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# **New Pathways: evaluating the implementation of a major work- related programme in Northern England**

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## **Introduction**

The evaluative research upon which this paper is based is focussed on the implementation of a three-year programme “Pathways to Success” (usually shortened to “Pathways”) in South Yorkshire, England. It is part of a much larger regional regeneration project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) from 2001-2004. South Yorkshire receives this funding (known as Objective 1 funding) as 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 £700 million 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.

The Pathways programme is concerned with developing innovative curricula for the 14-19 age range in four Local Education Authorities (LEAs)<sup>1</sup> and is taking place in 76 secondary (high) schools. A feature of the ESF-funded projects is that they are commissioned and implemented by partnerships. For example, the Pathways to Success programme involves a partnership of LEAs, the local Learning and Skills Council<sup>2</sup>, the Department for Education and Skills<sup>3</sup> and Connexions<sup>4</sup>. There is also wide representation from employers and the community.

The central government policy initiatives that are guiding the development of Pathways to Success have recently been published in two consultation documents (DfES, 2002; DfES, 2003). These are informing the next phase of the development of vocational curricula in England and Wales.

Our approach to the evaluation is influenced the fact that there are three distinctive strands within Pathways operating in each of the four LEAs. It is significant to note that this is the first time that the four LEAs have worked

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<sup>1</sup> LEAs are broadly equivalent to US districts

<sup>2</sup> A government body responsible for managing and funding post-16 education in local regions

<sup>3</sup> A central government department which formulates policy and provides funding

<sup>4</sup> A government body charged with providing careers advice and help to individual learners

together on a project of this scale (worth around £8 million). The three strands to the Pathways programme are:

- Key Skills
- Enhanced Curriculum
- Re-engagement with Learning

All three strands are all concerned with broadening the school curriculum from the age of 14. The **Key Skills** strand enables pupils to develop a range of skills. In England, Key Skills have been developed at a national level and comprise communication, application of number, and information and communication technology (ICT), alongside other broader key skills such as improving own learning, problem solving and working with others. The **Enhanced Curriculum** strand provides opportunities for pupils to take part in vocational courses such as engineering, construction, leisure and tourism and health and social care, either as short or longer accredited courses. These are often held in learning environments outside the school such as in colleges or with work-based training providers. Pupils who are at risk of dropping out of education are targeted by the **Re-engagement with Learning** strand, which provides a wide range of innovative learning opportunities in and out of school, with individual learning programmes designed to suit each pupil. Usually each strand in each LEA is managed by an appointed coordinator. More details on each strand have been reported in our first Interim Report to the Project Steering Group (Holland et al, 2002) and will be reported in another forthcoming paper (Holland et al, 2003).

Within such a broad programme, there are clearly many stakeholders who have a shared responsibility for making things work in line with the notes for the AERA Annual meeting: *“True accountability mean broadly shared responsibility, not only among educators and students but also among administrators, policy makers, and educational researchers.”* Our focus is on the way these stakeholders work together to make the Pathways programme succeed in schools and in particular how the teachers at the centre of the project respond to and develop professionally through its implementation.

### **Perspectives and Research Questions**

A team from Sheffield Hallam University is responsible for evaluating the success of the Pathways programme and our findings reported here refer to the first year of implementation. The research questions addressed in this paper are:

- What factors are in place to enable the successful process of change leading to the implementation of the Pathways programme in schools?
- How are school management structures being changed to manage the additional resources?
- How is the Pathways programme affecting teaching and learning in the schools involved?

These questions were chosen to enable us to examine both the bigger picture of the schools themselves and the particular impact of the programme on the teachers and learners involved. School staff are the fulcrum on which the project is hinged: they are the link between the partners, LEA coordinators and the pupils. As such we believe that by focusing our research on teachers and project coordinators initially, we will be able to understand more clearly the development and implementation of the project as a whole.

The paper builds on recent findings (Coldwell and Holland, 2001; Trickey, 2001; Holland, Coldwell and Close, 2002) from other evaluative work undertaken in the South Yorkshire region by members of the research team.

