt a high involvement and high-skill model of productivity is aided by an overall weakness of labour market regulation coupled with a lack of upskilling opportunities. If policy makers have an inclination to view skills as an economic panacea, then arguably, higher-income, higher-skilled sectors tend to produce high-quality products, while lower-income, lower-skilled sectors tend to produce a greater share of standard quality products. However, if firms engaged in low-value production are able to survive quite conveniently in their existing market environment, it is unlikely that they will respond to policy agendas to move into a more high-value product area requiring high-skill activity (Mason 2004). Notwithstanding this perception, Payne (1999) argues that the meaning of skill within a radically transformed labour market requires clarification. Widely divergent principles and working practices span the skills divide. While many jobs remain low-skill, the distinction between enhancing ambiguous high-skills development, which in effect is low-skill by another name, and, really upskilling for a new generation of the high-skilled in a high-tech economy presents major problems that Warhurst et al (2004) have highlighted.

What emerges from this skills debate is the impact of training for a low-skills and low-wage economy in determining labour demand at the level of the firm. Seemingly, in the short-term it is the concentration on productivity that will encourage companies to employ whatever labour is required to produce that output. However, where technology is used as a substitute for labour, this is often the justification for investment in new methodologies requiring fewer employees, rather than employing more workers using existing equipment. Inevitably, this strategy influences workforce development in

regard to type of jobs created, which in turn appears to have critical implications for investment in long-term training.

SKILLS SCEPTICISM

Inescapably, the very diffusion and ambiguity of the notion of skill across the high-skill low-skill divide questions what society requires from an effective education and training system. It is about skills acquisition within a framework of competing technical efficiency, about relevant training for real jobs and about the quality of provision. Finegold and Soskice (1990) contend that it is the interaction of institutional structures – state and social - that place constraints on improving the level of skills, thereby creating a '*low-skills equilibrium*'. Their analysis centred on economic rhetoric surrounding the future of the UK economy. The combination of inadequately trained managers and a poorly trained workforce on the one hand, with the manufacture of inferior quality products on the other, stressed the need for radical reform. This rationale identified deficiencies in training and ingrained weaknesses in the UK's approach to VET (Coffield 2004, Keep and Mayhew 2001). Alongside this rationalisation is the global argument for an education system able to deliver the skills and knowledge needed to compete globally in a high-skilled market place. However, this view neglects the fact that in a constantly changing global environment low-skill workers producing cheaper goods, as exemplified by the Asian economies, add not only to the growing polarisation of the UK's skills base, but also to an over-supply of goods that may not be met by the demand of the UK market (Lloyd and Payne 2004).

Yet, who are we educating and training, and why? In preparing individuals for a productive role in the labour market, policy-makers appear to have attempted to re-invent the wheel. Industrialists remain resistant to change, while educationalists attempt

to tackle the complexities of fragmentation and class differentiation. It appears that the focus of VET rhetoric centres on whether education can be the instrument of skills efficiency within the labour force and still serve educational aims. Evaluation of government's demands for a skilled workforce underlines the extent to which the impact of socio-economic and political forces have influenced the education and training system.

The debate around a national culture of high-skill, high value-added as a recipe for global competitiveness and the establishment of an education and training system able to deliver, continues unabated. Grubb (2004) posits that the New Labour mantra of *'education, education, education'* might be an exaggerated response to the inadequacies of the labour market, through arguing for an increase in the relative supply of skilled labour. His research questions whether there is an economic imperative for intensive skills development. The implications of new technology and different job design, while requiring new skills sets for service level skills, does not appear to support the need for *'two-thirds of all individuals in positions that don't require much advanced schooling'* (Grubb 2004, p45). At the same time, the balance between supply and demand of high level skills is not borne out by intermediate-skill levels, which shows a 41% over-supply of labour. Thus, as explained by Grubb (2004), skilled individuals are left to find unskilled employment, alongside increasing numbers leaving an expanded further and higher education system and taking employment intended for non-graduates. There is qualification inflation through the supply of educated workers without an equivalent increase in demand. This situation is exacerbated when employers appear indifferent to the skilling of their employees. Explicit criticism of current policy regarding the too narrow focus on education and training initiatives highlights the under-utilisation of high-skill employees in low-skill employment. There is a clear need to raise employer

demand for skills development to make any kind of impact on workplace training strategies. Yet if skills reform is undertaken in the face of opposition from employers, then the outcome is workforce development delivered for political expediency matched by the loss of an effective learning and skills policy. Alternative strategies need to be firmer and move towards a political consensus giving scope for a more radical settlement around the creation of a training market in which employers pay more in order to stay competitive. Differences in the economic environment will also impact on the means by which employers utilise employee skills. If employers demand low-level skills from their employees, this can act on an individual understanding of education and skills development. Often the result of this vicious circle is that decisions taken by firms to increase the demand for employee skills will be determined by their perceptions of the local labour market and have an effect on future pattern of skill supplies.

DISCOURSE ON SKILLS

Despite employers' views of skills trends in the workforce, discourse in the Skills Strategy appears to have taken a broad view of the skills that are relevant to its remit. The skills individuals possess affect most aspects of their everyday lives, but in particular their prospects in the labour market and their status in society.

We want to encourage the development of skills right across the board. Supporting the development of higher level skills and qualifications is every bit as important in a knowledge economy as helping those with no or low skills. Many of our skills deficits are at those higher levels. So the strategy must provide a framework, which encourages such investment. But that is different from deciding who pays for it. The state cannot pay for everything.
(DfES 2003, p27)

A comprehensive portfolio of skills is considered essential for access to the workforce. However, the relationship between skills and work is not only about employability. The possession of certain skills is not a guarantee of job security. Strategies are required to

assist individuals from disadvantaged communities become more employable through a range of flexible and defined generic skills:

In many disadvantaged areas, low community expectations and aspirations are significant factors in holding back the prospects for economic and social development. That is reinforced by low-skills, low achievement and early drop out by young people from education and an assumption that learning and skills are not relevant to people's lives once they have left school (ibid, p105)

The Skills Strategy is expecting different industries to adopt a variety of approaches to promote collaborative action on skills through Sector Skills Agreements that would cover:

An analysis of sector trends, the drivers of productivity, any areas in which a 'low-skills equilibrium' is apparent, and the consequent workforce development and skills needs to increase competitiveness over the medium to long-term (ibid, p55)

In spite of an apparent political willingness to change the historical inadequacies of skill through the Skills Strategy, there is an overburdening of economic factors in government discourse from which skills and workforce transformation is justified. Rhetoric in the context of the relationship between education and the economy highlights the impact of different types of skills required by the individual in the workplace. As pointed out by Ainley (1999), an emphasis on skills at whatever level of the curriculum and learning is intrinsically ambiguous. It masks political debate by either encouraging young people onto training schemes as participants in a semi-skilled labour force and by offering job opportunities to higher level graduates that were previously undertaken by a low-skilled workforce. It is the contradiction between these models, with generic and personal skills for employability on the one hand and higher cognitive skills on the other, which leads to over-inflation of the qualifications needed to gain meaningful employment. This commodification of learning acts as an inhibitor in the acquisition of knowledge and skills confining individuals to the periphery of the labour market. As a result, lack of permanent or relevant employment opportunities is tending to encourage learners of all

ages back into education for re-training or qualification achievement. However, the quantification of learning through government policy and change in terms of financial efficiency and performance indicators is part of a settlement in which education is increasingly subject to market accountability.

These dimensions of the knowledge and skills process would suggest that the relationship between the Skills Strategy and the marketisation of learning is a contingent political construct. Whilst discursive analysis is useful in identifying change in the political language of the skills agenda, the question remains as to whether explanation of this change is any closer. Implicitly or explicitly, attempting to understand this particular discourse and the extent to which the perspectives of respondents captures their own experiences as stakeholders, is reflective of discursive practices which are constructed within their own roles. For example, according to one employer Respondent E, cogency for the argument concerns how linking knowledge to the debate around skills gaps is making education more accountable in terms of its curriculum:

The problem here lies with the fact that, in some ways, the stable door of skills gaps is being shut after the learning horse has bolted. Any initiative designed to address these deficits is welcome and will have a positive effect. But in order for these to be as effective as possible there has to be this link back to the delivery of learning in schools. In some ways it has fallen on the shoulders of the employer to deal with the perceived skills gap. So in order for the policy initiatives to work the government has to take a very broad, almost holistic view, of education and learning and development.

While for another employer, Respondent D:

Certainly it (the Skills Strategy) is an improvement ... but from a funding point of view you need to go to a higher level than the Level 2. Because our biggest skills gaps are not at the bottom levels, they're in the management levels and they're the ones which will have the biggest effect on the people at lower levels ... can train and give them more ability, more opportunity, pass on experience. But they can't do that if they haven't got that set of skills. So the trouble is they're expected to pay for it and management courses aren't cheap.

There are inherent contradictions highlighting what might appear as another paradox - the connection between localised forms of learning and skills development within companies with the strategic view of what employers presuppose as an entitlement from the state or free training opportunities. The rationale underpinning employer demands reflects a discursive contest in which education and training is subordinated to the needs of industry. While employers' views can dictate the dominant discourse in the realisation of a corporate learning organisation, the perspectives from policy-makers are more geared to economic determinism. It is not a simple dichotomy, however, as expressed by Respondent N of the QCA:

Where you've got the mighty pound and the private company turns round to government and says 'what's going to be my profit out of this? ... if you want me to spend more money on the identified gaps in my organisation, which aren't at Level 2, and I can't get funding from you ... where's the payoff?' Perhaps the gap we have to overcome is in all these private organisations recognising that they're going to have to invest and that's going to cost a bit more.

The lack of congruence between these contrasting views on funding skills development contests whether competing relationships between agencies is having a detrimental impact on numerous fledgling post-16 partnership arrangements. In highlighting the complexity of the skills landscape, the dominance of the discourse is seen in the transformation of what is a fragmented and diverse arena into an economic and political mechanism of how skills deficits are measured and integrated into current learning and skills data. The discourse articulated by Respondent C, from a skills alliance point of view, presents the tensions of labour market skills deficits as a force for reform and employer engagement:

There is a lot of confusion about what are basic skills levels. What is the level of basic skills deficits? Because some of the figures are considerably at variance and not robust enough to make policy on. That's not to say there is not a significant skills problem, but I think it can be distorted sometimes, as there is a lack of clarity as to how big the problem is. That's an issue of perception ... When we come to somewhere like the Thames Gateway there are some very significant underachievements, there are some significant skills

shortages ... they are a constraint on growth and development. In an area like this where there's huge growth predicted in population, which has to be accompanied by inward investment ... we have to address that. The shift to new SSCs will have to get a more realistic picture of how big the problem is. That has to be the basis on which to start planning appropriate learning provision.

And again for Respondent C, definition of the parameters for success and a timeframe for implementation of the Skills Strategy was important:

Typical Cabinet timescales? ... you need to see success in an area like this in three to three and a half years if you're going to start addressing the issues. It poses some major questions for some of the providers ... The LSC has been slower to respond to the huge skills challenge in North Kent. The LSC tends to fund incrementally year by year. You can't do that where there's major growth. You've got to plan ahead. You've got to put in the resources and capital investment to have an impact. For example, take the Ebbsfleet development, twenty thousand jobs potentially, and all the skills that go with that. When it starts to come on stream for 2007, unless you start putting in significant resources now you will have a skills deficit which will be a disincentive to people to invest.

While for Respondent N of the QCA, responsibility for identification of where the skills gaps lie:

It will be the SSCs who have to identify these... and we cannot forget the regional input that's got to come from this country, where we've got to address more resources, where we've got to get people involved for a particular sector.

An underlying theme is whether new policy initiatives can be effective in addressing perceived national sectoral deficits. Rhetorically, new agendas could both provide equality of opportunity and produce an effective and differentiated labour force. Yet there are still divergences within stakeholder discourses. The following extract illustrates a FE perspective from Respondent A:

In terms of skills shortages and skills gaps, employers sometimes don't say what they mean. For example, I visit employers, and they say 'we haven't got the right skills coming through the colleges, people don't get trained in the right way' ...or, 'we've got skills gaps and skills needs'. But when you talk to employers in depth, what they're talking about is very specific, such as engineering, and not generic. So there's this idea that there's lots of skills shortages ... and employers feel that colleges should pay for that ... Also employers don't understand the post-16 learning structure. Talk to employers and they talk about wanting recruits to have a BTEC rather than a NVQ. They don't understand NVQ structures or frameworks that surround them. So the

take-up is particularly poor ... There is a mismatch, but government - they haven't found the mechanism to meet employer need and what they see as being the real problem.

Different overlapping discourses can be seen operating through interviewee assertions of what actually is effective in terms of critiquing skills deficits. According to a union viewpoint from Respondent J, a measure of validity is:

I can be very brief about this ... remember the Tories coming in with this in the eighties? I'm afraid it's still true. You look at the skills shortages, especially in Greater London, 70% of them aren't even low-skill they're no-skill ... There is an awful lot of jobs that don't demand any skills. So this is a challenge to the employers. Do you want a high-skill, high value-added economy – and if you reckon that you need loads of skilled people to do it – you've got to invest in the infrastructure to deploy those skills.

What is happening in the supply of skills can properly be understood only if seen against policy changes at all levels of learning and workforce development and indeed against this narrative from one PCET adviser, Respondent M, as to why there is a push towards Level 2 achievement:

It's getting us back to thinking that we've got to improve industry by improving the qualifications of the workforce. Derived demand theory would put it the other way round. That would say that industry is operating at the moment at a level which means that it doesn't require high level skills. The first move is not to provide high level skills. Because if you do it that way round the employers are not going to pay for it as they don't see the need ... It's very fundamental ... my approach now is that the one lever government feels it can pull is to do with the supply of skills. It's therefore trying to improve our competitiveness and our industries through altering that. But that's a rubber lever ... I'm persuaded by the argument that says the first move is to stimulate a company by other means ... it will then come to the colleges for help because their staff haven't got this knowledge or skill.

The notion of derived demand is a means by which the dichotomous relationship between innovation and training is perceived as a driver for training (Brown et al 2004). On the one hand, education and skills policy is a mechanism to promote the supply of qualified employees to the labour market, while on the other, innovation is an outcome of a higher demand for the training of the workforce by employers who decide to

innovate first. Both education and skills policy and business innovation can be inscribed in discourses that seek to influence public opinion. Policy texts are a public expression of the intent of government. As stakeholder groups take an increased interest in the instruments of government's learning and skills agenda, these agencies become the public mechanism by which stakeholder expectations are managed.

SUMMARY

In this chapter a principal argument for undertaking occupational training and skills development has been its link with economic growth and productivity – investment in skills incurs current expenditure in anticipation of future benefits. The cost to employers in the level of productivity between a skilled or trainee worker can be balanced in terms of the overall benefits or financial returns at the completion of training. The implications of low investment policies are twofold. Whilst on the one hand there is an obvious deterioration in the quantity and quality of available skilled labour, the cost to industry in terms of labour investment, is minimal. Industry's rationale is one of part-time, casual and flexible labour. Current policy poses a challenge to the concept of skills development across the workforce agenda. Workplace training is assumed to be the responsibility of employers but in reality many employers remain reluctant to give priority to investing in skills activity. To an extent there is a perception that it is an inefficient VET system that is producing skills deficiencies. As the skills debate again emerges as a policy issue, complex and conflicting expectations concerning government's approach to VET continue to impact on efficiency and expediency in the demand for skills and the market for employment. How then does current government policy sit with this trend? The introduction of the Skills Strategy is heralded as a remedy for change. But the impact appears to be failing to move education or employers in the right direction. There is a perceived mismatch in skills, but government has yet to

identify an effective mechanism to address what employers see as being the real problem. Where exactly concerns about fundamental differences in education provision fail to imprint an image of political and economic competence, and why a network of disparate approaches to sustainable skills formation and mismatch has evolved in the labour force, will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICISATION OF LEARNING

POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS AND PROVISION IN THE POST-16 SECTOR

This chapter assesses the merits and problems of three closely related facets of the politicisation of learning – policy, partnerships and provision. It illuminates some significant features of education, of the economy and of the workplace by reference to the Skills Strategy. In particular, it considers the discourse of the Skills Strategy in its relationship to interviewee discourses. This section outlines the key policy issues that continue to cause concerns about dual academic and vocational pathways and the link to workforce development, the pivotal role of partnerships in the governance of the post-16 sector (Appendix 2) and the provision of learning and skills through reforming the qualifications framework.

POLICY

Recent attention on learning and skills policy highlights the failure of the UK to invest in education and training has left the post-16 sector with a low level of skills and productivity. In the face of this dereliction by succeeding governments of different political persuasion, VET has once again been placed at the centre of policy debate. Post-16 education and training has become a market-driven, learner-centred response to employer needs. Learning policy now articulates a discourse of competitiveness, target-related funding and limited entitlement parameters. Learning and skills development is underpinned by new principles of collaboration between the LSC, educators, government, employers and individuals. Within these policy arrangements, FE remains a key stakeholder driven more by private, rather than public enterprise. Since the incorporation of colleges following enactment of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) and the subsequent transformation of the post-16 sector (Elliott and Crossley

1997, Ainley and Bailey 1997), the rhetoric around greater autonomy, professional management of institutions and improved quality standards implies a commitment to an ethos of radical change in the structure of learning organisations.

Sectoral educational policy is driven by a response to global market forces impacting on the type and range of post-16 curriculum delivered by FE colleges. The emphasis is on teaching the knowledge, skills and attributes needed in the world of work. Current practice is focused on the development of vocationalism and skills initiatives determined by the engagement of the education sector in workforce development to meet the needs of a knowledge-based global economy. Government policies allude to embracing lifelong learning as a response to skills shortages and unemployment. Provision is a dichotomy of specific employment and workplace skills programmes on the one hand, which are diametrically opposed to areas of vocational specialism linked to academic education on the other (Brown & Keep 1999). Field (2000) reinforces this view pointing out that lifelong learning policy interventions have been implemented to address skills shortfalls and ensure labour flexibility, rather than engaging learners in a range of learning opportunities. Bottery (1999) claims that within an educational sphere social policy is subordinated to the economic:

The rationale for learning is openly technical-rationalist, economic and reductionist, and provides no other reasons for why learning might be good other than its economic usefulness (1999, p.306)

The focus of learning is located firmly on workplace skills development and labour market needs to the detriment of interactive learning contexts across the educational divide. Yet, the academic remains privileged over the vocational. Accepting this rationale, the implications are clear. On the one hand, policies that prioritise national and global economic demands over the interests of learners will marginalise cultural, educational and social issues vital to the enrichment of institutions. On the other,

government strategies for employability are allied with seeking investment in skills and knowledge to perform labour tasks brought about by rapid technological change.

