

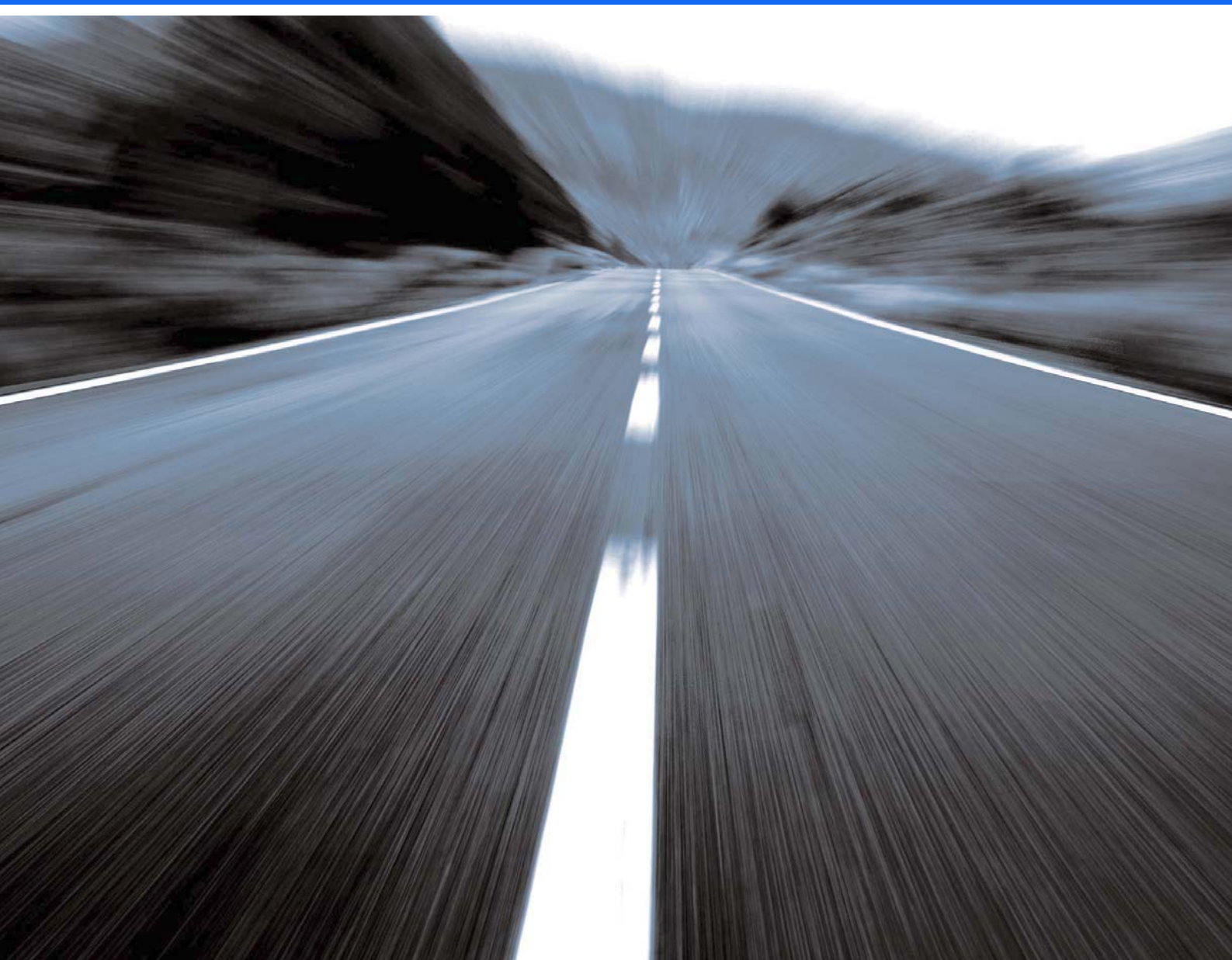
# GLA INTELLIGENCE

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## The Wolf Report on Vocational Education

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## Executive summary

- The author of the Wolf Report is clearly of the view that young people's educational achievements and future prospects reflects the educational opportunities, the 'curriculum offer', available to them. To modify an old adage, achievement equals ability plus effort *plus opportunity*.
- While the Wolf Report specifically concerns the future of vocational education for the 14 to 19 age group, that point applies to the 'curriculum offer' available to all pupils and warrants further investigation.
- Read alongside her earlier work, Professor Wolf's Report challenges long-held assumptions about educational organisation, training, skills and the economy. The Wolf Report is relevant not just to those dealing with the curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds, and needs to be understood by those working in each of the fields of further education, 'adult skills' and regeneration.
- The Wolf Report is critical of the effects of policy on, and the funding and regulatory framework for, vocational education, but is also at pains to stress examples of existing high quality vocational education for the 16+ age group.
- It is written against the background of a rapidly changing economy, large scale unemployment and the virtual disappearance of jobs for young people aged 16 and 17, the large majority of whom now remain in education.
- In that context Professor Wolf is in favour of a broad general education for young people which prepares them for a changing world, and has major reservations about narrow instrumental occupational training for young people who are not yet in work (as opposed to occupational training for adults who are already in employment).
- The Wolf Report places a particular emphasis on the importance of good grades in the General Certificate of Education (GCSE) English and mathematics, and this *Briefing* concludes that it would be helpful if research on the impact of good grades in *both* subjects, with and without good grades in other subjects, were published.
- The Report is particularly critical of low level vocational courses, especially National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), where these neither act as entry qualifications for more advanced education nor open doors to the world of employment.
- The Wolf Report explicitly links the increase in those courses for pupils of compulsory school age with the perverse effects of national performance tables, which now include courses deemed equivalent to GCSEs when in reality their content and the teacher-student contact time involved mean that they are no such thing.

- The Report recommends that the full range of attainment in schools is included in national performance tables, and that the Department for Education carry out a review of provision for those in the lowest quintile (20 per cent) of raw score attainment.
- The author of the Report is opposed to children of compulsory school age being prematurely tracked into low level vocational courses, and recommends that such courses should not take up more than 20 per cent of a school's time
- The Report also recommends that qualifications recorded in performance tables should be subject to a quality check.
- Despite the supposition that low level vocational courses boost pupil efficacy, with benefits for other aspects of their education, the Report makes it clear that pupils taking low level vocational courses do not show gains in motivation and achievement at GCSE.
- The Wolf Report is strongly in favour of a growth in apprenticeships, where part of the cost to the employer is met by central government, where quality assurance is carried out by central government, and where the apprentice has access to continuing general education.
- The Report specifically recommends an overhaul of the regulatory framework for further education to reduce the number of agencies involved, to shift oversight arrangements from detailed approval of individual courses to approval of qualification awarding bodies, and to review the way in which National Occupational competencies are used in the design of courses.
- The Report is clearly not a manifesto for narrow vocational education for all, and Professor Wolf's earlier writing stresses the value of education in itself. It is also clearly not in favour of centralised education planning, and supports the devolution of decision-making to the local level.

## Background

The Wolf Report concerns the provision of vocational education to young people aged 14 to 19,<sup>1</sup> It is written against the background of existing research on the relationship between education and the economy, some of which is referred to on the *Briefing*. Professor Wolf does not subscribe to the view that increasing educational provision ‘causes’ economic growth. Nor does she subscribe to the view that the supposed emergence of a ‘knowledge society’ or ‘knowledge economy’ now requires higher levels of education for *all* young people than in the past, or to the view that the expansion of higher education will automatically confer economic benefits on the rest of society.<sup>2</sup> Some, including policy makers and some employers, will find her views challenging.

In terms of the ‘knowledge society’ the Wolf report states that

*In recent years our economy – as in most other developed countries – has moved in the direction of an egg-timer or hourglass, with growth at the top and bottom and shrinkage in the middle, rather than an inverted pyramid with more and more ‘top’ jobs.*

*(The Wolf Report page 35)*

The quote refers to change over time, and Table 1 provides information on occupational change in London and in England as a whole between 2004-05 and 2010-11. It is based on the most recent Annual Population Survey, and indicates that approximately one in 10 people are employed in elementary occupations, which includes labourers, waiters, bar staff and messengers. The figures for those in elementary occupations are only slightly different for London and England as a whole, and have remained stable over the period shown. That is not the case for those in professional occupations or who are senior officials or managers.

The proportion of those in professional occupations, who are senior officials or who are managers is greater in London than in England as a whole, and there has been a greater increase in that group in London than in England. Table 1 does not measure ‘knowledge intensive jobs’ directly, and testing the ‘hourglass’ view using more appropriate evidence for London might be useful for wider work on education and society. However, based on the evidence in Table 1, it is *likely*, if not certain, that a larger proportion of occupations in London will require higher level

educational qualifications than is the case in England as a whole, which presents challenges for those with no or only low level qualifications.

**Table 1 Percentage of those working in London and in England working in different types of occupation, 2004-05 to 2010-11<sup>3</sup>**

	2004 to 2005	2005 to 2006	2006 to 2007	2007 to 2008	2008 to 2009	2009 to 2010	2010 to 2011
London - percentage employed in groups 1 and 2	43.8	44.4	45.2	44.0	46.0	47.8	50.2
England - percentage employed in groups 1 and 2	27.0	27.4	27.8	27.9	28.5	29.3	29.5
London - percentage employed in groups 6 to 9	34.5	34.4	34.4	34.6	34.3	34.1	34.3
England - percentage employed groups 6 to 9	35.5	34.4	35.8	37.4	37.5	38.1	38.8
London - elementary occupation	8.4	8.1	8.9	9.1	8.8	8.4	9.0
England - elementary occupations	11.0	10.8	11.0	11.1	10.8	10.6	10.9

Note: Group 1 and 2 includes professional occupations, senior officials, directors and managers

Note: Groups 6 to 9 include caring, leisure and other service occupations, sales and customer service occupations, process, plant and machine operatives, and elementary occupations

Source: Annual population Survey. Crown copyright

The situation of young people with only low level qualifications is a major concern in the Wolf Report, and the collapse of the youth job market partly explains that concern.<sup>4</sup>

*For young people with poor qualifications, the collapse of youth employment is a double problem. The qualifications they are offered are often not valued in the labour market. And while in the past, it was relatively easy to offset a lack of 'valuable' qualifications through labour market experience, this is no longer true. Improving opportunities for this substantial group of young people must be seen as a national priority.*

*(The Wolf Report page 39)*

The words ‘The qualifications they are offered are often not valued in the labour market’ express a key point in the Wolf Report, and it is against a background of a diminishing youth labour market, and existing research on the limited value of some vocational courses, that Professor Wolf was asked to conduct a review of and to report on vocational education for young people in England. In the words of the Department for Education (DfE)

*The Secretary of State for Education commissioned Professor Alison Wolf of King’s College London to carry out an independent review of vocational education. She was asked to consider how vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds can be improved in order to promote successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes. She was also asked to provide practical recommendations to help inform future policy direction .....<sup>5</sup>*

The main aim of this *Briefing* is to assess the Wolf Report in the light of the available evidence, whether presented in that Report or elsewhere. However, before moving to that, it is important to establish from the outset *what the Wolf Report is not*. It is not

- a re-run of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “academic vs. vocational curricula” dichotomy, or
- a further exploration of the tensions in the ‘new’ vocational education of the 1980’s between fostering creativity and team work on the one hand and ‘the manager’s right to manage’ on the other.
- Nor is it a document in which (virtuous) policy-makers and analysts set out to correct poor classroom practice amongst teachers and lecturers (or vice versa).