## **Methodology and Data Sources**

The research focuses on a set of case studies in 15 schools involved in Pathways and on interviews with 14 LEA coordinators and other officers. In each case study, interviews have to date been held with over 60 teachers and support staff and a number of small groups of pupils. With the consent of teaching staff some classes have been observed. A group of about 10 representative pupils in each school are also being tracked over a two-year period. Documentary data have been collected, and interviews held with key managers and coordinators involved in the school's programme. Our findings are contextualised on information on good practice, interactions between the LEA coordinators and the schools, and teachers and pupils. The case studies will eventually include both quantitative and qualitative data.

Evaluators also attended some professional development training sessions for teachers, some guidance sessions for pupils about to make choices about their 14+ curriculum, and accompanied teachers when visiting students placed at a college or with a training provider. Some of our interview data come from non-teaching staff who are significantly involved with the pupils, such as learning mentors or managers of learning centres (based in schools to provide individual support) and administrative support staff.

The case study schools 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 (in England, some schools can specialise in particular subject areas such as languages, technology and sport), achievement range, prior involvement with pilot projects, and schools in inner city, urban and rural environments.

The difficulty of generalisability of case studies is well known and if we are to generalise our research beyond the boundaries of the region explored, we need to consider a 'fuzzy generalisation' (Bassegy, 1999: 52) or 'analytic generalisation' (Yin, 1989: 38) from cases. In this evaluative research, we cannot be sure that the population of schools as a whole will show the same responses as those in our study, but we can theorise that particular conditions within the cases are related to particular results (in terms of changes in practice and organisational development), and the case studies provide some support for that theory.

There is a long-standing debate in the literature about the relative merits of single versus multiple case studies, or what Bryman (2001) calls 'comparative design'. Intensive examination to generate theory is typical of the single case study, and some commentators argue the multiple-case designs can take the researchers' focus away from the highly specific context of each case. However, we have examined and drawn out the differences and similarities observed among a set of cases to develop theory and build typologies, in the same way that, for example, Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) identified 'common and differentiating factors that lay behind the successful management of change' (Bryman, 2001: 54) in a set of large British companies.

In the following section, we report on the three research questions in turn. This analysis can be thought of as examining three levels of the implementation of the Pathways programme in schools. First, we examine what might be thought of as the **macro** level – picking out factors across the schools that are in place to enable successful implementation of change. Second, we look at the management models in place in each school that are driving this change: the **meso** level. Finally, our analysis of the effect of the Pathways programme on teaching and learning focuses on the work in the classrooms and the project's direct impact on pupils, at the **micro** level. Although presented separately, clearly these elements are interdependent, a point we return to at the end of the paper.

## Findings

### ***The process of change: project implementation***

In the context of teaching and learning, the National Curriculum in England and Wales has been highly prescriptive and subject to mounting criticism since its imposition in 1988. Critics of the National Curriculum such as Edwards and Kelly (1998) put the case for education being a "*collaborative rather than competitive activity*" and the curriculum should support "*the growth of individuals towards empowerment, enrichment and a sense of social responsibility, and the development of a society towards a more genuinely democratic form.*" (Edwards and Kelly, 1998:19). They also argue for a curriculum "*framed in terms not of subjects but of 'forms of representation' and/or areas of experience*" (op.cit.:17). The democratic principle has to some extent now been recognised by the Government as it has now introduced 'citizenship' into the curriculum, but the fundamental principles of the subject-based curriculum are still dominant, except for the post-14 age range, the area being supported by the Pathways programme.

We argue therefore that one factor that is likely to lead to the successful implementation of a programme such as Pathways is local agreement about meeting the needs of learners rather than simply providing the same prescribed curriculum for all. The evidence collected from the interviews with the LEA coordinators and school staff is that these considerations, together with the need to improve the skills needed for employment, were embraced

when the programme was drawn up. Schools saw the proposed initiatives as providing a flexible curriculum and support for widening the opportunities of young people, and had no difficulty in supporting the programme's aims.

Our data are related to the initiation and early implementation phases of change. However, some of the changes that are supported by the Pathways funding are already embedded in the school structure and curriculum as they are extensions of previous projects. This is a complex situation and we have used the structure outlined by Miles, 1986 [cited in Hopkins et al, 1994:37] to interpret our data. We have selected this model because it fits well with our data from the beginning phases of the implementation of Pathways. The model provides a set of factors that make for successful **initiation, implementation and institutionalisation** of change.

