



There are many  
paths to success

# Six Steps to Change Manifesto 2009



**‘More than 1 in 6 pupils  
leave school unable to  
read and write and add  
up properly.’  
Leitch Report, 2006**

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**This manifesto proposes a series of policy steps which Edge believes will significantly raise the status of practical and vocational learning in the UK.**

**Edge is an independent education foundation, dedicated to raising the status of practical and vocational learning, so that:**

- **all young people have the opportunity to achieve their potential, and**
- **the UK's future workforce is equipped with the skills to be successful in the modern economy.**

**Edge believes:**

**There are many paths to success.**

**All learning routes, whether academic or practical and vocational, should be equally resourced and recognised.**

**Young people are motivated by experiencing practical and vocational learning which is demanding, reflects the needs of the modern workplace, is professionally resourced and is taught by people with relevant experience.**

## Introduction

The current education system, driven by the disproportionate value placed on academic education, is failing children and the UK economy.

In 2007 less than half of 16 year olds gained a Grade C in both maths and English. 30,000 left school without any qualification.  
DCSF, 2008

Young people often feel uninspired and demoralised because their experience in the classroom does not take into account their individual passions and talents.

Primary schools' emphasis on testing academic subjects is restricting children's opportunities to develop other skills and interests. While teachers are being assessed by their students' results in SATs they will be tempted to teach to the test and give a low priority to teaching the personal skills necessary for life, such as creativity and team work.

During their first three years at secondary school students continue with a very theoretical academic education. There is little scope for developing skills and attributes in practical and vocational areas. Students, therefore, are rapidly turned off because their learning does not match their aspirations.

At 14 students are given a limited choice, but having experienced only a narrow academic curriculum, most continue along this academic route whether it suits them or not.

Not only are vocational subjects not taught before 14, students are rarely given insights into employment and education opportunities which will be available to them in the future. Unsurprisingly, many students do not see the next two years as an opportunity to develop their interests and strengths but rather as something to be got through. The lack of relevant experience prior to choice is also one of the reasons for the disappointing take-up of the new Diploma qualifications.

Even when a student is able to choose to study a vocational subject in a school this may be taught in poor facilities by teachers without the appropriate qualifications or experience

and often does not reflect local employment needs. This leads to vocational studies gaining a poor reputation.

By the time students are 16 only 7.1% of qualifications points are vocational and only 26% of students have gained a vocational qualification.  
QCA, 2007

This narrow curriculum, little real choice, and poor facilities result in thousand of students leaving compulsory school feeling like failures, with 10% not entering employment or further education.

189,000 16–18 year olds are not in education, employment or training.  
DCSF, 2007

This pattern continues post 16. Although students have more choice it is made all too clear by society that it is best to continue along the academic tram lines. Practical and vocational learning remains the second best option so that students are misled into following a course which does not really suit their abilities. This leads to disillusionment and failure and is one of the reasons why the percentage of 11–18 year olds participating in education did not improve between 1994 and 2006.

### The participation rate for 16–18 year olds in education or training.

Year	At 16	At 17
1994	90.8%	82.3%
2000	86.4%	80.5%
2006	89.7%	81.5%

DCSF Statistical First Release, 2007

At 18 many students on the academic treadmill drift into university courses. Routes from vocational qualifications into Higher Education are unclear, often preventing students from progressing further.

In 2008 the Audit Commission noted that "in the UK adult and continuing vocational education policy is proceeding on a separate trajectory from Diplomas. The absence of clear progression pathways for non-academic qualifications in England marks a clear distinction from...other countries."

Even those students who choose to study a vocational subject at university may find that at the end it is of little value because it is academically driven rather than reflecting the most up-to-date needs of employers.

Whilst this combination of lack of choice and poorly valued vocational education has been recognised in recent years, the search for diversity and choice has had limited success despite various initiatives because:

- "Specialist Schools" are typically general academic schools with a limited emphasis on a particular academic aspect.
- The Academy programme has freed up the governance of the schools but most are still offering the same general academic curriculum.
- Schools do not have the necessary resources or appropriately experienced teachers to inspire the students to excel on more practical and vocational courses.
- There is insufficient support to help students and parents to make choices.
- Employer involvement is limited. They are commentators rather than participants.
- Universities are ranked primarily according to research and academic achievement rather than vocational relevance.