Much of what the Report sets out to do would be missed by the reader if it is interpreted in terms of *any* single simple dichotomy, or as a source of information that might be useful in bolstering such assumptions. It needs to be approached with an open mind.

The Wolf Report is written in plain English and, with more than 230 references to existing research and, with a bibliography of 120 books and articles, it has an extensive evidence base. It is also written in the context of a wide range of earlier published work by Professor Wolf. On



any reasonable measure, the Report draws on a great deal of work and expertise. It is at pains to stress that there are many examples of successful vocational education in England, mainly for 16 plus age group (Wolf Report pages 7, 46, 47, and 67-79).

A central view in the Report reflects conclusions from long-standing research that a rapidly changing economy requires the young to have a broad education leading to general, *transferable*, skills and a flexible approach to employment, rather than a narrow training in limited occupational skills which quickly become obsolete.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, long-standing research of which Professor Wolf is aware, and which is referred to again in Section 2 of the *Briefing*, also highlights how *very poor*, as opposed to intermediate, basic skills in literacy and numeracy can be a barrier to employment.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to drawing on existing, and in some instances long-standing research, the Wolf Report raises four key points, which lead to a series of recommendations. Each is discussed in more detail later in the *Briefing*.

The first of these is included in the terms of reference set for the Report, and is that education for young people should lead somewhere, either by meeting the entry requirements for more advanced education or by way of entry to the labour market. This principle of progression may appear to be self-evidently (axiomatically) true. There are a number of other statements in the Report that will be axiomatic to some, but not necessarily all readers. In particular, it may be self-evident to those who have worked closely with the relevant data that good grades in *both* English *and* mathematics at the end of compulsory education, more so than in other subjects, are key to the individual's future prospects. It would help others if that evidence were published.

The second point is that successive well-intentioned government policies have had unintended 'perverse' effects. These include

- (i) boosting the provision of low level easy-to-pass vocational courses that improve the institution's position in performance tables or attract funding, but do not otherwise benefit the young - who actually need a general programme of education including subjects such as English and mathematics up to the end of compulsory schooling (and beyond if necessary) since these do count for the young person's future.
- (ii) fostering a plethora of high cost regulatory organisations and procedures and

- (iii) encouraging a competency-based approach to education and training which can be appropriate for those already in employment but not for those who have yet to find their first job

The third point can be put as a question. Why is it that employers who have, at least supposedly, led the development of vocational courses and training place so little value on some lower level courses that there is no economic benefit for those who take them?

This in turn leads to a fourth point. Why is it that the number of apprenticeships available to young people has declined dramatically and that, at least until recently, those which remain tend to be the preserve of older individuals?

## A general education. English and mathematics grades and young people's economic prospects

The introduction to, and contents of, *The Maths We Need Now: Demands deficits and remedies*, edited by Clare Tickly and Alison Wolf and published in 2000, shed light on views in the Wolf Report. The introduction distinguishes between a limited form of 'numeracy', which is evidently a close relative of arithmetic, and 'mathematics' which would also include geometry and algebra (and presumably trigonometry, calculus and so on). In the editors' view the former (numeracy) has been emphasised in mathematics courses for the majority of pupils of compulsory school age at the expense of the latter. Referring to the Cockcroft Report the editors wrote

*The Cockcroft message was that the range of school mathematics for the vast majority can and, indeed, should be highly limited ...its most consistent and longer-lasting impact was through its advocacy of a limited diet of numeracy for most students and most adults.....This book demonstrates how profoundly misconceived this was for a modern economy, but it is not merely a monument to the perils of predicting even the next 20 years ..... It also assumes a world in which the design of a workplace is the responsibility of a small elite, with everyone else being allocated a pre-defined and limited task for which they can be trained. This is not only inegalitarian, but a recipe for economic stagnation.<sup>8</sup>*

The introduction to *The Maths We Need Now* recognizes the importance of numeracy/arithmetic,<sup>9</sup> but the implication is that stressing these at the expense of a wider mathematics education misses giving pupils and students the capacity to think more widely and to develop the ability to respond to a changing world. That theme also runs through the Wolf Report's assessment of narrowly instrumental vocational education.

The second chapter in *The Maths We Need Now* is by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons and entitled *The Impact of Poor Numeracy on Employment and Career Progression*.<sup>10</sup> It deals with an issue that at first sight may not appear to be referred to in the Wolf Report, but is nonetheless relevant to it. Rather than looking at curricular provision, the authors use longitudinal data to

trace the origins of poor levels of numeracy. These include a disadvantaged home background, poor parental education and low levels of parental interest in the child's numeracy and literacy. These were associated with poor levels of numeracy and literacy early in the child's life, and were associated statistically with poorer employment prospects later in adult life. The authors wrote that

*...a remarkably large proportion of the variability in adult basic skill scores – approaching 45 per cent – could be attributed to prior conditions and experiences, the fact that over 55 per cent remained 'unexplained' suggests that at the individual level there is still much to play for.*

*(The Maths We Need Now page 33)*

Bynner and Parsons conclude that poor numeracy skills are more damaging than poor literacy skills to the individual's employment prospects,<sup>11</sup> and that is mentioned not so much because it parallels the Wolf Report's emphasis on young people achieving good grades in both English and mathematics – it does not. It deals with the very different issue of the impact of particularly poor skills in English and mathematics. The relevance is that, for many young people, the origins of poor literacy and numeracy predate educational provision for young people age 14 to 19, which is the age group mentioned in the terms of reference for the review carried out by Professor Wolf.

Interestingly, the fourth recommendation of the Wolf Report refers to the lowest performing twenty per cent of pupils.

*DfE should review current policies for the lowest-attaining quintile of pupils at Key Stage 4, with a view to greatly increasing the proportion who are able to progress directly onto Level 2 programmes at age 16. Performance management indicators and systems should not give schools incentives to divert low-attaining pupils onto courses and qualifications which are not recognised by employers or accepted by colleges for progression purposes.*

*(The Wolf Report page 13)*

*(Note: the majority of key stage 4 pupils will be in the penultimate or final year of compulsory schooling. Pupils aged 15 at the start of the school year are in the last year of compulsory schooling.)*

The Wolf Report does not refer to *The Maths We Need Now* but, as its co-editor and one-time immediate colleague of John Bynner at the Institute of Education, University of London, Professor Wolf would have been aware that problems with literacy and numeracy predate the last two years of compulsory by many years and, at least in part, have their roots in early childhood, and this point is touched on again in the conclusion to this *Briefing*. Essentially, any expectations that changes in pedagogy in the last two years of compulsory education can reverse the cumulative effects of issues that have their origins in part in the pre-school years are doomed to disappointment. A review of provision at key stage 4 could reasonably take account of existing research on the identification and improvement of poor literacy and numeracy in earlier childhood.

However, and as noted, the Wolf Report is concerned with the importance of good grades in both English *and* mathematics together at the end of, or immediately after the end of compulsory schooling. Young people in England currently begin the last year of compulsory education aged 15, and the Wolf Report refers to qualifications as providing employers with ‘signals’ about the people they might employ (Wolf Report pages 32, 33 52, 86, 90) as in the following

*It seems to be the case that employers see those young people (16 or 17) who are looking for employment as likely to be low achieving, or below average in terms of personal qualities ... This does not mean that these young people are, necessarily, without the skills needed to do the jobs they are applying for – but they are perceived as likely to be.*

*(Wolf Report, page 30)*

Additionally, in *An Adult Approach to Further Education* Wolf makes the point that only a limited number of qualifications are used by employers as ‘signals’ in this way.

*When one examines actual hiring practice one finds that, at sub-degree level, They (prospective employers) look at and give credit to only a very few long-standing qualifications, mostly GCSEs and A-levels.<sup>12</sup>*

Nonetheless, there are difficulties in interpreting the existing evidence on employer's attitudes towards prospective employees' qualifications. One paper co-written by Andrew Jenkins and Alison Wolf *Why do Employers Use Selection Tests?*<sup>13</sup> begs the question 'at what point in the recruitment process do employers use selection tests?' Tests are likely to apply after candidates have applied for a job, and the application may well include information on qualifications obtained. A further paper co-written by Andrew Jenkins and Alison Wolf in the same year as *Why do employers Use Selection Tests?* focuses on the use of psychometric tests in the employment recruitment process. It contains the following

*..... four respondents did comment directly on the current standard of qualifications; always in relation to academic awards and degrees. (None of our respondents mentioned vocational ones.) All of them did so negatively. One (in local government) noted that, in his experience, there was 'an amazing lack of correlation' between GCSE and ability test results, and he therefore now relied on the latter; and another that he and others felt an 'increased mistrust' of exam results..... One recruitment specialist notes that 'If I'm sifting, and have two candidates with the same experience, but one has GCSEs at C+ and the other doesn't, I would go for the one with GCSEs'*<sup>14</sup>

This is hardly direct evidence of large-scale employer confidence in GCSEs or of strong antipathy towards vocational qualifications and, again, qualifications *may* have been taken into account by others in the organisation at an earlier stage of the recruitment process. A further paper co-written by Andrew Jenkins and Alison Wolf published in 2005 includes the statement that

*Hard evidence on how qualifications are interpreted at the time of hiring is very difficult to obtain.*<sup>15</sup>

That statement specifically refers to whether employers see qualifications as signalling wider personal capability or as demonstrating specific abilities, but a degree of uncertainty remains as

to exactly what employers are actually taking into account as far as educational qualifications are concerned when considering young people for a job.

The evidence in other research available at the time of writing is at best mixed. A literature review published by the then Department for Education and Skills in 2004 referred to Scottish research as follows

*In his analysis of the Scottish School leavers' Survey, Biggart (2002) explored the initial labour market experiences of low attaining (no GCSE level passes at grades A\* to C) school leavers. Although his focus was on the role of academic rather than vocational qualifications in relation to recruitment, he found that a lack of qualifications often did not pose a barrier to employment, particularly for young males, and suggested that low-attaining males have benefited from sheltered entry points within particular (male dominated) segments of the labour market. However, there was a greater tendency for low-attaining young women to be 'side-lined' by service sector employers who preferred to recruit either better qualified (academically) applicants or older women.*<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand these difficulties with the employer survey data may not matter if other evidence shows that those with particular qualifications are in practice more likely to be employed or have higher incomes than those who do not have those qualifications. This is a field that has been explored in some detail for more than a decade by economists as 'the returns to education'.<sup>17</sup> An early synthesis of that work reported that those with five or more higher GCSE grades (A\* to C) were at an advantage compared with those without those grades, and that GCSE grades below C brought no comparative advantage at all.<sup>18</sup>

However, the Wolf Report stresses the importance not just of higher grade GCSE passes, but higher grade passes in *both* English *and* mathematics (Wolf Report pages 10, 15, 32, 172). The assumption that these subjects are particularly important is not new,<sup>19</sup> and it is likely that they will confer an advantage where individuals wish to take more advanced courses (or take up jobs)

where higher levels of prior attainment in both English and mathematics are needed. However, no published research was located during the writing of this *Briefing* which tests the hypothesis that GCSE grades at A\*-C in *both* English and mathematics confer advantages that other subjects do not. If unpublished research on the comparative *combined* impact of English and mathematics attainment compared with the impact of other subjects exists (which it may well do) it clearly would be helpful if it were published.