Many teachers interviewed commented on how the Pathways programme has complemented existing provision:

*The key to Pathways was that it enabled the school to extend and sustain the work it was already doing (school C teacher)*

*The school philosophy is that these projects are integrated into the curriculum, not bolt-on. The school does not use fragile funding for core curriculum: it has to be a bonus (school E teacher)*

*The school has used ASDAN<sup>5</sup> very successfully for disaffected youngsters for about 10 years (school M teacher)*

*The Key Skills course (one lesson a week) ensures that all students are competent at practical skills by 16. Portfolio exercises are based on real life situations e.g. planning a family holiday, design of a new school uniform, design of own bedroom, lobby of an issue for Parliament (school G teacher)*

These comments provide support for Miles' criteria for initiation, in particular that of meeting a local agenda and building on existing successful practice. Key Skills were being put into the curriculum before the start of Pathways and many schools already had some provision for disaffected youngsters, who could be 'disapplied' from some GCSE subjects. Teachers recognised that each strand of the programme had a champion within each LEA (the strand coordinators) who provided assistance with planning and implementation within schools. The coordinators have also held regular briefing and training events for school representatives - all of which has resulted in teachers feeling that they are actively involved in a well thought out initiative. We therefore feel that the criteria of Miles for successful **initiation** have been met, namely:

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<sup>5</sup> ASDAN is an awarding body offering Bronze, Silver and Gold awards to pupils who complete certain 'challenges' and programmes of study

- innovation tied to a local agenda and high-profile local need
- a clear, well-structured approach to change
- an active advocate or champion who understands the innovation and supports it
- active initiation to start the innovation
- good-quality innovation

Our data for the next stage, **implementation**, show more variation in practice between schools. These relate to how schools have creatively used the Pathways funding, often together with other funding sources.

*A learning mentor was appointed as part of the Excellence in Cities programme and now has the position of Re-engagement with Learning Engagement Co-ordinator (school K teacher)*

*Three co-ordinators and an admin person have been appointed, with each teacher receiving an extra management point (school M teacher)*

*A new appointment is being made manager of the learning base, who has a youth work background (school A teacher)*

*Three senior staff manage and teach on the programme...the central co-ordinators are very helpful - staff attend these meetings and have access to staff development courses - however they cannot access many of these as it is difficult to get cover (school B teacher)*

But some teachers feel that they have increased responsibilities without financial reward:

*Difficult to do cross curriculum work (in Key Skills) because of no 'clout' in the school, no extra pay (teacher at school O)*

Other teachers commented on the usefulness of training:

*Pathways money allows staff to go out for more training - local training reported to be good with opportunities for teachers across South Yorkshire to meet (school D teacher)*

However, gaining release from schools is not always possible:

*...staff cannot access many of these as it is difficult to get cover teachers (school B teacher)*

The Key Skills element is different from the other two strands in Pathways in that often all students in years 10 and 11 are involved. The size of this initiative and the involvement of many staff in the school presents problems of its own:

*Key Skills is seen as a mixed blessing by staff. Accreditation is fine and accepted as being worthwhile but the paperwork and tracking is unwieldy producing a lot of extra work for teachers (school A teacher)*

How well do our data match the successful implementation criteria of Miles? Implementation involves:

- clear responsibility for orchestration/coordination
- shared control over implementation - good cross-hierarchical work and relations; empowerment of individuals and the school
- a mix of pressure, an insistence on doing it right and support
- adequate and sustained staff development and in-service support
- rewards for teachers early in the process (empowerment, collegiality, meeting needs, classroom help, load reduction, supply cover, expenses resources).

Our conclusion at this stage is that that teachers feel generally positive about implementation, but are concerned about additional workload and rewards. There is no doubt that many teachers are benefiting by taking on new roles and responsibilities, are engaging in more staff development activities and are being encouraged to be creative.