DISCOURSES ON POLICY REFORM

With the publication of the Skills Strategy it should be feasible to discern a coherent and unambiguous policy direction. Yet any sense of policy coherence fades as an identified consensus about what the problem might be in terms of learning and skills deficiencies is negated by lack of resolution of the issues involved. Instead, the policy is one of new arrangements in which responsibility for much post-16 funding is being redistributed and provision is devolved from FE to employers. And the likelihood of mass financial contributions from employers into post-16 learning looks increasingly remote. Explicitly, the discourse from government is that it aims to revitalise learning and skills policy around workforce development and employer needs, as a vehicle for the UK economy to address global competition and technological change. This is indicated in the Skills Strategy where the reform process is constructed as a categorical statement:

The White Paper builds on the extensive skills and adult learning reforms put in place since 1997. It addresses frequently articulated concerns of employers, trade unions and providers. They have challenged us to create a coherent policy framework which supports frontline delivery and develops an education and training system which is focused on the needs of employers and learners. (DfES 2003, p21)

In addition, the national skills agenda is framed in wider terms of European economic reform and action agreed by the European Union member states in Lisbon in 2000:

It will take concerted effort across government and across the European Union to drive forward the process of economic reform ... This strategy underpins our efforts to tackle the skills gaps which undermine our economic performance (ibid, p115)

What is evident is that the Skills Strategy reform agenda is portrayed as a competing framework of economic interests, reflective of the impact of a global marketplace. The

Lisbon Council embraces the notion of a European approach to lifelong learning policy from early years to retirement. However, as argued by The Work Foundation in its *Where are the Gaps?* (DfES 2005c) report, the UK learning culture remains locked in the idea that the acquisition of skills is useful in specific business contexts rather than as skills for employability, creativity or lifetime learning. Participants' ways of talking about the politicisation of vocational learning determine how these narratives should be viewed as a process in which the economy and educational change are defined through different frames of reference. The underpinning meanings and principles of coherence can be unpacked and reconstructed (Potter 1996) using the Skills Strategy document. What is involved here is an opening up of the focus of inquiry - that it is not only the epistemological position about the status of knowledge, but also an ontological one concerning the nature of the social and educational world itself (Wetherell et al 2001, Potter and Wetherell 2004). In this respect, the constructed narratives of participant interviews employ discursive strategies in pursuit of different approaches to engagement in education and training, while latching onto different interpretations of the Skills Strategy. The crux of this analysis is in determining whether there are different or conflicting discourses in the Skills Strategy. These strategies gain significance in that they are intended to facilitate the process of change (Hammersley 2003). Thus, the discourse captures discursive interpretations of how the politicisation of the learning and skills agenda has come to be, how it could be different and how it can be changed.

One of the features in the production of narratives is the extent to which the texts approach the possibility of change (Apple 1995). Change needs to be contextualised. And the free-market state is seen as a primary re-contextualising agent. Yet it is debatable whether state intervention necessarily deals with the problems it is meant to solve. Moreover, any solution tends to generate conflict at governmental level or in the

policies and practices involved in the political and economical aspects of education. The example of skills development demonstrates how mechanisms for dealing with complex ideological differences concerning vocationalism and workforce training also creates an arena for historical conflicts to re-emerge. Issues of training provision and the adoption of mandatory policies through state intervention continue to be controversial. Multiple political and economic agendas are brought together in a complex set of relations to further the progress of an increasingly regulatory post-16 framework. Interview outcomes suggest a fluid and differentiated skills market and more fragmented experiences than the established orthodoxy of a skilled workforce. The impact of skills shortages in certain sectors depends on how the labour market operates. One trade union view expressed by Respondent K:

If there's a shortage of labour in a free market, then you raise wages to attract the labour in ... if I was an employer I would like highly skilled plumbers queuing up for work then I can offer knock down rates. Really what the government wants is for the FE colleges and universities to turn these people out. The result of the Skills Strategy by training people - it does work – is to reduce wage rates and reduce incentives, so that if people aren't trained up and you get thousands of plumbers on the streets looking for work you'll be able to approach them at a knock down rate ... It's a supply and demand issue. If you're talking regeneration and the Thames Gateway, for example – in talking about construction, there's a shortage of construction workers.

In this interview, discourses around the meaning and purpose of a skilled workforce are reconstructed within a labour market framework. This framework is depicted in two strands – a discourse of procedure for connecting supply and demand and a discourse of meanings that validate the notion of labour shortages. In other words, employment and VET policy must choose between failing supply-side resolutions or improving demand-side opportunities for upskilling a flexible workforce. However, Respondent M from PCET gives an alternative view of 'demand':

The question is whose demand are we talking about? What do we do when there is a mismatch? Demand is expressed by the state, demand is expressed by employers and demand is expressed by learners. If they

don't match, it doesn't matter how strongly the government advises you to teach certain skills, if you can't get recruits ...?

Notwithstanding the differences in understanding what constitutes labour market skills needs, the question remains as to whether the inevitability of change can be left to voluntarism and the markets alone? While the implications for the more complex regime of statutory provision is not unimportant, this approach raises fundamental and contradictory questions about the relationship between voluntarism and a flexible labour market. As observed by Respondent K, a trade union voice:

Voluntarism runs out of steam as you go down the grades in a company. People are very happy to train you at a higher level. Less happy to train people at the lowest level, because they may lose these people in a really flexible labour market. It's the ability to train people at the highest level and keep workers and combine them into a career structure – core and periphery labour market theory. A lot of people are on the periphery.

Discourses of de-regulated provision and labour market theory intertwine in this text to produce narratives problematising VET initiatives created by government in seeking to address its abiding concerns with skills (Keep and Mayhew 2001). Traditionally, workforce development arrangements have been primarily voluntaristic, with relatively little regulation or subsidy. Resistance by employers to invest in training has shifted training activity to the margins controlled by voluntary targets, subsidised work-based learning for identified groups of employees and promoted persuasive government tactics for maintaining the status quo. There is an absence of purposeful political consensus to allow government intervention. Employers are charged with responsibility for skills and workforce development in the belief that voluntarism is a key determinant in a competitive global market economy. However, in the current climate of training market failure in the UK, could a system of intervention or employer training levy benefit individuals and firms, allowing the labour market to move to higher training equilibrium? Despite potential caveats, the future policy route might be to consider

interventionism as a pathway to greater equity in skilling the labour force. According to Vickerstaff and Sheldrake (1989), past interventionist strategies sought to intervene as a short-term palliative in the training of the labour force. And these strategies did not provide a stable solution to the national problem of skills shortages. Clearly to date, voluntarism and free market forces have patently failed to deliver skills demanded by the economy. However, it is pivotal that within the scope of education policy, government must accommodate real and lasting reform, linking economic relations beyond market and employer-led considerations.

PARTNERSHIPS

The concept of partnership is key to New Labour's approach to governance (Fairclough 2003). Partnership arrangements are evident as public-private partnerships as well as relationships between the state and industry. Yet there are obvious tensions in these alliances aimed at making government more transparent and consensual. In essence, partnerships offer public service development without increased public spending. Critically, they often negate the efforts by educational institutions to raise the profile of their mission. Demonstrating inconsistency and uncertainty, influence for post-16 initiatives moves to organisations that are not necessarily committed to the sector, in the same way as those charged with delivery of learning and skills. Clarke and Herrmann (2004) examine the relevance of different partnership and institutional arrangements and the role of the state in learning. They argue that government has devolved responsibility for VET to a system of quangos, operating independently from government, but for which government is ultimately responsible. Quangos such as the SSCs (under the auspices of the SSDA) and the LSC maintain significant power and control of public spending (although recent research undertaken by Hammond (2004) suggests that the original LSC model is not working adequately and is failing to deliver government's

rationalisation agenda – Appendix 2). In an effort to secure employer participation, government set up these organisations as private companies. These arrangements have implications for skills development, inasmuch as a voluntaristic approach reliant on outcomes, creates barriers between industry and training, resulting in poor levels of workforce development. The fragmentation of skills adds to the complexities of implementing policies constructed by government bodies or influenced by local agencies detracting from the learning needs of the individual. The plethora of organisations such as the LSC with a national agenda, the local LSC with its own remit and targets, Local Education Authorities, Department for Education and Skills, and the Basic Skills Agency are involved in curriculum delivery. Inevitably, the outcome is separate agencies working disparately rather than in co-ordination, each interested party accountable for different pots of money whilst endeavouring to attract the non-traditional groups of future lifelong learners. In the practical world of delivery, this structure and practice is a potential obstacle to bridging the divide between employer interests and the voice of vocationalism. As alluded to by Hyland (1999), actions articulated by policy-makers have not been backed up with the commitment of appropriate and sufficient resources into supporting a new market of learners. And what is still not clear is whether the role of partnerships within the current framework of continuing education reform will impact positively on the needs of learners.

DISCOURSES ON CONNECTING PARTNERSHIPS

Skills Strategy issues of increasing productivity and achieving economic aspirations are devolved to government agencies through forming partnerships and developing regional and local collaboration:

Successful delivery of this Skills Strategy will depend on stronger partnerships between those who deliver services. The government will take the lead by bringing departments and agencies with responsibility for skills and business support together nationally. Regionally and locally,

organisations which help employers to meet their demand for skills must work more effectively with those who plan and fund courses.
(DfES 2003, p99)

While development of regional collaboration aims to:

... increase employer demand for skills and the responsiveness of provision to business needs, and to equip more adults with the skills, competences, knowledge and understanding which employers need, thereby raising productivity and economic competitiveness (ibid p104)

The partnership proposals within the Skills Strategy underlie a government agenda of maintaining some control at the centre. The potential vagaries of devolved post-16 management as a collective responsibility emerge as a significant change in methods of collaborative working. The ultimate demise of erstwhile corporatist bodies such as the Training Commission (formerly the MSC) in the eighties, in effect absolved government from taking responsibility for industrial relations (Vickerstaff and Sheldrake 1989). Arguably, the political costs of a corporatist policy were seen as greater than the economic benefits. Later government strategies have increasingly transferred education and training away from the control of professional educationalists to a proliferation of new quangos. Vocationalism is subject to the creation of managerial systems in which the accountability of institutions centres on responsiveness to external agencies and agendas. And New Labour discourse bases the notion of partnership around a convergence of interests between government, business education and voluntary organisations (Fairclough 2003). In short, it is now the engagement of a wide learner alliance of partnerships that is seen as the potential for advancement of greater participation in a potentially eroding post-16 field. Respondent M, a PCET consultant, expressed concerns regarding the need for centralisation:

The worry I have is that we've created a lot of bodies that we've got to centralise. We talk about it being demand-led, but the demand is being expressed through organisations like the LSCs, SSCs and RDAs. They aren't the customer, they aren't the demand. So it isn't really demand-led, they are saying what the demand is. But the real test is can you get local employers to give of their own time and an employee's time to a course.

*If you succeed in doing that there is evidence that there is a real demand.
And so we should perhaps subsidise for doing it.*

An alternative view on local and regional partnership connectivity was put forward by Respondent B, a HE practitioner:

... The local level is still needed as well as regional. Actually you couldn't really ensure effective connectivity within these new networks without tapping into the old ones ... there isn't really a need to set up a new level of networking ... Link new networks to the old ones because that will ensure connectivity ... So what I am saying is if you want to make effective connections you'll have to tap into existing ones. And in order to get a new skills agenda delivered that tapping in has to be smooth ... RDAs naturally would be working alongside those groups.

And in another pivotal yet sceptical view of post-16 agency connectivity by a trade union representative, Respondent J:

I have no idea whether (regionalisation) will work or not. You have to ask yourself what's the role of the LSCs in all this ... I accept the fact that if you're not going to have a levy system then you've got to get employer involvement somewhere along the line ... But you're elaborating yet another huge set of bureaucracies with an even bigger drain on the public purse ... I think this is creating a whole new set of quasi-quangos – there'll be a turf war for the next two years and there'll be a small number that will come out on top ... not all these organisations are going to survive.

A distinctive feature of skills connectivity is the notion that while it will be led by each sector, skills shortages are reflected by the effectiveness of individual SSCs. As explained by Respondent N from the QCA:

... it comes back to the SSCs – they are the ones that are the motor for all of this through their research and development. The information that is going to be provided for the employer, for the regulatory authorities, the awarding bodies – how they can develop initiatives that are going to support regional development. We've only started to look at regions in the last year, we're only in our infancy. The SSCs are in their infancy and some of them will be for the next two to five years. Some are more advanced, others not at all. Some are running on like headless chickens.

A discursive construction of partnerships and connectivity is that organisations have to accept there needs to be a 'joint agenda' and that they have to change their 'power base'

in order for connectivity to occur. Respondent A, in articulating a FE view, concludes that:

Personally, I don't think we've got it in terms of JCP, LSCs, RDAs – they're all fighting their own corner anyway to such an extent that there isn't an honest broker amongst them who can actually understand the whole agenda ... We need a lead player to be able to say this lead player manages these organisations. So there isn't a level and equal playing field and never will be ... so they're fighting for their own patch.

The articulation of these narratives demonstrates the differentiation between the state's discourse (another interviewee, *ut ita dicam*) on partnership arrangements and a collective resistant discourse from some stakeholder respondents. Foucault (1982) contends that the interrelationship between institutions brings into play both tacit and explicit power relations, in which the exercise of power is embodied outside of individual institutions. Moreover, that '*power needs resistance as one of its fundamental conditions of operation*' (Foucault 1982, p147). Through the experience of resistance, relations of power are disrupted and disordered. In this way power is rooted in a system of institutionalised networks. Thus the exercise of power is characterised on the one hand, by government's delivery of the Skills Strategy prioritising the implementation of key targets and indicators for raising productivity and competitiveness in partnership with specific agencies (DfES 2003). On the other, interviewees register a cynical resistance along with a certain disillusionment to the 21st Century White Paper, interpreting the fallout and lack of focus in collaborative working as an indication of increasing polarisation of post-16 sector stakeholders.

Relatedly, the formulation of the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action is perceived by policy-makers as a template for linking skills and employability at a sectoral level (FRESA 2002). The LSC in its '*Concordat on future working between RDAs and the LSC*' (LSC 2004c) argues for harmonisation of skills training and

employment opportunities through Regional Skills Partnerships to ensure improved alignment to deliver regional economic strategies. Human capital as knowledge, skills and experience of the workforce is deemed the key driver of productivity and competitiveness (FRESA 2002). Underpinning this notion is the contested view that educational systems are axiomatic in the development of human capital and the realisation of economic and competitive imperatives (Avis 2002). It is an assumed logic that upskilling the workforce is exigent in sustaining competitive advantage and thus has become the substance of policy makers. Arguably, it is government's narrow approach to human capital theory that if people are invested in, then they will be more productive at a higher level. Yet how will that manifest itself within an organisation? Paradoxically, the pedagogical function is not limited to the learning experiences of individuals wanting to improve the work environment through shifting their culture but extends to the broader context of organisational status and hierarchical issues. In other words, people maintain a vested interest in their employment and resist change to processes that affect their job role. Government's message about how the workforce can be more productive is an assumption that is ineffectively articulated in practice.

PROVISION

One of the shifts that has taken place in the post-16 arena is the role of FE within the remit of New Labour priorities. Whilst promulgated as a fundamental driver in the achievement of a learning society, there is plainly a need for government consensus in order to maintain the diversity and resonance of the FE institution (Flint 2004). Of concern is that in addressing the issues located around post-16 provision, New Labour is failing to deliver on so many of its intentions, including retaining the distinctiveness and synthesis of the broad aims of FE. Despite the rhetoric, the reality is government appears not to understand what the FE system does. Colleges form part of the post-16

sector and are able to demonstrate the capacity and experience to strengthen an inclusive curriculum that facilitates the links with a lifelong learning culture. The Skills Strategy, while presenting an opportunity for enhancing skills and workplace initiatives, is using FE as a politically motivated vehicle for meeting new government demands. Policy makers declare education as part of the solution to a range of economic and social dilemmas. This tendency places an almost impossible burden on the post-16 community. As argued by Fullick (2004), emphasising the economic case for wider benefits of learning in a primarily voluntaristic environment is reliant on encouraging employers and individuals to subscribe to government's policy on skills development. And while some employers might articulate support for the Skills Strategy and lifelong learning through workplace activity, they want government to pay. As deduced from the LSC remit in its *Annual Statement of Priorities for 2005/06* (LSC 2004a), the focus is on colleges being '*fully responsive to employer needs*' through a demand-led approach. The rationale is to transform the FE sector in order that it attracts and stimulates more investment in learning and skills development. To state the obvious, policy direction and implementation needs to take account of the 'transferability' of learner skills and the mobility of individuals in their aspiration or quest for positive learning experiences. Equally, in the pursuit of learner development of skills and knowledge to meet diverse economic, social, industrial and commercial needs, there is an expectation of self-directed and independent learning to support flexible delivery of the curriculum. What is important here is to build an accessible framework of opportunity that engages employers and inspires learners from a range of backgrounds. However, as noted by Keep (2000), few employers commit their organisation to non-job related learning by employees. The political rhetoric of employer involvement in fact masks a gradual shifting of responsibility towards education institutions and the learner for occupational training. Ensuring access to diverse learning opportunities and drawing on the benefits

from raising national skills standards involves providing tangible and practical support where it is required. The apparent absence of employer commitment to skills development brings into question any future sustained contributions by employer organisations to lifelong learning.

DISCOURSES ON PROVISION AND QUALIFICATION REFORM

Skills Strategy discourse on learning and skills deals with increasing the supply of skilled labour through bringing about change, enhancing productivity and competitiveness while creating greater choice and higher demand for workforce training:

A demand-led approach to developing skills in the labour force must enable individual employers to access training provision in a way which meets their business needs. It must also encourage them to invest in skills and qualifications, particularly for low-skilled employees. (DfES 2003, p36)

And as a measure of achievement the Skills Strategy aims to raise effectiveness in delivery of learning programmes:

We will reform the qualification framework so that it is more flexible and responsive to the needs of employers and learners ... (ibid, p14)

This re-shaping of official learning and skills discourse promotes curriculum change policies and the restructuring of the workforce development mandate. Yet for interviewees it has neither positive correspondence with the dynamics of the workplace nor with the political priorities of the state's agenda. Respondent H, representing the interests of FE, registers the frustrations of operating within a post-16 environment driven by economic constraints:

We're coming back to the Skills Strategy and this idea that the government will do its share and employers and individuals will do their share. The reaction you get from employers is pretty common. Some employers do spend quite a bit of money on education and training but it's all on the the internal stuff – induction courses or whatever. The reforms in a sense won't reprioritise or rebalance funding. What will happen is that the government will direct more funding to basic skills and Level 2 and reduce its funding for other provision. Employers and individuals won't increase what they spend. So the result is colleges will eventually do less Level 3

and Level 4 and other provision, which might have all sorts of damaging effects on the skills that are available.

And for PCET consultant, Respondent L:

Our view is that FE colleges traditionally understood their local needs and monitored them quite closely as they couldn't afford not to know if demand for provision was disappearing. I think the difficulty will arise when colleges in order to get the LSC shilling will have to put on provision which is needed sectorally or locally. If that is against their own better judgement, how are they to influence things?

In talking about engagement with industry, Respondent C an authority on Southeast regional skills development, expresses a discourse of liaison in which the problems with employer negativity needs to be transformed into a positive achievement:

Clearly, employer engagement is very important and this is tough ... it is tough when dealing with a relatively small number of larger employers. I mean 80% of companies in this area employ ten or fewer people and getting through to them is difficult. They can only develop so much in the way of tailor made provision. We've got to find ways of pulling them together. I think a lot of work needs to be done in terms of engagement of employers And finding ways of addressing their needs.

