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## Pathways to "opportunity and excellence": collaborative curriculum innovation in South Yorkshire

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# **Pathways to Opportunities and Excellence: Collaborative Curriculum Innovation at 13+ in South Yorkshire**

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## **Introduction**

This paper reports on two aspects of a large-scale curriculum project currently taking place in four LEAs in South Yorkshire. The first of these is concerned with the positive and negative influences on effective curriculum innovation and is addressed from the perspective of the LEA project managers who are managing the delivery of the project in the region's schools. The second aspect considers what the pupils (Year 10, age 14-15) think about the new learning opportunities. The project is set in the context of regional regeneration.

The two research questions are:

1. What are the barriers and drivers for effective curriculum innovation at 13+ at the level of schools, LEAs and other providers?
2. How are the new learning opportunities impacting on Y10 pupils, particularly in respect to allowing them the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that will be helpful to the regeneration of South Yorkshire?

Stakeholder analysis is the primary type of analysis used in this paper, encompassing as it does a range of different methodologies for analysing stakeholder interests. Its purpose is to determine whose interests should be taken into account when making a decision. Consideration must be given to those individuals and groups who could damage or weaken the outcomes, those who support or strengthen the outcomes and thirdly, those who are in a position to influence the outcomes either positively or negatively Crosby (1991).

Force field analysis, is one such methodology, developed by Kurt Lewin that helps to identify forces that resist change and to enable strategies to be developed to overcome the resistance. It is a method for listing, discussing and dealing with the forces that make possible or obstruct change. This method was used to create a set of drivers and barriers to effective curriculum change, and to help answer research question one.

Consumers may be viewed as stakeholders but as they frequently have little power to influence decisions; their views may not be sought, certainly at the critical initial stages of implementation. Indeed, research has often omitted the views of the young

people who are the recipients of change. Hazel (1995) has commented that "*There has been a tendency to treat young people as passive subjects whose opinions are peripheral to the understanding of the issues which fundamentally affect them.*". The importance of listening to secondary pupils' views has been recognised by, amongst others, Cullingford (2002), Fullan (2001), Gillborn & Youdell (2000) and Rudduck et al (1996). In relation to school improvement, Duffield et al (2000) point out that pupils are generally construed as beneficiaries of school improvements but their views have been discounted except as a managerial tool for school self-evaluation. The pupil's voice is also seen as an important element in understanding teaching and schooling more generally (McCullum et al, 2000). The work of these writers on examining pupils as stakeholders is used to help answer research question two.

## **Background to Pathways to Success**

Pathways to Success is an extensive programme of curriculum development for 13-19 year olds in South Yorkshire, supported by the European Social Fund via Objective 1. Unique within Europe, as it is the first time that ESF has been used to support pre-16 education, the programme is the focus of considerable attention and interest; it is designed to strengthen vocational achievement and equip the future workforce to meet the needs of the area. A key focus of Objective 1 is to build a world leading learning region in order to increase and improve employment opportunities and to foster equity and social cohesion.

South Yorkshire receives Objective 1 funding because unemployment is higher than the European average, due to the decline of the traditional steel and coal industries, and the gross domestic product for the region is less than 75% of the European average. Around £700M of European funding is matched by £1.1 billion of other UK public and private funding with the aim of creating 35,000 new jobs, starting over 1000 new businesses, training young people in the skills needed for new industries, developing and renewing deprived communities and boosting the economy.

Pathways to Success is timely as it coincides with and reflects the Government's Green Paper *Extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002) and the subsequent policy paper *Opportunity and excellence* (DfES, January 2003). The curriculum for young people at Key Stage 4 is developing in ways that will, potentially, offer more flexibility and be more responsive to pupils' individual needs. Delivery of this new, flexible curriculum will see increased collaboration among schools, colleges, training providers and employers so that a wide range of education, training and accreditation opportunities are available to the full range of young people 13-19.

Pathways to Success is a partnership programme across four Local Education Authorities - Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield - and comprises three strands of activity. *Enhanced Curriculum* (EC) supports schools to improve students' access to vocational learning and qualifications. *Key Skills* (KS) allows schools additional funding to improve provision related to the development of Key Skills and their accreditation. *Re-engagement with Learning* (RE) is focused upon the development of appropriate opportunities for those young people who are unlikely to reach their full potential through the National Curriculum.