For some, it will be virtually self-evident that higher levels of attainment in both subjects will confer those advantages across the board. But it will not be self-evident to everyone, including at least some who followed a numerate programme of education. It is also likely that those who followed a largely arts-based or humanities-based path through education will have a limited background in mathematics, as research published in 2002 suggests, and they may well need persuading that mathematics is essential for the present generation of young people. The 2002 research was on the returns to Advanced General Certificate of Education (GCE A level) mathematics includes the following

*..... the majority of students in the United Kingdom choose not to study any mathematics at all after the age of 16. Indeed many do not study any numerate subjects post-16.<sup>20</sup>*

This does not mean that those young people were 'wrong' – simply that it may well not have been self-evident to them, or to those who provide 6<sup>th</sup> form education, that mathematics was central to young people's futures.

The 2002 research just quoted does find that there is an additional economic return to A level mathematics for a given level of initial pupil ability which does not apply to 'science, foreign language or English A level'.<sup>21</sup> This raises the possibility, though no more than that, that GCSE mathematics may have a similar impact. More recent research from 2006 analyses the relationship between higher grade passes in GCSE mathematics, staying on in education or being not in employment, education or training (NEET). A higher grade pass in mathematics *is* associated with staying on in education. Additionally, so few people with that level of mathematics attainment were not otherwise active that the probability of their being NEET could not be calculated.<sup>22</sup>

However, unlike the 2002 research just referred to, the 2006 study does not compare the impact of attainment in GCSE mathematics with attainment in other individual GCSE subjects.



That being so, while higher grade passes in mathematics can be seen as conferring an advantage, it is still a moot point whether that advantage is greater than the advantage conferred by higher grade passes in other subjects. This does not mean that the Wolf Report's emphasis on the combined value of GCSE English and mathematics is 'wrong' – it is quite likely that it is right - but simply that published research which tests that view has not been identified during the writing of this *Briefing*.

Research on the impact of low level vocational qualifications taken at the end of compulsory schooling is less equivocal. There are generally no returns, or there are negative returns to those qualifications.<sup>23</sup> Low level vocational qualifications are those thought to be equivalent to lower grade GCSEs, and a negative return means that any economic benefit that follows from taking such courses is less than the benefit achieved by not taking such courses.

Later research includes returns to more advanced courses and notes that

*There are high returns to academic qualifications across the board, substantial returns to higher level vocational qualifications and smaller but nonetheless significant returns to some but by no means all intermediate and lower level vocational qualifications. We also confirm the non-existent average returns to NVQ2. We find high wage (and..... employment) returns across a range of contexts for a number of level 2 and level 3 vocational qualifications, such as BTEC, City and Guilds and RSA.*<sup>24</sup>

For those not familiar with the acronyms involved, what the quote means is

- that National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ2) deemed to be equivalent to GCSEs at grades A\* to C, do not confer any economic advantage on those who hold them
- but that some other vocational courses at that level and at a more advanced level do including awards from
- the Business Technician Education (BTEC), City and Guild and Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

On balance research on the returns to vocational education supports the Wolf Report. Some more advanced qualifications gained after the end of compulsory schooling have a positive

return, but lower level NVQ qualifications, perhaps taken during the compulsory school years have a low or negative return.

## **The perverse effects of policy. Low level vocational education - 'A great idea for other people's children'**

Chapter 3 in Alison Wolf's 2002 book *Does Education Matter?* is titled 'A great idea for other people's children'. What this points to is that, while vocational education in England has a long history (some of it rooted in institutions which are now major universities) and while the Wolf Report can point to present day examples of successful vocational education in further education, there is another view. That view sees low level vocational courses as somehow automatically the best, even the default 'offer' for 'less academic' pupils.

*There of course remains a risk that some schools will, as has happened in the past, effectively write off some of their least academically successful students, and park them in vocational courses irrespective of whether these 'count'.*

*(Wolf Report p.114)*

*Claims are often made that vocational options motivate young people more and therefore lead to them achieving higher grades in their other subjects; and that such options also stop them from dropping out and 'becoming NEET'. Indeed, a good number of submissions to the Review treated it as self-evident that this was the case. This might suggest that a larger share of time should routinely be allocated to vocational options for some students.*

*(Wolf Report p.108)*

The 'some students' referred to in the second quote are those who are in danger of dropping out and becoming NEET. These would be the less able students, who are not succeeding on more academic courses and who 'self-evidently' needed something different in order to flourish. The Wolf Report tests that 'self-evident' conclusion against the evidence, and finds it wanting.

*The cohort for which the most detailed information is available (LSYPE) was in year 11 in 2005/6. This was before the huge rise in VQ entries, so very few took*

*anything other than GCSEs. Conversely, a good number report taking 'vocational' qualifications, meaning, for the most part, GCSEs with vocational titles (eg business studies) or vocational GCSEs. An analysis by CAYT for the Review looked at whether taking such qualifications made a difference to the later trajectories of disengaged students (identified by poor attitudes to school, aspiring to leave education, playing truant). They found no statistically significant effects.*

*(Wolf Report p.110)*

It has not been possible while writing this *Briefing* to determine whether pupils with lower levels of attainment in key stage 2 at the end of primary schooling are more likely than other pupils to be taking low level vocational courses five years later at the end of compulsory schooling. However, 2008 summary data were already available on the attainment of pupils in different types of school entitled to free school meals. Free school meals (FSM) are used as an indicator of poverty, and pupils eligible for FSM tend to have lower levels of attainment than other pupils.

Table 2 below provides information for pupils in the final year of compulsory schooling in 2008, when Academies were mainly inner city schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. That is, they might be expected *at that time* and on average, to have proportionally more pupils than other schools entitled to FSM. In 2008 pupils on roll in Academies were more than twice as likely as pupils in other mainstream state schools to be eligible to free school meals. The question is whether this translated into a different pattern of attainment in summer 2008 public examinations.

**Table 2. Pupils aged 15 at the start of the 2007-08 school year. Number and percentage eligible to free school meals, January 2008, England, Academies and other maintained mainstream schools.**

	Total roll aged 15 at the start of the school year	Number eligible for FSM	Percentage eligible to FSM
All maintained mainstream schools other than Academies or City Technology Colleges	576,539	68,668	11.9
Academies and City Technology Colleges	12,917	3,249	25.2

Source: 2008 English Pupil Dataset

Table 3 shows the number and proportion of pupils who achieved “level 2 qualifications”, which included low level vocational courses, but did not achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes, taking account of free school meal entitlement and whether the mainstream school attended was an Academy or not. The terms used here warrant explanation. Level 2 courses are deemed to be equivalent to 5 GCSE A\*-C awards. These would include vocational courses and GCSE courses, while the figures in figure 2 for the number and percentage gaining 5 or more higher grade GCSE passes refer exclusively to results achieved in GCSE examinations.

In Academies 33.5 per cent of pupils who achieved level 2 did not achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes, compared with 13.4 per cent in other mainstream schools.

In Academies 42.0 per cent of pupils entitled to free school meals achieved level 2 but did not achieve 5 or more higher grade GCSE passes compared with 28.4 per cent in other mainstream schools. The same disparity also existed amongst pupils who were *not* entitled to free school meals. In Academies 31.4 per cent of pupils *not* recorded as being entitled to free school meals achieved level 2 qualifications but did *not* achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes compared with 12.2 per cent in other mainstream schools.

**Table 3. Pupils aged 15 at the start of the 2007-08 school year. Achievement in public examinations by free school meal entitlement and school type. England, 2008.**

	Did not achieve 5 A*-C grades			Achieved 5+ A*-C grades			Total		
	No record of FSM as eligible eligibility, to FSM in 2008	Recorded 2008	Total	No record of FSM as eligible eligibility, to FSM in 2008	Recorded 2008	Total	No record of FSM as eligible eligibility, to FSM in 2008	Recorded 2008	Total
Non-Academy mainstream maintained schools									
Number									
Did not Achieve level 2	162,426	39,832	202,258				162,426	39,832	202,258
Achieved level 2	42,066	8,185	50,251	303,379	20,651	324,030	345,445	28,836	374,281
Total	204,492	48,017	252,509	303,379	20,651	324,030	507,871	68,668	576,539
Academies and CTCs									
Did not Achieve level 2	3,238	1,682	4,920				3,238	1,682	4,920
Achieved level 2	2,017	658	2,675	4,413	909	5,322	6,430	1,567	7,997
Total	5,255	2,340	7,595	4,413	909	5,322	9,668	3,249	12,917
Non-Academy mainstream maintained schools									
Percentages									
Did not Achieve level 2	100.0	100.0	100.0				100.0	100.0	100.0
Achieved level 2	12.2	28.4	13.4	87.8	71.6	86.6	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	40.3	69.9	43.8	59.7	30.1	56.2	100.0	100.0	100.0
Academies and CTCs									
Did not Achieve level 2	100.0	100.0	100.0				100.0	100.0	100.0
Achieved level 2	31.4	42.0	33.5	68.6	58.0	66.5	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	54.4	72.0	58.8	45.6	28.0	41.2	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 2008 English Pupil Dataset

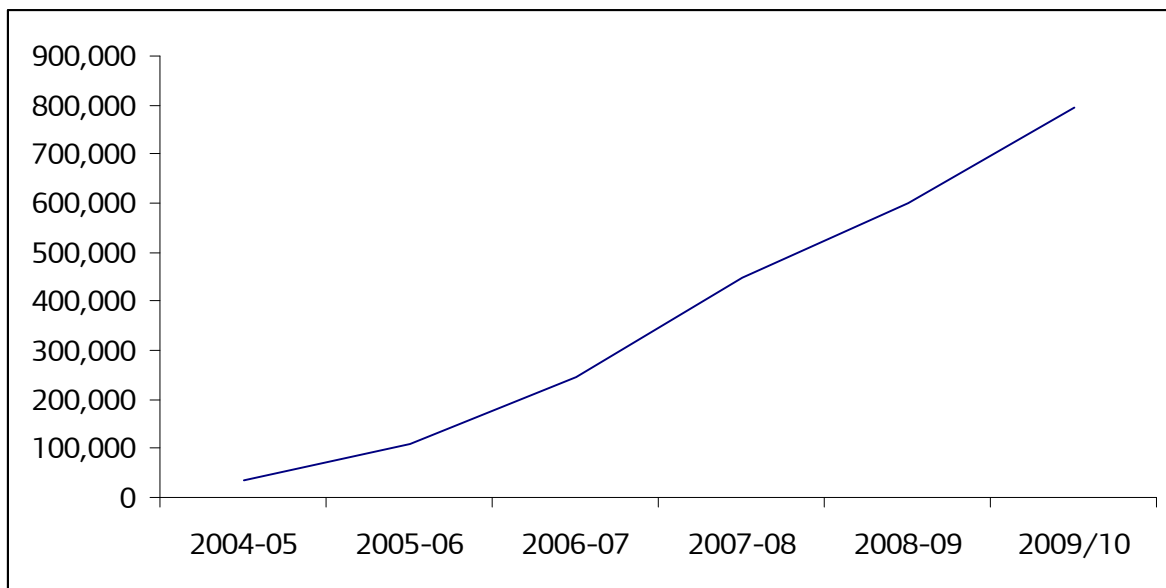
Note: the tables excludes seven pupils with conflicting GCSE and level 2 records

It could be argued that the academies were, quite properly, offering a broad curriculum tailored to their distinctive intakes though the figures can be interpreted in other ways. However, the evidence in Table 3 supports, albeit indirectly, the Wolf Report's view that less able children are more likely than other pupils to be allocated to vocational courses which, on the basis of evidence referred to in earlier sections, may not lead to progression to more advanced education or into employment.

