

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI)

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Key Features of TVEI

Operation Date: Announced 1982. Operated 1983 - 1997

Target Population: 14 to 18-year-olds

Purpose: Designed to encourage 14 to 18-year-olds to obtain qualifications and skills needed for work. One aim was to make the curriculum more relevant and include meaningful vocational content in order to prepare young people for the world of work.

Introduction

The Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was intended to instil a significant element of vocational and technical education into the curricula of mainstream schools and colleges (Williams and Yeomans, 1994). It was the first major initiative by central Government in curriculum development. The pilot was announced by then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the House of Commons on 12th November 1982 (Department of Education and Science, 1982). The initiative commenced as a pilot scheme in secondary schools in September 1983 (Gleeson and McLean, 1994) starting in schools in England and Wales and then being extended to Scotland later as the initiative developed further (Finegold, 1993). The initiative ended in 1997 (Yeomans, 1998). It has been stated that around £1.1 billion was spent on the TVEI scheme (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010; Yeomans, 1998).

The initiative was operated through the Manpower Service Commission (M.S.C)[1], which was unusual at the time as it was not operated through the Department of Education and Science. The M.S.C had been involved in government training policy, intervening in curriculum development, local education authority policy and links between schools, colleges and work (Gleeson, 1987). It has been contended that the government viewed the M.S.C as a means to introduce marketplace realities within education (Gleeson, 1987; Kenyon, 1991).

[1]Manpower Services Commission was rebranded as the Training Agency in 1987 and then abolished in the 1990s.

Participation for local authorities was voluntary, whereby schools and colleges submitted proposals to be opted into the TVEI, and given funding, based on the aims and criteria set out by the M.S.C (Uzodinma, 1991). To be accepted schools and colleges needed to obtain support from employers in order to support the curriculum offer (National Audit Office, NAO, 1991). The M.S.C required a 'balanced intake' to the scheme, for example with regards to gender and ability, they stated that participation should be voluntary for students (Shilling, 1986). During the launch of the pilot, 14 local education authorities participated, with a limit of 1000 students for each local authority (NAO, 1991). The pilot was extended nationally in 1987 to allow all 14-18-year-olds' involvement and became known as the Technical Vocational Education Extension.

The initiative endeavoured to align education more closely to the 'needs' of industry and increase the knowledge, skills and attitudes of school leavers for work. The initiative was offered as a full-time course, where students could start at age 14 and carry on until 18. The curriculum needed to relate to the skills needed in the current world of work; offer direct work experience; give careers guidance; improve young people's skills and qualifications, particularly in Science and Technology; and provide students with better guidance on employment and further education and training (NAO, 1991). Thirty per cent of the students' curriculum would focus on TVEI, with the remaining seventy per cent being the same as non-TVEI students (Williams and Yeomans, 1993). Typically, the curriculum was organised into core activities, undertaken by all pupils, and optional activities, which students could select based on their interests and capabilities (Uzodinma, 1991). The structure of the curriculum was around a series of workshops and assignments, and students worked on portfolios of evidence, leading to a record of achievement. It has been argued in the literature that there were differences in curricula between schemes, with some resources centralised and shared, or individually institutionally based, or a combination of both (Baines, 1987).

Since the TVEI concluded there have been, and continue to be, a number of initiatives and curriculum reforms in vocational education: General National Vocational Qualifications followed by National Vocational Qualifications in the early 1990s, Curriculum 2000, Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education, 14-19 Diplomas and entry to employment (2005), and more recently, T-levels (Dale, 2016; Department for Education [DfE], 2020). There is also an argument that University Technical Colleges mark a recommitment to the goals of the TVEI (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). The aim of this review, therefore, is to examine the TVEI and to consider the relevance of this initiative in relation to the current vocational education and training context.

Context

Before the TVEI was announced in the 1980s, there were crucial changes going on in British society, in terms of radical rethinking about industry, trade unions, jobs, schooling, teaching and labour markets (Shilling, 1989), and the initiative embodied these crucial changes (Gleeson and Mclean, 1994). There was a high level of youth unemployment and debates were ongoing about whether the school education at the time prepared young people for work (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010).

Vocational education was seen as a 'secondary' option, for the child who would "seek to leave school at the earliest opportunity to take his or her chance in a youth labour market" (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010, p. 37). Compared internationally, the UK was lacking in high quality technical education and training, and the TVEI was introduced in an attempt to address this (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010; Yeomans, 1998). It was thought that better vocational education and training would lead to greater individual productivity and therefore economic growth (Yeomans, 1998). TVEI was intended to support 14-18-year-old students to gain qualifications and skills that would be of direct value to them at work, better equip them to enter the world of employment, and to give them a better understanding of industry (Hodge, 1992). The TVEI intended to influence education for this cohort of young people in order to prepare them for a better working life (NAO, 1991).

Funding was based on contractual commitments by local education authorities and the M.S.C (Williams and Yeomans, 1994), this became known as categorical funding (Harland, 1987). The funding was provided to local education authorities in order to help them design and develop a broad, balanced and practical curriculum that met local needs (NAO, 1985; Yeomans, 1998), and also the national aims and criteria of the TVEI that was set by the M.S.C (Williams and Yeomans, 1994). This was a novel means of funding, usually such initiatives would have been funded through the Department of Education and Science (DES).