The European Social Fund has enabled staff across South Yorkshire to develop a range of innovative teaching and learning strategies and resources which are designed to motivate, engage and accredit young people, so that they can make

better progress in education, training and employment. New training opportunities have been facilitated for staff across the region.

The operation of Pathways to Success is facilitated by new and enhanced partnerships between the four Local Education Authorities and a wide range of providers: the 76 secondary schools, local colleges and training providers, the voluntary and community sectors, employers and examination boards. The programme has also been supported by local and national government organisations. The experience of managing, monitoring and evaluating such a large partnership programme offers a rich source of quantitative and qualitative data, which can inform future practice. It is significant that this is the first time that the four LEAs have worked together on a project of this scale (worth around £36M over 3 years).

Local Education Authorities within South Yorkshire appointed managers for each strand at the start of the programme. As the initiative has developed, managers have been required to overcome many difficulties in order to achieve success. Working collaboratively, they have focused upon drivers and barriers to curriculum innovation to develop solutions at both a local and sub regional level and they have built upon the positive forces for change to make progress.

### **Curriculum change**

McBeath (1995) in her review of research into curriculum change concluded that:

*Curriculum change is a complex and difficult process and requires careful planning, adequate time, funding and support and opportunities for teacher involvement. ....The complexity of the change process means that, as research seeks key concepts, it must also recognise the dynamics of each innovation as being uniquely different.*

*Smooth and successful curriculum change is enormously difficult and time consuming and cannot be accomplished without potential implementers becoming personally involved and accepting the change on their own terms and according to their own constructs of reality.*

The Pathways to Success initiative resonates with this perspective of curriculum change. It has been centrally driven, but has a strong teacher involvement in development and decision making. The 12 project managers across South Yorkshire play a key role in encouraging schools to participate and negotiate with learning providers; they also facilitate networking and the sharing of good practice among teachers. Through their direct contact with schools, teachers, learning providers and policy makers they are in a unique position to make judgements about the drivers and barriers for curriculum change and the following section outlines the key influences, which, on reflection, have shaped the development of the curriculum initiatives.

### **Barriers and Drivers for Effective Curriculum Innovation**

In this section, the project managers present a narrative of the development of their understanding of barriers and drivers to change, and their relationship to the Pathways to Success project outcomes.

Forcefield analysis, as noted above, is a management technique developed by Kurt Lewin in 1951. It is a useful tool for assessing the forces for and against a decision -

or in our case the project. Sheffield LEA made use of this technique in the initial planning of the Pathways to Success programme. This technique enabled the LEA to develop strategies to overcome the barriers which would stand in the way of project success and also to encourage the forces which were working in favour. The following figure (Figure 1) is a further development of this original forcefield analysis and was formulated after discussion and reflection by project managers from each of the LEAs, at the end of the first phase of the project. It is hoped that these findings will provide new insights for the second phase of the Pathways programme (2003-2006).

**Figure 1: Drivers and Barriers for Effective Curriculum Innovation**

Drivers	Barriers
Funding per school per year – for co –ordination, preparation time and resource purchase	
	ESF bureaucracy and paperwork, lack of joined-up thinking as a consequence of over-reliance on funding
'Added value' of joined up thinking and practice	
	Legal demands; initiative overload
Need to raise attainment, attendance, motivation and progression	
	Competition between providers and clash of cultures between organisations/ LEAs
Substantial and free professional development programme for teachers	
	Lack of capacity amongst providers to cater for increased training needs
Development of professional networks aids WRL	
	Child Protection and Health and Safety Issues
Additionality of accreditation boosts pupils' will to succeed	
	Qualifications and progress for WRL post-16
Accessible learning style with manageable chunks of learning for pupils	
	Universities slow to fully recognise key skills
Reduces number of pupils who leave without a qualification and builds their self confidence	
	Cross-curricular portfolio development is complicated
A chance for schools to develop a more flexible and innovative curriculum	
	No real robust links with employers
Ties in with the national agenda for education and training	
	Lack of effective national publicity about Pathways

### **Barriers to effective curriculum innovation 14-19**

In the initial stages of the programme schools found the task of understanding and meeting the demands of claiming European Social Fund extremely onerous; some staff felt that the whole process might be counter productive in the drive to raise standards and develop the curriculum. However, where schools allocate sufficient administrative support to the programme, the business of managing the collection of evidence and the completion of the claim seems to have become less troublesome as the programme has progressed.

