



There are many
paths to success

Evaluations of Practical Learning Programmes

Practical learning is seen as a way of giving people, of all abilities and interests, a better understanding of the work and academic environments they will encounter as they move through life.

Contents

02	Section 1 Introduction
03	Section 2 Evaluations of practical learning programmes
04	Section 3.1 Evaluation reports
07	Section 3.2 Qualifications
09	Section 4 Key themes

Section 1

Introduction

Research, including that conducted by Edge in 2005, has demonstrated there is a huge amount of support for introducing practical learning to young people. Practical learning is seen as a way of giving people, of all abilities and interests, a better understanding of the work and academic environments they will encounter as they move through life. A variety of government-initiated programmes have therefore sought to introduce elements of practical learning into school curricula, as well as further and higher education. This tailored briefing note summarises evaluations of programmes aimed at those under 19 year olds, with an emphasis on evaluations and research conducted since Labour came into power in 1997. Some of the initiatives have been implemented on a UK wide basis but most are nation specific.

Section 2

Evaluations of Practical Learning Programmes

Evaluations of practical learning have been considered in two ways for this briefing note:

1. An evaluation (often by an office of government or NDPB) of a specific programme which is concerned with promoting or improving practical learning – the outcomes of the report have been summarised with an emphasis on lessons learned.
2. Research on particular qualifications that include practical learning – here, research findings on the qualification types are compared and contrasted for evaluative lessons.

Section 2.1

Evaluation Reports

Where hyperlinks are provided, the full evaluation report is available to download.

Programme evaluated	Conducted by	Key findings		
		Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations
<p>The Impact of Programme-led Apprenticeships</p> <p>Unlike traditional apprenticeships, PLAs are driven by providers rather than employers. Originally called 'programme led pathways', the scheme was introduced in 2003. The evaluation was carried out in the Autumn of 2007; inspectors interviewed national and local LSC offices, the National Employer Service, 6 FE colleges, 19 work-based learning providers and 10 SSCs. Available evidence on learner and employer feedback was also reviewed.</p>	Ofsted, Jul 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -PLAs received positive feedback from employers – they found the 'planned initial training' for learners beneficial (learners are either on this or in a work placement if with a work-based learning provider. In FE colleges, learners go on a full time vocational course with the objective of entering an employment apprenticeship). -Learners felt they were better able to meet employers expectations and had a better knowledge of the sector after their PLA. -Success rates were higher and full apprenticeships were completed more quickly when 'initial planned training' took place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participation has decreased by 58% from 2005 to Oct 2007: possibly the result of poor promotion of the scheme and slow implementation from LSC. -SSCs are not yet on top of how PLAs link with their apprenticeship frameworks. -The low level of payments to learners is a potential deterrent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participation amongst employers needs to improve. -Data collection on success and completions is required – the Unique Learner Number may help in future (75% of providers for this evaluation could supply figures but there is no national collection). -The programme needs development to lead to an employer apprenticeship more effectively and encourage FE participation. -Develop a new name for PLAs to better reflect their reformed route / pathways. -SSCs need to define how PLAs fit within their Sector Qualification Strategies.
<p>The Young Apprenticeships programme, 2004 – 2007</p> <p>Launched in 2004, Young Apprenticeships are offered at Key Stage 4 to 14–16 year olds. This evaluation summarises and compares inspections on 18 partnerships in 2004/05, 24 in 2005/06 and 14 in 2006/07.</p>	Ofsted, Dec 2007	<p>The programme has shown improvements since its introduction – particularly in the collaboration within partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Good personal development amongst students seen by enthusiastic, motivated and well behaved young people. -Teaching and learning recorded as 'good' in over half the partnerships inspected. -Improvement since 2004/5 inspection in arrangements for monitoring progress and students' ability to work independently. -Advice and guidance also improved greatly over time – helped achievement rates and in supplying parents and young people with information about progression routes. -Achievement was rated as at least satisfactory in all partnerships inspected in 2006/07 and was good in half. -Work experience provision has improved over three years (11 of the partnerships offered 50 day programmes). -None of the partnerships had inadequate curricula. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Self evaluation, although scored as 'satisfactory' in 10 out of 14 partnerships in 2006/07, not felt to be well developed. -Targets set in 2006/07 were not seen as sufficiently challenging in half the partnerships (an improvement however on previous years). -Over half the partnerships either lacked gender equality policies (to tackle traditional, sectoral stereotyping) or found them to be ineffective. -1/3 of partnerships had inadequate use of individual learning plans and there was a lack of matching learning to individual competencies and interests. -In seven partnerships, the provision of work, including homework, was inadequate. -Only three partnerships had 'good' key skills programmes (six were weak). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Set more challenging targets based on Key Stage 3 data on students abilities. -Make better use of individual learning plans. -Find ways to tackle gender stereotyping. -Offer students work plans "to extend and consolidate their learning between sessions". -Develop key skills programmes to be more effective.

