The Key Stage 4 curriculum

Increased flexibility, work-related learning and Young Apprenticeship Programmes

Contents

Executive summary

From autumn 2004, secondary schools were offered greater flexibility in the curriculum for 14–16 year olds. Design and technology (D&T) and modern foreign languages (MFL) became 'entitlement' subjects, offered to all students but no longer compulsory. At the same time, work-related learning (including enterprise education) became a requirement for all students, while collaboration between schools and colleges was encouraged to broaden access to suitable vocational courses, including the Young Apprenticeship Programme.

Ofsted was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to inspect and report on how schools were responding to these opportunities for increased flexibility at Key Stage 4, and also how well schools were introducing the new statutory requirement to ensure that schools incorporated work-related learning (WRL) for all 14–16 year olds into their curricula. Additionally, in those areas where WRL was given an additional boost from the Young Apprenticeship Programme, Ofsted was requested to include this in its surveys.

The inspections began in 2004 and will continue until 2007. This interim report summarises the effectiveness of the changes to the curriculum and work-related learning in their first year. During that time, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), additional inspectors appointed by Ofsted and inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate visited six local authority based partnerships involving eight colleges and 63 linked schools, as well as 67 schools selected on a nationally representative basis. In addition, visits were made to 18 Young Apprenticeship partnerships.[1]

Schools in the survey have, on the whole, responded well to new opportunities and requirements; most schools are making positive attempts to change the curriculum to meet students' needs. While in most cases these changes have been partially effective, the limiting factors to successful change include weaknesses in auditing, specifying, monitoring and evaluating changes to the curriculum. In some schools, too, the pace of curriculum change has been slow, partly because of their perception that their position in performance tables might suffer. In a few schools there is still resistance to the idea that WRL is for all.

The students on adapted programmes of study are overwhelmingly positive about the changes to their curriculum. Adaptations are mainly, but not exclusively, aimed at those who might otherwise become disengaged from their learning. Well-considered changes to the curriculum have improved their motivation and attendance. Students are generally very positive about WRL. There is also some evidence to suggest that attainment and staying on rates are improving.

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[1] Full survey details are given in Annex B.

Collaboration between the partners involved in the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) and other initiatives is generally expanding. Two thirds of the schools are managing the introduction of WRL satisfactorily. Young Apprenticeship Programmes have made a good start and the teachers, staff and students involved are positive about their impact. However, there are practical difficulties which inhibit effective communication and liaison between partners in these initiatives.

Teaching and learning in the courses new to schools were good or better in two thirds of the lessons seen, but unsatisfactory in nearly a fifth, a higher proportion than Key Stage 4 as a whole. There is, overall, insufficient training for teachers to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills for new courses.

Key findings

❐ Most of the schools visited have made positive steps to make their curriculum more relevant and appropriate for all by offering a wider range of subjects and qualifications. In a minority of schools development was inhibited by the perception that their position in performance tables might suffer.

❐ As yet, most schools are struggling with what a statement or definition of entitlement to WRL might look like. In the early months, planning for WRL was generally satisfactory, although there were few signs of impact on the broader curriculum, and not many schools were confident that their provision was of an acceptable standard for all students.

❐ In a few schools, there is resistance to the idea that WRL is for all. Some staff and governors do not see the relevance for high-achieving students.

❐ The Young Apprenticeship Programme has made a successful start. The majority of students enjoy their study, are making progress and have a clearer idea of their future career pathway.

❐ Links between the Young Apprenticeship Programme and students' vocational courses are underdeveloped. Useful cross-referencing between placements and other learning was rarely in evidence in either planning or in implementation.

❐ Students are expected to have a minimum standard of attainment and ability in order to benefit from a Young Apprenticeship Programme. However, a third of the partnerships did not meet this criterion for all students and in one partnership, 40% of students had not reached the required level.

❐ A minority of Young Apprenticeship Programmes has fallen short in important respects: the integral role of the 50 days' work experience is often ignored; parents are not always fully informed of the nature of the course and its status; and students are not always interviewed by partner employers.

❐ In most cases teaching on the Young Apprenticeship Programme is effective in motivating the students and encouraging good behaviour. However, some programmes are not good at helping students to become independent learners.

❐ Teaching and learning in the new and adapted courses were good or better in two thirds of lessons, but unsatisfactory in nearly a fifth. This is a poorer picture than that for Key Stage 4 as a whole. However, the proportion of satisfactory lessons increased over the year, so that in the summer term, only a very small number was inadequate. There is, overall, insufficient training for teachers to acquire the requisite knowledge and skill for new courses.

❐ Students are achieving well in half of the providers surveyed, but in one in ten, too many students make insufficient progress.

❐ Most students receive satisfactory guidance in Year 9 and support to make informed option choices and to enable them to benefit from work experience. However, although guidance is good in almost a half of schools, in the others, help to make appropriate course choices often lacks the necessary fine-tuning to meet individual needs. Schools and colleges do not always share information efficiently and this hinders effective guidance.

❐ There is good collaboration between schools and their partners in only one in ten partnerships. It is unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter. Local authorities are generally not influential in support arrangements although some 14–19 initiatives have been helpful to Young Apprenticeship Programmes.

❐ Resources to support new courses, while being at least satisfactory in almost all of schools visited, are only good or better in a quarter. The quality of accommodation in schools varies considerably. There are isolated examples of excellent accommodation but overall it is only adequate and sometimes is poor. Many schools and colleges report that their planning is hindered by a lack of sustainable and predictable funding.

Recommendations

Schools should:

❐ Provide a rationale for curriculum change, articulating a strategy for a coherent pathway for students from 14–19 which can be shared with students, parents and governors. Where schools choose not to adapt their curriculum, they must demonstrate that students' best interests are already met.

❐ Include in their continuing professional development programmes training in the teaching and management of new courses.

❐ Consider more comprehensive methods of assuring the quality of delivery and equality of provision across the school.

❐ Ensure that all students have sufficient information about pathways and good support to help them make appropriate course choices.

❐ Offer early intervention to those students who appear to be at risk of leaving school with no link with learning or employment.

❐ Pursue collaboration where it will enhance the opportunities for young people, ensuring that sufficient information is passed on to their partners and monitoring how well their students are progressing.