Clearly, there are benefits from additional, external funding but there is a concern that the plethora of short- term targeted funding streams can work against continuity of provision and coherent curriculum planning. School staff can suffer from initiative overload. Furthermore, the potential problem of double counting beneficiaries and/or outcomes can lead to an emphasis on funding rather than on provision and supporting young people. This can result in a lack of 'joined up' thinking and 'joined up' structures.

At the start of the programme, the LEA officers were required to spend a great deal of time in consultation with council solicitors in order to draw up contracts, service level agreements and commissions for external suppliers. This initially hampered cash flow to schools, challenged relationships and inhibited development.

The collaborative approach to curriculum initiatives, described above, has allowed for real innovation across South Yorkshire, but the developments have been difficult at times. The region has an extensive range of providers within the further education, work-based learning, community and voluntary sectors. Hitherto, there has been a certain amount of competition amongst providers. It has been necessary to begin to break down barriers between organisations and to demonstrate that not only is there a part to play for all good quality provision, but that it is often possible to achieve added value for young people and providers by working in collaboration. Sometimes, clashes of culture and ethos can make collaboration difficult, but as the programme has progressed, barriers are beginning to reduce. Even amongst the four LEAs working on the Pathways project there is a disparity of size, culture, ethos, structure and approach, which can occasionally present a challenge to programme managers.

As the programme has gained momentum, and increasing numbers of young people are offered activities out of school, we have found that there is a lack of capacity amongst providers to offer the amount and range of training and activity that is required. Whilst this offers an impetus to find creative solutions to the problem there is sometimes a lack of balance between the development of the curriculum and the need to engage young people in appropriate education.

As the curriculum develops and more young people are educated off school premises, concerns around the Health and Safety and Child Protection are increased. The development of the systems and safeguards required to ensure that due care is taken in relation to these issues is time consuming and complex.

Within Pathways to Success there have been efforts to ensure that curriculum activity is accredited wherever possible. However, this is not always straightforward. There is a contradiction between the Government's drive for a flexible curriculum, delivered by a range of organisations, and the pressure for schools to perform well in league tables. It is likely that in the long term a wider range of qualifications will be accepted as part of schools' points score, but at present there is a mismatch between the qualifications that schools would like to offer and the qualifications that 'count'. The range of qualification frameworks and the fact that new or non-traditional qualifications are often slow to be recognised further complicates accreditation.

There is evidence of some resistance within schools to the introduction of new qualifications, particularly those with an emphasis on the vocational. The drive for parity of esteem between what has traditionally been viewed as academic and what is vocational is an ongoing challenge and thus a barrier to curriculum innovation. Negative media attention, particularly in the area of Key Skills development and the fact that higher education establishments have been slow to recognise the qualifications compounds this problem.

In reviewing the concept of vocational education Lum (2003) reminds us that *vocational education in the UK is regarded as a concrete commodity, a product to be delivered to objective standards and clear cut specifications. ..The educator is increasingly marginalised - turned at best into a facilitator and that this is connected with the long standing debate about theory and practice, knowing and doing.*

Current arrangements, according to Lum, might be grouped according to how they are based on three interrelated assumptions:

- skills, competences or capabilities can be non problematically related to definite ends or outcomes
- skills, competences etc. are inert in the sense that a person's view of the world is not transformed
- there is an epistemological assumption that that there are two kinds of knowledge - knowing *how* and knowing *that*

While Lum recognises that this concept of vocational education is neither new nor unique, it does provide a way of understanding the resistance reported by project managers in some schools to the introduction of new vocational courses. It is likely that a significant number of teachers would have concerns about their possible role change towards 'facilitators', and also possibly a feeling that teachers might be giving less emphasis to the 'opening of minds' in the future.

The introduction of vocational courses has also impacted on assessment practices and the development of course work/portfolios across a number of different subject areas and a number of different organisations. This can cause problems for staff and students. Teachers are recognising the importance of keeping track of students' work and establishing clear systems to ensure that accreditation requirements are understood and met.

Within South Yorkshire there is still a need for more robust links with employers in order to provide authenticity in work-related learning. A barrier to the effective development of work-related learning in South Yorkshire is the paucity of employers with the capacity to become involved in work with young people.