Employers develop another level of discourse when they refer to the skills needs of the labour market. Respondent E, an employer, points out that the VET system is producing a curriculum provision that is removed from the reality of workplace requirements:

There is a current dichotomy between the concepts of academic achievement in the education system and the ability of this system to equip people entering the workforce. Historically, the education system didn't make provision for work-based skills, being highly orientated around the old 'O' and 'A' level examinations. But it appears that now students often leave full-time education with a lower attainment of key skills than in the past. And whilst there is provision for apprenticeships for young people enabling them to study vocationally via NVQs, this doesn't take into account factors such as the effect that recruiting young workers into a vibrant and competitive workplace (eg. in manufacturing) has on long-term company turnover, ie. it often makes more economic sense to a company to recruit higher-paid but skilled workers as their production is higher.

This narrative critiques the standard of education delivered to future employees. Despite Skills Strategy rhetoric, VET policies to date have not been able to compensate for

labour market exigencies, while employer interests in investment in workforce development continue to diminish. The drive for modernisation of vocational qualifications is perceived as critical to the industrial needs of the UK. Current post-16 policy assumes that formal qualifications are necessary for employability and the creation of economic growth. Or is the reality somewhat less complex?

Respondent M, from the point of view of a PCET adviser, challenges this notion:

... Saying that we're not competitive is not the same as saying that we don't have the same level of qualifications. This is where I think the Strategy goes wrong. Many employers don't think getting qualifications are the way to get more competitive. In the education world we equate one with the other. We equate skills with qualifications. So we have an unqualified workforce. The extent to which we have an unskilled one is not clear. Many people with skills simply aren't accredited ... It's very loose thinking – need to separate training from qualifications. Need to be careful about equating competitiveness with qualifications. Obviously a more skilled workforce contributes to competitiveness, but so do other things like investment ...

What is significant about this narrative is that it questions the political ideology of New Labour's employability strategy to get people into work rather than as a link to a knowledge-driven education. The driver for employment is skills located around the economic agenda. Yet perceived inconsistencies for differentiating skills and qualifications within this narrative demonstrate the complexities in determining the bridge between the academic and vocational divide. Respondent M once more, goes on to reinforce these anomalies:

Again, there's an incoherence here, because what evidence there is tends to show that employers tend to recruit on the basis of academic qualifications. I'm not talking about qualifications the workforce require, but it's actually vocational qualifications that don't help you in gaining a job. The correlation is that NVQs don't seem to do much in gaining you a job, A levels are far more likely to. It's something to do with employer behaviour. They say they want vocational skills but recruit on the basis of academic skills.

This discursive approach to qualification structure cuts across a number of interviews. To achieve an academic qualification is to be qualified. The relationship between

participant narratives is couched in defined oppositions - academic qualifications provide access to economic success and job stability, but vocationalism does not. This negative stance towards vocational qualifications is acknowledged by government through its current attempt at '*parity of esteem*' (Dearing 1995) for organising a more accessible achievement and qualification structure for learning and skills. The LSC in partnership with the QCA and SSDA have identified that a new approach credit-based qualification structure through the implementation of the Framework for Achievement (FfA) is critical for the participation of individuals in flexible learning (LSC 2004a, QCA 2004). Herein lies government intervention for a unitised, credit-based qualification infrastructure that is embodied in the LSDA (2004) response to the Education and Skills Select Committee inquiry following publication of the Skills Strategy. It conceded that the review will allow greater responsiveness to the needs of learners and industry through '*the emphasis on the need for a qualifications framework that recognises stages of learning and does not link achievement to ages*' (LSDA 2004, p3). This view is endorsed in the FfA - that qualification reform '*offers an opportunity to make significant changes to the way in which we recognise achievements*' (QCA 2004, p8). As the FfA sets out its vision for a qualification structure with the functional purpose of meeting national skills needs and of being more flexible to demand, it argues for transferability between career paths for individuals and job flexibility between employers. Respondent N from the QCA:

We're actually developing the framework now, which provides within the framework, units of learning which are specifically related to employability, so that if people leave into another sector they're taking something generic with them that they can use ...

But for Respondent A working within FE, individual employability skills have got to be harnessed early:

Education has got to be more in tune with what workforce development actually means. If you talk to employers, and if you are talking about a young

sixteen or seventeen year old, they're not really looking at qualifications, but they are looking at attitudes

Undoubtedly, New Labour believes that its Skills Strategy has adopted a more coherent approach to learning and skills than has previously been the case. The narrative is now one of responsibility for post-16 providers to furnish Britain's workforce with the skills and qualifications as enhancements to productivity and competitiveness that are '*valued by all users*' (QCA 2004). The political and economic imperative is to compete globally in order to legitimise the learning and skills agenda. However, as expressed in participant discourses, tensions concerning lasting qualification reform and meaningful provision continue to pose real threats to government's attempts for achieving coherence in the post-16 sector.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, exploration of the nature of connections between policy, partnerships and provision discourses have pointed to a reality, which is largely missing from the rhetoric of the Skills Strategy. The Skills Strategy document positions the role of learning and skills discourse as a tool for legitimising vocationalism. However, the reported narratives from respondents on policy highlight some of the contradictions between educational discourse, the dynamics of the labour market and the emphasis on the economics of the Skills Strategy agenda. Few involved in post-16 learning would deny that there is a need for change. Indeed rhetorically, many would argue that a multi-agency approach is needed to avoid the pitfalls of centralisation and the consequent hazards of over-prescription and lack of flexibility in the sector. Centralised control enforces change linked to a rigid target setting and funding regime. However, moves towards partnership reform and connectivity between government agencies could lead to post-16 innovation without effective change. New tensions exist between the need to

make post-16 learning structured and coherent and the vested interests in diversity encouraged by agencies and partnerships. The role of government and its partnerships is to facilitate, but the role of post-16 providers is now subordinated to this. At the same time, questions of education provision and qualification reform continue to be stridently debated in the public arena. Given the aim of the Skills Strategy to encourage both employers and learners to embrace the notion of skills development and lifetime learning, investment in reform strategies can only be of value if future skills forecasts match predicted employment structure and job content. The next chapter moves on to consider how learning and skills opportunities, while articulating the language of accessibility to education provision and increasing participation in a skills-related job market, have a tendency to increase inequalities for those excluded from the experience. From this perspective, attempts at achieving widening participation and inclusivity in the post-16 sector focus on how changes in the education system and structure of the labour market can often perpetuate greater inequality towards individuals without qualification or skills.

CHAPTER 6

ACCESSIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

In this chapter the organisation and delivery of post-16 learning and workforce development is examined in the context of widening participation and social inclusion. In the language of the Skills Strategy, issues of equality and inequality are reflected in the changing nature of learning and skills reform and its impact on understanding the trend towards lifelong learning. Class, gender, race and age each act as determinants in participation (Field 2000). Relations between learning and social inequality increasingly touch on other policy areas, as responsibility for welfare provision is shifted from government towards the individual. Participation in learning and upskilling is seen as a way of balancing some of the risks and removing the barriers to employability and industry competitiveness. Education and employment is perceived as a route to inclusion and the engagement of disaffected learners. Nonetheless, extending participation to the least qualified while ensuring individuals have the skills to participate in the workforce are not necessarily, in themselves, factors that will sufficiently equip the marginalised and disillusioned located at the periphery of the labour market.

A STRATEGY FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The main findings of the Kennedy Report, *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* (1997) argued that individuals who are disadvantaged educationally are also disadvantaged economically and socially. Kennedy acknowledges that:

... developing the capacity of everyone to contribute to and benefit from the economic, personal, social and cultural dimensions of their lives is central to achieving the whole range of goals that we set ourselves as a nation.
(1997, p.22)

Kennedy recognised that:

... *participation must be widened, not simply increased.* (1997, p22)

What emerged from this Report corroborated the inalienable tenet of the relationship between flexible learning and economic prosperity. Further, it raised the significance of the development of an equitable and self-perpetuating learning society designing and delivering learning programmes within a framework of good practice, relevant curriculum and the removal of barriers to participation. The recommended changes suggested that individuals should be able to access learning and qualifications at a level appropriate to the learner while building the skills required to continue learning as a lifetime experience. Kennedy saw the application of new policy initiatives in the vocational education and training arena, as a significant step in removing divisions and reconstructing the lifelong learning agenda. The Report aimed to put FE back at the heart of learning. It exposed a lack of appropriate funding mechanisms and highlighted those recommendations perceived as essential to eradicate the '*previous invisibility of the sector*' (Elliott 1999). There is no doubt that widening participation was adopted by the post-16 sector as an issue that is at the heart of its commitment to deliver to, and reach out to, under-represented groups of learners. The FEFC responded to *Learning Works* by setting out proposals for strategic partnerships that addressed the creation of new learning organisations. Circular (98/07) identified the steps needed to make the widening participation vision a reality, while Circular (98/10) invited applications for funding of partnerships that would disseminate good practice to inform learners and practitioners. The FEFC confirmed an extension to funding for widening participation uplift (99/42) to include groups of disadvantaged learners (eg. ex-offenders, recovering drug/alcohol abuse dependants, full-time carers), not already targeted by current policies or funding mechanisms. The FEFC Inspectorate Report (FEFC 2000) summarised

progress on widening participation within colleges since 1997, identifying areas of reshaping within the sector and ensuring that provision matched the needs of learners.

Crossan et al (2000) support the sustained existence of a learning divide – that achievement and participation are uneven, as certain groups are under-represented. This sentiment is endorsed by Clarke and Edwards (2000) who question whether changes in learning opportunity can address issues of inclusion. And further, whether learning does contribute to economic competitiveness (Wolf 2002). The link between widening participation and lifelong learning as a method of upskilling the workforce (Hodgson 2000, NAGCELL 1997) is constrained by the existence of a learning divide and a focus on economic values. It is perceived as a panacea for raised levels of participation rather than entry into a broader social perspective. Whilst research in *Creating Learning Cultures* (NAGCELL 1999) intimates that policy makers and practitioners should act as catalysts in encouraging participation from learners who are least likely to utilise learning opportunities. And how those individuals might engage with an increased and widened education system.

An initial response to the Kennedy Report (FEFC 98/07) included additional funding for non-traditional learners as well as extra resources for the unemployed prior to the implementation of the New Deal Welfare to Work. The main emphasis of the New Deal is to move individuals from unemployment benefits into unsubsidised work and education and training opportunities (Hyland 1999). On the one hand, it would appear that the New Deal global remit has been to successfully implement a governmental welfare reform scheme rather than to enhance vocationalism and increase learning opportunities. On the other, notwithstanding the complexities of the structure of New Deal that may impel a minority of people into unwanted or unwelcome employment, the

emphasis has been on the promotion of social development and social inclusion. Inevitably, the transitional character of the current education and training system, within which the New Deal is placed, poses its own constraints. It is challenged, as part of the lifelong learning agenda to contribute to the constant re-skilling of a flexible workforce, yet the investment in education and training opportunities is not necessarily providing the skills required by industry. Hyland and Musson (2001) endorse this view. They report salient concerns in regard to the practice and delivery of the New Deal to disadvantaged learners with specific needs, suggesting that current arrangements marginalise individuals who are already disaffected. Learner alienation needs to be addressed through appropriate and responsive learning programmes rather than the drive to meet government targets. What emerges from these perspectives is that the government's approach towards the New Deal initiative tends to be one in which the focus on skills updating and reduced unemployment statistics will not necessarily lead to relevant learning interventions or job creation, especially in times of recession and high unemployment. In addition, for learners outside of paid employment, the New Deal route is the sole access to workplace learning opportunities (Unwin and Fuller 2003). The New Deal initiative has been implemented within a paradigm that attempts to combine labour market flexibility with income redistribution and reduction of educational disadvantage. Through widening participation and enabling the labour force to contribute to a knowledge economy, there is an assumption in terms of a positive impact on a low-skill, low pay job market.

Against this background, there is the push for increasing participation rates in post-16 learning to meet the need for a more highly skilled workforce. New Labour intends that by 2010, 90% of all 22 year olds (LSRC 2003, Unwin and Fuller 2003) will have participated in a full-time learning programme equipping them for access to skilled

employment or higher education. It is anticipated that government means-tested support through the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) (DfES 2003), introduced in 2004 and available to learners attending Further Education and Sixth Form colleges, will encourage 50% of 18-30 year olds to enter higher education by 2010 to meet government participation targets. As set out in the paper *'The future of higher education'* (DfES 2003c) reform for improving access to higher education will be prioritised through raising participation rates in further education. This raises the question of the degree of impact on the orientation of vocational post-16 pathways of learning in comparison to academically orientated school routes. Despite rhetorical claims to the contrary, it appears that vocationalism continues to be a second-rate option for the less academically able, rather than a solution for a shrinking skills market. Widening participation strategies require, not least, greater pedagogical and funding policy coherence set alongside the eradication of the academic-vocational learning divide.

DISCOURSES ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Discourses for shaping policy on widening participation are central to the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003). The trajectory of participation within the learning and skills context highlights the political and economic agenda driving educational policy and workforce development initiatives:

The LSC is currently developing its new strategy for widening participation for adults in learning. (DfES 2003, p70)

Discourse for widening participation rhetorically prioritises economic determinism. It is informed by individual, political and social advocacy. It focuses strongly on individual interests, learning and skills development and the significance of a competitive global economy. Widening participation strategies and training engagement are embedded in economically productive activities, frequently limiting opportunity for expansion of

effective vocational provision. Inherent historical and cultural challenges make certain that non-compliant, disaffected or under-represented learners continue to be marginalised and are hence ineffectual in their influence on the post-16 agenda. As posited by PCET adviser, Respondent M:

I think that what happens at sixteen is the biggest barrier to participation and inclusivity. If you're in the right half of the population, the half that gets its five GCSEs by the age of sixteen, you have a very smooth path traced for you. If you don't get that, and there's no reason why you should actually ... it's a test you have to take, ready or not ... If you don't get the five A-Cs then what do you do next – the route is not very clear. Most 6th Form colleges won't take you, most school 6th Forms won't take you, even if they are comprehensive at eleven. Just trace through the psychology of that. If they are genuinely comprehensive, and most of them are, you suddenly start realising that there won't be anything appropriate for you in the school 6th Form. You're not one of the children they're interested in keeping on. And with a generalist FE college - depends on what frame of mind you arrive in. So you have to make the best of it. I think you have a hidden problem there about motivation ... There's interesting evidence now of that kind of selection – the willingness to participate.

Respondent A from FE supports the sentiment that selectivity and labelling people, particularly at the age of eleven and in Kent, affects individual personal motivation:

... we've got such a biased view in the system, either you're academic or you're not. And it's just criminal the way that we do it ... So in terms of disadvantaged learners, where do you start with all this? They wouldn't be disadvantaged if school didn't switch them off to begin with. Most people if they're going to drift, will drift at sixteen ... that's what we've got to consider. We're not doing that. Once they're disadvantaged we start going down the line of how do we capture them in other ways ... These disadvantaged learners are incredibly expensive.

In terms of barriers to learning, Respondent N of the QCA, articulated the view that:

I think that would change from sector to sector and I think this is something you identified earlier – the Skills Strategy is a document of perception rather than a document of reality. I think the barrier is the difference between perception and reality of what's gone on in each of the sectors.

Respondent E, a Kent employer, blamed both the system and its learners for the problems of participation. From his point of view the main barriers to participation

relate to the fall of literacy and numeracy skills 'across the board' impacting on the dichotomy between educational achievement and the requirements of employers:

...this has a knock-on effect reflected in the attitudes of young people coming into the workforce, perceivable as some lack of personal discipline, less application and persistency and an increase in the 'world-owes-me-a-living' approach. I also feel that disadvantaged learners aren't being equipped to see the benefits of VET and in most cases are happy to retain the status quo - again this is possibly a failing of the education system itself.

These discourses emphasise the importance of choices made by individuals at the age of sixteen, reinforcing a consensus of opinion and giving credence to their professional expertise in matters of post-16 skills and workplace learning. Moreover, it suggests that respondent views were either circumscribed within the local context of reality by what happens parochially in learning or employment, or defined within a national perception of policy implementation. Interviewee discourses concerning participation in learning and skills development present ways of theorising how confidence or mistrust regarding the Skills Strategy are constructed through debate in the public sphere. Such representations of the public sphere vary in the extent to which they are asserted or assumed (Fairclough 2003). The case for a 'public' perspective can be negated and restrained by polemical public narrative, marginalising the scope for political debate on issues of substance such as the Skills Strategy. In essence, an effective public sphere can only be defined by the quality of the narrative that takes place within it (Habermas 1989). This emphasises political participation as the core of a democratic society and an essential element of individual self-development. Kellner's (2000) critique of Habermas expands the discourse and ideology of the public sphere through its social structures and political functions. He asserts that the public sphere describes the location of institutions and practices, mediating between the private domains of workplace and family and the state that exerts forms of public power. Hence, if debate is sidelined to the margins, for example through the advocacy of institutional partnerships or committees, then

contentious or problematic learning and skills matters fail to achieve meaningful outcomes or consultation. Thus the theoretical relevance of Habermas's discursive approach is the application of his ideas in realistic education settings. Opening the public debate as a narrative approach provides a starting point in the construction of discursive reasoning between policy-makers in the formation of education policy and educators as stakeholders involved in education practice and delivery. However, the extent to which different levels and types of stakeholder have been able to deliberate or act on any concerns about the Skills Strategy as a means of influencing policy formation is debatable. What appears to be lacking here is real and valid consultation. While individuals might want to challenge what the Skills Strategy is saying, in fact the space to inform public debate is limited as specialist committees or partnerships marginalise a wider consensus interested in contributing to that discussion.

RHETORIC OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

By the nineties, the politics of reform identified that a longer-term process was necessary to remedy historical weaknesses in the structure of post-16 learning. Alongside widening participation expounded by the Kennedy Report (1997) to attract disadvantaged groups into FE, social inclusion strategies were perceived as a driver for breaking the cycle of deprivation experienced by many. The process of inclusivity was seen as a response to addressing social change and the causes of inequality. And part of that lay in expanding opportunities to embrace the disaffected by improving the quality of FE and training, thereby increasing the chances of employability. The purpose was to bridge education and employment. The principle of inclusive learning, contained in the publication of the Tomlinson Report, *Inclusive Learning* (1996), articulated the views of the Further Education Funding Council in regard to widening participation to excluded groups of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. Significantly, this seminal

report established far-reaching policy statements on inclusivity, highlighting the necessity for the FE (and Higher Education) sector to increase its capacity and respond to the needs of individual learners. It concluded that FE had shown a distinct lack of proactivity in developing opportunities for inclusion or improving quality within its institutions. In effect, Tomlinson firmly located the problem or deficit in terms of inclusive learning with the institution and not with the learner:

... we must move away from labelling the student and towards creating an appropriate educational environment... (Tomlinson 1996, p.4)

The subsequent implementation of the Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative: Stage 1 and Stage 2 was a FE sector-wide response to the Tomlinson proposal for a three-year staff development programme to assist colleges implement inclusive learning strategies (FEFC 1998, 98/31). The programme evaluation Circular (FEFC 99/50) reported that promotion of inclusive learning in key areas depended on a commitment to a culture of inclusivity, improved teaching and learning strategies and ensuring the setting of appropriate targets and policies. Undoubtedly, the establishment of a FEFC steering group to oversee the allocation of funding for inclusive learning had a beneficial effect on colleges working towards best practice methods to improve retention and achievement rates. Stuart (2000) researched forms of social exclusion that alienated the right to education of learners with disabilities. At the heart of her discussion is the reality that the theoretical framework of lifelong learning excludes adults with disabilities from the learning environment. She asserts that an individual's educational 'worth' is rooted in economic and democratic values rather than in a social perspective. Social cohesion and cultural assimilation might be a reason for combating social exclusion, but it is argued that government's economic policy drives the agenda (Johnston 2000). Although the social aspects of lifelong learning link with economic

considerations, involvement of learners as effective and motivated participants is critical to the relationship of ensuring inclusivity.