While still in the early stages of implementation many of the activities in the Pathways programme have been extensions of previous initiatives so it is proper to consider some of the criteria used by Miles for the next stage, that is, ***institutionalisation***. This involves:

- an emphasis on embedding the change within the school's structures, its organisation and resources
- the elimination of competing or contradictory practices
- strong and purposeful links to other change efforts, the curriculum and classroom teaching
- widespread use in the school and local area
- an adequate bank of local facilitators – advisory teachers for skills training

Institutionalisation is starting to occur. Our evidence for this comes from the changes that are being made to the curriculum structures in the schools, particularly for the 14 -16 age range. On our visits to schools teachers have explained how the option choices available to post -14 pupils are changing and what advice and guidance is given pre-14 to pupils and their parents about, for example, the re-engagement strand (which is usually given a more suitable name in schools).

*Curriculum models have been produced to match the students' choice (school G teacher)*



*The aim is for Key Skills to be fully integrated into the curriculum (school L teacher)*

*...college links are new. It is expensive to be involved with training providers. Quality is good at college, but if lecturers are ill classes are not covered which creates a problem (school O teacher)*

*The Careers Adviser comes to the Learning Base for 2 lessons a week. There is no Connexions help yet (school A teacher)*

*Good links with colleges, but colleges do not have sufficient capacity for pre-16 teaching and it is not possible to get all pupils on an appropriate course (school A teacher)*

These comments highlight some of the teachers' concerns about extending off-site learning opportunities, and the involvement of people other than teachers in the programme. While these are seen as real issues, teachers feel that provided they are raised with the appropriate bodies, that is, the LEA coordinators, appropriate action will be taken.

All schools involved in the Pathways programme are heavily monitored by LEAs and the national school inspection system (Ofsted). As such they are continually being expected to effect improvements. Does our data suggest that the Pathways programme is contributing in any way to school effectiveness and school improvement? To answer this we have mapped our data against some selected criteria from Stoll and Mortimer (Stoll and Mortimer, 1997:18-19). They note that school improvement is concerned with facilitating conditions. Our interviews with teachers and support staff suggest that the Pathways programme is contributing to some of the criteria below, particularly those in italics. These relate quite closely to the factors for successful implementation of change according to Miles discussed earlier.

- *participatory leadership*
- *shared vision and goals*
- *teamwork*
- *a learning environment*
- *emphasis on teaching and learning*
- high expectations
- positive reinforcement
- monitoring and enquiry
- pupil rights and responsibilities
- learning for all
- *partnerships and support*

It is clear that a major curriculum initiative can act as a focus for wider school improvement, as was the case in many UK schools which were involved in, for example, Schools Council and Nuffield projects in the pre-National Curriculum

era. Some of the teachers spoken to had in the past been involved in devising the Mode 3 Certificate of Secondary Examination courses, devised to meet the needs of specific groups of learners prior to the introduction of GCSE. They said that they were now being given the opportunity to influence the curriculum. Although there are several perspectives that could be discussed that relate to the school improvement literature we consider two of the above areas in the remainder of this paper - management and leadership, and the impact of Pathways on teaching and learning.

### ***The management of Pathways in schools and the decision-making process***

Overwhelmingly, the view expressed by LEA officers, as determined from individual interviews and confirmed by the Steering Group, was that schools identified as modelling good practice in managing and implementing the programme tended to have most of the following in place:

- a member of senior management has responsibility for the project
- a management team is in place which mirrors the make-up of the LEA models – a Pathways coordinator, with three strand coordinators
- Pathways work has dedicated administrative support
- many staff are involved
- coordinators have time protected to devote to Pathways
- there is a shared understanding within the school of the principles behind Pathways and a commitment to change practice

Conversely, a school was thought less likely to manage, implement and develop Pathways successfully if several of the following were true:

- strands are separated with little in-school co-ordination
- one member of staff is given responsibility for many aspects of Pathways, with little support from other colleagues
- inexperienced staff are given large amounts of responsibility with little support
- timetabled time is not committed for Pathways work for coordinators
- school involvement is centred on access to funding, rather than on Pathways principles
- lack of engagement with the need to change practice to implement Pathways.

It was also noted that such characteristics are those of schools with inadequate special funding, whatever the school's good intentions.

