QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

14–19 monitoring report 2003/4

November 2004

Contents

QCA's monitoring programme

Sources of evidence

1. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) meets its responsibility to keep the curriculum under review through an extensive programme of monitoring. The evidence gathered enables QCA to develop the national curriculum framework; evaluate qualifications and their use; produce information and guidance to support policy implementation; and provide advice to ministers on curriculum and assessment issues. This report covers the academic year 2003/4.

2. QCA's 14–19 monitoring programme has the following annual pattern. Numbers of participants and respondents refer to 2003/4. Initials in brackets show how these sources are referred to within the report.

    - Seminars in October 2003 and May 2004 with 37 case study schools that provide a longitudinal sample **(CSS)**.

    - Monitoring visits to 14 of these schools including interviews with senior management, teaching staff and students **(CSV)**.

    - Conferences in January and June 2004 with up to 100 local education authority (LEA) representatives and 10 headteachers attending each **(Confs)**.

    - A focus group with 24 practitioners working with students with educational needs in February 2004 **(SENFG)**.

    - A focus group with 25 representatives from schools and colleges in March 2004 **(14–19 FG)**.

    - A joint QCA/Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) postal survey in June 2003. There were 906 responses from post-16 schools and colleges representing over 112,000 students. The data are weighted to reflect national figures **(UCAS)**.

    - Monitoring curriculum and assessment (MCA) 2003/4 surveys, managed by the University of Manchester. The three relevant questionnaires are:
        – key stages 3 and 4 survey with 470 responses **(MCA KS3/4)**
        – key stage 4 survey with 429 responses **(MCA KS4)**
        – post-16 survey with 229 responses **(MCA post-16)**.

3. In addition, in any given year, events or projects that address specific areas of enquiry or result from other 14–19 work produce evidence for the monitoring report. In 2003/4 these were:

    - a baseline study into work-related learning to survey: a) the structure and quality of current provision and b) teacher and learner attitudes to work-related learning **(WRLBLS)**. This draws data from:

        – the MCA questionnaire on work-related learning

        – Ofsted inspection reports

        – a specially commissioned MORI telephone survey of 500 teachers

        – seminars with 21 employers from a range of industries and company sizes

– in-depth interviews with six employers

– an analysis of student work-experience in 43 state secondary schools from one local learning and skills council area

– a survey of work-experience coordinators across three areas with local learning and skills councils

– a survey in four schools of teachers' other employment; including a review of participation in teacher placements

– a research project on the information and guidance needs of year 9 students and those who provide them with advice. The report gathered qualitative data from: managers, teachers and support staff in 30 schools and six further education colleges; young people aged 14–19 following a variety of learning programmes; Connexions personal advisers; 14 Connexions partnerships; advisers and inspectors in five LEAs; research and inspection findings and relevant policy documents **(IG)**

- a survey of provision in pupil referral units in 49 LEAs. This produced hard and qualitative data **(PRU)**

- a survey of practice in the delivery of the personal development curriculum – personal, social and health education (PSHE), sex and relationship education, careers education, work-related learning and religious education (RE) – across 37 schools (not QCA case study schools). This produced detailed data to contribute to this report **(PD)**

- a project mapping the alternatives to GNVQ and following the experience of a number of centres in selecting replacement qualifications.

4. Other sources of information

- *14–19 pathfinders: an evaluation of the first year* (Universities of Leeds and Exeter, January 2004)

- 14-19 pathfinders' annual reports (DfES): see www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19

- *Designing a flexible key stage 3 curriculum* (DfES, October 2004)

- *Developing new vocational pathways: final report on the introduction of new GCSEs* (Ofsted, July 2004)

- *An evaluation of entry level qualifications* (QCA/ACCAC/CCEA/LSC, May 2004)

- *Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience* (Ofsted, May 2004)

- *Report on the use of vocational qualifications at key stage 4* (QCA, July 2004)

- *Survey of alternative educational provision* (TNS, November 2003)

- *The review of key skills (QCA/ACCAC/CCEA, December 2001)*

- *Vocational A levels: the first two years* (Ofsted, March 2004)

- provisional examination results (Joint Council for Qualifications, JCQ, June 2004): see www.jcgq.org.uk

- conferences, seminars and workshops.

Main findings

5.   The prospect or outcomes of 14–19 area-wide inspections and strategic area reviews were influencing curriculum development, particularly in terms of local progression, value for money and the needs of the local economy. Local education authorities (LEAs) and/or local learning and skills councils were setting up and using mechanisms to bring stakeholders together for the purposes of strategic planning and to establish a framework for more localised 14–19 development. There was also evidence of coordination and combining of different funding streams to support development within individual institutions and across partnerships. *(Confs, CSS)*

6.   Considerable curriculum development continued to take place, evidenced by the proportion of schools indicating changes to their curriculum offer. The main reasons given were 'to broaden the curriculum' and 'to meet students' needs'. Post-16 'student demand' also becomes an important factor. *(MCA KS4 and MCA post-16)*

7.   While consideration of the 14–19 continuum was increasingly evident in curriculum planning and design, most of the change had logically begun with key stage 4. There was little evidence of schools planning their curriculum for all students 14–19, in terms of lessening the break at 16 by offering courses that span years 11 and 12 or enabling classes of mixed age. Moves in this direction were beginning, however. *(Confs, CSV, CSS)*

8.   Some schools had introduced or were considering a two-year key stage 3 for some or all students. One of the aims is to increase opportunities at key stage 4. Another is to enable students in year 9 to begin courses leading to qualifications, the most common being in information and communication technology (ICT). *(Confs, 14–19 FG, CSS)*