Linking past policy to future strategy, raises questions as to whether the economic purpose of learning and skills addresses social inequity. Public policy is determinedly directed at employment as a pathway to inclusion within a flexible labour market paradigm. New Labour's recent demand for workforce development pinpoints employer participation as pivotal and influential in the drive towards a more competitive and socially inclusive work environment (PIU 2001). Without doubt, there is a core of employers who are reluctant to invest in upskilling or learning provision for their employees. Yet, inclusivity strategies are central to workforce development policy, enhancing opportunities for learners who lack work-related skills or knowledge (Unwin and Fuller 2003). A national framework within which organisations operate is important in underpinning workplace practice and learning. The Skills Strategy articulates an economic imperative that entwines with social objectives, aiming to protect the rights of disadvantaged workers. It suggests that low community expectations and aspirations are a significant factor in restricting access to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In seeking to tackle the causes of deprivation, how can the post-16 sector adjust to the challenges of delivering learning and skills and expanding workforce development? As more fluid patterns of working compel employers to consider the implementation of skills development or specialist training strategies, is the Skills Strategy as a measured policy response adequate for marginalised or excluded individuals on the edge of the employment market?

DISCOURSES ON INCLUSIVITY

Work-related skills development and reform of vocational qualifications reinforces the need to address past deficiencies and inequalities experienced by a majority of low-skill workers not benefiting from any type of formal learning. Increasingly, new pedagogies for meeting the needs of people with few qualifications and to ensure inclusion in learning opportunities remain a challenge:

We want to increase skill levels for all under-represented groups and encourage all individuals to improve their employability. (DfES 2003, p44)

In addition,

Achieving a fairer, more inclusive society depends on young people leaving school or college with the skills they need to work. Where they lack such skills, their exclusion is likely to be compounded during their lives (ibid, p60)

At the heart of respondent textual data, the vagaries and rigidity of the education and economic structures within which they operate clearly affect their work practice. Respondent B as an experienced HE academic, in reflecting on progress since the publication of the Tomlinson Report on *Inclusive Learning* in 1996, believes the barriers are still there:

Totally ... I think it's possibly worse than ever. Sorry to sound despondent ... we've been talking about this since forever ... to some extent two steps forward one step back ... we do make some progress, there is no doubt, but I still think we're not supporting our learners enough ... It's got to turn round the culture of institutions which is constantly blocking the involvement of learners. At every level from the gatekeepers who turn people away because they haven't got the social skills, right up to the managers who are turning people away because of bureaucratic processes.

Respondent C, from a skills regeneration viewpoint, supports this opinion:

As far as Tomlinson (1996) ... I think it forced institutions to address these things ... there has been an investment on majority needs. However, some of the best work is community based learning and this is where we are under pressure ... the best work done with disadvantaged communities could be under threat. I think this would be a shame ... three paces forward and one step back.

These narratives stress discourses of compliance and coping rather than discourses of resonance and integrity. In essence, the experiences of these respondents and their involvement in post-16 initiatives are conditioned by the system in which they work, reflecting their need to cope with the constraints of rigid policy-making and bureaucracy. This results in a diminishing capability and validity when dealing with what they actually do. What is happening in the post-16 sector can only be understood if set against policy changes. At the same time, competing influences position discourses within specific parameters in different organisational structures highlighting how interviewees understand divergent power relations. Sachs (2001) in her paper on teacher identity suggests that reforms emanating from government policy and educational restructuring have given rise to a complex set of paradoxes. Certainly, these ambiguities apply equally to related educational and occupational activities in the post-16 sector. On the one hand, competing discourses in education bureaucracies and management practices gain legitimacy through promulgating policies and the allocation of funding associated with those policies, as demonstrated by proposals in the Skills Strategy. Alternatively, new forms of reciprocity and collaborative action between practitioners, including FE, and other post-16 stakeholders emphasise a discursive approach to employer engagement, skill development and work organisation. Here the challenge for educationalists in the sector is how, in a market-orientated system concerned with a political rhetoric for quality and responsiveness, to deal with an increasing competitive culture rather than a collaborative ethos.

Social inclusion is reported by Respondent F, a SSC representative, as a concern to be dealt with in the context of *'it's important to be inclusive'*. However, patterns of narratives about disadvantage differ between stakeholders. Although policy makers speak about challenges, they emphasise personal potency in their role as agents of

change in developing the policy systems in which they operate. Learners and practitioners are changed by those systems, over which they have little authority or control. And again for Respondent F, these narratives extend into personal values:

I've more of a problem with inclusivity when it relates to those who've never had a chance in life ... someone who's not had a good start in life and sucked into a vicious circle ... to be fair to government, that's what their agenda is about.

While according to Respondent C expressing a skills development view:

The barriers still remain and are a key issue. Barriers in terms of the nature of the provision itself and domestic commitments ... Barriers in a sense that the education system has disadvantaged people by making them feel they are less capable than they are. I think one of the issues is the selective system – people's expectations are depressed by that system. So it's not low attainment but low aspirations. In many cases it's tackling the aspirational issue in North Kent. People need self-esteem. In the Skills Strategy it's important to recognise that it needs to be demand-led from the point of view of employers, but equally it needs to be demand-led from the point of view of employees, particularly in personal ambitions.

These individual perceptions suggest that many low achievers lack the confidence to engage in further learning. They acknowledge barriers to learners from socially deprived backgrounds. Further, these perspectives are shaped by the discursive practices that practitioners operate within. The vision concerning equality of opportunity remains limited, constrained by the requirements of a discriminatory education framework on one hand, and the demands of the labour market and skills development, on the other. For interviewees engaged in discourses of inclusivity, proposals contained in the Skills Strategy provide little evidence of understanding or empathy.

Within a climate of shifting post-16 structure, the impact of funding streams on raising participation and promoting social inclusion is fundamental in determining accessibility and appropriate delivery. Despite the rhetoric surrounding learning and skills initiatives, the current paucity of employer engagement demonstrates that companies are only beginning to acknowledge government's vision of an inclusive learning society

(LRSC 2003). As the demand for skilled workers intensifies, driven by economic growth and competitive pressures, this will call for proactivity and responsiveness from employers to reassess methods of training alongside innovative delivery. Provision will rely on employer collaboration, and where available, utilisation of funded government support (DfES 2003).

The new entitlement to free learning at Level 2 ... will help those disadvantaged groups of learners who are more likely to be low-skilled
(DfES 2003, p71)

Fundamentally, the Skills Strategy attempts to present a powerful rhetoric in arguing that the limited funds available in the public purse for Level 2 entitlement should be channelled to lower skilled workers. However, it seems that any benefit from the free adult Level 2 entitlement for a first qualification proposed by the Skills Strategy will be offset by the failure of New Labour's commitment to fund Level 3 qualification opportunities in the short-term (Flint 2004). Respondent D, an employer, expressed her dissatisfaction with the shape and arrangements for funded employer training:

The barriers that I've seen relate to the fact that some people already have a Level 2 NVQ, albeit from a completely different type of job. They can't do it now under the funding scheme. They're in a completely different type of career – they need that skill to do their job properly ... As an employer we're going to have to look for the funding for that ... We're not a huge employer and it's harder to find the money ... which is why we're using the funding scheme. That's a barrier and it's frustrating ... the management training doesn't cover that level.

The experience of employers is thus conditioned by shifting bureaucracies located between them and the system in which they operate (Little et al 2003). At the same time, while they feel responsible for meeting the skills needs of their employees, there is a funding tension that places this individual employer in an area of economic and moral conflict. On the one hand, government policy demands that employers deliver training to their staff, whether or not employers want to pay or can afford to pay. On the other, company officialdom demands financial restraint, which together with lack of access to

funding for intermediate or higher skills training, limits employer capacity to deliver provision. To an extent the workplace environment determines the ways in which respondents author accounts of their experience of learning in the post-16 arena.

This is seen in the context of Level 2 entitlement by Respondent G, an awarding body manager:

Because the focus is Level 2 and some people aren't Level 2 then that could potentially be a barrier... there could be some people at Entry Level or Level 1 who could develop to a Level 2 if given the opportunity. But if we just focus on Level 2 they may never get to that stage without support ... it's about second chances ... just focusing at Level 2 we could be in danger of disadvantaging some of those people who have already gone through a bad experience or are now going through another bad experience.

This rhetorical narrative is associated with reform policy. Likewise, Respondent L, one of the PCET consultants, seeks to align the Level 2 qualification as a future challenge that is primarily economic:

I am not convinced that Level 2 of itself should be some kind of mark of employability ... I am concerned that simply going through a formal qualification route should be seen as the answer to the problem. Unless we can actually get more recognition of 'work-based' in the true sense of that ... for example someone who successfully completed the old style apprenticeship, well there were no formal qualifications.

Respondent H, from a FE sector point of view, presents a premise upon which the Level 2 qualification framework is used as an agent of economic change in the transition to future learning and skills arrangements.

I've got a slight reservation in whether the Level 2 is fully the right way to go. It seems to me that it's been constructed by the government wanting a way of measuring the system – it's a target. They've identified that people who don't have a Level 2 qualification are generally in low paid jobs, or don't have jobs at all. There's an equal opportunities issue in there, it's not clear that giving a group of people a Level 2 qualification is actually going to make a difference to jobs or the exclusion of choice.

Respondent M, another PCET adviser, makes a similar point:

The Level 2 entitlement confused me and I think I know where it comes from.

It's that the economic evidence is that - ironic really - the Level 2 qualification doesn't increase your earning power very much. Therefore if you want people to have a Level 2 qualification, you can hardly ask them to pay for it because there's no payback. If you compare that to graduates you can ask graduates to pay for it as they get more wages when they've done it. I do think that for social and other reasons it's great that everyone should have at least a Level 2. The problem is the way it's implemented. As I understand it, any Level 2 - not a vocational Level 2 necessarily. So five GCSEs count. So in what sense is it part of the Skills Strategy?

Such questioning of policy concerns what employers are gaining, what individuals are learning and how society is benefitting. The challenge is to identify flexible arrangements. The reality is that there is a limited amount of funding and that New Labour requires both employers and individuals to contribute to investment in skills.

ACCESS TO LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Flexibility and diversity of learning provision should be the bedrock of an accessible curriculum that raises the quality of the learning and skills workforce. New methods of delivery unencumbered by bureaucratic complexities are core to enabling individuals to overcome the barriers of accessibility. The multiplicity of recent measures, devised to effect improved access to education, mirrors policy intentions and discourse around social inclusion and widening participation.

Legislative initiatives are paving the way for ensuring the rights of individuals to learning and development opportunities. The Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 is a driver to combating educational exclusion and providing equality of opportunity through improved access to learning. This piece of legislation requires institutions to make appropriate adjustments to ensure non-discriminatory learning experiences in terms of delivery mechanisms, support services and the physical environment. It supersedes and complements the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, which incorporated educational exemptions (JISC 1999, HMSO 1995). The

responsibility of institutions to remove discrimination is further enacted within the Human Rights Act 1998. This states that *'no person shall be denied the right to education'* (HMSO 1998). The key point here must be that the implementation of an effective and workable quality framework and standards for meeting legislative requirements is critical to ensuring fair and equal access for all. Yet, as put forward by Dee (1999) the tenet of promoting the rights of disabled learners in the inclusion debate is countered by potentially problematic competing functional elements that could negate inclusivity strategies. In other words, government has created a post-16 strategy that leaves learning to the vagaries of the market place, by handing over sections of it to employers and private training providers who do not necessarily deem inclusive training to be a business imperative. The reality is that, given the persistent failure of firms to train at the bottom end of the market, there is the potential to diminish public accountability for standards of education and training while ignoring the interests and social needs of excluded individuals. Meanwhile, an alternative rhetoric around the external legislation process articulates that part of the solution for accessible learning lies with colleges and workplace training providers in formulating strategies for learning choices. Attainable lifelong learning is related to access to resources, institutional strategies and inclusion of diverse views in policy and decision-making. Certainly, legitimate pressures for accessibility are increasing. The socio-economic realities of individuals who are disaffected or dislocated economically, socially or politically provide resonance when evaluating the lifelong learning agenda. However, Field (2000) suggests that the bureaucratic rigidity of government initiatives tend to obfuscate the needs of learners thereby impacting on inclusion. A key policy issue for lifelong learning pathways is how access can be assured for all learners and not just the young and unemployed (OECD 1996). Poverty, poor health and family disintegration impact on individuals and their right to engage in learning. Demographic features including

location affect the learning chances of many in society. Moreover, research indicates that institutional barriers still restrict access to education for minority groups. Refugees and asylum seekers have diverse and specific needs that are often neglected through the emergence of cultural, political and socio-economic difficulties (Hannah 2000), a lack of cohesiveness within existing policy and practice only serves to highlight an imbalance in access to learning opportunities. As put forward by Bagnall (2000), changes in provision and opportunity are determined by the economics of cost-benefit policies. Meantime, the skills and economy rhetoric argues that individuals risk marginalisation if they fail to be responsive in meeting the demands of global competitiveness and new technology.

DISCOURSES ON ACCESSIBILITY

The vision captured within the Skills Strategy aims to provide a framework for a skills revolution located in the wider context and language of economic prosperity and global competition (Pring 2005). It is justified as a necessary response to requirements for a knowledge economy, outlining the responsibilities that educational providers in partnership with other stakeholders have in ensuring people acquire relevant skills. Yet, the Skills Strategy combines with declarative statements about these interrelationships, particularly in regard to its contribution in terms of accessibility:

Our Skills Strategy aims to ensure equality of access to opportunities by ensuring that public funds are focused on those most in need.
(DfES 2003, p70)

And:

We recognise the importance of ensuring that students with learning difficulties or disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate and achieve in learning (ibid, p71)

New Labour's approach to policy delivery in the Skills Strategy provides an ongoing and repetitive categorical pattern in which the access agenda is alluded to, for example,

as strengthening *'the opportunities available to a diverse range of people facing disadvantage'* (ibid, p71). The Skills Strategy is an official record of government constructing its own version of the learning and skills agenda. Analysis of this textual source allows for comparing and contrasting the Skills Strategy with interpreting and understanding the transcribed views of respondent narratives (Potter and Wetherell 2004). However, Fairclough (2003) suggests that government has set out to achieve consent not through political dialogue or debate of policy initiatives, but through methods of management and forms of consultation with the public, such as focus groups or experts in the field, which it can control. New Labour's language of government is *'promotional rather than dialogical'* (Fairclough 2003, p12), thus discouraging debate. Moreover, the focus of the Skills Strategy is in recounting to readers proposed solutions as to what government perceives to be the problem with skills. In the language of interconnected agendas there should be a clear understanding of the different levels of skill and kinds of skill for different occupations and arenas. In reality, there are different voices and opinions, which are excluded from contributing to the Skills Strategy paper. Arguably, this use of discourse in implementing a major policy change rules out the option for practitioners concerned with the post-16 to contribute to the debate. What is pivotal here is that practitioners still have views to articulate about the Skills Strategy and in essence, are deterred from implementing the skills agenda effectively without articulating their opinions.

Notwithstanding New Labour's particular genre or use of language in the Skills Strategy, respondents offer clear opinions on what the problems are in terms of access and equality of opportunity. A certain inconsistency is apparent in the discourse of accessibility to learning and barriers to job opportunities, as explained by Respondent H from the FE representative body:

The starting point is the job market, there is still a lot of discrimination in it ... 95% of people in Construction are men and 95% of people in Care are women. Some of it is social, some of it is employer choice ... that's on the gender side. For ethnic minorities, more black students are staying on in education as they can't get jobs at sixteen or eighteen. Black graduates can't get jobs, again there's discrimination. In terms of students with learning difficulties, there're fairly massive disparities. People who are profoundly deaf find it difficult to get work. There are schemes to help employers fund extra costs, but there's a fairly big disparity. What can the education and training system do? ... in some cases it's a sticking plaster on a wound that already exists. It's not employers necessarily discriminating - they are under pressure themselves to stay in business, so they will pre-select applicants with the least problems.

Respondent F, from a SSC, describes employer discrimination as '*exclusion rather than poor decision-making*'. While Respondent J, from a union point of view, characterises employers' as dominated by a profit motive:

If there's a class on a Friday afternoon and it's in literacy and 4000 pies have got to be knocked out by 4.00 pm, then the pies come first ... There are different objectives here and there's got to be consensus about what those objectives are. So firms are always going to put the profit motive first. When you are dealing with small gradations of skill then they can be as cavalier as they want. What you can't do is run a computer software business with people trained to make pies! They've got to be qualified to a higher level ... But this is not the level we're talking about. We're talking about in some cases, very low level skills.

This sentiment contests the ideology of the Skills Strategy in practice – it reveals that the importance of skills in the text is far from the reality for employers. One employer, Respondent D, reasons that identification of the skills problem:

As a whole it's not something that we do a lot of, sitting employees down and identifying exactly what these skills are. As an employer it's something we probably need to improve on.

Commentary from Respondent F of the SSC, expressed disquiet based on industry experiences of individuals who opt out of the education and training system without achieving a basic level of literacy and numeracy, attracted to jobs such as hospitality and retail, that are ostensibly easier to recruit into. This applied to the '*indigenous population*' as well as immigrants.

In my experience if people are confident about themselves they will then pursue other qualifications, once they get an appetite for being qualified. But it's breaking out of the vicious circle and encouraging them to come forward. I think that accounts for why the economy has got a huge rump of people that are never going to go anywhere. And then of course you've got immigrants with English as second or third language, which is just compounding the problem. So I think funding needs to be in the direction of basic skills.

This narrative positions basic skills as a standard in the workplace, particularly for non-English speaking employees, and arguably, as a moral imperative for removing discriminatory practices that place barriers against learning opportunities. Again, Respondent J:

I have a feeling that the amount it (Basic Skills) is going to cost (and this might sound cynical), it's not going to look too good on a cost-benefit analysis in terms of what the out-turns are. Nonetheless, it's a moral imperative that it is done. Now there's a huge problem with refugees and asylum-seekers. In occupations they don't have many rights. I would have thought that training here becomes a real imperative, but it needs tracking and some robust contractual arrangements with providers and employers ... (government initiatives) are making an impact. But people have got to model it around what's happening in the future ... what volumes of refugees and asylum-seekers in next two, five or ten years and what happens is funded and properly monitored ... it's going to be very expensive.

References to a wider discourse of how effective learning and skills provision addresses individual as well as employers needs is endorsed by Respondent C from the learning and skills partnership:

The key barrier is the psychological or sociological barrier, which is one of low aspiration in the sense that a lot of people have a negative experience. That would tend to be the case with people in regard to background and applied disproportionately ... ethnic minorities ... whole communities can feel disadvantaged. That's recognised ... there's at least an appreciation that there has to be some kind of positive discrimination.