Programme evaluated	Conducted by	Key findings		
		Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations
<p>Skills for Work Scotland pilot courses – interim report</p> <p>This report evaluated the courses over the two year pilot of Skills for Work for 14–16 year olds. According to the Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government) “a key feature of these courses is the emphasis on experiential learning. This means learning through practical experience and learning by reflecting on experience.”</p>	<p>NFER, Nov 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Schools, colleges and providers see the value of Skills for Work (SfW) and believe it has raised the status of vocational education. -The emphasis for teachers is definitely on practical delivery and treating young people like adults. -SfW was seen to “enhance” skills for young people in a broad occupational area, giving them a better understanding of employment, employability skills and helping students make informed choices. -All 41 learners interviewed perceived some benefit from SfW and nearly all reported they were enjoying the course. -Course materials were thought to be of good quality although some teachers reported they had adapted the materials to suit their students’ needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Timetabling SfW was reported as a problem for several schools, particularly when learners need to be transported between centres. -Although providers perceived demand for SfW as increasing, they are limited in terms of physical space and staffing levels. -Some reported issued with college staff unwilling to work with younger learners. -Concerns about funding arrangements for delivery remain, including funding for transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Scottish Executive (now Government) to consider providing guidance on timetabling – some schools replaced one or more Standard Grades with SfW. -More delivery should be carried out in-school to overcome timetabling and transport issues but this would require a delivery partner to work with school staff. -Schools and colleges have recognised the need to work together – these partnerships should be encouraged and strengthened. College staff are particularly helpful in recruiting the right students for the programme. -Scottish Government to consider whether funding for non standard delivery formats or more flexible funding can be made available. -How LAs support the roll out of SfW needs careful consideration. -Raise awareness of SfW with parents, employers & HE.
<p>National Evaluation of Determined to Succeed – Phase 2: Early Impact Across Scotland</p> <p>Determined to Succeed sought to introduce an enterprise learning culture in schools and received £86 million of funding from 2003-8. 7 themes in enterprise were explored through practical learning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. working with others, 2. personal effectiveness, 3. problem solving /creativity, 4. communication, 5. approach to learning, 6. confidence and 7. life beyond school. 4000 pupils, 500 teachers and 500 parents were interviewed for this evaluation. 	<p>York Consulting Ltd & MORI Scotland, March 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -88% of teachers believe Determined to Succeed (DtS) is an excellent initiative. -Pupil confidence and communication skills were felt to be most improved by DtS. -Learning in ‘life beyond school’ was the area most used by special schools. -Felt pupils were at the “heart of the curriculum” in this programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -LAs and schools felt it was too early to state the true impact of DtS as other policies were also in operation. -Parents and local community members were less aware of DtS – ‘enterprise education’ was felt to refer to a very narrow view of business operations summed up as the ‘making and selling’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -DtS should be embedded in Scottish education policy and thereby in schools. -Support for vocational education and work placements amongst secondary schools needs to be reviewed in line with DtS plans. -During the evaluation, the Index of Enterprising Attitudes and Behaviours was developed to set a baseline of enterprise amongst young people – whilst the score was positive, there is room for improvement. -Communication, approach to learning and personal effectiveness are the three areas that need greatest attention in the future. -Promote DtS with parents more effectively. -Improve monitoring and assessment regimes, and in turn quality assurance, through better assignment of roles and responsibilities. -Improve the links between in-house learning and work experience by setting learning outcomes for the; work experience. -Bring the workplace to life through links with local employers and capitalise on teachers’ contacts with businesses. -Improve teaching timetables and student attendance at courses through better monitoring. -Improve teachers understanding of industry. -“The best college lessons are well structured with short sections integrating theory and practical work.” This approach needs to be replicated.