Did our findings from the interviews held in case study schools confirm the LEA officers' judgement? There is no simple answer because we found the systems of coordination and resource management complex and varied. It was difficult to find a pattern among the management structures for handling

the Pathways funding as each structure in the 15 schools was different. These are the major findings:

In most cases, a member of the senior management team in the school had been given overall responsibility for managing the Pathways programme, either the deputy head or the assistant head, but in 4 schools responsibilities were shared, and in one school the responsibility was nominal and real decision making lay with the coordinators of the individual strands or course leaders.

It was far from true that individual coordinators were always appointed for each of the three strands. Often Key Skills coordinators were in place, but usually the other strands were managed by the overall manager. In only one school (school M) were there 3 separate coordinators. Sometimes a person was appointed as coordinator who was not a member of the senior management team such as a curriculum development officer (school I), a guidance coordinator (school F) or a vocational education coordinator (school H).

Almost all schools had learning mentors or other non teaching staff to support pupils, but the salary of the learning mentors was sometimes resourced, all or in part, by funding from another source. In one school the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) was the Re-engagement coordinator.

Administration of the funding and record keeping was seen as a burden by all schools because of the requirement for regular monitoring, yet the administrative systems varied enormously. In some schools the administrative tasks were seen as an additional extra bolted on to the portfolio of tasks assigned to the bursar; in some the teachers shared much of the burden and in only one school (school M) was there a dedicated administrative officer to handle all the administrative tasks.

How did the various management structures originate and what was the decision-making process? Resource allocation is clearly an important element in the strategic management of the funding. It is important to note that funding only comes to the school when a delivery plan for each strand with clearly defined objectives and targets has been agreed with the LEA Coordinator.

The majority of schools had some experience of additional funding but most were relatively new to the notion of curriculum development in key skills, GNVQs and applied (vocational) GCSEs (Enhanced Curriculum) and of providing flexible curricula for disaffected youngsters (Re-engagement with Learning). Bush has argued that there are 4 main models of resource allocation in schools: rational, collegial, political and ambiguity models (Bush, 2000). It seems here that the prevalent model for the allocation of resources in these schools is the rational model. This model is encouraged in government papers and indirectly in the Pathways funding procedure with its consistent emphasis on the achievement of aims, objectives and targets, long-

term planning and links to organisational objectives - *'the selection of the best set of actions which are judged to be most likely to maximise achievement of the objectives'* (Levacic, 1995 :62).

Also the rational model, as Simkins has shown (Simkins, 1998:66), recognises the concept of value for money in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Economy means the purchase of a given standard of service at lowest cost, efficiency means the achievement of given outcomes at least cost and effectiveness the matching of results with objectives.

For some schools with years of experience of receiving extra funds to support curriculum innovation the model of resource allocation seems to fit the model of incrementalisation as they already had well-established structures to deal with additional funding; they adopted a pattern of resource allocation similar to that in previous years, rather in the way described by Knight (1983) but further work is needed to determine the models operating more precisely.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

In common with other countries (e.g. USA - see Anderman and Maehr, 1994), there is much evidence that as British pupils move through their school career from primary to secondary school (Blatchford, 1996) and, most starkly, through their later secondary years (Barber, 1996; Coldwell and Holland, 2001; Woods, 1990) their motivation and interest in school work, on the whole, deteriorates. This is accompanied by a corresponding increase in truancy (O'Keefe, 1994).

In Britain, it has been suggested that part of the explanation for this dispiriting picture lies in the National Curriculum, as we discussed briefly earlier in the paper. In its early days, not only was the National Curriculum highly prescriptive in terms of what should be taught (focusing heavily on traditional 'academic' subjects like mathematics, English and science) but also allowed little room for non-core subjects (such as music and art). Moreover, it was heavily dependent on rigid and over-prescriptive forms of assessment. It is claimed that the average British child *"sits 105 tests and exams between the ages of four and 18"* (Henry, 2002).