9.   There was considerable evidence of widening the choice of some students by offering them the opportunity to take vocational courses, in school or in collaboration with a college. Most of these courses were in vocational GCSEs, although use of NVQs had also increased. The increased flexibility programme provided a significant impetus for this. *(Confs, CSS, CSV, MCA KS4)*

10.   A higher proportion of schools than in 2002/3 were anticipating the changes to statutory provision by disapplying modern foreign languages (MFL) and design and technology from considerable numbers of key stage 4 students. *(MCA KS4)*

11.   There was a high degree of awareness of, and general support for, the forthcoming statutory requirement for work-related learning. Provision for work-related learning in schools showed considerable variation, with some aspects of the forthcoming non-statutory framework currently well covered and others less so, particularly enterprise education. Selective schools were less well prepared for the statutory requirement than comprehensive schools. There was a lack of knowledge and use of labour market information in schools. *(WRLBLS)*

12.   Collaboration continued to grow, encouraged by national initiatives such as the increased flexibility programme, 14–19 pathfinders and the Leadership Incentive Grant. A new development was the establishment or planning of

dedicated vocational or skills centres to provide vocational experience, mainly for 14- to 16-year-olds. *(CSV, CSS, Confs, MCA 16–19)*

13. Concern remained about the quality and impartial nature of careers advice and guidance, particularly in schools. Schools continued to be concerned about the level of support available from the Connexions Service for all students. *(CSV, Confs)*

14. The curriculum offer at level 3 continued to develop and broaden. Schools and colleges were continuing to modify their offer in the light of student need and student demand, with more qualifications being added to the curriculum than were removed. *(MCA post-16, UCAS)*

15. GCE AS/A levels were the qualifications taken by around 95 per cent of first-year advanced-level students and 92 per cent of second years. Programmes remained bigger than pre-2000, the average size being four AS, excluding general studies. There was also evidence that programmes were broad, schools saying that two-thirds of their students were taking subjects from more than one discipline. The proportion of students taking a new AS in year 13 held up, an opportunity most taken up by students in sixth-form colleges. *(MCA post-16, UCAS)*

16. Some Curriculum 2000 issues are becoming resolved. For example, teachers say they have become better acquainted with the standards required for A2 and the large majority of centres said their January assessment results were expected. Teachers were also better acquainted with the standards required for VCEs (vocational A levels) than they were the previous year. *(UCAS)*

17. While views varied on the extent of external assessment at A level, more centres than previously are content that the extent is about right. However, more centres expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of AS coursework this year. *(UCAS)*

18. Schools and colleges continued to use VCEs differently and there was a move from VCEs to BTECs in colleges. There was some evidence that more schools were offering level 2 provision post-16. In some cases this was GNVQ. However, a number of schools were planning to use BTEC/OCR national qualifications at this level. *(UCAS, MCA post-16)*

19. Key skills – around one-quarter of post-16 students were registered for one key skills test, smaller proportions for two or three. Under half of centres expected advanced level students to achieve certification. Further education and sixth-form colleges were most likely to be entering students. *(UCAS)*

Context

20. The 14–19 phase is a focus of political and policy interest. In the course of 2003/4 a number of significant developments took place, all with the purpose of achieving the ends outlined in *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (February 2002). A range of pathfinder projects has been set up to test out aspects of the vision articulated in several major policy documents. At the same time, longer-term reform is signalled by the Working Group on 14–19 Reform and the Skills Strategy.

21. The policy document *14–19: opportunity and excellence* (January 2003) set out a vision for the 14–19 phase. It described a staged process of reform for increasing student choice and achievement, widening participation and improving retention post-16.

22. Changes to the statutory key stage 4 curriculum were announced. From September 2004, design and technology and MFL would no longer be compulsory. However, students would have an entitlement to study these curriculum areas, and the arts and humanities. Work-related learning was to become a statutory requirement at key stage 4.

23. There was national consultation on the detail of these changes, and on the proposals for a new science programme of study to take effect in September 2006. In September 2003, schools received two QCA guidance documents on implementation, *Changes to the key stage 4 curriculum* and *Work-related learning for all at key stage 4*.

24. *14–19: opportunity and excellence* questioned whether there was greater scope for coordination of the personal development curriculum comprising citizenship, RE, sex and relationship education, physical education (PE) and careers education and guidance. QCA produced web-based guidance to help schools consider this issue, featuring case study material of different approaches.

25. In April 2004, the DfES published a progress report on developments since the publication of *14–19: opportunity and excellence*.

26. With the statutory requirement for work-related learning at key stage 4 in prospect, QCA conducted a large-scale baseline study. This surveyed teacher and learner attitudes to work-related learning, and the structure and quality of current provision. The findings were set out in QCA's *Work-related learning baseline study 2004* (September 2004). Also in anticipation of the statutory requirement, Ofsted retrieved data on activities and practice connected with work experience from its summer 2003 survey of the increased flexibility programme and reported this in its *Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience* (May 2004).

27. Careers education and guidance (CEG) was an area of development in 2003/4. Proposals to enable students to choose more individual programmes will increase the number and complexity of the choices facing young people. This underlines the needs of students for accurate information and high quality guidance, in addition to well developed career management skills. *Careers education and guidance in England: a national framework 11 to 19* (DfES March 2003) set out a national, non-statutory framework for CEG work

in schools and colleges. It was intended to act as an aid to providers in reviewing and developing their CEG programmes for September 2003.

28. The National Audit Office report on Connexions (March 2004) concluded that, while the Connexions Service has made significant progress towards reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training, it does not always cater for the needs of those young people not at risk of disengagement. It also referred to a lack of clarity about the respective roles of schools and the Connexions Service in providing careers advice to young people.