Inherent barriers are seen to link to basic skills priorities. As stressed by Respondent K, a trade unionist, some barriers are 'incredibly difficult to get over'. So that:

... the black and Asian population are less well represented. In cleaning and catering staff, yes, but as you go up the organisation it's hideously white. Not

because black and Asian people are not applying, it's because recruitment and employment is based on networks, which is an exclusionary process. So in a sense you can't take skills as an abstract notion and take it away from how the labour market works, cultural issues and practices.

These discourses demonstrate inconsistencies when looking at the labour market and the location of the less well qualified in the economy. A contingent of unskilled in the workforce, the poor status of skills development and the maintenance of significant inequalities of access and participation in VET highlight the contradictions between state discourses on vocationalism and the realities of the labour market

SUMMARY

Overall, this chapter has presented discourses that underline widening participation, inclusivity and accessibility in the post-16 sector. The concern has been with process. It has examined how the Skills Strategy discourse is continuously enacted in shifting relations with respondent discourses concerning inequality and exclusion, through disregard of individuals who have poor access to the labour market or support for work-related training. Clearly, despite the rhetoric of government policies, many individuals appear to be excluded from learning opportunities. The influence of the Tomlinson Report (1996) on inclusiveness and the Kennedy Report (1997) on widening participation is manifest in the changing face of post-16 learning policy and practice, notably in attempting to address issues for individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities. However, it remains pertinent that the outcomes of both Reports have produced and maintained a disparate approach to implementing inclusivity strategies as a means of reducing educational disadvantage, or equipping those on the periphery for work. Changes in pedagogy might have led to a plethora of fashionable programmes in response to the widening of a flexible work-based curriculum, but these have not widened participation. As more fluid patterns of working compel employers to consider

the implementation of skills development or specialist training, current strategies remain inadequate for marginalised individuals. While skills development and enrichment is articulated as being at the heart of the post-16 agenda, it is a process subject to polarisation as those unable to access new skills in a changing economy and employability market are excluded or displaced. The focus of the next chapter is on how the discourse of the Skills Strategy weaves through a diversity of respondent narratives to bring together critical aspects of this debate.

CHAPTER 7

KEY FINDINGS AND EMERGING TENSIONS

This chapter provides an overview of research interviews conducted with respondents. The purpose is to comment on issues that emerged from the narratives in terms of their relevance and significance to assessing the post-16 skills and workforce development agenda. In particular, who controls this agenda, and whether the rhetoric surrounding workforce development and the academic-vocational divide will be managed by implementation of the Skills Strategy - or indeed, its successor White Paper, *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*, (DfESa). Addressing such questions takes this thesis full circle – policy document burnout, rhetoric around a post-16 ‘crisis’ and the influence of this inquiry on future research. What emerges from this discursive review indicates diametrically opposed layers of perceptions between sector-valued skills, employer-valued training and learner-valued qualifications. By definition, any social and economic value placed on vocationalism diminishes, as VET priorities become increasingly obfuscated in the face of political stringencies, industry indifference towards engagement and learner ambivalence about participation.

OPINIONS, PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIONS

The intention throughout this investigation has been not only to reflect on the effects of social, economic and political exigencies in education and industry, but also to assess the adequacy of government policy in dealing effectively with skills and workforce development. To that end, and in the context of the Skills Strategy, the opinions of thirteen post-16 practitioners and stakeholders were sought, through their representativeness. Between them, all the participants had a diverse range of experience and involvement in the field of post-16 learning and skills. What emerged from the

interviews was the range of reference and meaning given to the post-16 environment. Respondents were quite clear about the framework within which they operated, highlighting the multiplicity, complexity and divergent levels in which their job roles are located. In essence, respondent discourses demonstrate differences in the way personal perspectives are situated and structured by individual work practices, their experiences serving to illustrate some of the problems encountered in sustaining a consensus for realising implementation of the Skills Strategy. In summary, through evaluation of the research material that has been collected and collated for this inquiry, the aim of the following four sub-sections on '*reflections*' is to draw together the findings examined in Chapters 3 to 6, from firstly, vocational education, training and workplace skills documentation underpinning post-16 provision, and secondly, from respondent transcribed interview data.

Reflections on workforce development and lifelong learning

There are a number of common threads weaving through the discourses in Chapter 3 demonstrating how political influences extend into a range of educational and workplace spheres. Policy-makers, employers and educationalists perpetuate disparate and conflicting expectations of the skills and workforce development agenda. Its low status is reinforced by a lack of innovation, as well as a paucity of resources, contributing to the growth of an ad hoc post-16 learning and skills system. Respondents acknowledge that VET is confined to diverse kinds of provision, under the aegis of different agencies with much of it inappropriately interpreted. This experience is gained from their range of work in post-16 contexts. Respondents link the rationale for learning through reference to the economic environment and a shifting employment market. There is an acknowledgement that a demand-led approach to workforce skills development and access to learning is necessary in order to plug the perceived skills deficit. However, the

picture is not a simple one, since skills change is perceived to be having a differential impact on various groups of individuals from within either employment or education.

Lifelong learning as part of the post-16 agenda is hindered in its development by uncertainty and ambiguity as to its definition. The UK suffers from the legacy of a poorly interconnected system of VET, resulting in difficulties for individuals either to effectively navigate their way through learning avenues or to participate in the much-vaunted knowledge economy. The traditional view of lifelong learning was originally prescribed as an opportunity for participation in lifetime learning to achieve vocational and social aspirations. All respondent interpretations of contemporary lifelong learning strategies shift in emphasis to include skilling and workforce development, driven by a rationale for economic and global competitiveness. Respondent discourses suggest that the contested nature of lifelong learning distilled from government's Skills Strategy, presents little evidence of the broader concerns of a learning society based on social justice and cohesion. Fundamentally, the lifelong learning agenda is vindicated by economic and global market concerns rather than social objectives. The fact that economic imperatives eclipse the social aspects of a lifelong learning continuum highlights some key differences between policy-makers and respondents in their view on developing more innovative forms of VET as a measure of achieving lifelong learning. Development of the post-16 education and training infrastructure by way of dovetailing it into a collaborative working schema to provide '*ladders of opportunity*' (DfES 2002, p14) is a declared government objective. Priority has been placed on VET facilitating institutional and labour market adaptation necessary for implementation of new workforce initiatives. Policy-makers articulate that the axis on which lifelong strategies revolve is based on the learning and skills competence of the labour force, particularly in early working life. Yet, respondent discourses (excluding employer discourses)

demonstrate how a lack of responsiveness by employers and employees to the implementation of learning and skills opportunities is contributing to labour market polarisation. Narratives transcribed from this sample of interviewees suggest that if obstacles to the modernisation of workforce development are formidable, then those confronting lifelong learning appear no less so. For them, the tensions in current policy discourse clearly impact on attempts to construct a real and viable VET system within the Skills Strategy agenda.

Reflections on the skills landscape

A critical question to emerge from participant interviews in Chapter 4 is whether skills are a driver for change or are skills a response to change? The narratives provide an illustrative evaluation of the case for moving the UK employment infrastructure from a low-skills equilibrium to a high-skills, high tech economy. Political rhetoric is focused on the accelerating failure of the UK's performance in economic growth and capability. This can be correlated to a national historical legacy of industrial primacy and early economic success, relatively free of state intervention. Increasingly, the UK's critically reduced manufacturing base, in the face of an emerging service sector, has become exposed to global competition. As the labour market becomes more flexible, the tendency is for a growing periphery of workers to move between temporary low paid employments creating a low-skill, low-tech economy. Respondents generally recognised that prioritisation of skills and competence in the workplace is deemed vital in economic performance. However, employer interviewees argued that the responsibility for skills and vocational development (or lack of it) fell squarely with government or the education system. The specific nature of skills delivery has implications for the type of support offered, particularly if funded from the public purse. For some respondents (again, excluding employers) the repercussions of industry shortcomings such as the

slow rate of innovation and low investment, which in turn have generated a detrimental effect on skills and learning, is a response to external economic constraints. A tightening of the relationship between economic objectives and education and training policy only serves to illustrate the long-term neglect of adequate investment in upskilling or vocational initiatives. Evidence from more than one respondent identified that the economic structure in North Kent differs from other sub-regional (and regional) economies. The argument persists for a more localised perspective to take account of the growth in micro-economies. Therefore, skills delivery needs to be tailored to local conditions to address the unease expressed by one interviewee that for skills development there is a political and economic tendency towards *'one size fits all'*. Evidence from another respondent suggests that new regional skills structures, while encouraging government departments to work more effectively together could in fact militate against other workforce development priorities in the Southeast. A concern is that local requirements do not fit into a convenient regional pattern or that regionalisation cuts across some key development areas. Undoubtedly, there are deeply entrenched views on skills development and VET strategies. Respondent discourses highlight the ambiguities underpinning government attempts at addressing the disparity between academic and vocational pathways. Whether reform to deal with perceived skill shortages and skill gaps, as set out in the Skills Strategy, would go any way towards compensating for differentiated entry routes to employment, workplace training or higher education remains unanswered. However, for all respondents, cogent and well grounded progress means tackling the broader constraints of skills formation in the UK labour market. What is certain is that one endless skills initiative after another has been produced by New Labour (Grubb, 2004) as the bedrock of education policy: *Skills for Life* (2004), *Skills for Business* (2004), *In Demand: Adult skills in the 21st Century – Part 1/Part 2* (2002), *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* (2005), *Skills in*

the global economy (2004) in addition to the document at the heart of this thesis, *Skills Strategy, 21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential (2003)*. In each case, the discourse of skills embraced by the rhetoric of economic reform is presented by government as the remedy for sustaining employment in a competitive market place.

Reflections on policy, partnerships and provision

An increasingly differentiated post-16 sector underlines the analysis in Chapter 5, focusing on a striking transformation influenced by government, collaborative agencies and education. In evaluating respondent discourses it is of little surprise that policy making has become so politicised. Respondents understand and contextualise skilling the labour force as a mechanism for both embedding government's policy and attempting to solve the problems of skills deficiencies in the workforce. The Skills Strategy is articulated by government as a policy lever for mapping the future learning and skills landscape. Respondent discourses suggest that while the Skills Strategy is seen as a planning tool for adult skills and HE, it is questionable whether it has the potential to settle joined up thinking strategies in the context of stakeholder involvement. Interviewees ally the national Skills Strategy to a concept of demand, focused on engagement with industry and its employers. Tensions concerning the impact of bureaucratic measures on education provision continue to cause confusion to those involved and the challenge, according to more than one respondent, is in simplifying a sector that has become subject to a continual tide of transformation.

However, respondents are divided over the interpretation of connectivity and regionalisation of partnerships. For some, changes to organisational structure reveal a problematical political relationship between regions and agencies. For one interviewee, this relates to achieving a greater coherence in policy and a more streamlined approach

to dealing with under performance in vocational opportunities and skills requirements. Overall, respondent discourses communicate a post-16 arena of partnership and collaboration complicated by repetitive government reorganisation and intervention. This complexity blurs the lines of accountability, the interaction of partners at local, sub-regional or regional level and the dynamics of an effective partnership structure. While partnership working between the agencies appears to be developed in the North Kent area, for at least one respondent it is seen as a necessity and burden involving external meetings attended by individuals who are not always certain about why they are there. Unless there is impetus for co-operation and real attempts to simplify a complex post-16 landscape, the outcome will be, according to Respondent H, different agencies spinning about *'in a perpetual alphabet soup'*.

The ideology of skills training and labour market provision is arguably about power. Skills policy is predicated on an employment structure facing a skills shortage economy (Lafer 2004). While the Skills Strategy talks about the scale of the challenge in terms of *the 'skills needed for sustainable employment'* (DfES 2003, p8), it also loosely discusses the notion that to compete globally *'millions of people'* need to see *'skills, training and qualifications'* as a personal goal to employability. Yet, respondent discourses highlight how qualifications are justified as a main driver for publicly funded provision. Qualifications are perceived as a *de facto* definition for quality through 'standards', rather than quality through learning. Fundamental features of marketisation, regulation and divisiveness in vocational provision and skills development have produced a pedagogy distorted by cost-driven delivery of learning and reform of the qualification structure. A culture of enterprise is displacing a former highly developed PCET culture, defined by its diversity of institutions and range of curriculum, alongside political expectations of retrenched expenditure and radical transformation in a post-16 system

that remains under-resourced and under-valued. Another respondent captures this ethos in the distortion of equitable allocation. While larger companies might set aside some kind of budget for training provision, SMEs are disincentivised to spend or commit to resources. Interviewees express concern that government has given no funding commitment beyond that of the stated Level 2 entitlement and basic skills. This anomalous strategy and lack of clarity about funding support, specifically at Level 3 and Level 4, is obviously detrimental to individuals who in the end are required to pay the fees and the sector in terms of identified skills gaps. As pointed out by respondents, what this political and economic approach fails to do is to shift negative perceptions on how to tackle long-standing weaknesses of skills needs and workforce development.

Reflections on accessible learning pathways

Thoughts on how widening participation is twinned with social inclusion to ensure accessibility for those most at risk of being disadvantaged are explored in Chapter 6. The combined effect of individual respondent experiences provides professional and practitioner representations of access to learning that appear to contrast significantly with learning and skills policy. Respondent discourses highlight a post-16 sector driven by change and economic imperatives that might bring about opportunity in learning and workplace development for some, but nevertheless has the potential to marginalise individuals at the heart of Skills Strategy. For respondents, simply increasing demand is not seen as sufficient to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. Widening participation strategies are perceived in the context of learners' previous educational and life experiences, which are not necessarily concomitant with government's notion of economic needs. The discourses report the impact of growing inequality in the pattern of selection and achievement during formal schooling. This trend, according to some of the respondents, accounts for exclusion from subsequent learning and work

opportunities, as the result of a pervasive culture of disadvantage and inequitable access. And as observed by one respondent, barriers in the context of the Skills Strategy refer to a perception of reform to compensate for educational learning and skills deficits, rather than the reality, which is that economic barriers to participation remain embedded in the post-16 sector.

In terms of social inclusion, the research findings suggest that post-16 learning is a process subject to polarisation as those unable to access new skills in a changing economic and employability market are excluded or displaced. As indicated by one respondent, skills distribution can only be resolved if employers engage more effectively and proactively in the system. For employees on low incomes, costs for training are less likely to be paid for by employers, while for the economically inactive without a Level 2 qualification, the funding costs are likely to be prohibitive. Government expects employers to respond to the demand for skills training, particularly when there is an opportunity for claiming the Level 2 entitlement. Nonetheless, respondents indicate that employers appear uninterested in taking up initiatives. Further, the rate of returns on a Level 2 qualification is disappointing in terms of employee future prospects and earnings. On the one hand, employers readily express concerns about skills deficits and economic competitiveness, yet fail to contribute to addressing issues of inclusivity and inequity.

Respondent discourses pertaining to accessibility generate disquiet, particularly in relation to equity permeating cultural attitudes towards gender, ethnicity and disability that result in exclusion for many individuals in terms of enhanced career opportunities. Traditional female fields of employment, such as the Care sector, are still dominated by women. Likewise, males monopolise sectors such as Construction. And for ethnic

groups, discourses of discrimination marginalise the location of the less well-placed in the labour market. These participant narratives demonstrate a stereotyping of individuals by limiting the ways in which they can access a contested post-16 arena for learning pathways or workplace development. Respondents describe how difficult it is for minority groups to achieve employment in any reasonable role, whatever their level of learning. In reviewing these issues, participants recognise that to effect long-term change for a more equitable correspondence by gender, ethnicity or ability, it is necessary to identify discursive practices that work towards eliminating marginalisation and workforce imbalance.

THE ART OF 'NO DOING'

To be honest, they're all ... bureaucrats. They're no 'doers' ... the doing is the process of doing, not the actual doing ... there're far too many people putting documents together and telling us things we already know ... there's nobody out there doing what we know should be done.

(Respondent A from FE)

This participant discourse suggests that, yet again, the UK is entrenched in another cycle of policy document fatigue and potential failure, as post-16 professionals are expected to deliver from imposed policies that often serve to frustrate, rather than to assist. This discursive text attributes inherent flaws and deficiencies in government strategy to policy-makers who simply assume that what is planned is what is delivered. Hence, the narrative captures the philosophical idealism of the Skills Strategy underpinning government's ongoing discourse of an endemic skills weakness and the problematisation of the UK's approach to labour market reform. The Skills Strategy cuts off meaningful debate over the nature and future of skills and workforce development through the exclusion of relevant post-16 agencies. It represents only one voice – that of government. Hence, it denies opportunity for practitioners to participate in informed discussion and open decision-making. Yet, full and inclusive debate is critical for a

Skills Strategy that depends on engaging employers and employees in '*skills, training and qualifications*' (DfES 2003, p8). As part of its political discourse, government aims to win support and validation for the Skills Strategy. What is needed is legitimate consultation with post-16 practitioners, who share responsibility for its implementation and delivery.

SO WHERE DOES THE SKILLS STRATEGY LEAVE THE POST-16 SECTOR?

In summary, respondent discourses are discursively interwoven and interconnected to provide an interpretation from a multiplicity of perspectives. Different texts in each of the four core Chapters 3 to 6 jostle for prominence, yet in analysing the discourses different emphases and different possibilities provide different meanings. In addition, much of the literature and recent policy discourse on post-16 learning and skills reflects a prescriptive approach articulated as a panacea to mask the apparent contradictions stemming from the expansion and inherent crises of the post-16 sector. A critical assessment of the current status of the Skills Strategy suggests that the current skills and workforce development environment is in a state of flux and very much at an evolutionary stage in its formulation.

The research question set out to determine the success or failure of the national Skills Strategy (DfES 2003). It is clear from the research and investigation that this will take a further period of time. The opportunity for delivering reform has been there. Yet two years on, it is discouraging to observe and experience only minimal progress in dealing with the underlying problems of the post-16 sector. The Skills Strategy was published with a rationalisation agenda. However, the publication of the subsequent skills White Paper, *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* (DfES 2005a) aims to lay the foundation for the next phase of skills direction and vocational opportunity.

Government's message is one of '*good progress*', the goal now is to deliver the national Skills Strategy through '*a comprehensive and coherent business plan*' (DfES 2005a) suggesting even more targets to meet. Implementation of this latest published skills White Paper is essential to more accurately assess the actual outcomes of proposed changes and to uncover the particular logic of both skills documents. In the present context of post-16 education and skills reform, assessment is pivotal. In deliberating the question of who controls the Skills Strategy agenda, narratives highlight respondent confusion in understanding the mechanisms of control. For one respondent, the Skills Strategy is a cross-departmental, unique document controlled by the DfES, with an interest from the DTI and DWP. For another, the Skills Strategy is perceived as a mechanism for control as government has ruled out alternative methods of mandatory intervention for skilling the workforce. Therefore, control is through the supply of skills – a rubber lever that government anticipates will have a positive impact on the economy. Rhetorically, political thinking is that the Skills Strategy aligned with training will produce a better economy. Yet all respondents acknowledge that training alone will not improve the economy. *De facto*, training will not be effective unless the economy is already changing. The shaping and cultivation of skills and workforce development is formulated on policy-making that promotes economic well-being and social cohesion, yet lacks the political will to address tension between academic and vocational ideologies. The existence of the academic-vocational divide remains in evidence from respondent discourses. VET is presented as a secondary option in the post-16 sector demonstrating the (so far) limited impact of the Skills Strategy and other policies discussed in this research. VET policy planning encourages skimming selective strategies for implementation. Any opportunities to improve VET systems must adapt them to valid labour market necessities in the context of a unified post-16 curriculum. Undoubtedly, the Skills Strategy has a long evolutionary period ahead of it. In the

meantime, the planned publication in Autumn 2005 of the Foster Report will link the Skills White Paper (2005), the 14-19 White Paper (2005) and the planned LSC change agenda. Of greater concern, is that diverse policy strands in New Labour thinking do not clarify or define the place of FE in the wider arena of post-16 learning and skills. Colleges are expected to respond to multiple agendas resulting in a fracturing of their role in contributing to the learning and skills demands of their local community.