In addition, the restrictive curriculum has had a detrimental effect on academic education which has been watered down in order to accommodate the many students who are unable or insufficiently motivated to benefit from theoretical and academic

learning. This has resulted both in the academic and vocational options being, at best, mediocre.

The Royal Society of Chemistry says that the system is failing a generation of school-leavers by setting them undemanding exams. It says: "The record-breaking results in school exam passes are illusory, with these deficiencies having to be remedied at enormous expense by universities and employers."

The Times, November 2008

Edge believes that it is only through bold action that we will fulfil the potential of all students. Edge's six steps would give students the choice of high quality pathways between the theoretical, the practical and a combination of the two. It would prepare students for this choice by giving students a broader range of experiences at a younger age. There would then be truly many paths to success.

The Six Steps would greatly support the aims of Every Child Matters as through a more diverse system more children will fulfil the aim that they should enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being.

Much has been written about the use of the terms academic and vocational education. Broadly speaking academic education is theoretical and without an employment context whilst vocational is within the context of employment. However, it is generally accepted that this division is too simplistic. Students studying a vocational course are likely to underpin this with academic studies and theory is sometimes best illustrated and understood through a practical activity.

Edge understands and appreciates the resulting difficulty of separating education into vocational and academic and in many ways would rather these terms not be used. On the other hand they are the terms in common use and are understood by most people and are therefore used in our Six Steps proposals.

## Step 1

### A broad curriculum up to age 14 with opportunities to develop life skills and experience a range of future options.

**The national curriculum up to the age of 14 is constructed around traditional academic disciplines. The pressure of SATs results in teachers concentrating on the content rather than other very important life skills. Schools are therefore not developing the whole child. When students reach the age of 14 their experience is narrow and they are not in a good position to plan their future.**

Edge is proposing to tackle this in two ways.

First by establishing a set of life skills which all pupils need to develop. These would include the ability to work in a team, to problem solve and to be enterprising and creative. It is only possible to teach these skills in context. This might be through academic subjects but it should also be through activities based around real world settings including business and community activities.

The teaching of such skills can not be an after-thought. They should show progression through the teaching and learning programmes with pupils assessed to show how well they are doing at each stage.

The second element is to expose students to possible future options and careers. It is not unusual to see the fire service visit infants. However, as pupils progress through junior and secondary schools there is very little mention of jobs and careers. There should be a new emphasis on providing opportunities for this to happen.

It may be through visits, guests in school or business engagement in the curriculum. Some of this activity would provide an ideal context for development of life skills. In order for these activities to have an impact they would need to be planned across the primary and early secondary stages.

The purpose of these activities is not to force a child down a career route before they are ready but to inspire and motivate them and to ensure they build up a body of knowledge before they make choices which will affect their future.

## Step 2

### SATs replaced by an individual profile of attainment, skills and aptitudes which would be used by students, parents and teachers to choose a pathway post-14.

**There is a need to monitor the progress of each student as they progress through school. The monitoring has two key purposes, to record the student's attainment and subsequently to plan their next stage of learning. Edge suggests that SATs are doing neither of these.**

SATs are narrow in that they only measure progress in literacy, numeracy and science. Whilst these are centrally important they far from represent the whole child. In addition, they only measure the progress twice in the student's school life and provide very crude grades.

There are many more accredited ways of testing the basic skills which not only give more detailed grades but can also be used on a more regular basis to give parents regular progress checks. Indeed most teachers are already using these in addition to SATs. The results of these would be a key part of a child's profile. However on their own they would still give a very incomplete picture of the child.

Attainment in other subjects would be recorded but also, crucially how well the child is developing their other skills. For example how they work in a team and how skilled they are at problem solving. In order to teach these skills effectively both the teacher and the students need to understand how well the student is doing in order to plan the next stage of development.