29. The DfES review of CEG focused on the support provided by schools, colleges and Connexions to 11- to 19-year-olds in England, to help them make learning and career choices for the 14–19 phase of education and an increasingly wide range of opportunities. Its outcomes will contribute to a Green Paper in autumn 2004.

30. Many of the 14–19 reforms are being tested through the 14–19 pathfinders programme. Phase one began with 25 pathfinders in January 2003. Their activities will help assess the scale and costs of new patterns of 14–19 learning. They are testing different models of collaboration and aspects of student guidance and support allied to increased flexibility and choice so that students' programmes are better tailored to their needs and aptitudes. In addition, five of them piloted alternative funding mechanisms for collaboration to provide vocational courses.

31. Some of the pathfinders are also involved in other initiatives such as Excellence in Cities, Diversity Pathfinders, the increased flexibility programme, Entry to Employment and Aimhigher/Partnerships for Progression.

32. Fourteen phase two pathfinders began in September 2003 to test more radical and innovative ways of approaching e-learning, the design and delivery of vocational courses, addressing skills shortages in specific professions, and new ways of engaging employers in 14–19 education.

33. Evaluation reports, case studies, annual reports and comments from those involved have contributed to this year's monitoring.

34. Over 170 Enterprise pathfinder projects started in 2003/4, involving over 500 secondary schools. They aim to generate national guidance on ways of teaching enterprise effectively, based on experience in these schools. The first Enterprise advisers started work with 900 schools in disadvantaged areas, to encourage enterprise practice among teachers and students.

35. 2003/4 was the second year of the increased flexibility programme for 14- to 16-year-olds. This initiative routed funding via colleges to 289 local partnerships, working collaboratively across providers to enable students to choose a range of qualifications delivered in different settings. In the first two cohorts, an estimated 90,000 14- to 16-year-olds in 2,000 schools were involved, working towards a vocational or work-based qualification, a substantial proportion being GCSEs in vocational subjects. A third cohort will begin in September 2004.

36. In July 2004, Ofsted's survey of the introduction of the GCSEs in vocational subjects culminated in the publication of *Developing new vocational pathways*

– final report on the introduction of new GCSEs. This followed the publication in March 2004 of *Vocational A levels: the first two years*, Ofsted's findings from its survey of quality and standards in VCEs.

37. Provision for those not in mainstream education was under scrutiny. Ofsted reported on provision for learners unable to access the full key stage 4 curriculum in *Key stage 4: a flexible curriculum* (June 2003). Following this, the DfES undertook a national survey of alternative provision, culminating in guidance for LEAs on making such provision. In conjunction with this, QCA produced *Designing a personalised curriculum for students in alternative provision at key stage 4.* This guidance set out principles of curriculum design for those who were planning for learners not in mainstream provision. The preparatory work contributed to the monitoring programme and is reflected in this report.

38. During the year, the Excellence in Cities initiative involved approximately 1,000 secondary schools. A new strand in 2003/4 was the Leadership Incentive Grant, offering three-year funding to approximately 1,400 schools. This is intended to strengthen leadership at all levels in secondary schools, particularly senior leadership teams. It also promotes collaborative activity and was mentioned in monitoring activities as a successful intervention.

39. By July 2004 nearly two-thirds of secondary schools had been accorded specialist status across one or more of 10 specialist areas. Specialist schools work with named partner schools for the benefit of pupils beyond their own school and with others in the wider community. This ensures that the programme helps to create a diverse network of secondary provision through the sharing of good practice and expertise. There was evidence of increased local planning of applications to ensure student choice and diversity. The influence of specialist status on the curriculum was also clear.

40. The apprenticeship progression route remains an important aspect of policy, designed to engage learners and to redress the skills deficit. Apprenticeships are available at levels 2 and 3. In its 2002/3 report, Ofsted expressed disappointment at the low completion rate of modern apprenticeships. Nevertheless, in 2003/4 there were 255,000 learners on modern apprenticeship programmes, and in the year ending April 2004 completion rates increased by five per cent. The proportion of apprenticeships at level 2 continues to rise.

41. In May 2004 the Secretary of State announced radical reforms to the apprenticeship programme alongside the launch of the Young Apprenticeship scheme. This is a level 2 programme aimed at 14- to 16-year-olds, and in its first year will involve around 40 partnerships, 1,000 students and four sectors.

42. Following pilots in 2002/3, Entry to Employment was launched nationally in September 2003, with at least 32,000 recruits to the programme. The aim of the programme is to engage those not yet ready for other forms of progression and enable them to progress to apprenticeship, employment or further education.

43. The Aimhigher programme seeks to raise young people's attainment levels and aspirations and improve the progression of those in groups under-represented in higher education. It works through local partnerships of schools, colleges and universities to provide support programmes such as mentoring, summer schools and university visits. From August 2004 it merges

with Partnerships for Progression, creating a national outreach programme operating most intensively in disadvantaged areas.

44. The Leading Edge Partnership programme was launched in July 2003 with 103 partnerships in the first round. Partnerships are focused on working collectively to help solve the learning challenges faced by underperforming schools and/or particular groups of underperforming pupils. The programme replaces and builds on the successes of the Beacon Schools programme due to be phased out by August 2005. In September 2004 the total number of Leading Edge Partnerships reached 205.

45. Learning and Skills' Beacon status provides recognition of excellence and innovation within the learning and skills sector. Beacons are drawn from the range of providers and include 14 sixth-form colleges, three tertiary colleges, one adult community learning centre and 17 work-based learning providers. They support the drive to raise standards within the sector by sharing good practice, providing a resource for the sector and leading innovation.