Recent reforms to the curriculum and current policy statements (DfES 2002; DfES 2003) have relaxed the rigid rules on the curriculum pupils must follow, and have reduced the number of compulsory subjects to be taken from the age of 14. Alongside this relaxation has come local and national impetus to develop more vocational and work-related opportunities for young people in and out of school, as one of the LEA project coordinators identified:

*Government policy to increase flexibility in the Key Stage 4 [age 14-16] curriculum in the Green Paper and what will follow in the White Paper has changed schools' attitudes. The funding has shifted schools' curriculum design. (Re-engagement with Learning Coordinator)*

The early tentative evidence from the teachers and LEA staff interviewed is that the range of alternatives provided has yielded benefits in terms of more flexible learning opportunities for young people:

*It enables the school to diversify the curriculum, in line with the Green Paper (school F manager)*

*There is now a more relevant and flexible curriculum [for the individual]. We are moving forward all the time - the old traditional way does stop that flexibility (school O manager)*

There was also much early, anecdotal evidence that pupils' motivation was improving, and this was reflected in improved attainment, behaviour and attendance:

*There are motivation and achievement gains in Key Skills - for some pupils it may be the only qualification obtained. The initial feeling is that for these students attendance has improved. (school D coordinator)*

*The youngsters attend better, but not always in school (Re-engagement coordinator)*

*Out of the 54 pupils, only 6 appear not to have improved in motivation this term (school F teacher)*

*There has been good feedback from [local college] and training providers about the behaviour of pupils. Some seem more motivated and have developed self esteem and confidence. (school K manager)*

Evidence from the recent literature on motivation (reviewed in Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000) indicates that pupils' interest can be caught by new and innovative teaching and learning opportunities. Where it is then 'held' (Mitchell, 1993, quoted in Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000) this can lead to higher levels of motivation. The introduction of new types of learning opportunities in colleges and with training providers, and using new subjects with different teaching styles, can provide this initial 'catch,' stimulating sustained interest and motivation. At this point, "*the individual's motivation can now be considered intrinsic*" (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000: 156). Interviews with teachers, and limited data from pupils, provided evidence that this intrinsic motivation is being developed:

*Pupils are enjoying their placements and improving in motivation and self esteem (school L manager)*

*[Pupil] was enthusiastic about his placement and wants to be a joiner... He talks fluently about his plans to make a dog kennel... He used appropriate technical language and*

*described how he could get help from his grandfather (from notes on interview with pupil)*

The evaluative work on the Pathways programme and other similar projects<sup>6</sup> indicates that attainment and attendance, as well as motivation to learn, in these 'non-traditional' learning environments are increased to some extent.

*There is data to show that attendance has improved. One boy was a long-term non-attender now has 100% attendance on work placement and over 90% attendance at school (school L coordinator)*

Yet it is also the case that these studies and others (such as Hall and Raffo, 2001) provide evidence that this attainment and motivation are rarely transferred into the traditional environments of the school classroom. In fact, previous research conducted by the authors (Coldwell et al, 2001) indicates that many pupils become less motivated in school environments when they return from colleges. Our research indicates that the pupils' experience practical, individualised learning in colleges with less rigid and more open relationships with college staff, and this contrasts sharply and favourably with the more traditional learning in schools.

Tensions in schools related to this new curriculum were evident. The traditional divide between vocational and academic tracks that has been shown to demotivate those on the less-esteemed non-academic tracks in the past in the UK (Lacey, 1970; Hargreaves, 1967) the US (Berends, 1995) and elsewhere (Bagnall, 2001) is still in place.

The pupils on the Pathways programme (particularly those involved in the Re-engagement with Learning and Enhanced Curriculum strands, tended to be of lower ability and were often perceived to be disruptive in traditional lessons. Although one of the LEA managers noted that one of the main aims of the programme was to "*widen the curriculum for the full ability range*", there was little evidence that the full ability range was in fact being targeted in all schools. In fact, where schools did involve pupils of higher ability, this often met with resistance from teachers of 'traditional lessons' who were unhappy that pupils were being taken out of their lessons to take part in visits to training providers, for example.

The problem of parity of esteem between vocational and academic tracks has been an issue for several years in the UK, and has recently led to policy changes in qualifications. All subjects whether vocational or not are now known by the same title; for example, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) that were taken before age 16 are being replaced by

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<sup>6</sup> These projects include 'Learning to Work' (LTW, discussed in Monteith et al, 2000) and the national evaluation of all 40 projects of which LTW was a part (see Watson et al, 2000).

'applied' General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSE), in line with the traditional non-vocational subjects.