### **Drivers for effective curriculum innovation 13-19**

There is little doubt that the large amount of European Social Fund (up to £80K per annum, per school) available to South Yorkshire schools has proved to be a major incentive for change. Schools have bowed to the bureaucratic demands of the ESF, despite early doubts about capacity to meet monitoring requirements, and have gradually improved their ability to understand and recognise opportunities for 'match' within the school system. The task of claiming ESF has improved schools' ability to see connections between separate initiatives and funding streams and has enabled them to improve the communication and 'joined up' thinking and practice which results in added value for pupils and staff. Externally funded programmes such as Aim Higher, Excellence Challenge and the provision of Learning Mentors have been linked to Pathways work and this has supported the development of a flexible yet coherent 13-19-curriculum. As time moves on, there is evidence that not only activity but also structures and resourcing strategies are beginning to alter in South Yorkshire schools, enabling them to offer a more varied and appropriate range of provision. Pathways to Success has undoubtedly played a part in these changes, both at individual school and authority level.

The establishment of professional networks to enhance vocational curriculum development, and enhanced employer links is supporting the growth of high quality work-related learning. Common referral processes to be used by a wide range of agencies to allow vulnerable young people to access education and training are emerging across the sub region.

There is, for every school, an imperative to meet national and local targets related to attainment, achievement, accreditation, attendance and exclusion. South Yorkshire has a record of underachievement in relation to national standards in education and training and the numbers of NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) is above the national average. Pathways to Success has proved to be an important vehicle in the development of the 14-19 strategy in South Yorkshire and schools are beginning to witness the hard outcomes which signal improvement in achieving targets.

Tackling underachievement in South Yorkshire is complex and schools are recognising teaching and learning as a central concern. Clearly, pupil-focused teaching methods pre-date the Pathways programme, but the additional support the initiative has offered, in the form of funding, staffing, training, and networking, has proved invaluable in changing teaching methods in the battle to raise achievement and improve opportunities for continuity and progression in education, training and employment. It is interesting here to compare the above perceptions of project managers with those of Raffo (2003) who reports on a work-related project to raise achievement in Manchester, particularly for disaffected/disenfranchised young people. One of his findings is that there is a tension between the need to both improve pupils' attainment in school at KS4 and to encourage pupils to remain in full-time education or training. He feels that a consequence of such tensions is that some young people may be less willing to participate fully at school.

Not only have there been changes around accepted models of teaching, both in and outside of the classroom, but there have been changes in curriculum content and models of accreditation. An emphasis on vocational education and a flexible curriculum, in line with Government policy, has necessitated collaborative models of delivery and increased support for pupils - often offered by non-teaching staff. There is a need to make learning and accreditation accessible for all. Staff are recognising that young people have a range of learning styles and learning needs which can be addressed in the delivery of Key Skills, specialist (vocational) GCSEs and the wide variety of re-engagement activities on offer.

The emergence of specialist (vocational) GCSEs and other vocational qualifications has supported curriculum innovation. Within South Yorkshire, the new qualifications are amongst a number of courses that are delivered collaboratively between schools, colleges and other providers. At a national level, a recent Ofsted report (August 2003) on the introduction of new GCSEs has found that the new courses do not yet enhance the development of the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT and recommends that schools make these courses available to a wider range of pupils, not just the lower attainers. The additional support for key skills funded by Pathways to Success has enabled the development of cross curricular activity to ensure that skills development is not bolt-on, is integrated with the wider curriculum and available to the full ability range in many schools.

Managing the curriculum diet and learning experience for challenging young people, through a broad range of activities, can be support intensive. However, the demonstrable success of vocational education, delivered in more appropriate environments to match individual learning plans, has speeded the process of change



and has allowed South Yorkshire schools to forge ahead in the drive for curriculum innovation.

Recognition that positive experiences for young people are key elements in successful education and training has been an important force in the Pathways to Success programme. Improved confidence and self-esteem flow from challenging yet enjoyable curriculum experiences where young people are supported in gaining success. An important feature of the Pathways programme has been the celebration of success events and in some respects, the whole school has benefited from the innovative programme.

The delivery of a new and varied curriculum to young people 13-19 relies upon the co-operation and collaboration of local providers from a range of sectors. Each Local Authority has strengthened relationships with local providers to develop new provision that meets the needs of local youngsters. The largely collaborative approach adopted allows for economies of scale and the shared use and management of data to develop capacity in appropriate provision.

It is important to recognise that a collaborative approach, across an authority or even the sub region allows strand managers to compare the nature and quality of provision in an area and to begin to develop quality frameworks that help in the drive to raise standards. The sharing of good practice has been a key feature of the programme.