46. The reforms brought about by the Success for All programme underpin the 14–19 strategy by driving up standards, providing better choice and building capacity across the learning and skills sector. The DfES Standards Unit focuses on supporting teaching and learning in priority curriculum areas. Materials have been developed and piloted in these areas for roll out from September 2004.

47. Area-wide 14–19 inspection and strategic area reviews (started in April 2003 for completion in March 2005) continue to provide local pictures of provision. Action plans resulting from these exercises have developed 14–19 provision and have promoted strategic planning across the range of decision-makers and providers.

48. The National Skills Strategy, launched in July 2003, aims to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled. It is relevant to the 14–19 strategy and any future developments in 14–19 must align with those in adult learning.

49. The Working Group on 14–19 Reform was set up following the publication of *14–19 opportunity and excellence*. It was asked to propose reforms to achieve greater coherence in 14–19 learning programmes and strengthened vocational programmes, suitable assessment arrangements and a unified framework of qualifications.

50. An interim report was published in February 2004 outlining proposals for long-term reform of the curriculum and qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds. This included moving towards a system of diplomas at the first four levels of the National Qualifications Framework: entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced. Diplomas would be structured around a core (mathematical skills, communication, ICT, an extended project, common skills, wider activities, personal planning, review and guidance) and main learning components from general or more specialised pathways. The report also outlined the assessment, recording and grading arrangements for the diploma.

51. Monitoring activity indicated that some providers were reluctant to undertake developments that they felt would be superseded if the proposals were implemented.

52.   In July 2004, the Secretary of State presented his department's five-year strategy for children and learners. This will provide an important aspect of the context for the 14–19 monitoring programme for 2004/5.

Findings

The curriculum

How is the 14–19 curriculum developing and what are the drivers for this?

53.   Considerable curriculum development continued to take place, evidenced by the proportion of schools indicating changes to their curriculum offer. The main reasons given were 'to broaden the curriculum' and 'to meet students' needs'. Post-16, student demand also becomes an important factor. While consideration of the 14–19 continuum was increasingly evident in curriculum planning and design, most of the change has logically begun with key stage 4. There was little evidence of schools planning for all students 14–19, in terms of lessening the break at 16 by offering courses that span years 11 and 12 or enabling classes of mixed age. Moves in this direction are beginning, however.

54.   There was considerable evidence of widening the choice of some students by offering them the opportunity to take vocational courses, in school or in collaboration with a college. Most of these courses were in vocational GCSEs.

55.   The prospect or outcomes of 14–19 area-wide inspections and strategic area reviews were influencing curriculum development, particularly in terms of local progression, value for money and the needs of the local economy.

56.   Different models of planning for 14–19 have developed, with different bodies taking the lead in local areas. This has enabled responsiveness to a range of local factors, but has not obviated the need for strategic planning at a high level to provide a framework for more localised initiatives. There was also evidence of coordination and combining of different funding streams to support development within individual institutions and across partnerships.

How has strategic planning for 14–19 developed?

57.   In most areas strategic planning for 14–19 had moved on. A range of models had been developed. Factors influencing this development included:

- geography and the respective sizes of the local learning and skills council and LEA(s) involved
- the relationship and working practices that have developed between the local learning and skills council and LEA(s) involved
- any local history, for example, of Learning Partnerships, collaboration or clusters
- established patterns of planning and provision (for example, post-16 provision in schools or tertiary provision)
- the enthusiasm of key individuals within the area.

58.   In some areas the local learning and skills council led on setting up strategic groups involving stakeholders to identify and target priorities. LEAs' key role was often to develop strategy and make links between schools and other stakeholders. In some instances the local learning and skills council and LEA had made a joint appointment of a 14–19 coordinator, or similar title, to

ensure effective communication and consistency across the responsible bodies. In a number of areas, providers of different kinds were grouped together with the aim of improving communication and provision. In a few cases, partnerships of schools and colleges had taken the lead themselves.

59.	The action plans developed following area-wide inspections were mentioned by LEA delegates as levers for 16–19 reform. Evidence was beginning to show that data on post-16 provision from these and strategic area reviews were a lever for strategic intervention in planning and provision for 14–19 across the range of providers. The main reasons given were to meet students' needs, raise the quality of the offer, improve progression and obtain best value for money.

60.	Where 14–19 issues featured as an important and well integrated part of LEAs' educational development plans or LEA strategic plans, they had more status in the eyes of those involved in implementation. In the same way, those responsible for 14–19 issues were more likely to be effective where they had a clear brief, linked to their educational development plan and/or other action plans and a place within the structure of LEA or learning and skills council that enabled them to have some influence over the development of 14–19 provision.

How are LEA statements of 14–19 entitlement framed?

61.	Following discussion at LEA conferences about their strategic planning for 14–19, a number of LEAs provided 14–19 strategy documents and statements of 14–19 entitlement for analysis. In most areas entitlement documents included 14- to 19-year-olds in all contexts, not just in schools but also in training, work or at college. They referred to provision of a learning environment that is safe, secure and healthy and to equal opportunities for all learners, including those with special educational needs, the gifted and talented and those from ethnic or low-income backgrounds.