## The perverse effects of policy. The provision of courses that benefit the institution by being included in performance tables, but do not benefit those taking them.

The Wolf Report refers to a 'huge rise' in vocational qualifications after 2005-06 (Wolf Report page 110) and that rise is summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Increase in the number of level 1 and level 2 qualifications other than The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) gained at the end of key stage 4, starting in the 2003-04 school year, England**



Source: Adapted from *The Wolf Report*, Table 4, page 47

Figure 1 focuses on qualifications other than GCSE or GNVQ, which were taken by pupils who would, in the main, have been in the final year of compulsory education. These increased in number from the 2004-05 school year onwards. By 2010 there were nearly 4,900,000 passes in individual GCSE subjects in England at grades A to G, and in the same year there were nearly 876,000 passes in level 1 and level 2 subjects other than GCSE, including Basic Skills and Key Skills.<sup>25</sup>

The Wolf Report describes this growth as a 'perverse' consequence of changes to the information included in school performance tables. That change meant that, rather than reporting passes in GCSE subjects alone, qualifications deemed equivalent to GCSE were included in what became one of the main national performance indicators - the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ GCSE A\*-C grades *or equivalents*.

This is seen as a perverse effect for two reasons. The first is that some of the courses included were supposedly equivalent to level 2 GCSE passes, but were actually nothing of the sort.

*Young people are being entered for 'vocational' awards at the end of KS4 for reasons which have nothing to do with their own long-term interests, within education or the labour market. They can and do find that they are unable, as a result, to progress to the courses they want and have been led to expect they will enter.*

*(Wolf Report page 80)*

The Wolf Report is not alone in its criticism of supposedly GCSE equivalent courses that are not in reality equivalent to GCSE at all. In a memorandum provided to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs in 2007 Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller criticised the idea of 'equivalencies' in vocational programmes, noting that the length of time it takes to complete vocational programmes which are supposedly at the same level actually ranges widely, from 43 weeks in catering to 88 weeks in Electrotechnical. The memorandum states that

*the notion of level equivalences in our national qualifications' framework is an illusion, with qualifications awarded at the same level having different amounts of exchange value and currency across both education and labour markets ..... Such differences would not be accepted in academic programmes.<sup>26</sup>*

In *An Adult Approach to Further Education* Professor Wolf puts the point more vividly

*'..... only in the looking-glass world of modern English education policy would anyone really claim that a 'full Level 2' in Customer Care, awarded at the workplace on the basis of fifteen hours' contact time, was 'equivalent' to, say, A to C passes in (all of) English, Maths, chemistry, French and History at GCSE.<sup>27</sup>*



The words 'all of' have been added here to stress that a full level 2 course is supposedly equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A\* to C rather than to a higher grade pass in any one of the subjects listed. Page 32 of the Wolf Report includes a comment from Lorna Unwin made during the review which preceded the Report.

*"There is only one real Level 2. Maths and English A\*-C."*

Bearing the information on the poor economic returns to low level vocational education qualifications, past government policy is seen in the Wolf Report as having incentivised schools to enter pupils for easily passed, low grade courses of no value to those taking them but which boosted the school's standing in league tables.

The second perverse effect identified in the Wolf Report is that national arrangements for performance tables encouraged schools, which had previously offered vocational education at 16 plus, to introduce vocational education into the compulsory school years, narrowing education for that age group in a way that does not prepare them for the world they will face immediately after leaving full-time schooling. Appendix VI to the Report (pages 160 to 163) contains evidence provided by the Department for Education. This shows that after leaving school young people typically switch (or 'churn') between jobs in different sectors, into and out of post-compulsory education with, in some cases, periods of unemployment. The Report concludes that in that situation a good general education will be of more value to the young person than narrowly defined occupational training. This also reflects the point made in section 2 of this *Briefing*, which referred to conclusions 'from long-standing research that a rapidly changing economy requires the young to have a broad education leading to *transferable*, general, skills and a flexible approach to employment, rather narrow training in limited occupational skills which quickly become obsolete'.

The Wolf Report advocates a general education for all pupils of compulsory school age, including English and mathematics, with vocational courses taking no more than 20 per cent of the timetable (Wolf Report pages 107-110). Any vocational qualifications that are counted in performance measures would need to be of a high standard set nationally, and there should still be space in the school week for teachers to offer other courses based on local need and preference.

The Wolf Report recommends that vocational education in the school years should be restricted to no more than 20 per cent of a school's time and that only vocational qualifications which meet high national standards should be included in national performance tables.

The Wolf Report also recommends that

*At the same time, any point-(score) based measures should be should also be structured so that schools do not have a strong incentive to pile up huge numbers of qualifications per student, and are therefore free to offer all students practical and vocational courses as part of their programme.*

*(the Wolf Report Recommendation page 113).*

It is not clear whether this refers to the piling up of low level vocational programmes, or GCSEs or both. Clearly the Wolf Report does not support the piling up of vocational qualifications which do not allow for progression, but the available evidence provides some support that some pupils do take large numbers of GCSE courses. The single largest group of London pupils attending maintained (state) schools in the last year of compulsory education in summer 2002 scored between 40.5 and 50 points in GCSE examinations. This was equivalent to between 5 and 6 A\* grades for each pupils or between eight and 10 C grades. Nearly a third of pupils achieved scores higher than that, with the highest attaining group achieving the equivalent of 10 A\* grades.<sup>28</sup> Some pupils have full timetables, but whether this is a matter of schools and pupils 'piling up huge numbers of qualifications' that are of no real value, or whether there is a more legitimate explanation warrants further investigation.

Additionally, given the risk, referred to above, that schools may be tempted to 'park' less academically successful pupils in vocational courses 'irrespective of whether these count', the Wolf Report also recommends

*A detailed examination of educational programmes for the most low-achieving was beyond the remit of this Review. They are not necessarily or even predominantly vocational in any real sense of the word and concrete recommendations here would also pre-empt the Department's ongoing*

*review of SEN provision. .... DfE should review current policies for the lowest attaining quintile at Key Stage 4.*

*(The Wolf Report, pages 113 and 114)*

Again, the evidence supports this. There are different groups of pupils with low levels of raw score attainment where issues are not primarily about the provision of general or vocational education. As the quote above acknowledges, these include pupils with special educational needs though it is unlikely to be confined to pupils with a record of SEN (see Section 2 above).

Additionally, some children in alternative provision, including some Children in Care, will not be on roll in either mainstream or special schools and will have experienced delays and gaps in their education. They also tend to have low levels of raw score attainment. There is nothing in the Wolf Report which presupposes that the recommended review should only apply exclusively to provision made by *schools* for those pupils who are actually on roll. However, the Wolf Report is a review of what has been taking place in schools and colleges and *readers* may assume that the recommended review would focus on provision there. There is no reason why that restriction should apply.

Further, the Wolf Report recommends that

*DfE should introduce a performance indicator which focuses on the whole distribution of performance within a school, including those at the top and bottom ends of the distribution.*

*(The Wolf Report, page 137)*

The evidence on GCSE point scores referred to on the previous page confirms that there is a range of attainment within schools, which is not captured by a simple division of pupils into those who do, and those who do not, achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes.

- Some 50 per cent of London pupils gained 40.5 to 50.0 GCSE points or above in summer 2002 examinations, and
- most pupils in the 40.5 to 50.0 point score group would have been comfortable within the 'achieved 5+ GCSE A\*-C grades' group.
- Achieving 5+ A\*-C grades is *not* a measure of high raw score attainment.

- To restate one point made on the previous page '*the highest attaining group achiev(ed) the equivalent of 10 A\* grades*'.
- Additionally, would classifying a pupil with 4 A\* grades and one D grade as low attaining compared with a pupil achieving 5 GCSE C grades be realistic?
- If the answer to that is 'yes', would we also classify pupils with no GCSE grades above grade D in the same low raw score attainment group?

Robert Cassen and Geeta Kingdon's *Tackling low educational attainment* used more than one measure of low attainment, including those with no passes, those with no passes above grade D and those in the lower point score groups,<sup>29</sup> and this provides one model that might be developed further. Educationalists may well welcome the recognition in the Wolf Report that pupils have that a range of attainment not previously captured in performance tables.

## The perverse effects of policy. Funding regimes and the qualification framework for further education

The framework for setting the content and funding of further education colleges is complex, and cannot adequately be reviewed in its entirety here. However, two areas stand out as being more complex than arrangements applied to schools and to publicly-funded higher education institutions (HEIs).

The first is the number, and rate of change amongst, the agencies responsible for the funding and regulation of further education. Figure 5 on page 66 of the Wolf Report lists 21 agencies which, between 2006 and 2011 had a regulatory function in relation to further education, 10 of which were created within that period and five of which no longer exist. That complexity and instability could only have come at a price, and a measure of costs in one area (advice and inspection) is included in *An Adult Approach to Further Education* with comparable figures for higher education. The regulatory costs for the FE and skills sector exceeded £40 million in 2006/7, more than 10 times the cost of equivalent activity in higher education, and at a time of declining adult enrolment in further education.<sup>30</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Wolf Report comments that

*Major changes are needed that will simplify the system, clarify decision-making and increase transparency, and which will replace a huge and ineffective regulatory system with a much smaller and more effective one concentrated on a number of key activities*

*(The Wolf Report page 104)*

However, the issue is not simply the number and instability of agencies involved in regulation, it is also their focus that needs to change. The Wolf Report recommends that the inspection of individual qualifications is replaced inspection of awarding agencies, and funding individual students should replace funding individual qualifications. Recommendations 22 to 24 in the Wolf Report (pages 132 to 135) deal in part with those issues. What is not clear is what the new regulatory framework would in practice cost, and whether it would reduce in practice the volume of bureaucracy faced by further education colleges. It would be helpful if the cost of any revised framework were to be made public.