❐ Audit current provision for WRL and formulate a vision of entitlement for all, defining the outcomes they will use to judge success, including qualitative and quantitative measures of achievement and progress.

Young Apprenticeship Programmes should:

❒ Implement consistent selection procedures.

❒ Inform parents about the Young Apprenticeship Programmes and offer opportunities for discussion to ensure they understand fully the requirements of the course.

❒ Ensure regular communication takes place between partners at management and practitioner levels.

❒ Develop students' learning skills to enable them to progress independently in the workplace.

❒ Monitor and assess students' progress carefully and support those who find the work difficult.

Part A. The Key Stage 4 curriculum in transition

A more flexible curriculum at Key Stage 4

1. Most of the schools visited have taken the opportunity to review what they teach in the light of greater flexibility and many are keen to do so. As a consequence, they have made their curriculum more inclusive by offering a wider range of subjects and qualifications. Indeed, as the academic year progressed, there was increasing evidence of schools planning further extension to the curriculum.

2. Where provision is good it is guided by a sound, inclusive rationale. The curriculum statement expresses the clear principle of raising aspirations and standards, is regularly discussed and updated as part of a school improvement plan. However, around half of schools surveyed have not yet defined their rationale for changing the curriculum in a summary statement which could be easily shared with staff, governors, students or parents.

3. Several factors have influenced schools' decisions to adapt their curriculum:
    *   the changes in National Curriculum requirements
    *   an aspiration to enhance the curriculum to offer more to interest and engage students
    *   the wish to reduce the undue pressure placed on some students by the volume of coursework and the number of examinations they take
    *   the understanding that some students are so disengaged from their school's curriculum that their behaviour and attitude suffer
    *   the need to provide some students with more demanding courses at a higher level
    *   the need to provide courses that match students' career aspirations
    *   the ambition to raise attainment.

4. The most effective approaches to curriculum change are those which match different combinations of courses to the needs of particular groups and individuals. These include newer and applied GCSEs; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and other vocational qualifications; additional GCSEs or Advanced units for higher attainers; and holistic courses covering a range of skills for those with learning difficulties.

    A large girls' comprehensive school, with a higher than average number of students entitled to free school meals, had made many innovative changes to the curriculum in order to raise attainment. The school's clear vision statement sets out the statutory core taught to all which includes a choice of technology subject; a wide range of options, including Urdu and dance, with a good number of vocational opportunities including leisure

and tourism, media, business, health and social care. A small group of students benefits from an Increased Flexibility Programme funded course for two half days plus after-school study. Theirs is a rich experience of vocational and media-based learning which builds their skills and personal effectiveness. For some in Year 10 a fast track course has been introduced where students study 5 GCSEs together with a day's work placement through the Education Business Partnership.

5.   Most of the changes made using the new flexibility are designed to benefit those for whom a traditional diet of GCSEs is not deemed suitable. Some students either do not cope with the type of work involved or are disaffected and at risk of truancy or exclusion. For other students, although they are able to achieve within the current curriculum, the school recognises that there are wider, more interesting and more useful alternatives. These often expect a different style of learning which builds autonomy and independence so helping students to 'learn how to learn'.

6.   Some schools have seen a reduction in the number of courses as the best way to raise the achievement of students who were struggling or disaffected, so ensuring that they have the opportunity to progress to post-16 education.

7.   Schools have also found benefits where students begin accredited study and enter for examinations earlier; and where students study off site, for example at college, with training providers or on extended work placements. Valuable learning also takes place outside the normal school day, for example sports and music education or guidance sessions with business mentors. The more effective schools have also developed some innovative ways of developing and accrediting students' broader achievements. These include: awarding internal school certificates; enriching the curriculum with activities such as Junior Sports Leaders Awards and Young Enterprise; and encouraging participative citizenship. These often promote more positive attitudes and acceptance of responsibility.

8.   Many schools have used new flexibility to drop MFL from the compulsory core, and this has resulted in a marked decline in numbers studying them. In one of the schools only 6% of students take a modern foreign language. However, in a few schools there has been an increased take up of community languages.

9.   In some schools, MFL had been retained in the compulsory core, reflecting the view that languages are an essential part of the ethos of the school and their study is in students' long-term interests. This example shows how MFL had been retained with flexibility found in other ways.

A successful grammar school with technology status maintains compulsory design and technology and modern foreign languages, as it is

felt that these are of proper value for all. Early GCSE work allows time for some in Year 11 to move into advanced study and this is carefully considered so that it slots into sixth form and college courses to allow genuine support to post-16 work. Some students are dissuaded from following a large number of GCSEs but encouraged to improve the standard at which they work.

10. Even in these schools, however, there is pressure from students and parents to make languages optional. In some schools it is only higher ability students who are encouraged to take MFL. The reduction in the teaching of MFL has had consequent staffing problems in some schools. Where this has been carefully thought through, language teachers have been trained in other subjects in order to broaden their capability. The changes to requirements relating to design and technology (D&T) have not had the same impact and most schools continue to offer a number of D&T options.

11. Whereas most of the changes have been made with the interest of students in mind, some schools appear primarily to have been driven by the need to improve their position in performance tables, as shown in the following example.

    A headteacher at a comprehensive school attempting to raise the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE A*–C grades admitted that the GNVQ ICT course, which counts as four GCSEs but which takes up only two option blocks, had been introduced overwhelmingly for that purpose. Whether all the students benefited from it or were prepared for suitable progression post-16 was not an issue. 'If we are asked to play these games, I will play them'.

12. In some schools the changes have been modest because of a range of considerations that have made radical review difficult. In most schools the time available for core National Curriculum subjects is not negotiable, so it is in the structure of option choices and arrangements that some flexibility can be found. Flexibility within options programmes is limited where pupils expect to take large numbers of courses. For example, it is now quite common for students to take nine or ten GCSE courses or equivalents, and many students supplement this by studying some subjects – such as drama – outside school hours. Smaller schools in particular find it difficult to offer larger choice unless they are able to establish partnerships to extend their curriculum opportunities. Other constraints on flexibility include a rigid approach to learning, for example, only a few schools use e-learning as a way of studying.