Other available reports that may be of interest but are out of scope for this report:

– **Specialist Schools: A second evaluation, Feb 2005.**

A follow up by Ofsted on the first evaluation published in Oct 2001; compared to the first evaluation where it was reported that GCSE results for the pupils in language, technology and arts schools were better than the national average, the differences in achievements were less obvious. Apart from in art schools, the quality of teaching is above that in non-specialist schools. Work related opportunities, however, are still felt to be limited in specialist schools.

– **Embedding ICT in schools – a dual evaluation exercise, Dec 2005.**

Small scale evaluation of 39 schools (secondary and primary). Although ICT was not embedded into the curriculum as hoped and assessment was often poor, resources were found to be satisfactory and staff were gaining confidence with the new practical element of teaching ICT.

– **Evaluating mathematics provision for 14–19-year-olds, May 2006.**

Ofsted found that amongst the 26 schools visited, mathematics is best taught when it is responsive to individuals needs and delivered in a way that encourages practical participation by students.

– **Learning to be enterprising - an evaluation of enterprise learning at Key Stage 4, August 2004.**

From the 33 school visits conducted, recommended that 'enterprise' should be better defined and that enterprise learning should be connected with vocational qualification pathways to continue to encourage participation amongst young people.

– **Young Apprenticeships: equal opportunities, 2006.**

IES, on behalf of DfES, looked at how to engage more young women and ethnic minorities in Young Apprenticeship programmes through targeted marketing campaigns, better guidance and the capturing of good practice case studies.

Section 2.2

Qualification Evaluations

Welsh Baccalaureates

Piloted since 2006, the only evaluation on the Welsh Baccalaureate to date is the *external evaluation of the pilot conducted by the University of Nottingham in July 2006*. This evaluation was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Strengths

- 31 centres offer the Baccalaureate and there is broad support for the qualification from provider staff.
- The Baccalaureate incorporates vocational and general qualifications (whereas the international baccalaureate does not have a vocational provision).
- UK HEIs have said they will accept the Baccalaureate instead of the third A level and it has been given 120 points on the UCAS tariff system.
- Support for how the Baccalaureate is seeking to broaden the curriculum has been perceived from many quarters.

Weaknesses

- Some centres found that the financial supplement for the Baccalaureate did not cover all their additional costs (managing, administering, tutoring, mentoring, verifying, etc)
- Some students criticised it as a waste of time – they could have spent the time on studying for their A levels instead and it replicated skills they were already aware of.
- The breadth of the qualification is questioned, e.g. it is possible to achieve a certificate without science.
- Universities outside Wales are less inclined to recognise the Baccalaureate and it has not been seen to help students gain a place.
- Employers are not well informed or aware of the Baccalaureate.
- Some centres are finding it difficult to integrate the core with optional subjects because of timetabling issues and courses at AS and A2 level, show less evidence of key skills than recommended.

Recommendations

- The finance model will need to be robust to ensure future roll out and take up.
- Students strongly recommend a grading system, rather than pass/fail only.
- A strategy is required to develop good quality work placements.
- Data needs to be collected to track students' progress into FE, HE and employment.
- Communications: market the Baccalaureate to HE, employers, LAs, learners and parents more effectively; share good practice and allow for networking between providers; cascade any guidance down to individual institutions and staff.
- To aid achievement of the Baccalaureate: develop key skills at all levels; ensure successful introduction of Foundation level, integrate the core and options more effectively and thereby reduce student workloads; recognise partial achievements in the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW); explore why learners fail to achieve the Baccalaureate L3.

1. Higham (2003), *The Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training*, Working Paper 4.
2. Smithers (2005), *Do school exams need reforming?* Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham.
3. Hewens (2005), *BTEC Qualifications*.
4. Fisher (1991), *BTEC: soundings from the "central engine room"*. *Education + Training*, Vol. 33, No. 1.

GNVQs

Introduced in 1993 in an initial five subject areas, General National Vocational Qualifications aimed to give young people an introduction to a broad vocational area that could be viewed as the practical learning equivalent to traditional, academic qualifications. Despite these high aims, GNVQs were lambasted by various sectors almost from the outset. Less than one year after launch, the Government announced that Dr John Capey would chair a review of the assessment and grading of GNVQs (seen to be particularly shambolic) and the *Capey Review* was published in 1995.