The Wolf Report is likewise critical of 'National Occupational Standards'<sup>31</sup> being applied as a template for *individual* vocational qualifications, at least as far as young people are concerned. National Occupational Standards set out what competencies are required to do existing job. Apart from the amount of detailed work that a focus on individual qualifications generates, the Wolf Report has two key criticisms of this approach. The first is that it focuses on what those who are already employed need to know, which is not an appropriate diet for those who have yet to settle into employment. The reasoning will by now be familiar.

*This may be an appropriate design principle for qualifications aimed at adults in specific employment; it is entirely inappropriate for young people who are likely to change jobs, and who are entering decades of employment in a rapidly changing economy.*

*(Wolf Report, page 75)*

The second objection is that competencies are either reached or not: they involve a dichotomous 'pass/fail' approach. They do not lend themselves to grading and are not suitable for grading achievement – which is exactly what is needed if a young person is to have any prospect of progressing through the education system.

*..... any candidate for educational progression needs to demonstrate not only a specific level of competence, but relative performance, otherwise the qualification is of little use to selectors.*

*(Wolf Report page 87)*

Published in 1995, Professor Wolf's *Competence-Based Assessment* also points towards the risk of more and more detail being piled up in competence-based systems as assessors attempt to be more exact in what is being assessed to the point that

*NVQ's have in fact consistently moved towards greater and greater attempts at specificity (and) many advocates of a competence-based approach would explicitly reject this as self-defeating. Nonetheless, any competence-based system ultimately faces the same dilemmas. However broad defined its criteria, the objective – and*

*the claim – is that these are clearly defined in such a way that the assessor can describe a candidate as have achieved (or ‘not yet achieved’) them.<sup>32</sup>*

In 2007 Professor Wolf expressed the potentially self-defeating nature of this approach in more colourful terms.

*“To assume that what can’t be measured easily really isn’t important is blindness.*

*To say that what can’t be easily measured really doesn’t exist is suicide.”<sup>33</sup>*

Clearly, the view of the Wolf Report is that programs of vocational education must allow for more than a doomed attempt by those designing competency frameworks to specify to the *n*th degree: they must also allow for educational progression.

## Work experience and apprenticeships

The importance of the benefits of work experience as a route to employment is stressed repeatedly in the Wolf Report (see pages 10, 14, 33, 114), with the following illustrates the point.

*though formal credentials are seen as increasingly important, they are not, in fact, all-determining. Work experiences still offer an alternative progression route, while many formal qualifications are not worth having at all.*

*(Wolf Report page 10)*

*Helping young people to obtain genuine work experience – and, therefore, what the CBI calls ‘employability skills’ – should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years. It is far more important than even a few years ago, because of labour market trends; and is made critical by the impact on youth unemployment of the most recent recession.*

*(Wolf Report page 130)*

This does not imply that any and all work experience is of value,<sup>34</sup> and the Wolf Report uses the views of one group of young people on a work experience exercise, where ‘most view(ed) it as just doing a lot of digging’ to illustrate that point. To illustrate what does work, the Wolf Report refers to ‘Working Rite’, which matches young people with self-employed tradesmen for a 6<sup>th</sup> month work placement and one-to-one mentoring.<sup>35</sup>

Apprenticeships form one route for learning, which involves but is not confined to work experience. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this was a route into skilled work in, for example, manufacturing industry. That is not so today (see The Wolf Report page 79). Their decline might be linked to the decline of manufacturing industry in England, but it might also be linked to willingness on central government’s part to fund vocational training and with the private sector’s willingness to accept that arrangement.



Restoring apprenticeships might involve re-directing money from the teaching of cul-de-sac vocational courses to employers for approved apprenticeship schemes. In any event, as the Wolf Report puts it,

*If we want to increase apprenticeship openings for young people, we will have to pay for them.*

*(Wolf Report page 122)*

*Payments to employers for some of the cost of apprenticeship make sense to the degree that apprentices are genuinely engaged in broad learning. "Business as Usual" apprenticeships and apprenticeships with no off-the-job component are unheard of in countries with large high quality apprenticeship schemes (and employer subsidies), and should cease to be funded here in the case of 16-18 year olds. Adult apprenticeships are outside the scope of this Review, but the degree to which funding is simply displacing employers' own expenditures, rather than creating more genuine new apprenticeship places and training, could also usefully be examined.*

*(Wolf Report page 123)*

Funding employers to take on apprentices might increase their (employers') input to young people's learning, but Wolf has written critically elsewhere of the private sector's input to vocational education, and in particular input from the CBI into education more generally.<sup>35</sup>

The answer appears to be that central government should retain a general 'quality assurance' role.

*While decentralisation and flexibility are critical, central government retains a core responsibility to set broad policy and assure quality. It must ensure that our education system takes account of a changing world, of the demands made*

*by the labour market, and the world economy, and of what this implies for young people's long-term progression, opportunity and success. It must also assure basic quality.*

*(Wolf Report page 20)*

## Education vs. Training

Professor Wolf was commissioned to review vocational education, with the main focus on provision for the 14 to 19 age group. The resulting Report opposes early specialisation in narrow occupational training, and stresses the value of a broad education for all pupils. In this the Report reflects the long-standing view that, in a rapidly changing world, the skills needed in the future will differ from those needed now. In that context young people need a broad education, and that broad education would include English and mathematics. Education in English and mathematics would continue into the post-compulsory years where needed, and both would be available through apprenticeship schemes.

Far from advocating a further expansion of vocational training as such, Professor Wolf has opposed the provision of education programmes that consist of a high proportion of easy to pass low level vocational courses that bring no economic or educational benefit for the pupils and students involved. Again, the Report is in favour of the large majority of pupils receiving a general education in the compulsory school years, and supports favour of an element of broad education in the immediate post-compulsory years and during apprenticeships.

Taking the Wolf Report in isolation, the conclusion *might* be that

1. narrow occupational training for school children, based on practice in currently existing jobs is self-defeating because the working world those young people will eventually move into will be very different from the one that exists now, and even where it is not young people will probably move into jobs other than the one/s they have been trained for.
2. That being so, it is best to hedge bets and concentrate on general education for the young, particularly where this ensures that young people become fluent in English and mathematics (as opposed to simple numeracy) and develop transferable skills and the capacity to cope with changing circumstances.

In other words, the conclusion *might* be that, for young people, general education is more effective than vocational training as an *instrumental* activity. On this view, the next step might be to identify and then focus on those subjects which can 'prove' that they convey the most transferable skills of value in the adult world of work - which would result in a narrowing of the curriculum the Wolf Report appears to oppose. And there are websites which justify individual subjects precisely in terms of the transferable skills they supposedly convey, as an internet

search 'What general skills do young people learn from .....?' (where the subject name of choice is keyed in after 'learn from') will confirm. As one example, the following web site argues that learning Latin confers benefits in learning in other subjects

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/whystudyclassics/a/whystudylatin.htm> while the next website sees music education as benefiting young people's capacity to learn, their self-perception and their achievement in reading and in mathematics.

<http://munchkinsandmusic.blogspot.co.uk/2008/07/10-reasons-why-children-should-learn.html>

However, a different line of reasoning emerges when the Wolf Report is *not* taken in isolation. Chapter 6 of Professor Wolf's *An Adult Approach to Further Education*, which is part-entitled *Psychic Income and the 'Good Society'*, contains the following

*Most education White Papers ..... pay cursory homage to the idea that education is about more than developing skills for the workforce, but ministers' and policymakers' hearts are not really engaged ..... Yet the idea that the only purpose of being educated is to get richer, and that having got richer, we should then expand education simply in order to get richer still, is both modern and very odd .... Our ancestors would have taken it to be self-evident that education was about much more than the economy ..... The French take it for granted that any course of study ..... should contain a strong element of general education .... because a society should be educated, and so should all its citizens. .... The Victorians – in far poorer times – funded museums, underwrote free lectures and promoted education for both men and women. They did so because they thought knowledge and education made people better and more fully human, not just better off. .... a society that is better educated will also be a better place all round, for everyone in it.*

*(An Adult Approach to Further Education extracts from pages 105 to 113)*

It is not likely that everyone will agree on which set of subjects/curriculum/pedagogy will enable general education to fulfil the role envisaged, *but that is not the point*. The point is that the emphasis on general education, in a report on vocational education, need not be read as requiring the former to develop as a more effective version of the latter. The message in the quote is straight forward: education is fundamentally about education. It remains to be seen whether policy makers and educationalists will read the Wolf Report in that way.

## Conclusion

*(i) Evidence on the impact of high levels of attainment in English and in mathematics*

The Wolf Report is particularly critical of the perverse effects of policy, and of the impact of evidence-free received wisdom. It emphasises the value of education which allows progression to further education or to employment. Elsewhere Professor Wolf's emphasises the link between education and the Good society. The four themes: perverse effects; received wisdom; education and the Good society and; progression provide the framework for this conclusion.

The Wolf Report focuses many of its criticisms on the unintended, 'perverse', effects of policy, that have led to an increase in the provision of 'low value' or 'no value' courses of vocational education for children of compulsory school age. However, the Report also criticises educationalists' assumptions that vocational education is self-evidently best for those who have not flourished on more academic courses. The following three quotes from the wolf Report are included in page 14 of this *Briefing*.

*There of course remains a risk that some schools will, as has happened in the past, effectively write off some of their least academically successful students, and park them in vocational courses irrespective of whether these 'count'.*

*(Wolf Report p.114)*

*Claims are often made that vocational options motivate young people more and therefore lead to them achieving higher grades in their other subjects; and that such options also stop them from dropping out and 'becoming NEET'. Indeed, a good number of submissions to the Review treated it as self-evident that this was the case. This might suggest that a larger share of time should routinely be allocated to vocational options for some students.*

*(Wolf Report p.108)*

The ‘some students’ referred to in the second quote are those who are in danger of dropping out and becoming NEET. These would be the less able students, who are not succeeding on more academic courses and who ‘self-evidently’ needed something different in order to flourish. The Wolf Report tests that ‘self-evident’ conclusion against the evidence, and finds it wanting.

*The cohort for which the most detailed information is available (LSYPE) was in year 11 in 2005/6. This was before the huge rise in VQ entries, so very few took anything other than GCSEs. Conversely, a good number report taking ‘vocational’ qualifications, meaning, for the most part, GCSEs with vocational titles (eg business studies) or vocational GCSEs. An analysis by CAYT for the Review looked at whether taking such qualifications made a difference to the later trajectories of disengaged students (identified by poor attitudes to school, aspiring to leave education, playing truant). They found no statistically significant effects.*

*(Wolf Report p.110)*

There is, then, a readiness in the Wolf Report to challenge received wisdom about vocational education, and to test ‘self-evident truths’ against the evidence. The recommended alternative to contemporary received wisdom includes a focus on the achievement of good grades in English and mathematics either at the end of compulsory schooling, or as soon as possible afterwards.