13. A number of schools continue to offer a curriculum in which students are guided into courses on separate pathways according to their attainment at Key Stage 3. This is an efficient way to timetable and is an attempt to offer coherence at different levels of attainment. It does, however, limit

the choice for students and can reduce their motivation. It also lowers the status of vocational courses if they are only offered to those who find learning difficult.

A comprehensive school offers the statutory entitlement well to all, with 80% of students expected to take a MFL. The school offers a variety of applied and vocational courses in leisure and tourism, sport, child development and college based courses. However, students are organised into three bands and only those in the 'bottom band' are able to choose these vocational options. The school recognises that this limits progression routes for many.

14. In schools where only minor changes have been made, the curriculum consists of a statutory core and entitlement options, with a basic diet of GCSEs supplemented with alternative courses for a few students with learning difficulties. There is often excessive caution about changing a curriculum that works well for the majority and where the school's overall performance is above average. Yet such curricula do not take advantage of broader opportunities and some groups of students continue to study courses for which there are more engaging alternatives.

15. Only a small number of schools have made no moves to add to or adapt their curricula. Most of these are selective schools where a more traditional curriculum is considered to be suitable. As a consequence, there are few opportunities for students to benefit from applied and vocational courses, albeit in these schools there are generally many opportunities for enrichment.

16. In other schools where there has been little change to the curriculum; one reason offered by headteachers is that their staff do not have the expertise to move into new courses. In a small minority of unsatisfactory cases, there has been little thought as to whether the curriculum is genuinely suitable for all groups of students.

17. Although overall provision is satisfactory in the large majority of schools, many do not entirely meet statutory requirements. In particular, many schools are not ensuring that all students are able to follow the programme of study for ICT at Key Stage 4 and almost all have not yet ensured that all students receive equivalent work-related learning, suitable to their needs. In some, what appear to be more urgent problems of behaviour and attendance have taken precedence so that not all students follow the statutory core; the schools' rationale being that it is better that the students study something perceived as more engaging rather than drop out. Although this inclusive approach is justified in terms of the need help students who experience difficulties, in some cases students could gain more, or a higher level of, accreditation to equip them to progress.

18. Collaboration between schools and with other educational providers makes a wider range of courses available. For example, good partnerships with the local college of further education provide teaching resources and technology and staff training, including joint teaching. This can be particularly helpful to smaller schools. However, moves to improve choice can founder where a lack of affordable transport hinders students' ability to travel – a major problem in rural areas. One innovative solution is peripatetic: the resources needed for hands-on experience of motor vehicle engineering and hair and beauty are transported to schools so that students do not have to travel.

19. Some schools that have been responsive to new opportunities, but which do not have an overall curriculum statement or rationale, have accepted courses offered by local colleges pragmatically and without ensuring that they offer a coherent package of learning to all students. Colleges are not always able to offer the variety of courses which schools feel appropriate for their students.

20. Where the FE colleges provide additional alternative curriculum courses at a cost to the school, these are generally thought to provide good value for money. However, smaller schools in particular do not always have access to sufficient funds to enable their students to benefit from these courses. There are a number of examples where the rationale for large differences in course charges from training providers and others is not clear to schools. Schools and colleges report the difficulties they encounter in managing varying, unpredictable and transient funding. Funding from Increased Flexibility and Pathfinder projects is welcomed and useful but schools are concerned that the long term sustainability of vocational projects is not secure, particularly those delivered off the school site.

21. On occasions, schools and colleges are in effective competition for students and here there are barriers to collaboration which are not easily overcome.

22. Over a third of the schools visited employ good or very good systems to evaluate the effects of changes to their curriculum. In the best practice, evaluation by the school and at subject level is regular, with clear measures of impact which include students and parents in the process. Changes in patterns of examination passes and the progress of different groups of students inform planning for the next cycle. In a few collaborative partnerships, providers work together to gauge the extent and level of students' improved attainment. This is helpful for future planning, but is not yet sufficiently common.

23. In the one fifth of schools where monitoring is weak, little account is taken of all groups of students and many departmental reviews are cursory or incomplete. Evaluation of the impact of WRL on students' learning or achievement is not generally in place.

24. Resources are good in half the schools and satisfactory in the very large majority. Specialist resources available in colleges are good and sometimes excellent, and meet industry standards. Around one third of schools had made very good use of additional funds from their specialist status to upgrade the school's resources and facilities, most notably in sports colleges and science and technology colleges.

25. However, the quality of accommodation for curriculum flexibility in schools varies considerably; overall it is only adequate and sometimes poor.

> *One school has developed its own beauty therapy and construction courses, without adequate consultation with the local college or employers. The resources do not meet the needs of the course and the school does not have sufficient funds to provide them. A beauty therapy lesson observed in the school was taking place in a computer room and inspectors had serious concerns about health and safety issues and the lack of professional standards.*

26. Where schools have invested in specialist facilities this has had a noticeable impact on standards and progress, as in the following examples.

> *- One special school has excellent media resources which it shares with mainstream schools. The school plans to build linked conference facilities where students will be able to qualify in hospitality and catering courses.*

> *- In another school, students following a 'skills for life' course benefit from their own base room which provides them with good access to computers and a clear identity that they value highly. Displays of their work support learning and celebrate students' achievements.*

> *- In a third school, new accommodation has been designed and developed with the new Key Stage 4 curriculum in mind. The school and local further education college jointly teach the construction course in the specialist accommodation on the school site. There is very good close collaboration between the two organisations.*

Standards, teaching and learning in new courses

27. Many of the courses observed were introduced into schools for the benefit of those not attaining well, and so the sample included a larger than normal proportion of lower attaining students. Most students who follow these courses are progressing well given their prior attainment. Schools feel strongly that new courses and practical activities are improving the motivation of students to achieve.

28. In the great majority of schools visited, learning on new courses is at least satisfactory; in over half it is good or better and in one in twenty it is excellent. Students' responses are generally positive: they are engaged, interested and behave well. Staff and students alike often comment that learning more effectively helps them behave more maturely, as in this example:

    Students were relaxed and confident but not over familiar with their teachers and tutors. Student banter was good humoured with their peers and with adults. There was sense of control in their behaviour although they could be very demanding of time and attention from adults on some occasions.