62.	Most of the entitlement statements analysed had the following features:

- a focus on learners – many contained the statement that learners' needs come first

- an intention to provide an experience that is positively perceived by learners, that students should be stimulated, motivated and extended, by a curriculum responsive to their individual interests, needs and aspirations

- access to more than one learning environment. One example gave learners the right to learn at a centre offering the provision most appropriate to their needs, irrespective of the institution they are enrolled with. Another states that value-added information will be available from all providers, allowing learners to make informed decisions

- a programme of work that matches their needs. This should be flexible, enabling learners to combine courses and different types of learning

- access to a range of learning styles, many giving e-learning as an example

- access to a range of qualifications

- information, advice, guidance and support that is, for example, comprehensive, reliable, impartial, ongoing. One example extended the advice and guidance service to the parents of learners. Another highlighted

the entitlement to 'fair and transparent' application and admission processes

- careers guidance enabling learners to access opportunities to make 'informed and realistic career decisions' and to 'understand basic legal requirements and responsibilities in the workplace'

- work-based learning/work experience. One example stated that work experience needs to be of high quality, to fit the individual's needs, to be designed with the employer to ensure mutual benefit and to be followed by a debriefing

- references to skills, whether described as key skills, skills for employability or practical skills for life and work

- a choice of extracurricular/enrichment activities and opportunities to improve personal and social skills. One went so far as to say that learners should take part in at least one residential learning experience and have the opportunity to visit at least one foreign country

- availability of planned and structured progression routes, including progression beyond the age of 19 and lifelong learning. Some added that programmes should allow for changes where necessary and 'opportunity for learners to redirect their programme of study'.

63. Some also included:

- a requirement that provision should reflect the needs of the employment market

- reference to individual learning plans, Progress File materials or similar systems. In one case this was to bring together the personal development, citizenship, enterprise and career and work-related strands of the curriculum

- a common format of reporting attainment to recognise both formative and summative achievements

- a commitment to involving young people in the planning and development of learning

- a statement of entitlement to high-quality teaching.

How is the key stage 4 curriculum changing?

64. Nearly two-thirds of schools responding to the MCA survey had made changes to their key stage 4 curriculum offer for September 2003. They gave extending vocational provision (33 per cent) and increasing flexibility (32 per cent) as their top priorities for curriculum development. Further curriculum development was planned for September 2004 as the changes to statutory requirements come into effect.

65. Almost nine out of 10 of MCA schools that had made changes to their curriculum had added subjects to their core, most often ICT. Four out of 10 had removed subjects from the core; in three-quarters of these cases MFL had been removed and in almost half, design and technology. This anticipated the change of status of these subjects from September 2004. ICT, MFL and design and technology were less likely to have all students following the full programmes of study than other national curriculum subjects.

66. Almost nine out of 10 schools added subjects to their non-core curriculum, mainly vocational subjects. The most popular of these were GCSEs in health and social care, leisure and tourism, ICT and applied business. Fewer than one in 10 added NVQs, hairdressing being the most popular.

67. Around one-third of schools had established collaboration with a college for September 2003. Groups of schools/colleges in some areas were also planning to set up vocational learning or skills centres, where schools and colleges are some distance apart or where college capacity to absorb more 14- to 16-year-olds is limited, or where college courses were seen as expensive. Such provision was often planned to match post-16 progression opportunities and local skills needs.

To what extent are schools enabling differentiated pace through key stage 4?

68. A significant proportion of schools responding to the MCA key stage 4 survey were enabling students to move faster through part of their programmes, but the numbers involved were small. Just under half of the schools had students who completed level 2 qualifications before the end of key stage 4. However, less than one-fifth had a whole class taking a qualification early and less than one-tenth entered a large proportion of the cohort. The subjects most often used in this way were mathematics, MFL and ICT.

69. One-fifth of schools had some students who completed AS units before the end of key stage 4, and one-sixth had students who completed whole AS qualifications, almost exclusively in mathematics, MFL and ICT. Other monitoring evidence indicated growing use of the AS in critical thinking. 14–19 pathfinder activity promises to widen the range of advanced level subjects studied pre-16 – for example, as specialist schools develop courses linked to their specialism.

70. A few schools entered students for some level 1 qualifications at the end of year 10, to enable them to take larger vocational or work-based programmes during year 11, or to consolidate achievement and encourage participation in year 11.

71. Some schools and colleges were unconvinced of the value of acceleration. Their concerns included progression, potentially lower GCSE grades and issues of timetabling and resourcing. Some disagreed with the notion of acceleration and preferred to provide breadth of experience.

72. There was no evidence of opportunity for students to attain and progress at a slower pace than the norm. Teachers were unsure of the benefits and considered attainment at level 1 desirable before embarking on level 2. They also saw difficulties in timetabling such provision and in ensuring progression, particularly where students transfer at 16.

73. Some schools were experimenting with a shorter key stage 3. In addition to the reasons above, their aim was to provide more time for key stage 4 courses and in some cases, students began GCSE courses in year 9. Qualifications in ICT were the most commonly used at key stage 3.

To what extent are schools collaborating to widen their curriculum offer?

74. A number of initiatives and funding sources were supporting the development of collaborative activities. The increased flexibility programme enabled more

pre-16 students to choose college-based vocational courses. Federations, 14–19 pathfinders and the Leadership Incentive Grant also promoted collaboration, widened the curriculum offer, facilitated staff development and encouraged innovation. Collaboration, particularly post-16, had been influenced by the outcomes of strategic area reviews and area-wide inspections.

75.   Two-thirds of schools responding to the MCA post-16 survey offered or planned to offer qualifications in collaboration with other schools and colleges. Collaboration mainly involved 16- to 19-year-olds but a substantial minority of schools involved 14- to 16-year-olds too. Schools with sixth-forms were more likely to collaborate with other schools than with a further education college.

76.   Collaboration involving employers or training providers was less well developed, in spite of their presence on local planning groups in some areas. This means that a work-based route is less available to students than a college-based one. There are examples of schools or collaborative partnerships setting themselves up as training providers.

How are schools responding to the introduction of statutory work-related learning at key stage 4?