The *Briefing* points out that there is evidence

- on the negative impact on employment of very low levels of literacy and numeracy, and
- of higher economic returns to Advanced level GCE mathematics
- and some evidence of possibly higher returns to GCSE mathematics.

However, published evidence has not been found during the preparation of this *Briefing* which confirms that good grades in both English and mathematics have an impact that good grades in other subjects do not. Additionally, the quote below from page 8 of the *Briefing* indicates that employers’ approach to young people does not necessarily focus on the functional understanding young people need in their first job.

*It seems to be the case that employers see those young people (16 or 17) who are looking for employment as likely to be low achieving, or below average in terms of personal qualities ... This does not mean that these young people are, necessarily, without the skills needed to do the jobs they are applying for – but they are perceived as likely to be.*

*(Wolf Report, page 30)*

This is a straightforward case of received wisdom shaping the young school leaver's reality. The absence of published research on the relative combined impact of English and mathematics at the end of compulsory schooling risks the Wolf Report being perceived as adding its own set of received wisdom – and that perception would be at odds with the Report's use of evidence-based approaches. It is entirely possible, and indeed likely, that there is unpublished research which confirms that success in both English and mathematics has an impact on employment and/or education progression which success in other subjects does not have, but it would be advantageous if that research were published and available for public scrutiny. The quote also raises another possibility. If employers are simply avoiding those at the lower end of the attainment range, then some young people will always face difficulties in the job market regardless of their actual level of raw score attainment.

*(ii) Testing whether there is an improvement in educational progression*

A key theme in the Wolf Report (and in the terms of reference Professor Wolf was given) is that educational provision for young people should not direct them into 'low grade' vocational courses that have no value as entry requirements for more advanced courses or in the job market. Central government has given the Wolf Report a favourable response but, in line with the spirit of that Report, whether or not there is a change in individuals' *educational* progression over time needs to be tested against the evidence and, in large measure, the data to do that already exist.

Individual pupil records in the National Pupil Dataset can be linked to provide a 'longitudinal'<sup>36</sup> record over time – in principle for each child from the early days of primary schooling to the last days of secondary schooling. That longitudinal record would include Key Stages assessments and entries and achievement in many, though not all, public examinations. Pupil progress can be tracked accordingly. However, some pupils switch to further education (FE), where there are



also records on a student by student basis of courses taken, and these can also be linked for the same FE student from one year to the next. The question is whether an individual's record from school days can be linked to the FE record for the same individual.

At one level the technology exists which allow that to happen, though there would be costs in terms of computing capacity and these would not be small. More broadly, the records involved would be for individual young people, and there are issues of data confidentiality and provisions in law that would need to be taken into account. At present the law allows *individual researchers* to access pupil level data from the NPD in order to analyse pupil achievement, but there is no equivalent provision as far as access to FE individual student record is concerned, nor is there provision allowing pupil records to be linked to FE student records. Allowing researchers access to matched pupil and FE student records would require a change in the law, and that would involve a review *at a policy level* first. That is a matter for others to decide on, but it is what is needed if educational progression in schools and FE is to be monitored, understood and acted on.<sup>37</sup>

*(iii) Recognising the causes of low attainment in order to raise achievement. Children speaking languages other than or in addition to English and Children in Care*

Professor Wolf's work prior to the report on vocational education raises what might be called a 'big question' about the association between education and the Good Society, and it is clear from that work that this meant education for the Good Society for everyone, and not just for a small elite. It is unlikely that everyone will arrive at the same conclusion about how education for all pupils links with, or is part of the Good Society but, having raised that big question, Recommendation 7 on page 14 of the Wolf Report contains the following statement (in which 'LDD' refers to learning difficulties and/or disabilities).

*Programmes for the lowest attaining learners – including many with LDD as well as those highly disaffected with formal education – should concentrate on the core academic skills of English and Maths, and on work experience.*

*Funding and performance measures should be amended to promote a focus on these core areas and on employment outcomes rather than on the accrual of qualifications.*

Some may see a disjuncture between this recommendation and Professor Wolf's view of education as a means to, and part of, the Good Society. Others may decide that, realistically, this is the best that schools and FE colleges may be able to achieve for some pupils in the final years of compulsory schooling, and/or that it will at least provide a route into employment and away from social exclusion. On the other hand, the Wolf Report does acknowledge that its focus is on vocational education, that its remit does not cover all forms of low attainment, and that low attainment will in some respects will have nothing to do with vocational provision. The quote below was shown on page 21 and is worth repeating here.

*A detailed examination of educational programmes designed for the most low-achieving was beyond the remit of this Review. They are not necessarily or even predominantly vocational in any real sense of the word; and concrete recommendations here would also pre-empt the Department's ongoing review of SEN provision.*

*(The Wolf Report page 113)*

The existing evidence on low attainment is more in line with the second of the two quotes above, in that it does not point to vocational education as an issue. Nor does the evidence support the view that the causes of low attainment will in all or even most instances be resolved by work experience in the last years of compulsory education. Two examples of groups which tend to have low levels of 'raw score attainment' are given, and others might be added including (as Professor Wolf notes) pupils with special educational, to illustrate the points that

- there are groups of pupils other than those with learning disabilities
- who are already known to have a high incidence of low attainment
- about whom more rather than less needs to be known
- and who require support tailored to their particular needs
- at the time when those needs become evident.

The two examples are pupils whose mother tongue is other than English, and Children in Care.

In the case pupils who pupils whose mother tongue is other than English, local authority research during the 1990's repeatedly confirmed that those who are fully fluent in English *tend* to have above average levels of educational attainment,<sup>38</sup> and those who have little fluency in English *tend*, unsurprisingly, to have low levels of 'raw score' attainment. The conclusion is that

there are advantages for attainment across the curriculum in supporting those pupils' English language acquisition, and in doing so at an early age. Information on pupil fluency in English is not collected in a common format in English schools and, in some local authority areas, is not collected at all. As a second best option, the analysis of pupil attainment in English in the primary school Foundation stage and Key stage assessments taking account of mother tongue will help shed light on where support is most needed.

Nonetheless local authority comparisons of public examination results, again from the 1990's, amongst pupils who were fully fluent in English confirmed there were differences in attainment depending on which specific language was the mother tongue. Fluency English is *not* the whole of the matter, and the implication in that research was that attainment would also be influenced (negatively) by social disadvantage. Further research in the same local authority also confirmed that social disadvantage did indeed have a negative impact on pupil progress in English language acquisition.<sup>39</sup>

More recent ESRC-funded pan-London research emphasises the point that the *existing* detailed record of mother tongue held in the National Pupil Database can add depth to our understanding of educational attainment in a way that sometimes very broad categories of ethnicity such as 'Other White' or 'Black African' do not. At its crudest, not all Black African speakers are low attainers. Pupils with Yoruba or Igbo as their mother tongue have above average rates of reaching nationally expected levels of attainment in public examinations.

*The language we speak often says more about us than our broad ethnic group; it gives ... clues about where people come from and their likely socio-economic position, religion and culture.*<sup>40</sup>

It will also be the case that information gathered in different years on the specific languages spoken by pupils will provide an insight into the changing composition of schools' intakes, and into newly emerging need. Supplementary datasets associated with what is to some extent a companion *Briefing on Educational Outcomes for Children in Care*<sup>41</sup> also point to perhaps unexpected low levels of attainment amongst some children speaking Dutch, Lithuanian, and Spanish, as well as to pupils speaking Lingala, a language spoken in politically and militarily unstable central Africa. That *Briefing on Children in Care* points to another group of pupils who tend to have low levels of educational attainment, where there are gaps in the available evidence, but where there are distinctive needs which are unlikely to be met through work experience in the later years of compulsory education.

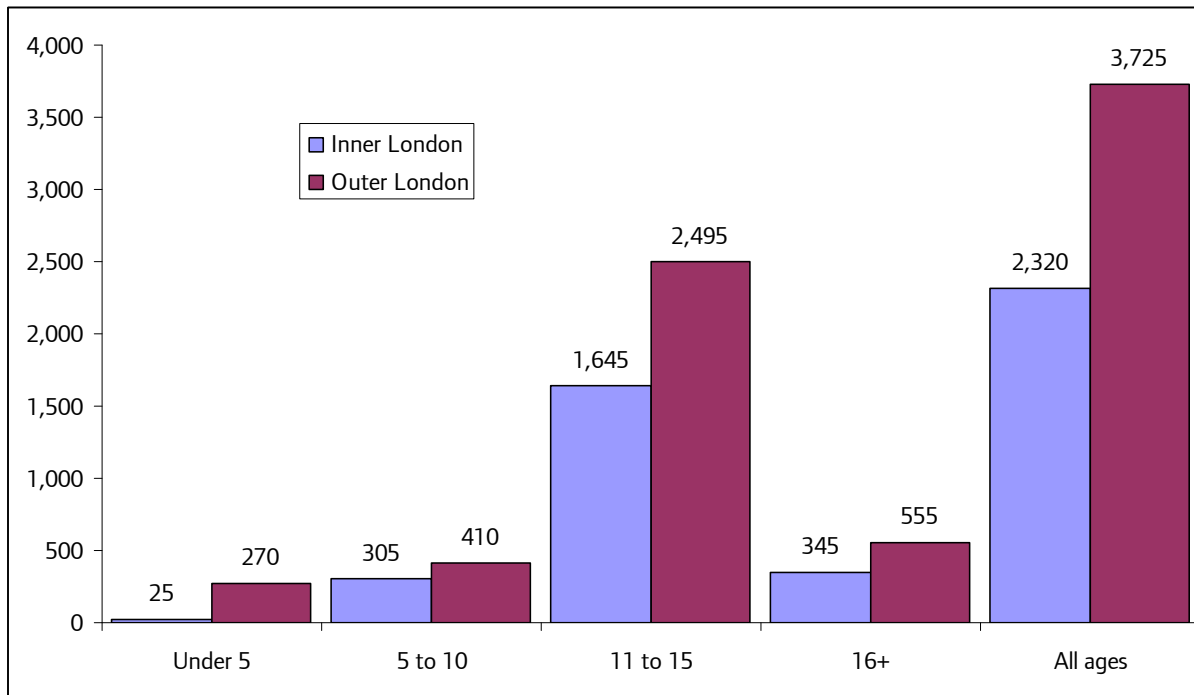
Abuse or neglect in the home is the single major reason why children are taken into care in England, and academic achievement amongst this group tends to be low, and worst amongst those at the end of compulsory schooling. Children in Care are more likely than other pupils to

- have special educational needs
- have a record of Behaviour, emotional and social difficulty
- have been admitted to their present schooling during the course of, rather than at the beginning of, the school year
- attend a mainstream school outside the local authority area in which they live
- travel further to school
- be absent from school and
- be permanently excluded from school
- and to be known to the police.

Children in Care clearly need education support which takes into account the circumstances in which they were taken into care, and *from the outset*. As far as provision is concerned, the limited information currently available is consistent with Children in Care experiencing disrupted schooling, with possible gaps in their experience of education in mainstream schools. There is a case in principle for extending educational opportunities for young people who are, or have been in care. Whether that case exists in practice can be answered by reviewing the longitudinal pupil record to give a more precise indicator of the extent of gaps in the record for Children in Care as well as to establish how complete their record of attainment is.