IS THERE A POST-16 CRISIS?

Part of the argument by the author in excavating the ideology of the Skills Strategy leads back to the original research question concerning its repetitiveness and reiteration. The Skills Strategy is an important political location for discursive ideas. What emerges from the document is that there are striking similarities between this discourse and events surrounding the Ruskin Speech during the Callaghan premiership of almost thirty years ago. Donald (1979) identified that the sense of '*education crisis*' in the seventies was being driven through a process of redefinition in terms of the role of education, while at the same time education institutions were being restructured to accommodate cuts in state expenditure. Alongside this strategy was an attempt to equip education more effectively to meet industry needs. At the heart of the 1976 Great Debate was the creation of a new political and economic settlement to supersede the former consensus in education. Donald (1979) asserts that contradictory forces contribute to ongoing crises in education through determinants articulated in political intervention and institutional practices. In charting the path of the political discourse embodied in the Skills Strategy, it is possible to correlate developments that demonstrate the articulation of a similar contemporary crisis in education – cuts in funding, the debate over 14-19 policy, pedagogical issues in institutions, the reorganisation and ascendancy of key government and partnership agencies, the effects of changing skills requirements in the workplace, a

new framework for the post-16 sector. Changes in New Labour policy highlight how the Skills Strategy is being imposed through the weaving of different discourses into some form of political and economic coherence. The current 'crisis' is presented as a redefinition of the issues around a new dominance of education and skills. Yet in examining the experiences of education and training over three decades, there are still apparent disparities between external political factors and the trajectory of learning discourses within the post-16 context. Even with the passage of time, government policy remains a contested notion, advocating contrasting political and educational agendas.

FUTURE RESEARCH – THE SKILLS STRATEGY AS POLICY

The author believes that the work undertaken for this thesis is rigorous and robust. What emerges from the research is an integrated discursive approach to skills development grounded in practitioner discourses and underpinned by analysis of government's Skills Strategy document. Initially, it seemed that the Skills Strategy articulated substance and coherence, as a consistent and functional document aimed at addressing New Labour's skills agenda. Yet as the inquiry progressed, the discourse of the Skills Strategy appeared increasingly repetitive, fragmented and paradoxical. To such an extent that the author now finds it difficult to reconcile how the meaning of the Skills Strategy constructs a coherent explanation of the skills agenda as a realisable and practical vehicle for delivery, particularly when bolstered by the rhetoric and nature of participant texts. Further investigation and consolidation would capture the evolution of the skills culture more fully, enabling evaluation of progress of government's most recent learning and skills policy. In essence, future research would take into account the views and personal experiences of an increased sample of practitioners in a range of different institutions and trainers in companies to gain an in-depth understanding of their formal

role in embedding workforce skills strategies. The Skills Strategy narrative is now underpinned by the recent 14-19 reform agenda that predicates policy interventions to increase participation and achievement. Broadening this thesis' research foundation to include 14-19 policy will provide additional evidence for the effectiveness or otherwise of workforce development and vocational strategies in enhancing positive learning experiences and skills achievement. One likely theme for future research is to provide a paradigm that considers the impact of constraints and limitations on learner choices in making decisions about education-work transitions in the current skills climate. Research in vocational contexts is required in order to illustrate how in pragmatic terms these choices are decided. How are learners included or excluded? How do they respond to, and shape opportunities for learning? How can a catalyst for change determine structural parameters within the learning and skills sector? The challenge of undertaking further research is to provide significance and reliance in one substantive area of post-16 sector investigation through gaining greater insight into an emerging policy, the dynamics of interactive agencies, the impact of culture and the perspective of individuals as stakeholders.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE SKILLS STRATEGY

This thesis set out to draw together the key arguments and meanings concerning the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003), its progress towards implementation, its effectiveness in engaging individuals and employers in learning and skills opportunities and its cogency as a paradigm for lifelong learning. To achieve this intent, the author reviewed a broad range of relevant literature, journal articles, academic papers and policy-related documents, as well as transcribing and analysing respondent interviews. The principal threads of the research have been interwoven within Chapters 1 to 8, to act as a focal point for deliberating the question at the heart of this investigation of when, if ever, the Skills Strategy will be judged a success or failure. The process of interweaving participant narratives with the author's commentary, alongside the Skills Strategy discourse as a multi-interpretable document has provided a unique reading of the learning and skills agenda. This method of research opened an innovative discourse pathway for evaluating the Skills Strategy as a working document for the post-16 sector. It provided new insights into how the Skills Strategy is interpreted by government as an interagency solution for national and sectoral skills deficits, while for participants, the Skills Strategy articulated a rigid approach to masking underlying crises in the post-16 sector. As stated in Chapter 2, the rationale for utilising a discourse approach was based on the author's professional values underpinning her experience as a practitioner. It provided a challenging opportunity for researching current government thinking within the context of pedagogical practice. In engaging with the Skills Strategy, through researching and analysing respondent narratives, the author experienced a range of reservations as well as expressions of optimism. Certainly changes in the author's

personal understanding of the Skills Strategy occurred in the course of readings and re-readings of the document. As a result and in terms of professional development, the author believes that evaluation of this research has broadened and deepened her overall knowledge in terms of policy implications and potential effects of the Skills Strategy, which intersect at a political and socio-economic level with wider post-16 learning and workforce development issues.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to contemporary thinking on skills development. It introduced the Skills Strategy as a document advocating choice and control for employers in making decisions about workforce development in a changing skills and labour market. In addition, it identified how government policy, past and present, critically features in the transforming context of VET reform and skills training within a global and economic market. Following on from the introductory perspectives of the first chapter, Chapter 2 described the research methodology. It provided a rationale for adopting a qualitative approach to analyse the meanings and assertions emerging from the Skills Strategy. Further, it detailed the determinants of the research instrumentation and sample, concluding with an explanation of the importance of the Doctoral research in the context of the author's professional development. How the discourse should move beyond critiquing the Skills Strategy was the subject of Chapter 3. It sought to evaluate the impact of the Skills Strategy in shaping workforce development and influencing lifelong learning opportunities. Further, it highlighted the concerns of participant narratives about the obduracy of government policy both in its regard to the skills agenda and its ability to influence employers in terms of training the workforce. This theme was expanded in Chapter 4, through exploring the issues of what constitutes skilling and identifying the location of perceived skills deficits and gaps. It considered the complexity of the skills mismatch and the means by which the Skills Strategy

articulates the demand for skills. Addressing the rhetoric and ambiguity surrounding the high-skill low-skill divide, the discourse maintained that in an employment climate of part-time, flexible labour many employers remain reluctant to invest in skills training. Differentiated skills development, VET strategies and the disparity between academic and vocational pathways highlight different and divisive entry routes to employment and training. Taking up this link, Chapter 5 outlined how policy, partnerships and provision as fundamental facets in the politicisation of learning underline the conflict between the dynamics of the labour market and an economically-driven Skills Strategy. It questioned the effectiveness of moves towards partnership reform in an increasingly divergent post-16 environment of marketisation and qualification reform. Chapter 6 reflected on the positioning of the post-16 sector in delivering learning that addresses issues of accessibility, widening participation and inclusivity. It argued that despite the rhetoric of Skills Strategy discourse, many individuals are excluded from learning and skills opportunities in a transforming economy and shifting employment market. Chapter 7 commented on the findings that emerged from respondent discourses of the Skills Strategy, providing detailed reflections on the four sub-themes or key objectives of the research embraced in Chapters 3 to 6. It suggested that the current complexity of post-16 reform has resulted from a learning and skills legacy devoid of coherent policy or effective strategies for skills and workforce development. The author compared the similarities between the political discourse embodied in the Skills Strategy and events surrounding the 1976 Great Debate. Having considered the tensions emerging from the Skills Strategy, the author went on to propose widening the research undertaken for this Doctoral thesis as a theme for future investigation in one substantive area of the learning and skills sector. In this final Chapter 8, the author concludes with some thoughts, caveats and reservations surrounding the Skills Strategy debate by bringing together

analyses from different discourses that impact on issues of post-16 learning and workforce development.

THOUGHTS, CAVEATS AND RESERVATIONS

So, how far is the Skills Strategy embraced within the post-16 sector as a coherent and inclusive framework for engaging learners and employers in learning? Meeting the terms for this remit in one sub-regional area of the Southeast requires new thinking about the correlation between learning and skills opportunities and work organisation linked to parallel national strategies. The research discussed in this thesis illustrates that there has never been a unified view of vocational education and training in the UK. The gap that exists between education and workforce development strategies points to the consequences of a system in which VET has been delivered either by practitioners with little industrial experience, or by industry trainers who have minimal teaching experience. Industry on the other hand, has historically undertaken the practical component of training provision. This implies that when skilled labour is required training should always be employer-led. The employer-led rhetoric centres not only on the relationship between training and industry, but on the fact that training is a political mechanism through which labour (often low-skill) is made available for low-tech employments. The concept of contemporary voluntaristic training arrangements is associated with its traditional involvement in the labour market. Workforce development has evolved as a major control in post-16 ideology and practice by legitimising the industrial needs emphasis. A tenuous symbiotic relationship currently exists between education and the economy. And quite clearly, government does have a legitimate economic reason to ensure the provision of a socially cohesive education system. However, with learning and skills policy pointing significantly towards economic ends and articulated as a panacea for ensuring social inclusion and improving

labour market opportunities, the danger is of segmenting and positioning the already disadvantaged even further into low status employment. Learning and skills development in preparation for working life requires a uniform and equitable model of accessible and consistent opportunities. The lack of a cohesive and integrated system in the post-16 sector demonstrates the ineffectiveness of weak government policies, which have launched ad-hoc training schemes as a catholicon to satisfy short-term political objectives rather than investment in future long-term education and skills acquisition. Competitive elements inherent in recent education policy-making reveal potentially destructive differences between the culture of the workplace and education criteria. The impact of this tension is defined in the power relations between educational and industrial interests as they compete for control in a differentiated post-16 sector. It is indicative of the political rhetoric that education and training is now funded, formulated and planned to meet the needs of industry. What is critical here is the impact of recent government policy on the development of a learning society in which individuals embrace the notion of lifelong learning. As a political and economic imperative lifelong learning features in mainstream educational policy, identified with national prosperity. It is targeted at increasing skills levels within industry and commerce, as a mechanism for enhancing competitiveness and economic success. As the pace of socio-economic change and technological innovation gathers speed, government strategy challenges employers and individuals to upskill to keep abreast of global interests. In the politics of the market place, lifelong learning can and does represent different ideologies. It constitutes a model of policy objectives with a mandate to accommodate the exigencies of the post-16 (including FE) sector, continuing adult education, PCET development, as well as a range of stakeholders and partnerships. Unquestionably, a definitive policy framework is essential if there is to be real cohesion in the efforts to achieve long-term reform for individual aspirations and lifelong learning communities. Market principles

contextualise a transforming knowledge economy in which the parameters of new employment structures define part-time, temporary, multi-job and ad-hoc or casual employment, flexible work arrangements, a circumscribed knowledge economy in which firms need to compete on the basis of skill.

Analysis of labour productivity highlights a mismatch between the skills people have and the skills industry needs. Skill imbalances affect productivity and employment and remain a key determinant in discourse around global competitiveness. Despite the rhetoric concerning the criticality of moving towards a high-skill environment, it is clear that for a substantial number in the labour force, pursuit of high-skill employment will not be an option. The reality is that in a flexible labour market lower skilled employees are offset by a low investment, low pay trajectory. And as part of the UK's pool of low value-added, low paid work, from which labour can ebb and flow, it is unlikely that firms will be willing to convert to high-skill employment. Political discourse might theorise about a low-skills equilibrium that is difficult to change. However, it is clear that employers have little incentive to move away from low-skills strategies while a low-skill model is the paradigm of choice. It is a self-perpetuating equilibrium (Finegold and Soskice 1990), inasmuch as employers tend to concentrate on producing low-tech products requiring low-skill operations. The labour force is not incentivised to acquire high-skills for working in a high-tech environment. Across the board demands persist for effective and cogent workforce development arrangements to support a more highly skilled labour force, as skills shortages threaten industrial expansion. Yet these demands are limited by contradictions as skills formation impact differentially on different groups of employees. Skills development builds on learning started during the employee's full-time education. It is inexorably linked with future workplace training. However, it is

the quality and level of training provision in relation to the commitment of employers to deliver diversity in skilling that will offset the negative impact of skills polarisation.

Government policy interventions underline how politicised mass post-16 education and training has become. Respondent discourses allude to a UK skills problem that cannot be addressed solely by increasing the supply of skills. Government continues to rely on employers to invest in skills development and vocational training. However, in the face of unremitting failure by a core of employers to train the labour force, the question is whether government should intervene by abandoning an essentially voluntaristic or low regulatory approach and imposing compulsory training through grants and levies? Whether or not intervention might be significant in future policy decision, it can be argued that what deters government against intervention is how regulation would impact on investment in the existing low-skills flexible labour market. The challenge is how the wider interests of those, other than employers, might be included if the state is unable to compel employers to contribute to training costs, either as a result of employer hesitancy (by a minority) or refusal (by the majority)? Part of the problem is that constructing a framework for work-based training is relatively straightforward. It is in engaging employers who are conditioned by a history of state laissez-faire policy approaches that difficulties lie.

Notions of collaboration and partnership between government agencies and deliverers of the post-16 agenda are at the heart of the Skills Strategy structure. These cohere with prevailing New Labour work-related discourses on lifelong learning. However, the concept of partnership effectiveness in the context of policy delivery is questionable. Partnerships in the public sector act as an alternative to reorganisation. If partnerships are to be the impetus for moving learning and skills in the requisite policy direction,

what should be the substantive focus for post-16 learning projects and how can they contribute to current efforts at collaboration? An overarching theme is one that inspires practitioners and external stakeholders to collaborate. This element appears to be the most neglected in the drive towards full cost recovery and the view of New Labour's reductionist policy towards post-16 non-funded delivery. Current 3-year planning for the LSC appears to be on hold as funds for any additional adult growth are curtailed and with Level 2 entitlement proposals not rolling out nationally until 2006/07 (LSC 2005c). Again, prioritisation for funding and planning focuses on a demand-led approach from employers and individuals. In addition, there is an expectation that *'under the Skills Strategy we'll expect individuals with higher level qualifications and employers to invest more'* (Mark Haysom, Chief Executive, LSC, speaking about LSC arrangements for FE planning and funding on 21 January 2005). Funded programmes invoke competition among diverse providers of learning. Skills and workforce development influence public policy. Yet the tension between central government direction and decentralisation is curious. The complexity of the national political prism imposes a constant cycle of reform, which espouses devolution by central government. Emphasis on accountability is part of New Labour's reform strategy. In the drive for efficiency, national targets imposed at a regional and local level, are set to meet learning and skills requirements. The risk is that the imposition of targets provides the wrong incentives for delivery. In an era of public policy reform, local and regional collaboration will be viewed negatively rather than from within a framework of consensus. It is not enough to connect former diffusely associated regional and local partnerships without strengthened central external funding and dynamically positioned key agencies. The Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA), as a document (2002), provides a position statement. It gives the impression that partners are striving for the same goals. Yet it risks creating divisions over the future direction of organisations such as the LSC, DfES,

RDAs and SSCs, in the sense that in England regions are artificial constructs that can cut across sector priorities.

What is observable from the Skills Strategy is that it articulates a demand-led system equipping employers with the control (and choice) over publicly funded provision. Whilst emphasising the skills agenda as vehicle for public accountability and critique, it struggles in defining how employers will engage in a publicly funded learning and skills sector. New Labour places skills development and provision at the strategic centre of national policy to increase productivity. Labour market entry is measured in terms of employer demand for skills and achievement of qualifications. Yet the relationship between employer and employee demand for training remains blurred, without clarity of how provision is to be funded in the absence of clear commitment from the very stakeholders for whom the expansion of education and training is intended. The Skills Strategy fails to ground its recommendations, giving rise to real difficulties as stakeholders such as FE face a constant need to adopt to the harmonisation of qualifications. The returns from achieving work-based formal qualifications appear nebulous. While a qualification may facilitate entry into the labour market, experience counts for more in many occupational sectors. There is a lack of understanding by employers towards engagement in post-16 learning, in which experience is valued above vocationalism.

Yet, curriculum diversity within the post-16 sector demonstrates a dichotomy of measures. On the one hand lifelong learning embodies the notion of flexibility, widening participation, social inclusion and ease of access, while on the other, there is an emphasis on vocational functionalism incorporating rigour and rigidity in terms of accountability, standards criteria as well as retention and achievement outcomes. The

complexities of ensuring learner involvement reflect a need to bring about widening participation and social cohesion through FE, a sector that has been undervalued in its achievements of provision. A valid and valued pathway to vocational lifelong learning opportunities is central to a fair and transparent system. The rhetoric clearly questions whether market principles alone will widen participation. Within FE, the context for social inclusion is set by government policy, which in turn informs inclusive learning strategies. It is imperative that the underlying principles for meeting this agenda ensure equality of opportunity through improved access to a curriculum that is socially inclusive. For colleges it is about ensuring accessible provision of resources and materials as well as learning opportunities based on an individual's needs. Accessible learning is a key policy for addressing the experiences of disadvantaged individuals and communities. While the assertions of policy-makers appear to validate the commitment to a strategic and legal framework to ensure accessibility, contradictory perspectives in the approach to lifelong opportunities need to be reconciled in order to ensure positive learner outcomes across all groups in society.

The purpose of the Skills Strategy is ambiguous. Its assurances are based on key assumptions about the functioning of the post-16 education and training relationship with employment, the nature of economic change and the instrumentality of government. If the economy and government are to be the drivers for a Skills Strategy that moves the post-16 sector in the direction of 21st Century Skills, clear direction is needed to avoid contradiction and confusion on how practitioners are expected to implement the changes. Evaluation of the macro- and micro-political agenda advocates expansion of post-16 provision while seemingly leaving key aspects of the broader lifelong learning agenda in a vacuum. The dilemma of post-16 learning and work-based training policy is in defining who controls it. The involvement of different government quangos, industry

organisations and partnerships that exert pressure on the education system, prompts the question of what power educationalists now hold within the post-16 sector. Political and economic constraints limit the options available. Government and industry have greater authority than ever before. Ultimately, it is about determining who benefits from the original investment in skills training and workforce development initiatives. Education and training should not be divorced from employment and workforce development policies. Past laissez-faire policy commitments continue to restrict interventions into industry to stimulate skills demands or to regulate exclusion of individuals from entry to labour markets. In the current fragmentary state of the education-industry interface divisive learning and skills policies continue to fail to resolve inherent post-16 sector problems.