In order for this not to become unnecessarily bureaucratic and time consuming, the number of skills and subjects to be monitored would be limited and the whole process carried out using a simple electronic profile which would follow the child through school.

The third element of the profile would record the child's interests and motivation. This would be written jointly by the student, parents and teacher and could be updated at any time by any of them. They would be assisted in this by the student undertaking psychometric tests. The results from these would be used to ensure that the real strengths of a student are not being over looked.

With these three elements – subject attainment, life skills and interests – there would be a complete picture of the students.

At 14 the student, parents and teacher will make a joint decision on which pathway the student will follow for the next two years. This would be an important decision which should not be taken casually. There would be a face-to-face meeting at which the profile would be central to the discussions.

There is much current criticism of the Independent Advice and Guidance which students receive in schools. However, unless the students have an understanding of themselves no advice system will be effective.

Edge believes that schools should be accountable for their students' results but that SATs are not a cost-effective way of doing this. Building on the work carried out by the Assessment and Performance Unit in the 1970s and 80s would allow the cost effective monitoring of pupil progress at school and regional level without the danger of 'teaching to the test'.

### Step 3

**At 14 all students, in addition to continuing a broad curriculum, including English, maths and science, would be supported in choosing a pathway matched to their interest and abilities, each with a different balance of theoretical and practical learning.**

**Truancy rates, exam results and student surveys all indicate that by 16 many students of all abilities are disenchanted with school. They have found the curriculum irrelevant to their needs, unchallenging or too difficult.**

Attempts to rectify this have met with some success, for example Young Apprenticeships and links with further education colleges. However, Edge believes that this has only scratched the surface and more students need to be given greater choice.

It is not only those students who would like to do a more practical course who are suffering. A consequence of all students undertaking an academic and largely theoretical course is that in order to accommodate all abilities the academic nature of the course has been gradually watered down. This has led to a lack of challenge for the most able and it should be no surprise that many independent schools are searching for alternative examinations.

The relatively few students who have been offered the choice of a more practical or vocational course find they have to travel to a college or if the course is offered in their school it is taught in poor facilities by teachers with little experience of the vocational area.

This lack of academic rigour linked to lack of vocational quality has led to mediocre academic and mediocre vocational education. These two problems need to be dealt with as one.

Students would choose from a variety of pathways each of which would have a different balance between theoretical and practical learning. They would be supported in doing this through the discussions between themselves, their parents and teacher around their profile described in Step 2.

A small proportion of the students would choose a largely theoretical and academic course ensuring that they are challenged and motivated.

The majority of students would chose a route based around a particular sector perhaps reflecting the new Diplomas. For example there would be routes in engineering, creative and media, and information technology. Within each route some students would choose a Diploma-type qualification which would have an equal proportion of theoretical and practical learning, while others would chose a much more practical course which could be similar to a Young Apprenticeship.

All students would continue with a broad education including English, maths and science with the possibility of adding other academic subjects. In this way no student would be shutting a door at 14.

## Step 4

### Students on practical and vocational courses would be taught in specialist facilities or specialist institutions and by appropriately experienced staff.

**If vocational courses are to obtain a high status then they have to be demanding, professional and taught in excellent facilities. Unlike many of our neighbours in Europe this is not currently the case in the UK.**

In Holland students aged 14 are taught vocational courses in specialist schools. They are of a very high standard and include, for example, modern car maintenance facilities, equipped hospital wards and professional catering facilities. It is easy to see in these schools that students have high self-esteem and are motivated by the work they are doing.

“Vocational courses in all three countries focus more specifically on the development of skills for particular types of employment than [they do] in England.”  
Ofsted survey of 14–19 vocational provision in Denmark, Netherlands and New South Wales, 2004

Equally important is the background of the teachers. In order to teach a vocational course in England teachers of vocational subjects are required to have a degree. They are not required to have any experience of the vocational area they are teaching. In many cases this means that they are unable to talk to students from experience. Teachers in Further Education (FE) colleges who are not required to be graduates are paid less than the school teachers.