29. In the schools where curriculum change can be linked to improved achievement, there is close monitoring of individuals' progress. Teachers are very clear about problems their students experience and plan the work accordingly. There is also careful analysis of the performance of particular groups of students, such as those with special educational needs or those from minority ethnic groups, to ensure that they are achieving and attaining as they should, as in the following example.

    A comprehensive school identified a group of girls who were seriously underperforming. Although they had ability, their progress was critically undermined by long-term poor attendance. The school and its partners actively worked with the girls and their families to ensure their presence in school and at lessons. In the main, this worked and the girls' attainment improved.

30. However, changes to the curriculum do not always benefit those groups of students who experience the most difficulty in improving their performance. In one in twelve of schools in the sample, a number of students who are following a different curriculum do not make the progress they should. This is often the result of weak assessment practice, with policies to help students improve being inconsistently applied. In particular, insufficient help is given to students as they are working to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Some schools concentrate on helping those students who might raise their attainment from grade D at GCSE to a grade C. While this may be helpful to this group, it does not in itself improve teaching or promote higher attainment for all. When teaching new courses for the first time, teachers often teach 'to the test' at the expense of teaching for understanding; students need to know about the criteria for success earlier in their courses. Too often, the coursework set is not well matched to students' capabilities and interests, and it is not clear how it will meet course requirements. Unsurprisingly in these circumstances, the coursework is thin, disorganised and shows little evidence of understanding.

31. There is an additional difficulty in monitoring the progress of students when their education is shared between establishments. Colleges and training providers do not always receive information about students' prior attainment and in some cases they do not understand the implications of student data, apart from the projected minimum grade. Occasionally there is a mismatch in the different assessment and recording systems of schools and colleges, and this generally confuses students and their parents.

32. Teaching in schools and colleges on the new and adapted curricula is satisfactory or better in nine out of ten lessons and good or better in six out of ten, a similar picture to that found in the Increased Flexibility Programme last year. Teaching observed improved over the year, so that in the summer term only a very few lessons were unsatisfactory and rather more were excellent.

33. The best lessons included lively, interesting teaching from teachers with expertise and an ability to vary activities and questions to include all students. Good lessons were characterised by committed teaching, good planning and, where appropriate, a clear WRL context. Students understood what was expected of them, for example working out the costs of a chosen manufacturing method, making business organisation charts, arguing the pros and cons of the development of a limestone quarry, or carefully practising techniques for using a lathe. Work-related learning includes learning skills for work, and where schools had given thought to permeate this through the curriculum, subjects such as history and geography improved students' abilities to become independent learners, to research from a variety of resources and to solve problems.

34. Where lessons are adequate but no better, teachers are insufficiently clear in communicating their aims with students. They often give too many objectives or make them too general. Less effective lessons do not challenge students to question, analyse or think for themselves and here students spend too long listening or completing worksheets with insufficient time to either understand the concepts or become properly involved with practical work.

35. In weaker lessons students spend too little time on relevant practical skills or too long on low-level tasks, and as a result their interest wanes and their behaviour deteriorates. In other poor lessons, teaching is uninspiring with teachers talking for too much of the time and failing to engage students' attention.

36. Where schools had suffered a large turnover of staff, they inevitably found it more difficult to match teachers to new courses. This was compounded where the induction of new teachers was inadequate. However, where teachers had access to training from awarding bodies and other trainers,

opportunities to visit other schools and vocational settings, good resources and the time to plan their courses, the teaching improved.

37. In those courses involving collaboration between schools and colleges, not all partnerships ensure that college staff received training in teaching 14–16 year olds, and some college staff are uncertain about appropriate methodology. In more effective practice there is close monitoring of teaching and learning in order to provide support.

38. Learning support assistants and other staff increasingly act as mentors and provide support when students are in lessons out of school. Although generally welcomed by students and college tutors, their effectiveness varies depending on how well they have been involved in, and informed by, prior planning.

39. Around half of the schools visited have evidence that a more appropriate curriculum, which meets the needs and interests of their students, has led to improved attitudes and behaviour. In seven out of ten lessons observed, students' behaviour was good or excellent: students were actively involved in their learning, responding well to their teachers' high expectations. Schools almost always report that the attitudes of students on vocational courses at the local college or a work-based learning provider are much improved and this has a positive knock-on effect back in school. This is especially the case for those young people whose disaffection and poor attainment has caused behavioural difficulties in the past, as in this example.

> *In one school, four boys at risk of exclusion attended a local college one day a week to complete an NVQ in engineering or construction. Their attitudes and work at the college are exemplary and their attendance and behaviour back in school is much improved. The school expects them to successfully complete Key Stage 4 and progress on to a college course at 16.*

> *One girl often displayed immature and disruptive behaviour in school lessons. However, at her beauty therapy session she worked conscientiously, dealt with her clients in a mature and responsible way and completed a manicure to a professional standard.*

40. Students perform best when they are actively involved in their learning. These students are confident in completing tasks and adopt a mature approach to their work. They work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. Students demonstrate many of the skills, attitudes and qualities valued in the workplace in a wide variety of contexts. Schools that have used the increased curriculum flexibility well provide engaging courses which instil good attitudes and behaviour, potentially for all students. However, in around one in twenty lessons where behaviour is poor, students are not productively engaged. They demonstrate a lack of

confidence, low self esteem and require constant supervision and direction from the teacher to keep them on task.

41. Good behaviour and interest from students when in college is not always transferred back to school: some students work well in college in smaller classes with more individualised attention and they prefer the practical nature of activities. Where the links between school and college are more securely made, good practice is shared within the partnership to develop better attitudes and behaviour overall.

Part B. Work-related learning

Planning for work-related learning

42. Over four fifths of the schools are managing the implementation of the new requirement for work-related learning at least satisfactorily: as yet, however, in the early days of the survey they were still at the stage of planning their WRL policy and statement of entitlement, and few had made significant changes to their existing WRL provision as a result of the new requirements. A fifth remain at a very early stage of reviewing existing provision, or have given WRL little attention.