77.   QCA's baseline survey of work-related learning revealed that teachers were generally aware of the forthcoming statutory requirement. However, current provision for work-related learning in schools was highly variable, with some schools being very well placed to implement the statutory requirement and others less so. For example:

- 66 per cent of schools had a work-related learning coordinator; an additional 22 per cent would have one in place for the 2004/5 academic year. (A smaller percentage of grammar schools have a work-related learning coordinator in place than non-selective schools)

- 27 per cent of schools had a policy on work-related learning; an additional 59 per cent said they would have by the 2004/5 academic year

- 51 per cent of schools had work-related learning in the school development plan and an additional 41 per cent said it would be for 2004/5

- 23 per cent of schools had identified learning outcomes for all students with an additional 62 per cent saying they would have for the 2004/5 academic year

- 43 per cent of schools said their students are involved in at least two tasks to develop an awareness of the extent and diversity of local and national employment opportunities.

78.   Teachers tended to refer to work experience when considering their school's existing provision (98 per cent of baseline survey interview respondents). They may not be aware of all their school's other provision, or think of it as work-related learning.

79.   The MCA key stage 3/4 survey also showed that many schools were developing their provision. Forty-five per cent of respondents indicated that the number of work-related visits out of school had increased over the past 12 months, and 41 per cent said that the number of work-related learning visitors to school had increased in the same period.

How is the post-16 curriculum changing in schools?

80.   This continued to evolve, if not at the same rate as that at key stage 4. One piece of evidence for this was that around half the schools responding to the MCA survey had added qualifications or enrichment activities to their offer.

81.   The majority of the schools made some change to their curriculum offer by adding or removing qualifications at year 12; more only added qualifications, so increasing their offer. The level 3 qualifications most added at year 12 were in ICT and psychology. The qualifications most often removed from the year 12 curriculum were in MFL. Both these groups of subjects may be offered in collaboration with other schools or colleges.

82.   The changes were motivated by the desire to meet student needs and demand; broaden provision; provide for minority subjects and respond to the expectations of specialist status. Also in these schools, 64 per cent of advanced-level students in year 12 were taking subjects from more than one discipline, representing continuing breadth within programmes.

83.   The number of MCA schools offering level 2 qualifications to post-16 students has substantially increased and 16 per cent of post-16 students in these schools were taking level 2 programmes. According to the UCAS survey, 55 per cent of post-16 institutions have level 2 provision – including over three-quarters of sixth-form and further education colleges. Relatively few level 2 programmes included elements at level 3. But nearly half of level 2 students overall were expected to progress to level 3 study.

84.   Around half of the schools in the survey offered GNVQ courses to post-16 students. Between 2003 and 2004, the number of schools offering GNVQ foundation post-16 slightly decreased, reflecting an overall 3.5 per cent decrease in entries for the qualification. The number of schools offering GNVQ intermediate to post-16 students increased, reflecting an overall seven per cent increase in entries largely in ICT.

85.   Nearly half of schools added new activities to their post-16 enrichment programme and the number of schools reporting increased student take up outweighs those with lower take up. The majority of the schools involve few or none of their post-16 students in citizenship development, work-related learning or enterprise capability.

Inclusion

What are the 14–19 issues for learners with special educational needs?

86.   Representatives from schools with learners with special educational needs felt that the changes to statutory key stage 4 did not take full account of the nature and needs of their learners.

87.   To provide access to each of the four entitlement areas, special schools might base their provision on those parts of the qualifications meeting entitlement requirements that they felt their students could manage. However, they did not feel that this necessarily constituted good teaching and learning. The entitlement areas might also require specialist resources (staff, staff training,

equipment, accommodation and funding) not available in all types of special school.

88.   The learning outcomes of the non-statutory framework for work-related learning were not appropriate for some students with special educational needs. While special schools try to ensure that their students have the opportunity for work experience, they have the additional challenge of ensuring that employers are aware of the students' difficulties and sometimes have to provide extra staffing support for the placement.

89.   While some special schools said that they were using GCSEs in vocational subjects, others felt that they were too demanding for their learners' capabilities or they required specialised equipment. The majority of representatives were using Entry level qualifications and ASDAN awards. A few found GNVQs suitable for the needs of their students.

How are providers within alternative settings catering for students at key stage 4?

90.   A large group of students who need to be considered under the heading of inclusion are those not in mainstream schools for some or all of their education and who are provided for in other settings. Two per cent of the total school population accesses alternative provision at any time. For many this is a short-term or part-time arrangement. In 2003/4 for 56 per cent it was as a result of sickness, hospitalisation, a medical condition or pregnancy. Sixteen per cent of students in alternative provision were in year 10 and 17 per cent in year 11. Permanent exclusion from school accounts for 15 per cent of students in this type of provision, with four-fifths being boys. (TNS)

91.   While surveys of LEA provision revealed considerable diversity in the organisation of alternative provision, pupil referral units are by far the most common means of providing for students longer term. Survey evidence also revealed different practice in arrangements and provision among pupil referral units.

92.   Nearly all LEAs (93 per cent) reported that their mainstream schools had in-school learning support units. Provision in mainstream schools was in many cases similar to that in pupil referral units and often included:

  ▪ smaller programmes than followed by most students

  ▪ involvement of youth workers, Connexions personal advisers, training providers

  ▪ use of ASDAN awards and basic and key skills

  ▪ skill training, sometimes leading to an NVQ

  ▪ opportunities for extended work experience.

Impacts of developments in assessment

How are schools and colleges using AS/A2 assessment?

93.   Just over half the schools in the MCA post-16 survey had a policy on the number of resits students could take, and when they could take them. One-

third said that their policy would change, or they would introduce one following the lifting of the restriction on the number of resits allowed.