Meanwhile, the absence of consistent and congruous trajectories ensures responsibility for learning and workforce development oscillates pendulum-fashion between whichever agencies it is politically expedient to invest with that responsibility. As a result, post-16 provision is now a patchwork of ideological imperatives. It appears inherently irrational. Dereliction in creating cohesive arrangements for learning and workforce development necessitates an approach that looks beyond the myopic definition of the problem in terms of past failures. Former perfunctory and fragmentary strategies must be replaced by learning and skills initiatives intended as a pathway to valid employment and not merely initiated as another set of temporary palliative measures. More to the point, inadequate policies that negate a cogent VET and skills development paradigm will continue to marginalise learners and the workforce along routes that lead nowhere.

AFTERWORD

CRITICAL REFLECTION

It is acknowledged that it is difficult to draw decisive conclusions about the impact of the Skills Strategy. However, synthesising critical forms of policy and practice within the parameters of post-16 learning and workforce development should not be an impossible task for educationalists, government and employers. The principal argument of this doctoral thesis is that current initiatives appear to have changed little in the sector. What supports this argument is the research evidence that highlights a lack of meaningful policy and reform aimed at meeting the needs of the individual. This process of investigation has enabled the author to reflect on recently completed research, in order to share the outcomes, as a source of influence for responding to the real issues and problems of vocationalism impacting on post-16 learning and skills development in the labour market. Reflecting critically on the research is a means of developing personal skills for enhancing professional knowledge, practice and understanding. It has involved an examination of how the author has reached particular conclusions in terms of this inquiry around the Skills Strategy and the appropriacy of the research methodology as a contribution to knowledge and professional practice. In addition, it takes into account the extent to which respondents are representative of the sector and the justification for data being drawn only from the Southeast of England.

Contribution to knowledge

The essence of this doctoral thesis is the demonstration of the author's original and significant contribution to knowledge in the academic field of post-compulsory education and training. The research addressed a specific gap in knowledge concerning 21st century skills, which as a response to economic and political imperatives moves the

skills paradigm beyond government policy. While the thesis built on existing documentation and knowledge regarding post-16 policy initiatives, skills development and lifelong learning, the work is unique in its output. As well as making reference to wider social and philosophical principles, it involves critical appreciation of, and makes valid contribution to, the growing evidence of the changing context of educational reform and workforce skills transformation through the further provision of original research. By contributing to current educational discourse, the author has added another dimension, another voice to the learning and skills debate. The creation and interpretation of this body of knowledge through independent research has generated, the author argues, a work of scholarship, relevance and competence. The scope and method of research demonstrates quality, rigour and accountability in terms of its doctoral level. Not only does the study show evidence of advancement of knowledge in a specific education field through the author's original research, but it also shows evidence of relevant literature, independence of approach and personal research abilities.

Contribution to professional practice

In the education and training arena, the correlation between theory and professional practice is inextricably linked. Thus the close affinity between research requirements and the education profession provided the author with a framework and structure to research substantive issues relating to the Skills Strategy agenda. The inquiry is a powerful tool for rethinking existing professional practice across a range of contexts and changing post-16 boundaries. As an active researcher working in a professional context it is an incentive and even a source of new enthusiasm for promoting collegiality and engaging with other practitioners involved in the delivery of the skills agenda. While the author's professional role is concerned with actual PCET issues, the study has facilitated a process of critical reflection, dissemination of practice-based transferable skills and

development of theoretical frameworks. This contribution to professional practice advances personal knowledge that provides grounding for further research. In addition, undertaking the professional doctorate has extended the forefront of personal experiences and relevance of research topic by providing a foundation for the collective exchange of knowledge to broaden academic activities between the author's workplace institution, the university as a research institution and the wider community of partnerships.

Respondent representation and location

The author acknowledges the limitations of the research sample in that interviewees are expressing their personal opinions, albeit from within the context of their job role as key stakeholders representing multiple and divergent levels of responsibility within the post-16 learning and/or workforce development frame. However, the use of interview methodology as a research instrument produced dynamic narratives, thus providing a rich source of data about respondent understanding of skills policy. These interviews are an important source for understanding the intentions of post-16 practitioners and decision-makers. Moreover, the author as specialist (in the context of the Skills Strategy) ensured that the pre-planned interview questions were detailed and informed. This level of personal knowledge allowed for more in-depth probing to ensure specificity in responses from participants.

The decision to confine the research to one geographical location, the Southeast of England, is both relevant and integral to data analysis. The focus on the Southeast assisted in gaining insights into respondents' shared understanding concerning Europe's largest current regeneration initiative, the Thames Gateway, which has learning and skills at the heart of its agenda. While the focal point is a specific locality, the study

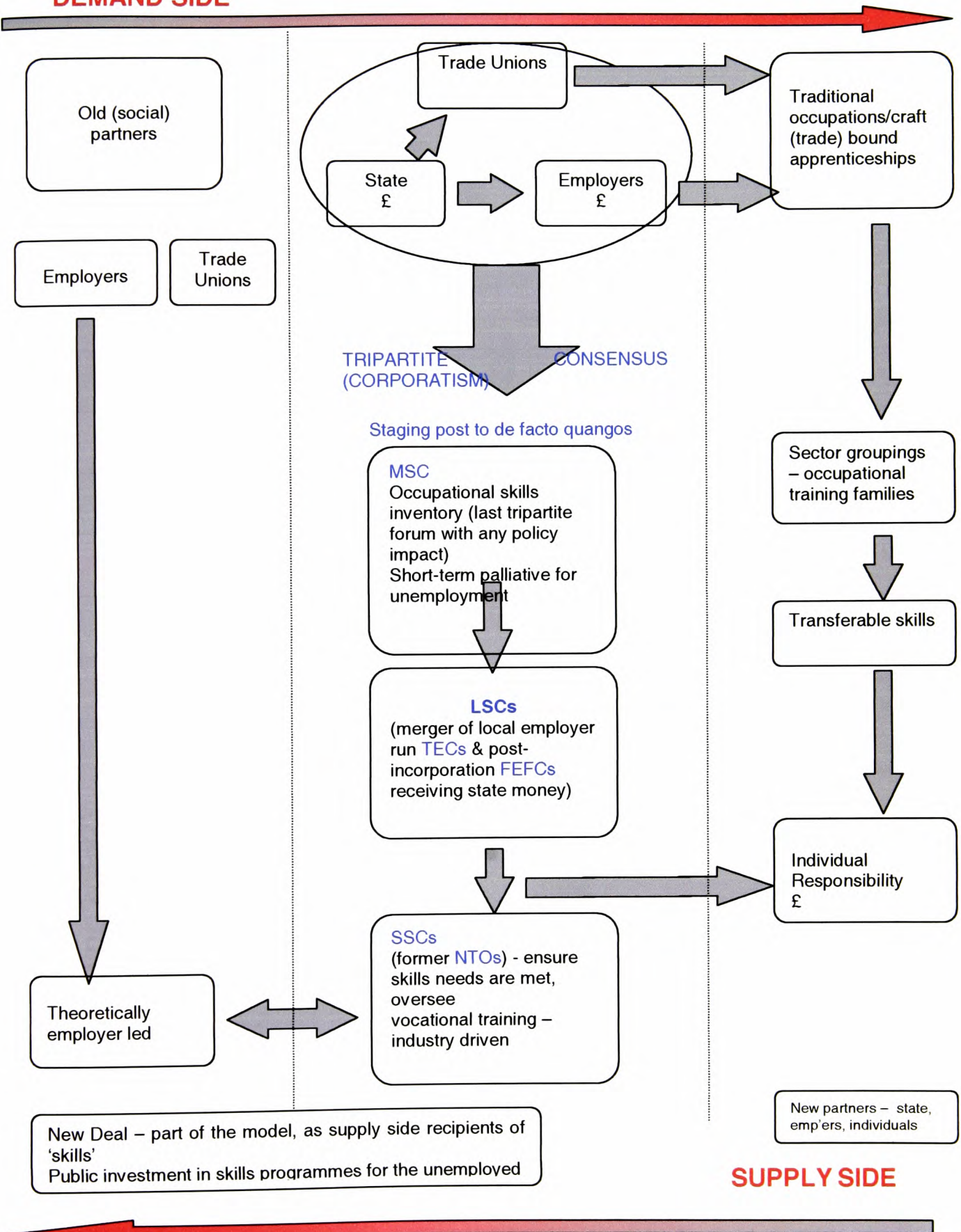
dealt with a topic that is of interest to a substantial post-16 audience. Further, it draws out those post-16 themes impacting at a sub-regional level, which have national relevance. Since narratives were produced from one key geographical location, patterns were realised that illustrate effective research design and gave quality of outcome through analysis of the Skills Strategy in a defined area of coverage. The findings and transferability of this inquiry will provide focus for the next piece of research into emerging national policy and strategic development in the post-16 sector.

MARKETISATION OF EDUCATION POLICY

The demise of tripartite corporatism

Appendix 1

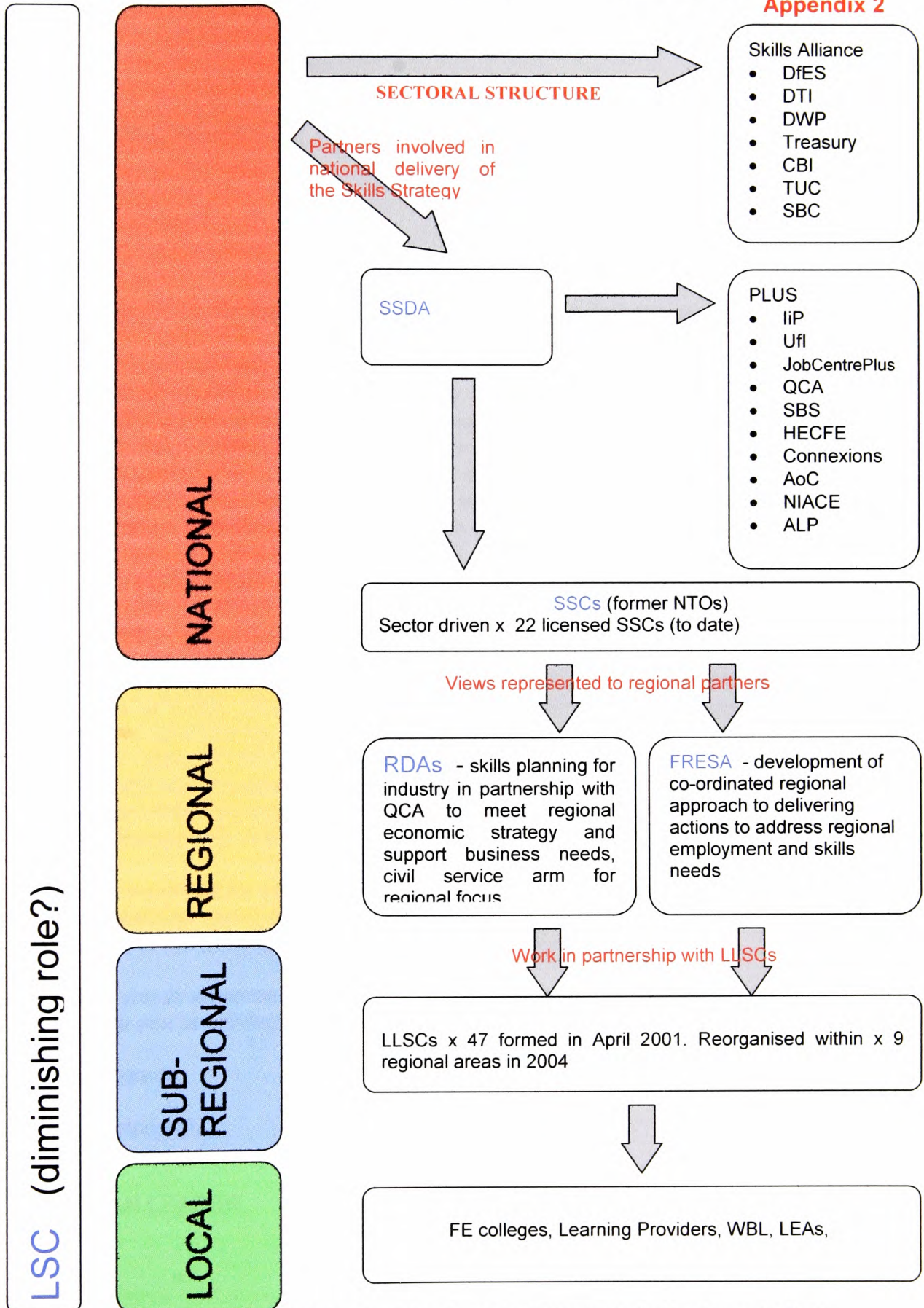
DEMAND SIDE



SUPPLY SIDE

SHIFT FROM LSCs TO SSCs AND RDAs
NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL FRAMEWORK
 Warp and weft of regionalisation and policy direction in post-16 arena

Appendix 2



(Following DfES, 2003, 21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation)

SAMPLE COPY OF LETTER REQUESTING AN INTERVIEW

Appendix 3

DATE

NAME AND ADDRESS

Dear

DOCTORAL RESEARCH: THE NATIONAL SKILLS STRATEGY

As explained to you during our recent telephone conversation, I am currently undertaking research for my Doctorate in Education thesis at the University of Greenwich. I am researching into the impact of delivery of government's National Skills Strategy on the post-16 sector and workforce development. The outcome of this investigation will contribute towards evaluating the benefits, or otherwise, of a new and different strategic agenda to improving adult learning opportunities and eradicating a perceived national low-skills culture.

The key challenge for the post-16 sector in the 21st century is to create a pedagogy appropriate to diverse learning organisations and differentiated employment structures. The emphasis is on raising the skills base and increasing employability levels of the workforce. Government's National Skills Strategy policy document published in July 2003 - *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential* – emphasises the role of further education and training providers in being more responsive to employer and learner needs. The focus is on creating a demand-led approach through reforming post-16 delivery, reorganising funding initiatives and remodelling the qualification framework. Government perceives improving skills and developing a culture of lifelong learning as a positive mechanism for adapting to economic and social change and enhancing workforce flexibility.

I would be grateful if you could spare some of your (very valuable!) time to answer a few questions about how you view the potential impact of implementation of the National Skills Strategy, on you or your organisation.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to be interviewed for this inquiry. I appreciate the time you are giving and look forward to our meeting on ...

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

GILLIAN LEADER

gl/07/04

Interpreting the Skills Strategy: Discourse in post-16 learning and workforce development

1. Evidence indicates that the UK's main competitors possess vocational education and training systems that produce higher levels of attainment and increased economic performance through a more highly skilled workforce.
How far do current VET strategies support employee skills development?
2. Alongside the UK's growth in employment is growth in some type of formal qualification. Yet formal qualifications no longer guarantee employment. By 2003 approximately 11% of the workforce had no qualification and 30% of those in employment were qualified at below Level 2.
What flexible arrangements are required to engage individuals in learning and to develop their level of employability?
3. The NESS 2003 * shows that of 679,000 vacancies 20% are the result of skill shortages, 22% of employers report skills gaps in their workforce and 2.4 million or 11% of employees lack the relevant skills for their job.
Within the current post-16 learning structure, how effective can new policy initiatives be in addressing government's perceived national and sectoral skills deficits?
4. Workforce development policy and education and learning interventions aim to foster equality of opportunity, enabling individuals to benefit from national economic growth and prosperity. Training has been seen as a pathway into employment and a means of addressing skills shortages.
In shaping and implementing government's new skills strategy, what do you perceive as the barriers to inclusivity and participation in post-16 learning and development by disadvantaged learners?
5. The National Skills Strategy aims to introduce free entitlement to adult learners without qualifications to help them gain a Level 2 qualification, to meet employability targets and to re-skill for sectoral and regional skills priorities. FE colleges have a key role in delivering specific government policies and play a critical part in the creation of a lifelong learning culture.
As these reforms will re-prioritise and balance public funds between employer, learner and state, how should providers ensure equitable allocation and be more responsive to the stated needs of employers and learners?
6. Government agencies plan to take the lead and work more closely together in supporting skills and raising productivity. Regional Development Agencies, Skills for Business, Local Learning and Skills Councils and Jobcentre Plus will form partnerships supporting the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA).
How will the regionalisation of key organisations ensure effective connectivity within these networks and the delivery of the new skills agenda?