The difference between the pay of FE, largely vocational, teachers and school, largely academic, teachers is becoming unsustainable. Students who travel to an FE college for the practical, vocational element of a Diploma are taught by teachers who are paid less than the teachers in school who are teaching the theoretical academic part of the Diploma. Not only is this unfair it also indicates the value put on the different parts of the course.

This leads to vocational courses in schools having little connection with the real world requirements of the sector. Edge believes that teachers of vocational subjects should have relevant experience and be trained to teach through a practical course rather than only through the current post-graduate routes.

“Although trainees had enough general teaching skills they were not prepared well for teaching their vocational area.”  
Ofsted report on Training to Teach Vocational Subjects in Schools, 2006

The third element which will ensure the professionalism of the course is the engagement of employers. Although they have been involved in the design of Diplomas, employers do not yet have sufficient control of the content of vocational courses. This is in contrast to other countries.

“In all three countries, employers are much more directly involved in determining the content and assessment of vocational courses than in England. This helps to give the courses and associated qualifications currency and status. It also helps to ensure that vocational provision is more closely aligned to the needs of the economy than it is in England.”

Ofsted survey of 14–19 vocational provision in Denmark, Netherlands and New South Wales, 2004

Currently students who wish to study a practical or vocational course often have to move to another college for one day a week to do that course. This disrupts their general education and results in a fragmented course. The alternative is to stay in their own school where the facilities are generally poor.

Edge believes vocational courses should only be taught in specialist facilities and that students should undertake all of their school-based studies at that facility. This would allow a much more integrated approach to the curriculum.

Specialist facilities could either be in a stand-alone college or attached to a school or college. The most cost-effective way of achieving this would have to be based on the particular needs of a community.

It is disappointing that the Building Schools for the Future programme is replacing outdated and run-down school buildings with schools which, whilst they are structurally sound and more attractive, are basically the same school. The chance to restructure the system of education and provide specialist facilities has not been taken.

The money from the Building Schools for the Future programme should be concentrated on securing the specialist facilities rather than as at present building general schools which only serve to reinforce the current system.

## Step 5

### At 16 students would choose to specialise within their pathway, change to another pathway or enter employment with training.

Since their choice at 14, students will have been focusing on an academic education or a broad vocational sector. However, because they have also covered at least English, maths and science they will be able to make an informed choice about the next stage in their education.

Students will have gained real knowledge and skills in their chosen sector which would allow them to choose a more specialist route or to continue across a broad area.

Other students may wish to change pathways completely. Their broad education would allow this although they would need to be supported in catching up on some of the skills and knowledge they may be missing.

Some students may wish to enter employment full time through an Apprenticeship. The vocationally orientated work over the previous two years would mean that they would start their Apprenticeship with better skills and at a higher level than is the case at present.

All students would be in a better position than at present to make this choice.

Many students on the current undemanding academic GCSEs do not understand the challenges of A-levels and a significant minority therefore drop out or do not enjoy their courses and achieve less than they would be capable of on a more vocational and practical course.

Other students enter post-16 employment and training without any real understanding of the demands and nature of the particular sector they have chosen. This is one of the reasons that over a third of young people do not complete their Apprenticeship.

Edge believes that the engagement of employers as described in Step 5 and Step 6 is not easy because of a lack of a clear structure of representation in the UK. There are often few links between employers who are, for example, leading the development of sector bodies and local employers. This is why, despite the involvement of employers in the development of Diplomas at a national level, employers and workers operating at a local level are unaware of the Diploma and are unwilling or unable to recognise its worth.

It is therefore vital that schools and colleges engage with employers at a local level and are allowed to tailor their provision to local requirements within a national framework.

## Step 6

### Beyond 18, students would have the opportunity to study at degree level in a centre of vocational excellence endorsed by employers.

Students who currently take a vocational course at 16 find it more difficult to gain a place at university and once there are more likely to drop out. The reason for this is that most university courses do not build on the work they have previously done. There is no clear pathway from vocational courses into university and little curriculum planning from school to university.