In fact, this so-called ending of the divide is seen negatively by many teachers, since they believe that the learning and teaching styles required by the older vocational qualifications are better suited to many young people:

*The 'applied' GCSE structure seems to be more like a [traditional] GCSE structure rather than the old GNVQ structure, for example in terms of loss of self-supported study, self learning and research skills... The GNVQs are more student-friendly. Will this change with the new applied GCSEs with more content? (Re-engagement Coordinator)*

*In 2001 we introduced GNVQ in information and communications technology, and we were hoping to keep using it. But it is being done away with now and replaced with 'applied' ICT. We don't like this - we are now using full GNVQ ICT, which is similar to Part 1 - very hands on (school O coordinator)*

As this last quotation illustrates, many schools are resisting this move towards a single qualification and will not accept it until forced. Schools see the differing learning opportunities afforded by GNVQs as being more suited to Pathways pupils. In fact, the evidence gathered so far indicates that the Pathways programme has made a positive impact not just on the learning opportunities of those pupils involved, but also on the teaching styles used both within the Pathways programme and elsewhere. Teachers and managers noted that teachers have moved towards planning more individual, pupil-initiated learning:

*There is an emphasis on individual learning (Enhanced Curriculum coordinator)*

*Schools have developed curricula that are more responsive to pupils' needs (Re-engagement coordinator)*

*Pupils work in smaller groups and work at their own pace - they can receive one to one help. (school G teacher)*

The curriculum tasks were also seen to be more practical and investigative, and staff were able to use more "*creativity in the classroom*" in the words of one teacher. This creativity extended into assessment - for example, the use of videos as evidence of learning. One teacher explained her experience in some detail:

*GNVQs and vocational GCSEs do require different teaching methods and learning styles. Teacher-centred work for traditional GCSEs is not appropriate. Research-based assignments are set, and although some sessions require*

*traditional input and teaching sessions, pupils have to learn how to manage themselves... The feedback from moderators is that the children really enjoy and get a lot from their work. They get lots of opportunities to learn in different ways, for example, one girl who spoke to her great grandmother and found out a lot about her early life. This teaches things about history etc that traditional teaching could not bring alive in the same way, and she gets the satisfaction of knowing she found this out herself (school F teacher)*

Cullingford (2002: 24) has concluded that many pupils, when asked about the type of learning they most enjoyed and found most effective, discussed working in groups, the variety of learning experiences and investigative work. Cullingford notes:

*The learning style which pupils prefer are those which include flexibility, variety and attention to individual needs. They are also rooted in the desire to share experiences and ideas rather than be confronted by them.*

These learning and teaching styles are the very ones that teachers pick out as being used in the delivery of the Pathways programme. But there is food for thought in the fact that Cullingford's findings were drawn from interviews with nearly 200 14-16 year olds of **all** abilities. However, in our research, there is a tendency for managers to talk about pupils' preferences for a 'vocational learning style', and this is usually reserved for the pupils who are perceived to be of lower ability.

It is rare for pupils of all abilities to be encouraged to take up vocational options. In fact, many schools opt for a 'pathways' approach (confusingly named in the context of this paper), whereby pupils are encouraged to take one of three or four routes involving either entirely academic subjects, entirely vocational or work-based units or some combination of the two. In practice, those pupils who are perceived to be higher achievers are generally steered towards the mostly or wholly academic routes, which involve more traditional learning styles. This fact is recognised by some of the LEA Coordinators, one of whom noted that it is not that there is a 'vocational learning style' suited to pupils of lower ability, rather that the higher ability pupils just have to cope with traditional approaches to get their qualifications.

However, there is more to Pathways than providing motivating and challenging learning experiences; a key aim, as noted earlier, is to provide a skilled workforce for the sub-region. At the time of writing, most of the members of the first Pathways cohort are moving through their final year of compulsory education, so it is too early to examine whether the programme is aiding the transition from school to college or training and then skilled work. However, it is worth noting that Pathways provides a range of learning opportunities in schools, businesses and colleges, and with training providers, with strong links with supportive adults in a range of teaching and, significantly, non-teaching roles.