Although the Capey Review found that students and teachers engaged in GNVQs had a positive view of the structure, it made 19 recommendations (later confirmed in the Dearing Report in 1996) to revise what was widely agreed to be an extremely complicated assessment programme. Critics, including most notably Alan Smithers (now of Buckingham University) pointed out the issues with GNVQ assessments:

- The tests for some mandatory units were so impossible, 90% of students failed the test in some subjects. This was not helped by a preset pass mark of 70% (originally 80%);
- Multiple choice was not seen to be an effective way to test practical subject matter and even worse, the level of external testing was not seen to be sufficient;
- The grading system was very complex: performance in the subject area was only assessed on a pass / fail basis but the student's ability to plan and organise their work had the potential to be graded as pass, merit or distinction;
- Despite these flaws, GNVQs equated with 4 'good' GCSEs (grade A-C) but give the student knowledge and understanding of only one subject area. This has however made GNVQs a popular option with schools for the league table points they deliver.

There is little about GNVQs that educational experts have managed to agree upon. Where as some (Higham, 2003) would praise the design of GNVQs for its ability to adapt to local needs and resources, others (Smithers) would criticise this as a lack of a syllabus.¹ In 2000, QCA announced GNVQs would be phased out and replaced by vocational GCSEs but interestingly, the plans were delayed as the regulatory authorities of England, Wales and Northern Ireland looked to bring in suitable practical learning alternatives. In 2005, entries for intermediate level GNVQs were at their highest. As argued by Smithers, however, 55% of the entries were in ICT, labelled a "quasi-academic subject", rather than the practical learning subjects GNVQs (1.2% of entries at intermediate level) were supposed to promote.² Furthermore, take up of GNVQs for pre-16 year olds was always lower than expected.

BTECs

Arguably, BTECs are one of the most successful exemplars of vocational qualifications, first taught from 1984 with the amalgamation of the Business Education Council and the Technical Education Council. Seen as the more vocational option than GNVQs and other 'practical' learning programmes, BTECs are, in certain sectors, viewed as the qualification of choice. Debate continues on how BTECs will conform with the new Diploma but there is a widespread view that BTECs should stay. Their longevity has been explained because of their ability to tune in with industry needs. As Michael Hewens from Edexcel has agreed, BTECs have often been "*become synonymous with providing second chance opportunities for learners whose talents or skills were not recognised in their school years. But the defining factor for their ongoing success is employer and industry recognition.*"³ Fisher, writing in the *Education & Training* journal in 1991, confirmed that his personal research indicated how employers value the BTEC, particularly in the creative subjects. He also pointed to the 1989 CWA Ltd research which found employees felt more work ready and could progress to "higher levels of responsibility" after taking their BTEC.⁴

5. Nicholls (1994), *GNVQs: Challenging the Gold Standard*. *Education + Training*, Vol. 36, No. 1

Section 3

Key Themes

- **The evaluations pin point what it is that is important about practical learning:**
 - It gives context to the theory, as long as the practical element is applied effectively;
 - Employers value practical learning and HE is therefore finding it increasingly acceptable.
- Many of the lessons are not being learnt or the recommendations are not sufficiently defined to be implemented effectively. Of real concern is that many of the essays written on GNVQs pinpoint exactly the same criticisms that are now being levelled at Diplomas (and the Welsh Baccalaureate) – particularly issues of how to assess and grade the Diploma. In one article by Anne Nicholls (1994), entitled '*GNVQs: Challenging the Gold Standard*', Nicholls asserts that the problem is (and has always been) in attempting to align a strongly practical qualification with the academic system. This immediately denigrates the 'practical' equivalent because it can never be tested the same way and is at odds with the stated aim of providing a different, more relevant option to 14–19 year olds.⁵
- Furthermore, government led qualifications and programmes often suffer from ill conceived or rushed design that leads to confusion and a lack of buy in from industry. The programme then experiences critical media coverage and worries about dumbing down.
- Employer engagement is absolutely crucial if the qualification or programme is to gain any currency. This is one area that researchers (and governments) all agree upon.
- There is, however, no agreement on whether 14–19 education needs a single overarching structure (Tomlinson argued this would give breadth and organisation to the learning) or whether a plethora of different subjects should be made available (Smithers argues that students or schools and their parents could and do create their own 'breadth' if the system remains as it is).
- The most successful qualifications and programmes are those where there is clarity on what they aim to achieve and who they are aimed at from the outset, for example, if the qualification leads to a license to practice or an accepted route to further study.

For more information
or to discuss the 6 Steps
to Change manifesto
please contact:

Edge

10 Golden Square
London
W1F 9JA

Telephone

020 7734 6414

Fax

020 7734 8328

Email

centre@edge.co.uk