Employers continue to have little influence on the structure and content of vocational courses which universities do offer. There is a tendency for universities to concentrate on filling the courses they offer rather than the outcome for students. Many employers hold the more vocational courses in little regard because they do not reflect the needs of their business. They might therefore just as well appoint a graduate from a general academic course.

The lack of clear progression routes and little career advantage is bound to reinforce any prejudice students and parents have against vocational courses.

"Vocational courses in the three countries are held in higher esteem by young people and others than they are in England. This is mainly because they are seen as providing clear pathways to higher education and employment." Ofsted survey of 14–19 vocational provision in Denmark, Netherlands and New South Wales, 2004

Edge is proposing that universities are encouraged to provide specialist courses in a particular employment sector which would be funded to provide world-class facilities. All the courses offered would be endorsed by the relevant Sector Skills Council. This would present clear advantages for a student by opting for a vocational pathway. Courses which have not been endorsed by employers would not be funded.

"Deliver more economically valuable skills by only allowing public funding for vocational qualifications where the content has been approved by Sector Skills Councils." Leitch Report, 2006

## The International Perspective

**Our intermediate and technical skills lag behind countries such as Germany and France. We have neither the quality nor quantity of the necessary vocational skills.**

**No two countries in Europe have the same education system, but there are two threads which distinguish the most successful from the United Kingdom and both give vocational education a higher status. The first is specialist provision and the second is employer engagement.**

The success of the systems in Sweden, Holland and England can be compared by measuring the engagement of young people by their commitment to education and training once schooling is no longer compulsory.

### Percentage of cohort in some type of education

Age	UK	Sweden	Netherlands
16	90	98	100
17	75	97	88
18	52	93	75

OECD, 2006

Not only do more students choose to continue with their education in Sweden and the Netherlands but retention rate is also higher.

The following comparison between these countries shows that whilst there are many differences a major conclusion is that in Sweden and Holland all vocational courses are taught in specialist institutions rather than being added onto general or academic as often happens in the UK schools and colleges.

### The Swedish Education System

Pupils start school at the age of seven attending their local community schools where they remain until they are 15. Pupils study a general curriculum including Swedish, English, mathematics, science and a range of other subjects. Pupil progress is measured by teacher assessment which is supported by very few external examinations.

At 16 students choose an upper secondary school for a three-year programme. In Göteborg there are about 400 course programmes with 47% of students choosing a general (academic) course and 53% a vocational one. This compares to 83% of UK students studying academic courses and 27% vocational courses.

There is a wide range of schools varying in size, some offering a range of courses whilst others are specialised. All students continue with some core subjects including Swedish, English, mathematics, science and RE. This enables them to change course and prevents students from making an irreversible choice.

There is a similar choice at 16 in Finland where the majority of students at 16 are now choosing a vocational rather than a general course.

Students choosing vocational courses have increased by 10% driven by economic factors such as students on vocational courses having a better chance of gaining employment than those on the academic course.

### The Dutch Education System

Secondary education encompasses schools providing pre-university education (VWO; 6 years, age 12–18), senior general secondary education (HAVO; 5 years, age 12–17), pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO; 4 years, age 12–16) and Practical Training (PRO; age 12–18).

Pupils who are unable to obtain a VMBO qualification, even with long-term extra help, can receive practical training, which prepares them for entering the labour market.

Vocational education offers participants from the age of 16 a choice of 700 vocational courses, four training levels and two different routes in which courses can be followed.

There are 40 regional training centres in the Netherlands. They provide vocational education in three sectors: Engineering and Technology, Economics and Health & Social Care. Vocational education in the agricultural, natural environment and food technology sectors are provided by agricultural training centres.