Thank you for participating in this research project

REFERENCES

- Ainley, P. (1990) *Vocational Education and Training*, London: Cassell
- Ainley, P. (1993) 'The Legacy of the Manpower Services Commission' in *Markets and Managers: New Issues in the Delivery of Welfare*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Ainley, P. (1999) *Learning Policy: Towards the Certified Society*, Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Ainley, P. (2001) 'From a National System Locally Administered to a National System Nationally Administered: The New Leviathan in Education and Training in England', *The Journal of Social Policy*, Vol 30 (3), 457-476
- Ainley, A. (2003) 'Towards a Seamless Web or a New Tertiary Tripartism?: The Emerging Shape of Post-14 Education and Training in England', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol 51 (4), 390-407
- Ainley, P. and Bailey, B. (1997) *The business of learning: staff and student experience of further education in the 1990s*, London: Cassell
- Anderson, D. (1999) 'Navigating the Rapids: the role of educational and careers information and guidance in transitions between education and work', *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol 21 (3), 371-399
- Apple, M. (1995) 'Official Knowledge and the Growth of the Activist State', in *Discourse and Reproduction: Essays in Honor of Basil Bernstein*, Hampton Press Inc
- Ashton, D., Maguire, M. and Spilsbury, M. (1990) *Restructuring the Labour market: Implications for Youth*, Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Avis, J. (2002) 'Imaginary friends: managerialism, globalisation and post-compulsory education and training in England', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politic of education*, Vol 23 (1), 75-90
- Avis, J., Bloomer, M., Esland, G., Gleeson, D. and Hodkinson, P. (1996) *Knowledge and Nationhood: Education, Politics and Work*, London: Cassell
- Bagnall, R. (2000) 'Lifelong learning and the limitations of economic determinism', *International Journal of Lifelong Learning* (Online) Vol 19 (1), pp 20-35. Available at <http://gottardo.catchword.com> (Accessed 23 February 2002)
- Benn, C. and Fairley, J. (1986) *Challenging the MSC on Jobs, Training and Education*, London: Pluto Press Ltd
- Bernstein, B. (1990) *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse: Volume IV: Class, codes and control*, London: Routledge
- Billett, S (2003) *Workplace pedagogic practices: participatory practices and individual engagement*, Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Hamburg, 17-20 September 2003. Available at <http://brs.leeds.ac.uk> (Accessed 23 November 2003)
- Bochner, A. (2001) 'Narrative's Virtues', *Qualitative Enquiry* (Online) Vol 7 (2), pp 131-157. Available at <http://www.sagepub.co.uk> (Accessed 14 November 2004)
- Bottery, M (1999) 'Global Forces, National Mediations and the Management of Educational Institutions', *Educational Management & Administration* Vol 27(3), 313-322, Sage Publications
- Brown, A. and Keep, E. (1999) *International comparisons of how well initial vocational education and training facilitates lifelong learning*. Available at <http://www.brs.leeds.ac.uk/> (Accessed 5 January 2002)
- Brown, N., Corney, M. and Stanton, G. (2004) *Breaking out of the silos: 14-30 Education and Skills Policy*, Nigel Brown Associates

- Brubacher, J., Case, C. and Reagan, T. (1994) *Becoming a Reflective Educator: How to build a Culture of Inquiry in the Schools*, Corwin Press Inc, Thousand Oaks, California
- Buchanan, J., Watson, I. and Briggs, C. (2004) 'Skills and the Renewal of Labour: the Classical Wage Earner Model and Left Productivism in Australia' in Warhurst, C., Grugulis, I. and Keep, E. *The Skills That Matter*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Cabinet Office, Performance and Innovation Unit (2002) *In Demand: Adult skills in the 21st Century – Part 1*. Available at <http://senet.lsc.gov.uk/guide2> (Accessed 14 April 2004)
- Cabinet Office, Strategy Unit (2002) *In Demand: Adult skills in the 21st Century – Part 2*. Available at <http://senet.lsc.gov.uk/guide2> (Accessed 17 March 2004)
- Cantor, L. and Roberts, I. (1986) *Further Education Today*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Chandler, J. and Wallace, C. (1990) 'Some alternatives in youth training: franchise and corporatist models' in *Training and its Alternatives*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Chapman, P. (1993) *The Economics of Training*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Cheek, J. (2004) *At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research*. Available at <http://www.sagepub.com> (Accessed 19 September 2004)
- Chitty, C. (1989) *Towards a New Education System: The Victory of the New Right?* The Falmer Press
- Clarke, J. and Edwards, R. (2000) *Flexibility and inclusion in lifelong learning: working the discourses in further education*, Paper presented at SCUTREA, University of Nottingham, 3 –5 July 2000. Available at: <http://brs.leeds.ac.uk> (Accessed 2 January 2003)
- Clarke, L. and Herrmann, G. (2004) 'The Institutionalisation of Skill in Britain and Germany: Examples from the Construction sector', in *The Skills That Matter*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Clayton, P. (1999) *Access to Vocational Guidance for People at Risk of Social Exclusion: Conclusions*. Available at: <http://brs.leeds.ac.uk> (Accessed 2 January 2003)
- Coffield, F. (2004) 'Alternative routes out of the low skills equilibrium: a rejoinder to Lloyd and Payne', *Journal of Education Policy* (online) Vol 19 (6), 733-740. Available at <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess> (Accessed 2 March 2005)
- Cousins, M. and Hussain, A. (1984) *Michel Foucault: Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences*, Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Crossan, B., Field, J., Gallacher, J. and Merrill, B. (2000) *FE and social inclusion: understanding the processes of participation*, Paper presented at SCUTREA, University of Nottingham, 3 –5 July 2000. Available at: <http://brs.leeds.ac.uk> (Accessed 2 January 2003)
- Dale, R. (1989) *Education Training and Employment: Towards A New Vocationalism?* Oxford: Pergamon Press - in association with The Open University
- Dearing, R. (1995) *Post-16 Qualifications: Interim Review*, London: The Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- Dee, L. (1999) 'Inclusive Learning: From Rhetoric to Reality?' in A. Green and N. Lucas (eds), *FE and Lifelong Learning: Realigning the Sector for the 21st Century*, Institute of Education, University of London
- Denzin, K. and Lincoln, Y. (1998) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc

- DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) (1996) *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Available at <http://www.hmsso.gov.uk> (Accessed 2 June 2002)
- DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) (1998) *The Learning Age: a renaissance for Britain*, London: DfEE
- DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) (1999) *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*, London: DfEE
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2002) *Success for All: Reforming Further Education and Training*. Available at:
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/earning&skills/pdf/success> (Accessed 24 Jan 2003)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2003b) *14-19: opportunity and excellence*. Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19> (Accessed 11 Feb 2005)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2003) *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation*. Available at:
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy> (Accessed 30 November 2003)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2003c) *The future of higher education* Norwich: The Stationery Office Ltd. Available at <http://dfes.gov.uk/publications> (Accessed 26 February 2005)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004) *Working Group on 14-19 Reform (Tomlinson Report)*. Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19> (Accessed 9 November 2004)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2005a) *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* The Stationery Office
Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications> (Accessed 23 March 2005)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2005b) *14 – 19 Education and Skills* The Stationery Office. Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications> (Accessed 25 February 2005)
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2005c) *Where are the Gaps? An analysis of UK Skills and Education Strategy in the light of the Kok Group and European Commission Midterm Review of the Lisbon goals*. Available at <http://info@ssda.org.uk> (Accessed 14 April 2005)
- Dickinson, H. and Erben, M. (1995) 'Bernstein and Ricoeur: Contours for Social Understanding of Narratives and Selves', in P. Atkinson, B. Davies and S. Delamont (eds), *Discourse and Reproduction: Essays in Honor of Basil Bernstein*, Hampton Press Inc
- Donald, J. (1979) 'Green Paper: Noise of Crisis', *Screen Education*, Vol 30, Spring, 13-49
- Education Group II, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham (1991) *Education Limited: Schooling, training and the New Right in England since 1979*, London: Unwin Hyman
- Edwards, A. (1995) 'Changing Pedagogic Discourse', in P. Atkinson, B. Davies and S. Delamont (eds), *Discourse and Reproduction: Essays in Honor of Basil Bernstein*, Hampton Press Inc
- Elliott, G. (1999) *Lifelong Learning: The Politics of the New Environment*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd
- Elliott, G. and Crossley, M. (1997) 'Contested Values in Further Education: Findings from a Case Study of the Management of Change', *Educational Management & Administration*, 25(1), 79-92, Sage Publications
- Esland, G. (2000) 'Education, Training and Nation-State Capitalism: Britain's Failing Strategy', in J. Avis, M. Bloomer, G. Esland, D Gleeson and P. Hodgkinson (eds), *Knowledge and Nationhood: Education, Politics and Work*, London: Cassell

- Evans, B. (1997) 'Training Policy in Britain', Political Economy Research Centre – University of Sheffield. Available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk> (Accessed 13 February 2005)
- Fairclough, N. (2003) *New Labour: New Language*, London: Routledge
- Fairclough, N. (2004) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, London: Routledge
- Field, J. (2000) *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order*, England: Trentham Books Ltd
- Fieldhouse, R. with Associates (1998) *A History of Modern British Adult Education*, Leicester: NIACE
- Finegold, D. and Soskice, D. (1990) 'The failure of training in Britain: analysis and prescription', in D. Gleeson, *Training and its Alternatives*, Open University Press
- Flint, C. (2004) *Further Education and Adult Learning: A NIACE policy discussion Paper*, Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Fullick, L. (2004) *Adult Learners in a brave new world: lifelong learning policy and structural changes since 1997: A NIACE policy discussion paper*, Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (2002). Available at <http://www.regionalobservatories.org.uk/fresa> (Accessed 10 December 2004)
- Further Education Funding Council (1996) *Inclusive Learning, Tomlinson Report*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (1998) *Inclusive Learning: Quality Initiative Prospectus*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (98/07) *Consultation on the Recommendations of the Widening Participation Committee*, Coventry, FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (98/10) *Applications for Funding for Strategic Partnerships to Widen Participation 1998-99*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (98/31) *Inclusive Learning: Quality Initiative Stage 2*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (1999) *The FEFCs response to the review of local arrangements for lifelong learning, skills and workforce development* Available at <http://lscdata.gov.uk/othercouncilpublications/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (99/42) *Extension of the Widening Participation Factor for 1999-2000*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (99/50), *Inclusive Learning: Quality Initiative*, Coventry: FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Further Education Funding Council (2000) *Widening Participation and Raising Standards* Coventry, FEFC. Available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/documents/circulars/> (Accessed 15 April 2002)
- Gleeson, D. (1990) *Training and its Alternatives*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Great Britain (1988) *Education Reform Act 1988* Her Majesty's Stationery Office Available at <http://www.hmsso.gov.uk> (Accessed 5 February 2005)

- Great Britain (1998) *Human Rights Act 1998*
Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Available at <http://www.hmsso.gov.uk> (Accessed 2 June 2002)
- Great Britain (2001) *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001* Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Available at: <http://hmsso.gov.uk> (Accessed 14 April 2004)
- Green, A. (2000) 'Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society: different European models of organisation', in A. Hodgson (ed), *Policies, Politics and the Future of Lifelong Learning*, London: Kogan Page Ltd
- Grubb, W. (2004) 'The Anglo-American Approach to Vocationalism: The Roles of Education in England', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 52*, October 2004, 1-61.
Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 10 January 2005)
- Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*
Cambridge: Polity Press
- Hammersley, M. (2003) 'Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: methods or paradigms?', *Discourse and Society*, Vol 14 (6), 751 – 781. Available at www.sagepub.com (Accessed 20 October 2004)
- Hammond, M. (2004) 'Old Wine in New Wine Skins? An Analysis of the Sector Skills Development Agency and the Sector Skills Council', Education-line Leeds, University of Leeds. Available at <http://brs.leeds.ac.uk> (Accessed 20 June 2005)
- Hammond, M. (2004) 'An Introductory Analysis of the Potential Effects of the 'Politics of the English Regions' and their Regional Development Agencies on the Further Education sector within the West Midlands Region', *Paper presented to the British Educational Research International Conference at UMIST 16-18 September 2004*
- Hannah, J. (2000) 'Education training and adult refugees in the UK and Australia', in J. Field and M. Leicester (eds), *Lifelong learning: Education across the lifespan*, London: Routledge Falmer
- HM Treasury (2004) *Skills in the global economy*. Available at <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk> (Accessed 17 January 2005)
- Hodgson, A. (2000) 'The challenge of widening participation in lifelong learning', in A. Hodgson (ed), *Policies, Politics and the Future of Lifelong Learning*, London: Kogan Page Ltd
- Hyland, T. (1999) *Vocational Studies, Lifelong Learning and Social Values: Investigating Education, Training and NVQs under the New Deal*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing
- Hyland, T. and Merrill, B. (2003) *The Changing Face of Further Education Lifelong Learning, Inclusion and Community Values in Further Education*, London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Hyland, T. and Musson, D. (2001) 'Unpacking the New Deal for Young People: promise and problems', *Educational Studies* (online) 27 (1), 55-67. Available at <http://www.catchword.com/v1> (Accessed 20 January 2002)
- Jenkins, A. and Wolf, A. (2004) 'Regional Variations in Adult Learning and Vocational Training: Evidence from NCDS and WERS 98', (National Child Development Study & Workplace Employee Relations Survey), Centre for the Economics of Education, London School of Economics. Available at <http://info@ssda.org.uk> (Accessed 3 August 2004)
- Johnston, R. (2000) 'Community education and lifelong learning: Local spice for global fare?', in A. Green and N. Lucas (eds), *Lifelong learning: Education across the lifespan*, London: Routledge Falmer
- Joint Information Systems Centre (1999) *Communications and IT and Disability Support Issues*. Available at <http://www.jisc.ac.uk> (Accessed 2 June 2002)

- Jones, M. (1999) *New Institutional Spaces: Training and Enterprise Councils and the Remaking of Economic Governance*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd
- Keep, E. (2000) 'Learning Organisations, Lifelong Learning and the Mystery of the Vanishing Employers', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 8*, Summer 2000, 1-18. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 14 December 2004)
- Keep, E. (2004) *Reflections on a Curious Absence: the Role of Employers, Labour Market Incentives and Labour Market Regulation*, Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training Working Paper 22. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 7 November 2004)
- Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (2001) 'Globalisation, Models of Competitive Advantage and Skills', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 22*, Autumn 2001, 1-41. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 14 December 2004)
- Kellner, D. (2000) 'Habermas, the public sphere and democracy: A critical intervention', UCLA – Social Sciences and Comparative Education website Available at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner> (Accessed 27 February 2005)
- Kennedy, H. (1997) *Learning Works: Widening Participation in FE*, Coventry: Further Education Funding Council
- Kivinen, O. and Silvennoinen, H. (2002) 'Changing relations between education and work: on the mechanisms and outcomes of the educational system', *International Journal of Lifelong Learning* (online) 21 (1), 44-54. Available at: <http://www.catchword/vl> (Accessed 20 January 2002)
- Lafer, G. (2004) 'What is Skill? Training for Discipline in the Low-Wage Labour Market', in C. Warhurst, I. Grugulis and E. Keep (eds), *The Skills That Matter*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan
- Learning and Skills Council (2004a) *The skills we need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities 2005/06*. Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 6 December 2004)
- Learning and Skills Council (2004b) *Investing in Skills: Taking forward the Skills Strategy*. Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 2 February 2005)
- Learning and Skills Council (2004c) *Concordat on future working between Regional Development Agencies and the Learning and Skills Council*. Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 23 August 2004)
- Learning and Skills Council (2005a) *Funding and Planning Letter – 21 January 2005*. Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 24 January 2005)
- Learning and Skills Council (2005b) *Skills in England 2004 Volume 1: Key Messages* Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 31 March 2005)
- Learning and Skills Council (2005c) *Planning and Funding Paper for 2005/06*. Available at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk> (Accessed 24 January 2005)
- Learning and Skills Development Agency (2004) *Evidence to the Education and Skills Select Committee, National Skills Strategy: 14-19 Education (Ref:1622)* Available at <http://www.lsd.org.uk/pubs> (Accessed 10 December 2004)
- Learning and Skills Research Centre (2003) *Learning from the future: Scenarios for post-16 learning*, Somerset: LSRC
- Lemke, J. (2004) 'Analysing Verbal Data: Principles, Methods and Problems', The School of Education at Brooklyn College. Available at <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/education> (Accessed 10 January 2005)
- Little, M., Jordens, C. and Sayers, E. (2003) 'Discourse communities and the discourse of experience', *Health* (online) Vol 7 (1), 73-86. Available at <http://www.swetswise.com> (Accessed 22 February 2005)

- Lindsay, C. (2004) 'Labour Productivity: Analysis of the reasons why the UK lags behind some of its major competitors' *Labour Market Trends*, Vol 112 (11), 447-454, National Statistics Online. Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk> (Accessed 17 January 2005)
- Lloyd, C. and Payne, J. (2004) '“Idle Fancy” or “Concrete Will”? Defining and Realising a high skills vision for the UK', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 47*, Spring 2004, 1-30. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 14 December 2004)
- Long, D. (1990) *Learner Managed Learning: The key to lifelong learning and development*, London: Kogan Page Ltd
- Maclure, J. (1979) *Educational Documents: England and Wales 1816 to the present Day*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd
- Mason, G. (2004) 'Enterprise Product Strategies and Employer Demand for Skills in Britain: Evidence from the Employer Skills Survey', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 50*, Summer 2004, 1-68. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 14 December 2004)
- Mizen, P. (2003) 'The best days of your life? Youth, policy and Blair's New Labour', *Critical Social Policy*, Vol 23 (4), 453-476. Available at: <http://www.sagepub.com> (Accessed 17 September 2004)
- NAGCELL (1997) *Learning for the 21st Century*, Fryer Report – 1st Report, National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning Available at <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/nagcell> (Accessed 3 March 2005)
- NAGCELL (1999) *Creating Learning Cultures: Next Steps in Achieving the Learning Age*, Fryer Report – 2nd Report, National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. Available at <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/nagcell> (Accessed 19 May 2002)
- National Employment Panel (NEP) Skills Advisory Board (2004), *Welfare to Workforce Development*. Available at <http://www.nationalemploymentpanel.org.uk> (Accessed 11 April 2004)
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Realising the Potential of All Our Regions: the way forward*, ODPM. Available at <http://info@ssda.org.uk> (Accessed 15 March 2005)
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (1996), *Lifelong Learning for All*, Paris: OECD
- Payne, J. (1999) 'All Things to All People: Changing Perceptions of 'Skill' Among Britain's Policy Makers since the 1950s and their implications', *SKOPE Research Paper No. 1*, August 1999, 1-19. Available at www.economics.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 14 December 2004)
- Peterson, R. and Associates (1979) *Lifelong Learning in America*, London: Jossey-Bass Ltd
- Potter, J. (1996) 'Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background', in J. Richardson (ed) *Handbook for qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences (Chapter for Web)*. Available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk> (Accessed 2 August 2004)
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (2004) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd
- Prais, S. (1989) *Productivity, Education and Training: Britain and other countries compared*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research
- Prais, S. (1993) *Economic Performance and Education: The nature of Britain's deficiencies*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research
- Pring, R. (2005) 'Labour policy 14 –1 9' *Oxford Review of Education* (online) Vol 31 (1), 71-85. Available at <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess> (Accessed 22 February 2005)

- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2004) *A framework for achievement: Recognising qualifications and skills in the 21st century*. Available at info@ssda.org.uk (Accessed 30 January 2005)
- Rogers, A. (1996) *Teaching Adults*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Sachs, J. (2001) 'Teacher Professional Identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes', *Journal of Educational Policy* (online) Vol 16 (2), 149–161. Available at <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess> (Accessed 2 March 2005)
- Sheldrake, J. and Vickerstaff, S. (1987) *The History of Industrial Training in Britain* Avebury-Gower Ltd
- Skills Alliance (2004) Available at <http://www.iipuk.co.uk> (Accessed 14 November 2004)
- Skills for Business (2004) *Sector Skills Development Agency*. Available at <http://www.ssda.org.uk> (Accessed 30 November 2004)
- Smith, J. and Spurling, A. (2001) *Understanding Motivation for Lifelong Learning* Cridon: Southgate Publishers, NIACE
- Stuart, M. (2000) 'Inclusive learning for 'active citizenship': Disability, learning difficulties and lifelong learning', in J. Field and M. Leicester (eds) *Lifelong Learning: Education across the lifespan*, London: Routledge Falmer
- Tapper, T. and Salter, B. (1978) *Education and the Political Order: Changing Patterns of Class Control*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd
- Taylor, R. (2005) 'Lifelong learning and the Labour governments 1997–2004', *Oxford Review of Education* (online) Vol 31 (1), 101–118. Available at <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess> (Accessed 14 April 2005)
- The National Archives (2005) 'British Economics and Trade Union politics 1973–1974'. Available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/releases> (Accessed 16 April 2005)
- Tuckett, A. (1997) *Lifelong Learning in England and Wales*, Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Unwin, L. and Fuller, A. (2003) *Expanding Learning in the Workplace: Making More of Individual and Organisational Potential*, Leicester: NIACE
- Vickerstaff, S. (2003) 'Apprenticeship in the 'golden age': were youth transitions really smooth and unproblematic back then?', *Work, employment and society* Vol 17 (2), 269–287. Available at <http://www.sagepub.com> (Accessed 17 September 2004)
- Vickerstaff, S. and Sheldrake, J. (1989) *The Limits of Corporatism*, Aldershot: Avebury
- Warhurst, C., Grugulis, I. and Keep, E. (2004) 'What's Happening to 'Skill'?' in C. Warhurst, I. Grugulis and E. Keep (eds), *The Skills That Matter*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Westwood, A. (2004) 'Skills that Matter and Shortages that Don't', in C. Warhurst, I. Grugulis and E. Keep (eds), *The Skills That Matter*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S. (2001) *Discourse as Data: A guide for analysis*, London: Sage Publications Ltd
- Wolf, A. (2002) *Does Education Matter? Myths about education and economic growth*, London: Penguin Group