Evaluation

Since its inception, TVEI has been the subject of some controversy. On one hand, the initiative has been praised for seeking to support the integration of vocational and technical education into the curriculum. On the other, it has been criticised for the shift to central government's running of schools and colleges from localised positions (Kenyon 1991). This has drawn wider attention to changes in policy and decision making in education that we see today (Kenyon, 1991). It has been contended that the TVEI scheme was poorly managed and lacked sufficient controls as to how the budgets were being spent and where the money was going (NAO 1991). The influence of the TVEI started to diminish as the Department of Education and Science reasserted itself, and then the national curriculum gained momentum (NAO, 1991).

Bradley (1986) is critical of the TVEI due to lack of consultation, or evaluation of the pilot scheme, prior to the announcement of the initiative expansion. "Education policy which fails to engage with the culture of school, college and the teaching profession is unlikely to achieve meaningful reform" (Gleeson and McLean, 1994, p. 242). The initiative was not a curriculum, it was a set of aims and criteria, which can be criticised as being too general and vague, and did not "draw upon an explicit theory of learning and assessment" (Yeomans, 1998, p. 20). However, Yeomans (1998) does argue that this vagueness was a positive advantage as it allowed curriculum construction with adaption and modification at the local level.

Teachers were given TVEI-Related In-Service Training (TRIST) for the scheme, and the TVEI has been noted to have changed the teaching style of those who participated (Bradley 1986). The literature states that an important effect from the TVEI was the way it raised "teachers' consciousness of the alternative purposes for education to the traditional liberal tradition" (Dale et al., 1992, p118), and that teachers claim it had altered their approach. However, Buswell and Jeffs (1992) argue there is little evidence to validate these claims. According to the NAO (1991) teachers were in need of better training in the use of active and flexible learning approaches. The pilot evaluation studies found that employers and teachers had insufficient knowledge of education and industry respectively (NAO, 1991). This was especially the case with regards to providing suitable and sufficient work experience placements for students and to helping with the development of the curriculum (Hodge, 1992; NAO, 1992). The lack of links from schools and colleges with employers prior to TVEI also hindered the early development of the scheme (NAO, 1991). This meant that in the pilot evaluations, there was limited employer involvement with curriculum development and links with employers did not stress the need to provide young people with real-life problems for use in the classroom (NAO, 1991). However, since the pilot studies it has been argued that the TVEI contributed to schools and colleges working in collaboration with employers (Jamieson, 1991; NFER, 1992).

The initiative was seen as failing to secure the coherent, skills-related curriculum that had been intended, and it has been argued that researchers could not demonstrate that it had led to any improvements in preparation for work skills or attainment for individuals (Finegold, 1993; Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). Hodge (1992) argues that often the skills developed and demonstrated through the TVEI were not the skills required for the jobs students went on to enter. It has been claimed that the TVEI was a notable failure in relation to establishing a long-standing qualification with significant meaningful vocational content, which was one of its initial purposes (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). After the pilot evaluations it was noted that the quality and consistency of Records of Achievement needed to be improved (NAO, 1991). The Wolf Report (2011) notes how 'Portfolios' and 'Records of Achievement' did not help to shift thinking from focusing on "a number of (established) qualifications" (p. 93). Richardson and Wiborg (2010) argue that schools looking to operate with technical specialisms in the future will need labour market value qualifications to support them in order for technical and vocational education to be successful.

The TVEI was aimed at all 14-18 year old students and promoted equal opportunities (Patterson, 1993). It has been argued in the literature that this concept of a 'balanced intake' and the scheme being voluntary was contradictory, with some young people encouraged to participate and some not encouraged into the scheme to meet the balanced criteria (Shilling, 1986). Slightly more males than females took part in the initial TVEI (Thorpe and Black, 1987). According to the NAO (1991), during the pilot phase, gender stereotyping was found to be prevalent in the options of work experience and curricular activities. Students also did not always have full access to resources and facilities like they were supposed to (NAO, 1991). It has however been argued that this imbalance diminished over time (Thorpe and Black, 1987). According to Williams and Yeomans (1994) there was also a notable decline in the prior attainment level of students opting for TVEI. They state a reason for this may be because non-TVEI teachers were discouraging students from participating as it was seen as secondary to the 'traditional academic curriculum' (Fulton, 1987).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many lessons to learn from the TVEI. The TVEI arguably paved the way for a shift from local to central government control, similar to the current direction of policy we see today. The TVEI did make attempts to integrate vocational and technical education into the curriculum for all. However, the initiative was criticised for being too vague. There were also some indications that there were gender differences within the initiative, and a notable decline in ability, although this was argued to be because non-TVEI teachers were discouraging students from participating. The initiative did have some positive effect on some teachers who participated, changing their teaching styles, but it was also reported that teachers had insufficient knowledge of industry and a lack of training. A noted hindrance of the initiative was the lack of links between industry and education in the beginning, although it has also been argued that since these links were formed there was sustained collaboration with employers and education. The TVEI was seen as failing to meet its objectives of a skills-related curriculum that would support young people into work. The TVEI was argued to have failed in relation to establishing a long-standing qualification with significant meaningful vocational content; for the future, those seeking to implement a technical and/or vocational curriculum should consider the labour market value of the qualifications and skills they look to develop (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). At a time when Government is aiming to place employers at the heart of the system, including through reforms to apprenticeships and the introduction of T-Levels, and when there are numerous requests for employers to engage with education and training, lessons from the TVEI initiative are invaluable. There are also lessons to be learnt around the importance of appropriately consulting with local stakeholders, and the importance of offering teachers continued professional development as part of any new policy development.

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