94. The UCAS survey found that 80 per cent of centres used the January 2004 assessment opportunity for AS and nearly 90 per cent for A2 examinations. Grammar and independent schools were least likely to use the January assessment opportunities in either year and sixth-form colleges were most likely to.

95. Over 70 per cent of centres reported that results from the AS examinations taken in January were as expected, while 85 per cent said the same for A2. These figures imply general understanding of the level of demand in these examinations. That this understanding has increased is confirmed by looking at responses over time to other questions in the UCAS survey. While in 2002 67 per cent of teachers were broadly confident they knew the standard required for AS, this had risen to 81 per cent in 2004. In response to the question about confidence in the standard of A2, the results were 44 per cent in 2002 compared with 82 per cent in 2004.

96. A majority (57 per cent) considered that the AS examinations in the summer term should be after the A2 examinations, in order to maximise AS teaching time.

97. While views varied on the extent of external assessment at A level, more centres than previously are content that the extent is about right: up to 44 per cent from 33 per cent. However, more centres expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of AS coursework this year (up to 33 per cent from 25 per cent).

Impacts of developments in qualifications

What impact have GCSEs in vocational subjects had on provision and take-up?

98. There was a strong take-up of GCSEs in vocational subjects in 2003/4, with over 113,000 examination entries. The increased flexibility programme provided a significant impetus to this. While in some schools they were not offered to students of all abilities, there was some evidence of schools widening the range of students in comparison with the first year.

99. In some areas, use of GCSE subjects was linked strategically to local sector skills needs. Industry links remained variable in quantity and quality across local areas, schools and sectors. Links between courses and work experience were often weak, with very few students being able to use work experience to contribute to coursework, often because it was organised separately from GCSE course planning.

100. GCSEs in vocational subjects were normally being offered in 20 per cent of timetabled time. This impacted on which students chose them, on the rest of the curriculum offer and on students' programmes. In many cases these qualifications were introduced at the same time as schools removed subjects from their core curriculum or used disapplication more freely.

To what extent are schools using a range of vocational qualifications at key stage 4?

101.   There was considerable evidence of widening the choice of some students by offering them the opportunity to take vocational courses, on the school site or in collaboration with a college. While most of these courses are GCSEs in vocational subjects, use of NVQ at key stage 4 had increased since 2002/3, largely stimulated by the increased flexibility programme. Nearly a quarter of schools responding to the MCA key stage 4 survey had students working towards key skills qualifications.

102.   There was little evidence as yet of use of other vocational qualifications in schools. Some schools reported some parental resistance to qualifications seen as vocational or to non-GCSE qualifications. At key stage 4, the extra cost of off-site provision, particularly where it entailed staff accompanying students to placements was an issue.

103.   Groups of schools/colleges in some areas are setting up vocational learning or skills centres to provide vocational opportunities. In many cases this is where schools and colleges are distant from each other, where college capacity to absorb more 14- to 16-year-olds is limited or where schools consider college provision to be expensive. Such centres are often planned with post-16 progression in mind.

104.   Nearly 10 per cent of MCA schools said that they were adding at least one NVQ to their key stage 4 curriculum. In most areas demand for places on NVQ courses outstripped availability. The most popular vocational courses were in hairdressing, construction, food preparation and motor vehicle studies. Some curriculum managers and teachers expressed doubts about the suitability of NVQs for key stage 4 students.

105.   The withdrawal of the GNVQ foundation was causing centres more concern than the withdrawal of intermediate level. Teachers considered the GNVQ foundation as a motivating qualification and did not know if the alternatives, where they existed, would have the same effect. They were unconvinced that GCSEs in vocational subjects would meet the needs of all learners at this level. Many were investigating BTEC qualifications to replace their GNVQ provision.

106.   Some of the issues relating to teaching and learning of vocational courses persisted, for example, teachers in schools without recent industrial or commercial practice and some further education teachers' lack of experience in teaching 14- to 16-year-olds. There was evidence that issues were being addressed, however: for example, by common timetabling for half-days across institutions, by staff training in behaviour management, pairing school and further education teachers, use of learning mentors and learning support assistants to help students.

How are schools, colleges and students continuing to use the Curriculum 2000 qualifications?

107.   Some previous trends in the use of Curriculum 2000 qualifications have been confirmed.

108. The MCA post-16 survey indicated that fewer students in those schools had changed or dropped a subject than in the previous year. Overall, the UCAS survey gave a figure of 14.5 per cent of students changing/dropping an AS subject in the course of year 12.

First year/year 12 students

109. Evidence from the UCAS survey shows that around 95 per cent of first-year advanced-level students were taking GCE AS level qualifications. This percentage has risen each year since 2001. The majority (57 per cent) were taking four GCE AS levels in June 2004, with 27 per cent taking three AS levels[*]. Both these figures are consistent with previous findings. As before, the overall figures contain a range, from 83 per cent of students in independent schools taking four AS, to 56 per cent in state schools and 29 per cent in further education colleges.

110. Twenty-one per cent of year 12 students were taking a VCE qualification. This figure is close to that in 2002, and slightly down on 2003 (25 per cent). In further education colleges the proportion reached 50 per cent.

Second year/year 13 students

111. Ninety-two percent of year 13 students were taking GCE A2 qualifications. Overall, 72 per cent of year 13 students were taking three A2 subjects, with 12.5 per cent taking two and 10 per cent taking four or more[*]. In further education colleges the figures are 56 per cent, 28 per cent and six per cent respectively.

112. Students in sixth-form colleges remained most likely to take one or more new AS qualifications in their second year – 28 per cent of them did so. In all types of school/college the average was 13 per cent.

VCE and other vocational qualifications

113. In further education colleges nearly half of students taking advanced-level courses were taking a VCE qualification. Overall, 19 per cent of year 13 advanced students were taking a VCE.