### **Pathways to Success: The Positive Outcomes - as identified by the 12 LEA project managers**

- An increase in qualifications and awards gained by South Yorkshire pupils at Key stage 4 contributing to raising overall attainment, attendance and progression
- Support for the development and delivery of a wide range of motivational and work-related learning opportunities, including enhanced work experience placements
- Development of a wide range of accreditation opportunities
- Quality professional development, training and networking opportunities for teachers; a number of teachers involved in the Pathways programme have advanced their careers
- Development of support documentation such as course guidance, procedural guidance and resources for teachers and learners
- Time for school staff to prepare, plan, monitor and assess new learning opportunities
- Creation of several web sites to facilitate communication and disseminate good practice across the sub region eg [www.sykeyskills.co.uk](http://www.sykeyskills.co.uk)
- Positive publicity opportunities for South Yorkshire LEAs and schools
- Development of strong partnerships between providers, including schools, further and higher education, work-based learning providers, the community, voluntary sectors and employers
- Strengthened working relationships between the four LEAs which have provided added value to the sub region
- Qualitative evidence of improved confidence among teachers and pupils as a result of participation in the programme. Even where there are no qualification outcomes among pupils there is evidence of progress in terms of attendance, attitude, aspiration and progression
- Impact on whole school organisational structure and planning to enable the delivery of a more flexible curriculum

- Impact on structures operating within LEAs to support vulnerable young people
- Project evaluation by Sheffield Hallam University leading to a national conference to take place in July 2004

When comparing the above positive outcomes with the HMI survey of 14-16 provision (Ofsted, 2003 b, para. 167) it is clear that many South Yorkshire schools are on the way to successfully identifying and providing for the aptitudes and ambitions of their pupils.

## **Pupil Perspectives**

### **Methodological Issues**

Jean Rudduck, co-ordinator of the ESRC Network Project, *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning*, argues that *"There are many reasons for taking seriously what pupils have to say about teaching, learning and schooling: most importantly our concern about pupils who disengage.."* She suggests that it is a priority to consult young people, *"they have a lot to tell us: they are observant, analytical, and on the whole their voices are constructive..."* (Ruddock, 2002)).

Case study schools (13) were selected using a number of criteria devised by the Evaluation Steering Group to provide a representative range of schools in the region. The criteria included: school age range, specialist status, achievement range, prior involvement with pilot projects, and schools in inner city, urban and rural environments. Towards the end of the first year of the project, between March and July 2003, the research team conducted focus group interviews in each case study school with Year 10 pupils from each of the three strands, Enhanced Curriculum (EC), Key Skills (KS) and Re-engagement with Learning (RE). The pupils interviewed were selected by the school as representative of the cohort. They will be further interviewed termly until the end of Year 11. It is also intended to seek teachers's views on the progress of pupils from data held in school reports, and to review their progress with form tutors in order to come to a better understanding of the impact of Pathways on young people.

There are, however, methodological difficulties involved in the collection of data, notably the difficulties involved in establishing open communication with children and in breaking down cultural and communication barriers. The methodology, that of semi-structured interviews, was chosen following discussion with teachers and project managers. The focus of questions was again agreed with teachers in the case study schools. The aim was to obtain pupils' views on their current Y10 experience and its usefulness for post-16 transition, careers advice received, future career plans and post-16 aspirations. Rudduck and Flutter (undated) suggest that the richest data can come from interviews or carefully handled group discussions, especially where the interview or discussion can be recorded in full notes or on a tape recorder. Where possible, our interviews were tape recorded and took place in a variety of settings. Attempts were made to enable pupils to talk freely and openly and to ensure that the interviewees included a range of pupils, male and female of various abilities. No attempts were made to make comparisons between schools or to analyse by gender or by ability grouping.

## **Choice of course**

Pupils in all schools felt that they had received thorough or adequate advice and information about the options available to them for KS4. The information giving process included Y9 parents' evenings, letters to parents, talks to Y9 pupils in large groups, booklets, form tutor advice and careers advice. Many schools were able to give each Y9 pupil an interview with a senior member of staff. In some schools, Y9 pupils were given short introductions (taster sessions) to unfamiliar subjects such as Leisure and Tourism and some visits to colleges had taken place.

Re-engagement (RE) pupils were most likely to have received individual counselling concerning the choice of KS4 options. In one case, a respected drama teacher had advised the pupil to take part in the Re-engagement option. In another school, pupils felt they had been selected for the Transition into Independence course. Pupils reported that their parents were generally in favour of the option chosen and thought that the vocational element would be of value. Some pupils said that their parents were quite happy to let them choose what options to take.