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**Summary of Education Systems**

	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>
<b>Compulsory</b>	5-16 which is planned to move to 18	7-16 (98% stay on into non-compulsory education)	5-16 which is planned to move to 18
<b>Structure of education system</b>	Primary schools 5-11 Secondary 11-16 (18)	Small all through schools (5-16). Average size 200 pupils	Primary 5-11 Specialist secondary schools 11-16
<b>Age when students can specialise</b>	Limited choice within schools at 14. Choice between providers at 16	Students have a wide choice of programmes and schools at 16. Programmes last for 3 years	Highly directed choice at 11 (selection)
<b>Nature of specialisation</b>	Students choose between academic and vocational courses. There are some specialist providers but most offer both academic and vocational courses	A wide variety of specialist schools. All students continue with a general education as well as their specialist programme. All students have 15 weeks work experience over the 3 years	Routes divided between general and vocational. Very specialised provision including vocational schools. 40% of students follow the general (academic) route and 60% the vocational route
<b>Tertiary education</b>	40% attend general universities. Proportion taking broadly vocational route is not known	All HE institutions offer vocational courses but some specialise, e.g. Technical Universities. 30% attend university of which 75% take a course leading to a vocational degree	Divided into higher professional universities (30%) and General Universities (60%)

The second factor which affects the status of vocational education in Europe is the amount and quality of work experience.

"In all three countries, structured work placements are a much stronger feature of post-16 vocational courses than they are in England. This helps to keep the courses relevant and strengthens the applied vocational dimension of the courses."

Ofsted survey of 14-19 vocational provision in Denmark, Netherlands and New South Wales, 2004

The following table shows how much work experience vocational students undertake.

#### **Work Placement on Vocational Courses (excluding Apprenticeships)**

<b>Austria</b>	<b>Compulsory practical training in business or industry in summer holiday</b>
<b>Finland</b>	<b>800 hours over two years</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>3 days a week</b>
<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>3 days a week</b>
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>At least 15 weeks over 3 years</b>
<b>UK</b>	<b>No prescribed amount across all courses</b>

Not only is there more time spent on work placements in several countries, the quality of work experience is guaranteed by assigning students mentors or supervisors who have been trained. The mentors are also in partnership with the teachers, where both are responsible for grading the students work. This ensures that the employers are fully engaged and have some responsibility for the maintenance of standards.

In Germany, only professionally trained individuals can become work-placed trainers. They have to undertake a trainer aptitude test to demonstrate their pedagogical and professional aptitude.

## Edge Exemplar Activities

Edge has undertaken a number of projects with the aim of demonstrating how its principles can be put into practice.

Edge is sponsoring **Academies** in Milton Keynes and Bulwell Nottingham which will specialise in Business and Enterprise when they open in September 2009. Each Academy will have a business hub which will host companies, enabling them to carry out their business at the same time as supporting the students. Business and Enterprise Directors who are not teachers have been appointed to lead this pioneering development.

Edge has supported **Lewisham College**, working in partnership with South Bank University in piloting an innovative training course for teachers who join the College direct from employment. The course is practical and aimed at developing the teaching skills necessary for a particular specialist area.

**Business in Schools** is a campaign to encourage employers to get involved in education and help schools and colleges provide work-related learning experiences for young people. It's being piloted in Hertfordshire and Yorkshire and the Humber, and we plan to extend it throughout the country in autumn 2009. The website [www.businessinschools.co.uk](http://www.businessinschools.co.uk) allows schools and colleges to register their details and select the work-related learning opportunities in which they're interested. Employers can then visit the site and find nearby schools and colleges in need of their help.

Edge has supported North Hertfordshire in its **development of Diplomas** by providing extra resources for training and the development of teaching materials. As a result the North Hertfordshire Consortium of schools and colleges has the second highest take-up of Diplomas in the country.

Edge launched **VQ Day** to celebrate the millions of people that gain a vocational qualification every year. For too long, this success has gone without the recognition and national celebration it deserves. Following the inaugural VQ Day, which took place last summer, Edge has announced that VQ Day 2009 will take place on Wednesday 24th June 2009.

A good example of the greater level of information and advice required was the **'Know Your Options'** campaign run by Edge throughout the summer of 2008. The centrepiece of the campaign was an independently produced guide on vocational and practical learning designed to help students determine the right educational path for them.



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