43. Although the schools approach WRL differently, effective management is characterised by a clear commitment from the headteacher, governors and senior staff who have a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. The most effective practice is seen where schools have audited current provision; used guidance from the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and other bodies; perceive WRL as integral to the school improvement plan; teaching and learning strategies, inclusion and equal opportunities; and have planned evaluation of its benefits for students. In contrast, where this practice is not in place few of the staff are able to pinpoint where their subjects are able to contribute.

44. The large majority of schools have at least satisfactory systems in place to plan and coordinate WRL, but these are unsatisfactory in one school in five. Most, but not all schools appointed a WRL coordinator to take up their post in September 2004, and so at the time of their inspection their planning was often at a very early stage. Most schools had begun to review their provision, but only a minority had completed a detailed audit to enable them to plan coherently. The proportion of good practice improved as the year continued.

45. WRL is generally well supported by a range of collaborative activities between education providers and other organisations such as Connexions and Education Business Partnerships. However, local authorities are rarely directly involved in informing decisions on course delivery and content.

46. Although work experience and a careers education and guidance programme are the most common components of WRL, other good provision includes the use of vocational courses, enterprise activities in the curriculum or on days when the normal school timetable is modified, WRL elements of specific subjects and extra-curricular activities. Innovative activities in WRL are often associated with school–business links.

47. The most effective approaches are characterised by a breadth of provision which include some or all of:
    - well considered work experience programmes

- careers education and guidance programmes which begin in Year 7 and build knowledge and skills cumulatively through to Key Stage 4
- WRL within subjects
- after school clubs and other extra-curricular activities
- industry days which contribute to the development of enterprise learning
- vocational courses
- community projects and wide ranging contact with employers.

48. Almost all schools prepare their students well for work experience and provide adequate time for students to reflect and evaluate.

49. However, the quality of that evaluation varies: it can be detailed and thoughtful, but is often cursory. Work experience is most successful when guidance and support help to create a sense of purpose for students. This enables them to identify and then reflect on the outcomes of the tasks they have carried out and what they learned. Successful support and guidance for work experience enables students to find out more about vocational areas in which they are interested; develop an understanding of the world of work; identify and apply social and technical skills required in the workplace and research specific aspects of their placement.

50. Students who organise their own work experience have mixed experiences: some find the choice and independence beneficial but others do not extend their understanding beyond the family business.

51. Learning is consolidated when students are able to identify links between their classroom learning and what they gain from work experience. However, this coherence is rarely planned. Often schools do not exploit the potential of school subjects sufficiently, so that for example, students' letters of thanks to employers are not written or presented in a professional way; and any reprise of work experience is cursory, without a requirement for students to reflect deeply on the skills and confidence they have acquired.

52. Although WRL is statutory for all, too often staff and governors perceive education relating to work as the preserve of those who are at risk of failing. This is to miss its potential. The few schools that ensure that all students are able to follow well designed WRL as part of their overall curriculum are able to show it enthuses and interests students – renewing their sense of purpose.

Standards, teaching and learning

53. Where students take part in WRL, most students achieve at least satisfactorily. They are generally actively involved in more practical activity, much of which they find motivating. Many are able to develop a range of skills which help prepare them for the world of work. They are

able to reflect on these skills particularly in relation to work experience. Many students are becoming increasingly independent in their learning as a result of deliberate approaches by schools to develop the skills to solve problems for themselves.

54. In the schools where learning is good, teachers help students practise a variety of skills, ranging from general to subject specific competencies. Students are aware that the ability to be punctual and attend regularly is valued by employers. They can see the relevance of working well in teams, making personal contact with unfamiliar adults such as their work experience provider, dealing with the public, attending interviews and listening to feedback on their performance. Students also understand the skills involved in research, in writing up their projects and in developing their subject specific knowledge. At best there is an excellent improvement in the key skills of communication, application of number and problem solving as well as the specific components of the lesson.

55. Work-related learning often benefits students who would otherwise have been expected to achieve much less. Most students are well motivated by their WRL and they are acquiring a range of skills, including individual learning. They feel well informed and supported due to good systems of advice and guidance in schools.

56. In most schools students are able to undertake a work experience programme which provides much of their learning through work. They also follow careers education and guidance programmes which enable them to be well informed about their choices at 14 and 16 and achieve much of the learning for work. Learning about work in some schools is less well developed except for those students following vocational courses. However, most students are able to relate skills and knowledge learned in school to the world of work. Where achievement and progress in WRL are good, students are able to achieve a sound understanding of the world of work through a variety of contexts and are enabled to work both independently and collaboratively.

57. Many students are able to identify a wide range of courses where they learn about work. The most common sources of information are careers lessons, outside speakers and tutorials where there is an emphasis on a broader knowledge of work and society linked to specific skills such as writing CVs, completing application forms and preparing for interviews. Students often cite personal, social and health education, geography, ICT and vocationally related courses such as business studies, leisure and tourism and health and social care. These subjects are perceived by students as helpful in improving their knowledge of work.

58. Students who have used careers software are very interested in what is reported about their skills, personality and linked careers options. The process generally widened their ideas of progression routes.

59. In general, students welcome a wide choice of courses, including vocational options at Key Stage 4 and value the effective support and guidance they receive when making choices. They are particularly positive about industry or enterprise days and their participation in vocational courses, often as part of link programmes with colleges. Students are generally very clear about the value in building both specific and generic work-related skills.

60. A small number of students express the view that their school has not prepared them for the world of work. In less effective practice, students are not gaining as they might from their work. They are too reliant on teacher talk and notes; their study skills are weak and they do not improve their ability to research independently. In some there is no link made between work experience and the skills they have developed, as in these examples.

> *Because students in the English lesson had not done sufficient work on how businesses might react to the scenarios, many took too long to understand the role play and learning was at a pedestrian pace.*

> *The teacher asked the class questions but then answered them too readily. If students were unsure about how to do something the teacher 'took-over' and demonstrated rather than allowing students to solve the problem for themselves.*

61. Although most of the teaching is at least satisfactory, very few schools employ good whole-school approaches to teaching WRL. All have some pockets of good practice but teachers' knowledge of the work-related learning framework varies, often according to whether or not a teacher is involved with work experience, careers education or vocationally linked qualifications. Rarely have schools involved all their staff in training or updated them on requirements for work-related learning. As a consequence, few teachers are aware of the QCA guidance. However, a small minority of schools have incorporated WRL into training days or plans to do so. Where it has been most effective, professional development generally involves all staff in the school's auditing of its provision and ensures that key staff attend external courses including training to implement and assess new courses.