Enhanced Curriculum pupils appeared to make choices based on personal preferences, for example several pupils mentioned wanting to do work that involved ICT. Others had been involved in taster courses in Y9 and found them interesting. Some pupils felt that the course selected would help them with future post-16 and career plans and others were attracted by the possibility of obtaining the equivalent of two or four GCSEs. Some pupils wanted to try out something different, especially if they had not enjoyed history or geography at KS3.

Pupils appeared to feel that they had a real choice at KS4 even when there had been advice from teachers. This contradicts the views of Gillborn and Youdell (2000, p206) *Pupils feel largely powerless in a system that assesses them, labels them, tells them the 'appropriate' subjects to study and dictates the level of examination that is in 'their best interests*. Data from schools visits confirm that case study schools have dedicated significant resources to preparing pupils for options at KS4 and use is made of the tracking data generated from KS2 & 3 results and other assessments, school reports, attendance and behaviour patterns. It appears that pupils recognise the importance of the transition to KS4 and feel adequately prepared.

## **Pupils' likes and dislikes**

Many of the RE pupils interviewed had been, and some still were, at risk of exclusion; many had been very poor attenders at KS3 and the majority were low achievers. However, the pupils interviewed were extremely positive in their comments about their Y10 experiences.

Some pupils were on work placements for three days a week while others were on shorter placements. However, they all enjoyed the adult environment of the workplace and many felt that they got on better with school staff now and even mentioned getting on better with parents and family members.

Pupils also liked the variety involved in the combination of work placement and school, they enjoyed practical work, meeting people and travelling. Some pupils worked with pupils from other schools when on college courses and said that they liked meeting people from different areas. Using and developing other skills were mentioned. One male pupil enjoyed working under pressure as a trainee chef.

It was interesting to find that pupils were also positive about the time they spent in school. They liked being part of a smaller group, working with learning mentors and in some cases having their own less formal accommodation. *"We call them by their first names and they treat us differently. We like being in the Goldfish Bowl."* (Learning Mentors' base room). A recent Ofsted report (2003a) found that the learning mentors appointed under the Excellence in Cities programme are having a significant effect on the attendance, behaviour, self esteem and progress of the pupils they support.

RE pupils followed the core curriculum in school (maths, English, science, PE, PHSE and religious education) and generally thought that these subjects were useful. One girl felt that she learnt more in two days than she would have done in five as they were kept busy and there was no time to get bored. Many pupils singled out Applied Science as a subject that they enjoyed because they liked the links between the science and vocational elements. They could see the relevance of the subject to the world of work.

Enhanced Curriculum pupils were also very positive about their courses. They all enjoyed the opportunities to get out of school on visits. Visits had been made to a variety of venues in the local area such as the Doncaster Dome Leisure Centre, Meadowhall Shopping Centre, a cinema complex, and the Jaguar car factory. Some pupils had been on residential courses, for example a weekend at the Earth Centre or a week at the Outward Bound Centre at Aberdovey.

Pupils liked the structure of GNVQ or specialist (vocational) GCSE courses with the greater emphasis on course work. Most pupils also enjoyed the emphasis on ICT and felt that their improved skills would help them in the workplace. Some pupils mentioned that they liked being more responsible for their own learning, *"The teacher sets us deadlines and we are responsible for getting the work done."*

Very few pupils reported negative feelings about their KS4 option. A few RE pupils didn't like getting up earlier and having a short lunch break when on work placement. Some found aspects of school work hard because of the amount of homework given. One EC focus group felt that *"Only lazy pupils don't like it. They let themselves and others down."*

Pupils frequently reported feelings of stress lower down the school when faced with large amounts of homework or on occasions such as being asked to read aloud to the class. Solomon and Rogers (2001) reported that disaffected pupils avoid or disrupt lessons they feel are stressful or difficult. The authors suggest that interventions to help disaffected pupils might be *"better located in the context of regular schooling, aimed at raising self efficacy in specific curriculum areas"* rather than in separate vocational provision. Pupils reported that Y10 had been less stressful and they felt more confident and successful. It would appear that the combination of vocational work with the in-school curriculum devised by the schools is suiting the pupils interviewed.

EC pupils in one school had suffered from frequent changes in staff because of illness and there was one mention of shortage of text books. Most pupils appeared very satisfied with ICT resources which they said had improved in the last year.