Information on pupils in alternative education, for example young people on roll in Pupil Referral Units, is not included in the National Pupil Dataset<sup>42</sup> and as, Figure 2 shows, their numbers are not small. The raw score attainment of those pupils is remarkably low.<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 2. Numbers receiving alternative provision in January 2011 by age group.**



Source Department for Education, *Schools Pupils and their Characteristics*, January

2011 Statistical First Release 12 2011 (DfE SFR 12 2011)

Note: age is as it would have been at the start of the school year.

We might also note that the Wolf Report focuses on existing educational provision in maintained schools and further education institutions. There is nothing in the Wolf Report which says that its conclusions do *not* apply to young people in alternative education, or to those encountering disrupted provision. However, there is a risk that a ‘perverse’ interpretation of the Wolf Report will focus entirely on provision by schools and colleges. The simplest way of reducing that risk is to see the issue as one of appropriate educational provision for all young people. The additional risk in not doing that is that, instead of being ‘parked’ in vocational training, more young people will end up ‘parked, off the radar’ in alternative provision.

As the quote from the Wolf Report shown on page 21 (and again on page 33) of this *Briefing* confirms, Professor Wolf is very clearly aware that there are issues, such as SEN, which have a bearing on attainment and which are not to do with the provision of vocational education. Additionally, and in all fairness, it is worth remembering that the terms of reference for the Wolf Report focus on provision for 14 to 19 year olds, rather than on provision for all young people from primary school age onwards. The point is that those terms of reference would not justify either the neglect of issues that may be evident in the primary school years, or the assumption

that they can be ameliorated or resolved by teachers and lecturers working in comparative isolation and focussing on English, mathematics and work experience in the last two years of compulsory schooling.

*(iv) adult vocational education*

That list illustrates the point that low levels of educational attainment arise in different circumstances and require different responses. The examples given also confirm that what happens early in a child's life, whether in the acquisition of a mother tongue or abuse, can have a long-lasting effect,<sup>44</sup> and cannot simply be set aside. For some the cost and the scale of the possible future research indicated above may appear daunting but it is, at least in principle, 'deliverable'.

Dealing with the other end of the age range, central government's 2011 report *New Challenge, New Chances. Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System* envisages reform for those aged 19 and above.<sup>45</sup> Page 4 includes the following

*This strategy sets out how we will ensure that they (prospective students)*

*and their employers are empowered to shape the FE and skills system.*

Chapter four of Wolf's book *Does Education Matter* is entitled *Does Business know best?*<sup>45</sup> and it opens with two quotes from government White Papers.

*Our training system must be founded on standards ... identified by employers*

*Conservative White Paper 1988*

*[We will] encourage better links between education and business*

*Labour White Paper, 2001*

In that chapter, Professor Wolf points out that there is more than one employer point of view, and draws a sharp distinction between the centralist, prescriptive planning and target-led approach of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) on the one hand, and the more laissez faire approach of the Institute of Directors (IoD) on the other. Apart from the uncontentionous point that there will be more than one 'employer view', a key issue is the length of time essentially managerialist approaches have been applied to further education. Someone born out the outset of this phase (with the creation of the Manpower Services Commission in 1973) would by now be in his or her forties or fifties, potentially with a working lifetime's experience

of targets, competency frameworks and so on. If there is no sense of an alternative approach, such as that provided by Professor Wolf with her experience of university research, reforming FE may be a more challenging task than the possibly daunting but at least deliverable research programme referred to on the previous page. Those charged with reviewing further education might well do worse than start by reading the work by Professor Wolf cited in this *Briefing*.

## Notes and references

1. The Wolf Report is available at the time of writing at <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00031-2011>

2. See Alison Wolf *Does Education Matter. Myths about education and economic growth* Penguin 2002.

3. Details of the 2011 Annual Population Survey are available at the time of writing at <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/articles/554.aspx> It is a sample survey, with the sample size ranging between approximately 500 to 800 in individual London boroughs. As a sample survey, it does not support estimates below borough level, and figures are not given for wards or other sub-borough areas.

Details of the 2010 occupational classification used in the APS is similarly available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-2-the-structure-and-index/index.html>

4. For evidence of the collapse in the youth labour market see, for example, Damon Clarke, Gavan Conlon and Fernando Galindo-Rueda *Post-compulsory Education and Qualification Attainment* Figure 5.7 p.83 in Stephen Machin and Anna Vignoles (Eds) *Whats the Good of Education* Princeton University Press 2005

On the other side of the coin, the percentage of 16 year olds remaining in education increased from marginally more than 40 per cent in 1979-80 to over 78 per cent in 1998-99. See Alison Wolf *Does Education Matter. Myths about Education and economic growth* Penguin 2002 Figure 3.5 page 2002

For a view of the change in the proportion of pupils in different age groups leaving school at different points in time see George Smith, Schools Tables 5.10 to 5.12 p.195 in A.H. Halsey with Josephine Webb (Eds) *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* MacMillan Press 2000

5. The statement appears on the DfE web page <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00038-2011>

6. For example, see extracts from the Crowther Report, reprinted in A.H. Halsey, Jean Floud, and C. Arnold Anderson *Education, Economy and Society* Glencoe Free Press, 1961, pages 24 to 30.

7. A range of publications dealing with basic skills written or co-authored by John Bynner is available at the time of writing at

<http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/Publications.aspx?sitesectionid=93&sitesectiontitle=Reports&page=1>  
These include

Carol Ekinsmyth and John Bynner *The Basic Skills of Young Adults* The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1994

John Bynner and Samantha Parsons *It doesn't get any better Basic Skills* Agency 1997.



Samantah Parsons and John Bynner *Influences on Adult Basic Skills*. Basic Skills Agency 1998.

Also see Katerina Ananiadou, Andrew Jenkins and Alison Wolf *The benefits to employers of raising workforce basic skills levels: a review of the literature* National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, 2003, page 12. Available at the time of writing at [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=42#](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=42#)

8. Clare Tickly and Alison Wolf *The Maths We Need Now: Demands, deficits and remedies* Bedford Way Papers, The Institute of Education, University of London, 2000, page 11.

The Cockcroft Report *Mathematics Counts, the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Mathematics in Schools* is available at the time of writing at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/cockcroft/>

9. Clare Tickly and Alison Wolf *The Maths We Need Now: Demands, deficits and remedies* page 14.

10. John Bynner and Samantha Parsons *The Impact of Poor Numeracy on Employment and Career Progression* in Clare Tickly and Alison Wolf *The Maths We Need Now* pages 26 to 51.

11. John Bynner and Samantha Parson *The Impact of Poor Numeracy* pages 41 to 43.

12. Alison Wolf *An Adult Approach to Further Education* Institute of Economic Affairs, 2009, page 45.

13. *Why Do Employers Use Selection Tests? Evidence from British Workplaces* Andrew Jenkins, Alison Wolf, June 2002 Paper No' CEEDP0027

14. *The Growth of Psychometric Testing for Selection Why Has Test Use Increased, Will Growth Continue, and What Does This Mean for Education?* Andrew Jenkins, Alison Wolf, June 2002 Paper No' CEEDP0029

15. Andrew Jenkins and Alison Wolf *Employers' Selection Decisions: The Role of Qualifications and Tests* in Stephen Machin and Anna Vignoles (Eds) *What's the Good of Education?* Princeton University Press, 2005, pages 155.

16. Lorna Unwin, Alison Fuller, Jill Turbin, Michael Young *What Determines The Impact Of Vocational Qualifications? A Literature Review* Department for Education and Skills, Research Report RR522, 2004, page 65

17. For one overview of research on the economics of education see

Stephen Machin and Anna Vignoles (Eds) *What's the Good of Education? The Economics of Education in the UK* Princeton University Press 2005

A range of analyses from the Centre for the Economics of Education (CEE) dealing with the returns to education are available at <http://cee.lse.ac.uk/pubs/default.asp> See

Lorraine Dearden, Steven McIntosh, Michal Myck, Anna Vignoles *The Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications in Britain* November 2000 Paper No' CEEDP0004

Barbara Sianesi, John Van Reenen *The Returns to Education: A Review of the Macro-Economic Literature* November 2000 Paper No' CEEDP0006

Colm Harmon, Hessel Oosterbeek *The Returns to Education: A Review of Evidence, Issues and Deficiencies in the Literature* December 2000. Paper No' CEEDP0005

Gavan Conlon *The differential in earnings premia between academically and vocationally trained males in the United Kingdom* June 2001 Paper No' CEEDP0011

Gavan Conlon *The incidence and outcomes associated with the late attainment of qualifications in the United Kingdom* July 2001 Paper No' CEEDP0013

Lorraine Dearden and Barbara Sianesi, *Estimating the Returns to Education: Models, Methods and Results* October 2001 Paper No' CEEDP0016

Fernando Galindo-Rueda, Andrew Jenkins, Anna Vignoles, Alison Wolf *The Determinants and Effects of Lifelong Learning* April 2002 Paper No' CEEDP0019

Dorothe Bonjour, Lynn Cherkas, Jonathan Haskel, Denise Hawkes and Tim Spector *Returns to Education: Evidence from UK Twins* April 2002 Paper No' CEEDP0022

Steven McIntosh *Further Analysis of the Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications* January 2004 Paper No' CEEDP0035

L. Feinstein, Fernando Galindo-Rueda and Anna Vignoles, *The Labour Market Impact of Adult Education and Training: A cohort analysis* January 2004 Paper No' CEEDP0036

Lorraine Dearden, Leslie McGranahan, Leslie McGranahan and Barbara Sianesi *Returns to Education for the 'Marginal Learner': Evidence from the BCS70* December 2004 Paper No' CEEDP0045

Lorraine Dearden, Leslie McGranahan and Barbara Sianesi, *An In-Depth Analysis of the Returns to National Vocational Qualifications Obtained at level 2* December 2004 Paper No' CEEDP0046

Richard Blundell, Lorraine Dearden and Barbara Sianesi *Evaluating the Impact of Education on Earnings in the UK: Models, Methods and Results from the NCDS* December 2004 Paper No' CEEDP0047

Jörn-Steffen Pischke and Till von Wachter, *Zero Returns to Compulsory Schooling in Germany: Evidence and Interpretation* January 2006 Paper No' CEEDP0054

Oscar Marcenaro Gutierrez, Anna Vignoles and Augustin de Coulon *The Value of Basic Skills in the British Labour Market* May 2007 Paper No' CEEDP0077

Charley Greenwood, Andrew Jenkins, Anna Vignoles *The Returns to Qualifications in England: Updating the Evidence Base on Level 2 and Level 3 Vocational Qualifications*

September 2007 Paper No' CEEDP0089

Anna Vignoles and Augustin de Coulon *An Analysis of the Benefit of NVQ2 Qualifications Acquired at Age 26-34* October 2008 Paper No' CEEDP0106

18. Barbara Sianesi *Returns to Education: A Non-Technical Summary of CEE Work and Policy Discussion* Institute of Fiscal Studies and Centre for the Economics of Education 2003, pages 2 to 3.