62. A feature of weaker teaching is that teachers do not help students manage their own learning. As a consequence students' folders are disorganised, untidy, and comprise mainly text copied directly from internet sources and the whiteboard or notes dictated by teachers.

63. Assessment of WRL is not well developed, although individual components such as work experience and vocational courses often include well established evaluation of outcomes and there is some good use of

progress files. Schools do not regularly draw together existing procedures to provide an overall picture of achievement and progress in WRL for each student.

64.   Similarly, there is as yet no overall assessment of WRL against the QCA framework, although there are generally good arrangements for monitoring specific projects such as industry and enterprise days, work experience and particular vocational qualifications. This example shows the limitations of current practice.

> *Students are encouraged to review their own and others' work. They are very positive about this, but do not complete it against criteria-based, such as level descriptions. The head of maths in one school recognised criteria based assessment needs further development by school; he is working on it but reported some reluctance among staff. There was little display of students work and none (in classes visited) that overtly illustrated work of high quality.*

65.   Most students have very positive attitudes towards WRL and can identify how their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world outside school have improved as a result. Typically, students say that understanding the requirements of work, particularly by direct experience, opens their eyes to how demanding it can be. Most feel that experiencing the expectations of a chosen career motivates them to work harder at school to gain necessary qualifications.

66.   The most common improvements suggested by students to schools' practice in WRL are to introduce a sense of the variety of jobs and opportunities open to them earlier in Year 9; to have more visiting speakers; more mock interviews – particularly with people from outside school; and to include more work experience and better variety within it.

Part C. Young Apprenticeship Programmes

Management and collaboration

67. Young Apprenticeship Programmes have generally made a good start. Students are making progress and are overwhelmingly positive, although they have some suggestions for improvement. The management of programmes by partnerships is generally at least satisfactory and in a quarter it is good.

68. Many of the partnerships build on networks and experience developed through previous activities such as the IFP or other local collaboration. Where partnerships are successful this is often because local authorities and the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) have successfully encouraged colleges, secondary schools and work-based learning providers to work together on the 14–19 agenda. However, there is substantial variation in the contributions made by local authorities and local LSCs.

69. Successful partnerships have a number of factors in common:

   - the partnership agreement and the Young Apprenticeship agreements form the basis of the monitoring activity which the steering group undertakes
   - the steering group meets regularly and includes all parties to make a strong, efficient network
   - fees are managed and standardised so that, for example, it costs the same for a school to send a student on the automobile apprenticeship (which is a costly provision) as it does to send one on business administration
   - partnerships have taken advice from the employment sectors and awarding bodies.

70. Some partnerships offer a wide experience including options for students to be involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, local community initiatives, the Young Enterprise scheme and Outward Bound courses. For example in one partnership, all students now take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme even though it is not compulsory. Students appreciate these opportunities.

71. However, although schools welcome the extended opportunities the Young Apprenticeship Programme offers their students, it is a challenge for partnerships to meet the requirement of two days per week for the programme without seeming to adversely affect the curriculum of those students involved. This can force schools and partnerships to choose between either reducing the options available to some students or interpreting the programme in a different way which does not meet the Young Apprenticeship guidelines.

72. Providing the full requirement for a minimum of 50 days work based learning has been particularly problematic. Only three partnerships have clear plans for students to complete the requisite work experience and many have different interpretations of the requirement. Where it has worked best, careful plans have been formulated at an early stage.

> *Twenty students will have two two-week placements with employers, the first coincides with the schools' designated work experience period for all Year 10 students, and the second follows the Year 11 examinations. In each period, a group of three to four students will go to one employer who has set a 'real' team project for them to work on over the two weeks. The team will make a presentation to company engineers at the end of the two-week period. Students also spend one half day (extended from 13.00 to 17.00) each week, approximately 50 days, on NVQ2 training in a local college training workshop under similar conditions to that experienced by any engineering apprentice. Achievement of the NVQ units will mean that any future apprenticeship can be accelerated. Day visits to four employers attached to the scheme are programmed into the first year and other visits are planned for Year 11.*

73. Health and safety checks, risk assessment and insurance for work placements are usually undertaken effectively by organisations experienced in making these arrangements such as Education Business Partnership, local authorities or work experience administrators. A difficult issue for partnerships is that of ensuring criminal record checks have been made on all staff in contact with young apprentices on work placements. This is exemplified in one partnership which is well aware of issues relating to the care of 14–16 year-olds in their own and the employers' premises. They have insurance, health and safety and risk assessment in place for all employers on their list: but they are still not clear to what extent criminal record checks on the employers will be necessary, and are taking advice.

74. Links between the Young Apprenticeship Programmes and students' vocational qualifications are generally underdeveloped. Useful cross referencing between placements and other learning was rarely in evidence in planning or in implementation.

75. The advice and guidance produced for students about the Young Apprenticeship Programme was thorough overall, although in some partnerships there was lack of information or lack of clarity about progression routes post-16. Partnerships typically produced information leaflets and booklets and supplemented these with presentations to students and parents.

76. However, where partnerships were accepted late into the national programme, information arrived in schools after students had completed

their option choices for Key Stage 4. Many schools did not make the programme available to all students but selected from those who had already chosen certain subjects such as GCSE engineering or other vocational choices. There are indications that practice has improved for the second cohort.

In one partnership, because of short notice, the first cohort of Young Apprenticeship students was simply drawn from a single school's GCSE engineering cohort, well after option choices had been made. For the second cohort, the Young Apprenticeship Programme is a clear option choice. Students have been thoroughly selected based on Key Stage 3 performance, an individual interview, aptitude tests and a group 'industry day' that assesses how the applicants will work together. The interview is designed to assess the applicants' needs, motivation, and aspirations. About a third of those expressing interest after a detailed introduction to the proposed new scheme were rejected as a result of these processes. Each school has ensured that other essential learning and core curriculum entitlements are in place. For the second cohort, although not the first, all eligible students at the school were given information about the scheme. The provider made presentations at careers events and open evenings, and had a special meeting with the parents of those selected.