## **Pupils' feelings about themselves**

In many schools, setting is used at least for core subjects at KS3. Pupils see this as labelling and it can have a profound negative effect on pupils' motivation (Demetriou et al 2000). RE pupils have usually spent the first three years of their secondary schooling in bottom sets. According to Chaplain, disengaged pupils have lower self concepts and self esteem than their engaged peers (Rudduck et al, 1996). They have characteristics that tend to make it difficult to achieve academically such as 'giving up easily at school work' and are more likely to be fed up with school on a regular basis.

RE pupils interviewed appeared to have benefited a great deal from their involvement in the work-related programme. All pupils interviewed said that they now felt more confident and attributed this to having opportunities to talk to a wide range of people in the work place and on visits. EC pupils felt that interviewing people when working on assignments had forced them to become more confident, assertive and articulate. In some schools, work placements were used as a vehicle for assessing Communication and other Key Skills.

The vast majority of RE pupils were still on the programme at the end of Y10, whereas teachers and pupils themselves believed that several would have dropped out or would have been excluded if they had been following traditional GCSE courses. In one school, 42 out of 44 RE pupils were still on the course. The two missing pupils were long term absentees and there had been no exclusions, in spite of several members of this group having been at risk in Y9.

All pupils reported that they were trying harder this year; they saw the relevance of what they are doing and felt that they were achieving greater success than in previous years. Results in Applied Science were mentioned in particular. In one school which had received a favourable Ofsted report for the subject, pupils reported grades of A or B for recent assessments. In some cases, this was the first time these students had achieved such high grades and they were very pleased. *"There's lots of work but it's worth it."* (m. Applied Science).

RE pupils said that their attendance had improved, and some mentioned they now had achieved 100% attendance. Typical responses were:- *"We behave better, more like adults."* *"We are doing something we like."* *"We are getting better grades at school now."* One RE pupil (m) had 85% attendance in Y9 but 100% in Y10. He had gained a prize, been appointed deputy head boy and is doing three vocational courses.

## **Teaching and learning styles**

Pupils seemed to be aware of their learning styles and needs. Two RE girls described how they had always had problems with reading and writing which meant that they had always done badly in school. *"I'm like a bit slow....I can't write my thoughts down... I think, what can I write down instead of that word?....I can't just pick up a book. It's got to be pictures, diagrams and like. You know, things to remember,"* (articulate female pupil). These pupils were enjoying the practical work on placement and in Applied Science and felt that they were being successful. The RE co-ordinator commented that it was probably the first time in their school careers that these pupils were achieving A and even B grades. The school is recognising the different needs of pupils and investing in lap top computers for use in Applied Science.

RE and EC pupils thought that lessons were now more relaxed and they were treated more like students. They enjoyed the obvious links between work in school and the workplace. EC pupils liked the assignment based work with a research element, especially when there were opportunities to improve grades. In most cases, pupils were in smaller classes, usually about 16 in size and they liked the arrangements provided for more interaction with the teacher and other pupils; they felt that their peers were supportive. Most pupils appreciated having deadlines to meet as this gave them more responsibility. Many pupils felt that their teachers treated them better this year. *"They treat you like working people"* (m construction placement). Many pupils commented that they did not mind doing two or three days in school and could see the relevance of the core curriculum, but would not have been able to cope with five days in school.

The employment of Learning Mentors and the creation of innovative posts spanning the pastoral and administrative function have meant that pupils have been able to establish relationships with a wider range of adults. As previously described, pupils enjoyed the informality of these relationships and, where purpose-built units had been established, enjoyed working in a more relaxed and friendly environment. The traditional classroom setting still holds many bad memories for significant numbers of these pupils. McLaughlin and Talbot note that non-traditional students struggle in these *"teacher-directed, sometimes impersonal classrooms"* (Fullan, 2001). Many pupils enjoyed the greater freedom and trust involved in vocational work. *"I need a bit of freedom...I don't like being in a little prison. I need to be out doing things"* (f, motor mechanics placement).

Pupils rated highly the teaching styles and personalities of their training providers. They said they liked being treated as adults and tutors gave them a lot of help. Some pupils reported their tutors would spend time talking to them about problems on a one to one basis, something that their teachers could not do in big classes. *"There, (the placement) they treat me like gold"* (f mechanics placement). Research indicates *"that such 'friendly adults' can be invaluable for these young people who are disengaged"* (Coldron et al 2002).