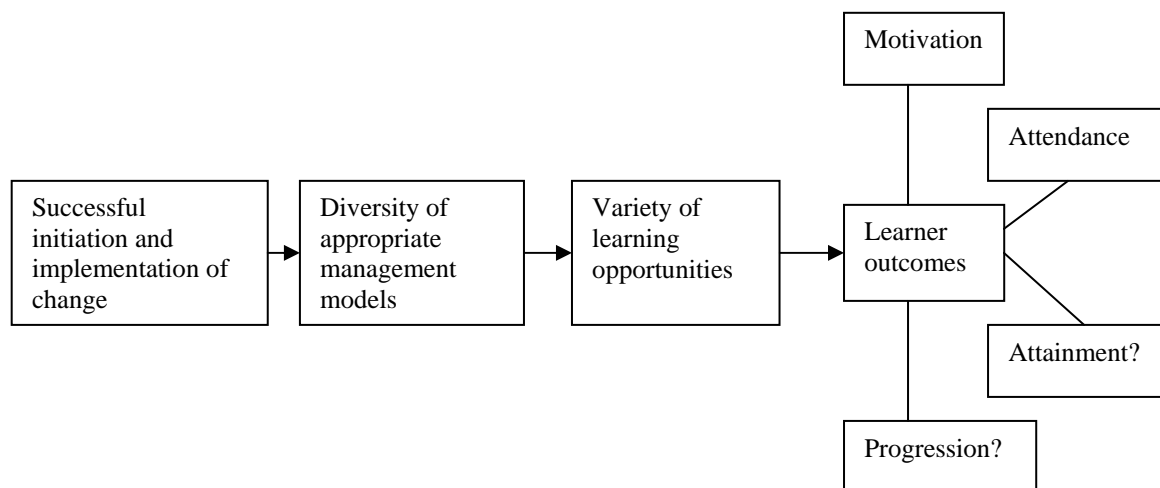


Learning mentors, in particular, have a new role to play as a ‘bridge’ between teachers and non-teaching adults, along with Connexions Personal Advisers and others. Other research undertaken by our research team provides evidence that such ‘friendly adults’ can be invaluable for those young people who are disengaged and excluded from schools (Coldron et al, 2002). It remains to be seen whether these individuals can facilitate access to the vital social capital and networks which can help youngsters gain fulfilling work that others have noted is missing in many work-related schemes (Hall and Raffo, 2001).

**Discussion: Linking the macro, meso and micro levels**

So far, we have treated the three elements of our analysis separately: clearly however they are linked. Diagram 1 below illustrates how the linkages can be theorised. We can think of the successful management of change as providing the foundations for a range of embedded structures of management, individually created to suit each school. These structures then allow a diverse range of learning opportunities to flourish which is reflected in improved motivation and attendance. Evidence is not yet available, but it is hoped that these new learning opportunities will also lead to improved attainment and progression from compulsory education to post-16 education. In Diagram 1, we symbolise the fact that evidence is not yet provided for these last outcomes by the use of question marks.

Diagram 1: Linking change to learner outcomes



Clearly, the arrows linking the elements of our analysis do not indicate a necessary causal mechanism. Rather, they indicate the provision of conditions for the next phase to occur. It is clearly often the case that individualised, apparently appropriate management models are in place, but

these do not lead to a varied diet of learning opportunities. However, these models do allow this to happen if the will is there.

The schools taking part in the Pathways programme are, on the whole, managing the changes successfully, moving through initiation and implementation phases, and showing some signs of institutionalising such changes. They are implementing these changes using a variety of management structures, designed to be complementary to those already in place. This appears, at this stage, to be a key strength of the management of Pathways.

The Pathways programme is giving opportunities in terms of staff development for teaching and non-teaching staff, and involving large numbers of school teachers, non-teaching staff and outside agencies such as colleges and training providers. Schools tend to use rational models for resource allocation, linked to long term aims and objectives, in line with local and national objectives.

As these management structures become embedded in schools, it is possible to see how the three strands of Pathways are affecting teaching and learning. With new flexible curriculum opportunities for pupils, there is growing evidence of increased motivation and related outcomes such as better attendance. Pathways is encouraging a wider range of teaching and learning styles, and early indications are that attainment is improving. Whether this early promise will come to fruition remains to be seen. Progression into learning and employment after compulsory education is in many ways the key issue for the programme, and this is the next area to be explored as the programme develops.

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