77. While the involvement of Connexions is helpful in the guidance process for some of the schools, it is inconsistent at both steering group level in partnerships and for support for individuals and groups in other schools visited. There is little evidence of relevant progression paths for Young Apprenticeships being included on careers databases.

78. Efforts to reduce the impact of gender stereotyping, particularly in engineering which forms a large part of the Young Apprenticeship cohort, have not been successful although there are some rare exceptions. In some partnerships this is not seen as a priority, in others efforts are not sustained and there is a tendency to accept the existing situation.

Standards, teaching and learning

79. Standards in the programmes are broadly satisfactory, although where practical work has a high profile, standards are often good and sometimes very good. Students are gaining a good knowledge and understanding of the specialist skills required in their particular vocational areas and this is developing as the programme continues. Those on work placements have good knowledge and understanding.

80. Key skills development is uneven and often characterised by a lack of coordination between partners, and in some cases key skills are not adequately assessed or recorded.

81. Where key skills are well developed, there is good collaboration and teamwork in the partnership, as in this example.

    All of the students in one partnership show good development of ideas and concepts, with good progress in both vocational programmes and double award GCSEs. The quality of portfolios, written work and practical work shows definite improvement in the order and disciplined analysis of assignment work and in its presentation.

82. Although almost all of the partnerships have in place what are called 'individualised learning plans' for young apprentices, they are not used consistently or effectively to support progress. Trainers make little use of the Key Stage 3 attainment data to plan for different abilities or to set targets.

83. Students are expected to have a minimum level of attainment in order to benefit from a Young Apprenticeship Programme, measured by the attainment of 14 points at Key Stage 3. However, a third of the partnerships did not meet this criterion and in one partnership 40% of students had not reached this level. Some trainers were not aware of the requirement. In one partnership, overall progress was unsatisfactory because the late selection of students had been inappropriate and resultant problems were compounded by staffing changes and large class sizes.

84. In a few cases, partnership managers felt that aptitude and attitude were at least as important as Key Stage 3 attainment, as in this example.

    In one partnership, of 29 students, three did not meet the Key Stage 3 benchmark but were offered places on the basis of enthusiasm and aptitude. Although one student was not put forward by his school, he read about the Young Apprenticeship Programme in the local newspaper. With the support of his mother, he applied and gained an offer of a place. His enthusiasm remains undimmed and despite not doing very well in Year 9, he flourishes within the programme.

    Such successful cases are unusual; in the main students need to have proven skills to cope with the demands of the courses.

85. Students enjoy their Young Apprenticeship work, responding well to a different, often more adult environment than they are accustomed to in school. They tend to have higher work rates and increased application compared to their peers.

86. Most partnerships have made arrangements for parents to be informed about the programme.

The school takes responsibility for reporting to parents, but additionally parents have been invited to open afternoons for parents and carers at the training provider. This gives them an opportunity to see the young apprentices in action and have a short presentation; the partnership staff are on hand to answer any questions about progression and the apprenticeship programme generally. These meetings have proved to be very successful.

87. Where parents are not fully aware of the demands of the programme, the dropout rates tend to be high, as in this example:

The partnership was dismayed that of 31 students who initially enrolled and 29 who started, 12 withdrew by the end of the first year. Only 17 applications have been received for 30 places for autumn 2005 start. In hindsight, the specialist provider recognised that insufficient attention had been given to informing parents about the achievements and opportunities that Young Apprenticeships offer. Most of the withdrawals were under parental pressure and fuelled by anxieties about the consequences of committing so large a proportion of the school timetable to a single qualification in a single discipline.

88. Students are generally well informed about the assessment requirements and are supported in improving their work by systems of review, often involving one to one interviews with tutors, as in this example.

Assignments have a significant part in teaching students the skills they need. Students are well informed about assessment and there is regular one-to-one tuition on how to improve their work. Students are continuously assessed in the workshops and they are clear that the quality of practical work will not be accepted until the tutor is satisfied that good standards have been met.

89. While reporting between college and school to parents is adequate, some early reports have concentrated on the students' effort and social and emotional development, but have not given sufficient prominence to their progress and standards.

90. In most cases teaching is effective in motivating the students and encouraging good behaviour: this helps students to make satisfactory and often good progress.

A new young apprentice was being introduced to a placement and the teacher quickly established a relaxed relationship which enabled a productive first learning session. Teaching methods skilfully took account of what the student knew and extended her understanding of the aspects of the vocational sector. The highly motivated student was able to respond maturely and make good use of prior knowledge to demonstrate understanding of appropriate behaviour in the workplace. In another

situation, where a whole group was involved, the session was very well taught; the students were extremely well motivated by a good level of discussion, very good explanations and helpful demonstrations. Students were all encouraged to ask questions and felt confident to extend their knowledge or check their understanding.

91. Many of the teachers and tutors have relevant industrial experience and experience of teaching in their vocational areas and so their subject knowledge is good. Many partnerships have good arrangements for tutors and trainers to improve their skills in working with 14–16 year olds. These include trainers beginning to acquire teaching qualifications and collaboration between schools and colleges on teaching approaches.

92. On the rare occasions where behaviour and motivation are less than satisfactory, the work often lacks that practical element which students value highly.

93. Teaching is less effective when early planning does not inform practice. This can result in a lack provision for students of different abilities and insufficient coordination between teaching programmes in school and those on Young Apprenticeship Programmes. Not all providers set homework or check it. Although most students are keeping portfolios of evidence which are well maintained, in a minority of the partnerships the development of portfolios has been slow and the recording of evidence is inadequate.

94. Resources for Young Apprenticeship Programmes are often very good and make use of up-to-date teaching resources, ICT and good quality accommodation.

   In one partnership, resources for learning, particularly in the practical workshop, are excellent. The small classrooms are well equipped with an overhead projector, laptop, data projector and there is a store of practical and class workbooks. Some of the programme is available on DVD for students' use. Seating arrangements encourage flexibility. The workshop has been equipped to a high standard. Teachers can draw on the good resources in other workshops if these are needed.