## **Key Skills**

Pupils' perceptions of the Key Skills element of the curriculum are varied, however all agree that Key Skills are important. In one school, Key Skills ICT is being taught through religious education at KS4 and this has improved pupils' motivation in both subjects. *"RE (religious education) can be boring and ICT can be meaningless on its own."* They liked doing PowerPoint presentations on aspects of religious buildings and then giving presentations to Y7 pupils. In another school where ICT is taught as a separate lesson, some pupils said that it could be boring as they felt their ICT skills were already good.

The wider Key Skills are frequently evidenced and assessed through work experience and many pupils mentioned that their communication skills had improved on work experience. Problem solving skills were evidenced on placement. For example, the interviewer observed a group of RE pupils on a motor mechanics placement. Their task towards the end of their placement was to make one good car out of two. One car had a 10 month's MOT but the second car had some better components. Students had to make decisions based on observations, calculations and prior knowledge. When observed, pupils were taking measurements and studying fixings to see if front seats could be exchanged. They were taking the task seriously, working well together and communicating effectively. They thought that this

was a really good task to do as it was useful, involved new skills and gave them a lot of responsibility.

Even pupils who did not enjoy writing said that they didn't mind filling in the booklets where they recorded evidence for Key Skills. They liked compiling portfolios and adding material such as photographs, certificates and press cuttings to show achievement. Schools are getting local publicity for their KS4 achievements and this also increases pupils' sense of self worth.

### **Perceptions of the future**

According to Rudduck et al (1996), disengaged pupils show high levels of anxiety about their future chances and the working world. The Pathways pupils interviewed, however, appeared to have benefited from careers and options advice, vocational tasters and placements and, in Y10, appeared fairly confident about what they would do when they left school. All had received careers advice which was regarded as only slightly useful at this stage. Some had definite ideas about post-16 choices and future careers, for example, to become an electrician with the firm where he was on placement or become a chef where he had been offered an apprenticeship while on placement. Others wanted to go to college to pursue vocational studies and some wanted to wait until Y11 before making up their minds. Some pupils had obtained Saturday and holiday jobs through their placements and some had even been offered jobs when they left school. Pupils in these situations were very proud of their success.

Conversely, some of the higher achieving EC pupils interviewed appeared more worried about the future. Some were considering A level courses and possible university entrance and this was, for many, a step into the unknown. Schools were trying to overcome barriers and visits to colleges and universities had taken place and some pupils had attended ACE days at Barnsley College where they were able to work with College students and to consider post-16 opportunities. Some pupils had already visited universities such as Lincoln and Durham, but still felt that university entrance would be frightening and difficult because of financial worries and the unknown change in locality and lifestyle. Sheffield Hallam University first year Education students had been involved in mentoring projects in some schools where small groups of Y10 pupils worked with pairs of University students on exercises to develop communication and study skills. This initiative enabled pupils to find out more about university life from students from similar backgrounds.

### **Conclusion**

Some previous studies, (Saunders, Stoney and Weston (1997), quoted in Cullingford (2002 p.158) show that work-related provision has little impact when not fully integrated into the curriculum. The experiences of Pathways pupils appear to demonstrate that the fully integrated EC, KS and RE programmes are seen by the pupils to be enjoyable and beneficial. There are signs that the guidance for good practice in the publication *Vocational and work-related learning at key stage 4* (DfES, 2002) - which is a response to Ofsted's national evaluation: *Extending work-related learning at key stage 4* (Ofsted, 2001) - is being taken on board by schools in South Yorkshire and developments are being accelerated by the Pathways to Success project.

Many of the drivers identified by the project co-ordinators are supported by the pupils' views. Project funding has enabled pupils to access an alternative curriculum and experience vocational tasters and work experience placements. The more flexible and innovative curriculum is appreciated by pupils who say that their confidence has increased; they are proud of their improved performance and keen to succeed. There are early signs that attainment, attendance and motivation are improving. Year 10 pupils are already considering post -16 options and some even have offers of jobs when they leave school.

Few of the barriers identified by project co-ordinators appear to impinge on pupils' perceptions. A small minority of pupils reported some problems with choice of work placement, but most appear satisfied and want to continue in the same area in Y11.

The extremely positive responses from the sample of pupils in all three strands of the programme indicate that the greater emphasis on vocational work and work experience in schools is having a strong motivational effect on pupils who are responding with improved attendance, behaviour and achievement.



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