19. Lorna Unwin, Alison Fuller, Jill Turbin, Michael Young *What Determines The Impact Of Vocational Qualifications? A Literature Review* Department for Education and Skills, Research Report RR522, 2004. That review noted, on page 79, interest at a national level in 2001 in provision to improve attainment in both English and mathematics.

20. P.J. Dolton and Anna Vignoles *The Return on Post-Compulsory School Mathematics Study* *Economica*, volume 69, 2002, pages 113 to 141. The quote is from page 114.

21. P.J. Dolton and Anna Vignoles *The Return on Post-Compulsory School Mathematics Study* *Economica*, volume 69, 2002, also page 114.

22. Patricia Rice *Wages and the Education and Employment Choices of Young People: Empirical analysis for Great Britain* *Discussion Papers in Economics and Econometrics* Number 0612, School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, 2006, pages 12, 17, and 20 to 22.

23. Lorraine Dearden, Steven McIntosh, Michal Myck, Anna Vignoles *The Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications in Britain* November 2000 Paper No' CEEDP0004 Also see the other papers cited in reference 11 above.

24. Charley Greenwood, Andrew Jenkins, Anna Vignoles *The Returns to Qualifications in England: Updating the Evidence Base on Level 2 and Level 3 Vocational Qualifications*

September 2007 Paper No' CEEDP0089, page 9.

25. Local authority web tables 11 and 15 associated with Department for Education (DfE) *GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2009/10 (Revised)* Statistical First Release 01 2011 (SFR 01 2011)

26. House of Lords, Select Committee on Economic Affairs, Minutes of Evidence. Memorandum by Professor Lorna Unwin and Professor Alison Fuller, Section 4. 2007. Available at the time of writing at

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldselect/ldeconaf/138/7013002.htm>

27. Alison Wolf *An Adult Approach to Further Education* page 45.

28. David Ewens *Ethnicity and attainment in schools. An analysis of the 2002 and 2003 London Pupil Datasets* GLA DMAG Briefing 2005/31, page 47.

29. Robert Cassen and Geeta Kingdon *Tackling low educational attainment* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007, pages 64 to 76.

30. Alison Wolf *An Adult Approach to Further Education* Institute of Economic Affairs, 2009, pages 36 to 38.

31. Information on a number of National Occupational Standards is available at <http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/nos-search/Pages/SearchResults.aspx?k=All%20NOS>

The list is not exhaustive, but the website does provide examples of how detailed the scheme is.

32. Alison Wolf *Competence-Based Assessment* Open University Press, 1995, page 60.

33. Alison Wolf quoting the McNamara fallacy in *Diminished Returns. How Raising the Leaving Age to 18 Will Harm Young People and the Economy* Policy Exchange, 2007, page 5.

Wikipedia provides the following quote to illustrate the McNamara fallacy:

*"The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be easily measured or to give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide."*

Daniel Yankelovich "Corporate Priorities: A continuing study of the new demands on business." (1972)

34. For a precursor of much of the discussion in the Wolf Report see Alison Wolf *Does Education Matter?* Pages 56 to 97.

35. See the Wolf Report page 131. At the time of writing, the Working Rite website can be accessed at <http://www.workingrite.co.uk/aims.htm>

36. 41. *Cross-sectional* information is a 'snapshot' providing information for a single point in time, and school performance tables from the 1980s and early 1990's were examples of that type of information. *Longitudinal* data involves information for the same individual/s at different points in time, and this is essential in analyses of young people's educational progress.

By way of (admittedly simplified) illustration, cross-sectional information in school performance tables might show a year-on-year improvement in raw score educational attainment in an area after local educational reform or following local economic regeneration projects. Longitudinal information will show whether pupils originally living in the area have stayed and achieved an improvement in raw score results, or whether they have moved elsewhere with the 'better' results being achieved by 'incomers' who would have been expected to reach those higher levels of attainment anyway.

Organisations with expertise in longitudinal data include the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London at <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/> and the think tank Longview at <http://www.longviewuk.com/>

37. Individual pupil and student records are, by their nature, confidential, and that confidentiality is bolstered by provisions in law with the Data Protection Act 1998 being one well-known example. Statutory Instrument 1563 2009 includes a list of agencies which can receive information from the NPD, and also specifically permits the release of records for

research into pupil achievement where that actually requires individual pupil records. Section 122 of The Apprenticeships, Skills and Learning Act, 2009 also provides for the release of ILR information for research, but only to a limited number of agencies. Education researchers in universities, research institutes – and at the GLA – do not have *direct* access to ILR information.

Arguably, there are grounds for reviewing the Apprenticeships Act, to determine whether its provisions can be brought into line with those provisions for research in SI 1563. I am grateful to the colleague at the Department for Education who, in private correspondence, pointed to the need for further provision to be made if researchers are to work with merged NPD and ILR datasets to achieve a more complete view of educational progression.

The NPD contains a wide range of information including each pupil's date of birth, sex, entitlement to free school meals, ethnicity, type of special educational need (SEN) and level of SEN support. It also includes information on key stage assessments and public examination results. Beginning in January 2002, the range of the information collected has expanded, with some information, for example on pupil attendance, now collected in each of the three school terms. Information for pupils on roll in Pupil Referral Units is not included in the NPD.

The term 'National Pupil Database' may mislead some. The NPD does not contain comparable information for pupils on roll in independent schools, or cover pupils attending Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish maintained schools. Strictly speaking, the term 'Database' is correct. It refers to data held in multiple files in a data warehouse, and as such its structure will be familiar to those used to working with relational database software such as ORACLE. Researchers used to working with 'single flat files' in statistical software such as SPSS or Stata might prefer to think of the NPD as a series of *datasets*. For an introductory guide see David Ewens *The National and London Pupil Datasets. An introductory briefing for researchers and research users* GLA DMAG Briefing 2005/8. At the time of writing this is available at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/plugin/publications/>

The FE Individual Learner Record (ILR) record also includes a record of the 'learning provider' and location of learning, student home area, learning difficulty or disability, education programme type, and planned and actual dates of completion. Individual Learner Records are complex, and reflect information required from differently funded courses and the complexity of FE provision where courses may be short or long, with information gathered at several points over the course of the year. There is no 'starter guide' to the ILR datasets equivalent to DMAG Briefing 2005/8. However a brief summary of what the ILR is for is available at the time of writing at <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/> and the specification of information collected is available at [http://www.theia.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/108B67A4-B90B-4367-8240-C6CF4BDAB9CC/0/singleILRSpecification2011\\_12v4\\_03Oct2011.pdf](http://www.theia.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/108B67A4-B90B-4367-8240-C6CF4BDAB9CC/0/singleILRSpecification2011_12v4_03Oct2011.pdf)

38. Lesley Kendall and Lara Ainsworth *Examination results in context. Analysis of 1996 examination results* National Foundation for Educational Research and the Local Government Association 1997. This is a report which used multilevel modelling to analyse the achievement in GCSE examinations of over 17,000 pupils on roll in 118 schools in 12 London boroughs. The project was organised by the local authority London Education Research Network, and the analysis and carried out at the NFER. It was preceded by similar exercises in 1994 and 1995. Page 14 contains the following

*Pupils for whom English was an additional language and who were fully fluent*

*In English outperformed those who had English as a first language, who in turn*

*Outperformed pupils who were not fully fluent in English.*

For more recent local authority work on this topic see Feyisa Demie *English as an additional Language: An empirical study of stages of English proficiency and attainment* Presented to the 2011 Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association and currently available at

<http://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Research%20and%20Information/Documents/EALEmpirical2011.pdf>

39. Also see Haringey Council *1996 KS1 & GCSE Results in Context* 1997 and Haringey Council *Linguistic Diversity and Language Progress in Haringey Primary and Secondary Schools* 1999, copies of which are available from David Ewens ([david.ewens@london.gov.uk](mailto:david.ewens@london.gov.uk)). The first of these shows that pupils in different language groups who are fully fluent in English nonetheless tend to have different levels of educational attainment, while the second highlights the relationship between social deprivation and more limited progress in English language acquisition. The second report explores the rates of progress made by pupils generally between different levels of fluency over time, and the same issue is dealt with in Feyisa Demie's later paper *English as an Additional Language: How long does it takes to acquire English Fluency?* (Journal of Language and Education, forthcoming). That is, both papers provide some insight into the social/educational context of English language acquisition.

40. The quote is from a press release for an ESRC-funded project which made use of pan-London data on languages spoken by pupils attending maintained (state) schools. The press release is available at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/press-releases/20633/language-diversity-will-make-london-a-true-global-player.aspx>

The National Pupil Database (NPD) has contained a record of each pupil's mother tongue, which was first collected, albeit on a voluntary basis, in 2007. It is now the single most comprehensive annually updated record of languages spoken in England.

This comparatively recent research project, stressed the value of language data in exploring variations in educational attainment within what can otherwise be very broad classifications of ethnicity such as 'Black African'. It also set the context for a wider analysis of mother tongue and educational attainment by mapping languages spoken in London and giving their provenance (see John Eversley, Dina Mehmedbegović, Antony Sanderson, Teresa Tinsley, Michelle von Ahn and Richard D. Wiggins *Language Capital. Mapping the languages of London's schoolchildren* CILT, The National Centre for Languages, 2010).

41. See David Ewens *Education Outcomes for Children in Care* (forthcoming, GLA)

42. For a preliminary analysis of the categories of young people who 'go missing' from the NPD record, and of the schools they attend, see David Ewens *Social Selection, Social Sorting and Education -2: 'Missing' children* GLA DMAG Briefing 2008-27, and available at the time of writing from <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/plugin/publications/>

43. Remarkably little is known about the achievement of pupils placed in alternative provision, but what little is known points to very low levels of attainment indeed. See web tables P1 to P6 associated with DfE Statistical Release 01 2011 *GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2009/10 (Revised)* available at the time of writing at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/index.shtml>

44. The Sure Start programme and the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project, were both predicated on this reality. For one account of the Sure Start project see Naomi Eisenstadt *Providing a Sure Start. How Government Discovered Early Childhood Policy* Press 2011. A range of documents associated with the national evaluation of Sure Start is available at <http://education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/evidence/b0069449/publications-from-the-national-evaluation-of-sure-start>.

A child's pre-school home learning environment will have an impact on his or her readiness for school. The measures of the home learning environment used in the EPP study are give in Edward Melhuish, Kathy Silva, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart, EPPE Technical Paper 7. *Social/behavioural and Cognitive Development at 3-4 years in relation to family background March 2001* Institute of Education University of London and the Department for Education and Skills 2001 page 9. Further information about the EPPE project is available at <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe/eppeintro.htm>

In London children begin the first year of full-time year at age 4 in primary school Reception Classes. A 'Foundation Stage Profile' is used to gather information on the children's readiness for school.

45. See *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011 and available at the time of writing at

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/f/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan>

46. For example see Alison Wolf *Does Education Matter?* Chapter 5 *Does Business Know Best?* pages 98 to 130.

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