114. Provisional results show that entries for the VCE double award at 39,045 were down on 2003 (43,807) but entries for the single award and the VCE AS were both up.

	Single award	AS
2004	42,708	18,296
2003	40,914	15,976

(JCQ, June 2004)

115. Around one-fifth of UCAS respondents offered BTEC National or other advanced-level vocational qualifications, reflecting the relative numbers of schools and colleges responding. One hundred centres of the 900 responding stated an intention to move from VCE to BTEC in at least one subject area, and 15 to another vocational qualification.

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[*] Note: the figures quoted above exclude general studies. Sixty-two per cent of MCA schools offered AS general studies and 52 per cent offered A level as an option or a compulsory part of the curriculum. In most cases this was as a fourth or fifth AS. These figures are consistent with previous surveys.

116.   Less than 30 per cent of centres said they had an agreed policy on using AEAs and in 80 per cent of institutions the decision was up to individual departments or teachers. Sixth-form colleges are most likely to use these qualifications – 53 per cent saying they did so and state schools least likely to at 17 per cent. Overall, 27 per cent of centres said they entered students for AEAs in 2004. Previous responses have been around 20 per cent. There was a total of 7,246 entries for AEA in 2004, around half of them resulting in distinction or merit grades.

Key skills

117.   According to the UCAS survey, 42 per cent of year 12 and 33 per cent of year 13 students were working towards at least one key skills qualification. The range was wide, however, with further education and sixth-form colleges most likely to be entering students. Four out of five year 12 students in sixth-form colleges and year 13 students in further education were working towards at least one key skills qualification.

118.   Overall just over one-quarter of students in those centres responding to the question were registered for one key skills test and smaller proportions for two or three tests. Forty-two per cent of centres expected advanced level students taking key skills to achieve certification; the others expected students to develop key skills without having them certificated. Twenty-five per cent said that they offered application of number, 33 per cent communication and 37 per cent offered ICT.

Transfer and transition/progression

What changes are schools making to their CEG programmes to help students choose 14–19 programmes and plan for progression?

119.   Almost all transition programmes from key stage 3 to key stage 4 began in the spring term of year 9 and included careers information, explanation of the key stage 4 options available and parental involvement in option choices. Fewer than half prepared students for new ways of working at key stage 4 or used current students to talk about their courses. Taster courses were used by less than 20 per cent of schools.

120.   There was awareness that learners' guidance needs will change as 14–19 programmes become more varied and choices become more significant. Forty per cent of schools had made changes to their key stage 4 and 29 per cent to their post-16 CEG programmes. A higher proportion planned changes in the coming year and 30 per cent said these would involve work-related learning.

121.   Four-fifths of MCA key stage 4 and two-thirds of post-16 schools were aware of the national framework for careers education.

122.   Where changes had been made, they most often involved increased collaboration with Connexions or other careers agencies, more time for CEG, and post-16, a more structured programme.

123.   Difficulties reported included time pressure within the curriculum; the availability to teachers and others advising students of accurate and up-to-date information; and continuing tension between institutional self-interest and

impartial guidance. The Connexions Service was seen as under-resourced to meet its aims. Some schools would still like to have provision for all students to have individual careers interviews.

124.   Some schools are using Progress File (used by nearly 20 per cent of MCA post-16 respondents), individual learning plans, or commercial products such as 'Fast Tomato' to support students in understanding their own capabilities and their progression opportunities, including further education and higher education.

125.   There continued to be a lack of awareness of the range of apprenticeships available. In some areas, opportunities were lacking, especially where the majority of employers were in small businesses.

Implications for further monitoring and action

126. QCA will continue to monitor the development of the 14–19 curriculum along the lines indicated in the relevant Green Papers, the Success for All programme, the five-year strategy for children and learners, the 14–19 Working Group's report and subsequent White Paper. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of changes to the statutory curriculum at key stage 4, including the introduction of statutory work-related learning and enterprise skills. We will aim to check the extent to which students in special schools or alternative provision have access to the range of opportunities available to those in mainstream schools.

127. We will monitor the development of strategic planning and operational systems to support schools and colleges in developing their 14–19 offer. The impact of area-wide inspection, strategic area reviews and changes to achievement and attainment tables will be investigated.

128. We will also investigate issues of staffing, such as how management structures are evolving, the impact of workforce reform and staff capacity to meet the new demands.

129. We will interview students about their experience of the 14–19 curriculum and trace how it is changing. We will ask particularly about their experience of guidance and transition and the features they regard as helpful and unhelpful to their progression. In monitoring careers education and guidance programmes changes to help students choose 14–19 programmes and plan for progression will be noted. We will also ask to what extent student capacity to take advantage of opportunities is in itself an issue that needs addressing.

130. We will include more colleges in our monitoring and consider how the role of colleges in 14–19 learning is changing, what capacity issues they have and how post-16 provision and use of qualifications at entry level, level 1 and level 2 are developing.

131. Training providers will be consulted on their experience of involvement in strategic planning for 14–19, the range of their provision and use of qualifications.

132. A major project on vocational provision will evaluate the GCSEs in vocational subjects, look at the range of other vocational qualifications offered at key stage 4 and consider what makes these qualifications appropriate for pre-16 use. We will continue to monitor how centres are choosing and using replacements for GNVQ qualifications across the phase.

133. As more students begin to follow a work-based route we will investigate how these students are identified or selected, specifically how students are selected for inclusion in initiatives such as Young Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment and post-16 apprenticeship and the nature of their experience in some of these programmes.

134. Links will be made with national evaluation programmes such as 14–19 pathfinders, Young Apprenticeships and the increased flexibility programme.