   However in most schools, there is a lack of resources such as textbooks and software for students to follow up their Young Apprenticeship work.

95. Additional support for students is often good, providing high ratios of staff to students with support from other adults such as mentors. For example, in one partnership a group of 12 students is supported by two tutors from the training provider and a support tutor from the school.

96. After a hesitant start, students are gaining confidence in their interactions with trainers, employers and peers and are beginning to work

independently and take increasing responsibility for their learning. In the main, students respond well to trainers and supervisors.

In one partnership a skills mentor holds planning sessions with students in small groups or individually before their employer-based placement begins. Students contact employers directly, provide their CV and research the company via its website or other materials before attending for interview. Understandably, some students find this quite demanding but rise to the challenge and, in hindsight, report positively on this process. Sensitive work by the school's mentor is the successful key to this process.

On the infrequent occasions where students do not interact well with adults on the programme, work is too passive and does not encourage student involvement or give them enough challenge.

Annex A. Background to curriculum change

Impetus for change has been described in the White papers: *14–19: Opportunity and excellence*; *Schools achieving success* and in 2005, *14–19: Education and skill*.

Schools have been encouraged to be more flexible with curriculum arrangements and required to adapt them for 14 to 16 year olds in Key Stage 4. The purpose is to enhance and better meet the needs of all students – particularly, though not at all exclusively, those who are at risk of being disengaged from school. The curriculum flexibility allows schools to create time during the school week for alternative courses to those in school and to adapt the school curriculum to give students who find oral and written communication difficult, the chance to study something they find more satisfying. Aspects of the National Curriculum have been made optional: no longer do all students need to study design and technology or a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11 and can use that time to study alternative subjects. At the same time, schools must ensure all students have the choice to continue to study some subjects: modern foreign languages, design and technology, the arts and humanities. Some schools, because of their particular or specialist status, do expect some aspects of this 'entitlement' curriculum to be compulsory in their school.

A new requirement came into force in September 2004 making it mandatory for all students to take part in WRL which includes enterprise education. Work-related learning is designed to help students understand more about the world of work and develop skills to help them in their chosen careers. They should learn about work, learn skills for work, and learn through direct experience of work.

Collaboration between school, colleges and other education providers has been encouraged, most notably in the Increased Flexibility Programme.

As a very specialised pilot, the Young Apprenticeship programme was introduced in September 2004. Young Apprenticeship Programmes are managed by partnerships of schools, colleges, training providers and employers. In addition, many partnerships are supported by local Learning and Skills Councils, local authorities, Education Business Partnerships, awarding bodies and the Learning and Skills Development Agency. In a few, Chambers of Commerce and universities are also involved.

The programme allows students to gain experience of work and pursue vocational qualifications outside of school. It is intended to be of high quality and is aimed at able, interested and well motivated students. Students follow the core curriculum in school and spend about two days a week following vocationally based qualifications. The programmes require students to learn on work placements for a minimum of 50 days. This is designed to help students

understand: the skills used in the vocational sector; the role of apprenticeships; the place of qualifications and progression in companies; their local economy and the companies within it and have a good sense of career opportunities. The programmes expect 80% to achieve level 2 industry specific qualifications, and half of those enrolled to progress onto a full apprenticeship when they are 16. Partnerships offer engineering, automotive engineering, business administration, health and social care, art and design and hospitality. The programmes are deliberately small-scale at present to ensure that all aspects can be monitored.

Annex B. The surveys

Starting in September 2004, the DfES requested Ofsted to carry out surveys into how schools were responding to opportunities for increased flexibility at Key Stage 4, and how well schools were introducing their new statutory requirement to ensure that schools incorporated WRL for all 14–16 year olds into their curricula. In some areas, WRL was given an additional boost from the Young Apprenticeship Programme, and Ofsted was requested to include this in its surveys.

The surveys are planned to continue from 2004 to 2007. This is an interim report summarising the effectiveness of change in the first year.

Over that first year visits have been made by HMI, additional inspectors appointed by Ofsted and inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate. From September 2004 until July 2005 inspectors visited six local authority based partnerships involving eight colleges and 63 linked schools; another 67 schools were selected on a nationally representative basis. In addition, visits were made to 18 Young Apprenticeship partnerships. Inspectors discussed curriculum rationale with headteachers, their senior staff, teachers and, where it could be arranged, with governors, parents and employers. Over 200 lessons were observed, mainly, but not at all exclusively, on those focused on alternative or vocational learning. Some schools showed how they felt that changes to the curriculum had enhanced the opportunity and learning of students.

Inspectors met with students and discussed their perceptions about what they were learning and how well they were progressing. They also looked at students' written work in a variety of subjects. This direct observation and contact was supported by around 650 students' written answers to questionnaires. Students were chosen by the schools and were often, but not all by any means, those on particular alternative work based programmes. Some schools completed a curriculum summary sheet.

Initially, inspections of curricular flexibilities within partnerships and that of WRL were conducted separately. Although with different foci, there were many areas of overlap between the two, particularly as increasing flexibility was most often used to enhance alternative WRL. So, in the summer term a nationally representative sample of schools provided information about their curriculum changes, including WRL.

The inspection of Young Apprenticeship Programmes has continued separately, incorporating evidence from those school and college visits where provision coincided.

The second year of these linked surveys is planned to look more closely at how all groups of students are considered in changes to the curriculum and at how well students in Year 11 are helped to make the transition into learning post-16.

Annex C. Further information

Ofsted

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Increased flexibility programme at Key Stage 4: evaluation of the first year (HMI 2074), Ofsted, May 2004

Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience (HMI 2220), Ofsted, May 2004

Developing new vocational pathways: final report on the introduction of new GCSEs (HMI 2051), Ofsted, July 2004

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

www.qca.org.uk

National Foundation for Educational Research

www.nfer.ac.uk

Learning and Skills Council

Increased flexibility case studies: improving practice
www.lsc.gov.uk
http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/ImprovingQuality/GuidanceandGoodPractice/flexstudiespracticemar04.htm

DfES

www.dfes.gov.uk/qualifications
www.14-19reform.gov.uk

Association of Colleges

www.aoc.co.uk

Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.lsda.org.uk
www.vocationallearning.org.uk