



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Report on vocational learning provision at key stage 4

Annex 3: Methodologies and school samples

January 2006

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The questionnaires

Data was gathered from two questionnaires: the Monitoring Curriculum and Assessment (MCA) annual questionnaire, sent out to a stratified sample of 1,000 secondary schools in England as part of a suite of subject questionnaires, and a bespoke investigating vocational provision (IVP) questionnaire sent to a sample of 200 schools that were selected because they had the highest national participation in vocational provision either:

- a) because of the proportion of students gaining vocational qualifications, or
- b) because of the number of different vocational qualifications they offered.

It is important to note that, although the sample of schools used for the MCA questionnaire was more representative than the sample used for the IVP questionnaire, it is subject to a self-selecting bias in terms of completion. Schools are not required to complete and return the MCA questionnaire. Schools that did return it were more likely to be involved in offering vocational qualifications, simply because of the content of the questionnaire.

The MCA analysis is based on responses from 303 schools (a response rate of 30 per cent) and the IVP questionnaire analysis is based on returns of 106 questionnaires (a 53 per cent response rate).

For the full and detailed analysis for both questionnaires, please see Annexes 2 and 3.

The schools

The schools in our samples had similar percentages of IFP schools (in the MCA 52 per cent and in the IVP 57 per cent). Fifty-eight per cent of MCA respondents said their school had a sixth form, slightly above the national figure of 41 per cent (SCU, 2002), and 42 per cent of schools from the IVP survey said they had a sixth form. The percentage of schools in our samples with a specialism was significantly higher than the national figure (75 per cent of sample schools versus a national figure of 41 per cent).

Centre Visits

From February to April 2005 consultants visited 29 state secondary schools across England on behalf of the QCA and the investigation into vocational provision at key stage 4.

The school sample was taken from a list supplied by the DfES of 1,000 schools that had been identified as offering a significant vocational curriculum, either in terms of the number of students involved or in terms of the number of vocational courses offered.

We contacted the head teachers of the top 50 schools explaining the project and why their school had been selected and asked if they would allow QCA consultants to visit for part of a day. Twenty-nine of these schools agreed and visits were arranged.

Ahead of the visit the school was sent a short questionnaire that included questions about the school and the qualifications it offered. It was also sent a full list of the questions that were going to be asked during the interviews.

At each school, consultants held structured discussions with the head /deputy head of curriculum, teachers who had subject responsibility for the delivery of GCSEs in vocational subjects, teachers who had responsibility for the delivery of other vocational subjects and two groups of students: those studying a GCSE in a vocational subject or subjects and those studying 'other' vocational qualification(s).

It is important to note that the schools in this sample were hand-selected because of their level of vocational provision. We would therefore expect levels of participation and the number of qualifications offered to be higher than in the school population as a whole. This is not a representative sample and it is important that the reader keeps this in mind when reading through the following analysis.

The schools

Forty-eight per cent of the schools said they were IFP schools (the national figure stands at 66 per cent).

In terms of regional distribution, we included at least one school in each of the Government Office Regions in England.

Government Office Region	n	%
London	3	10%
East of England	2	7%
Yorkshire and the Humber	5	17%
South East	5	17%
South West	4	14%
East Midlands	3	10%
West Midlands	3	10%
North East	3	10%

North West	1	3%
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School size

The respondent schools were made up of:

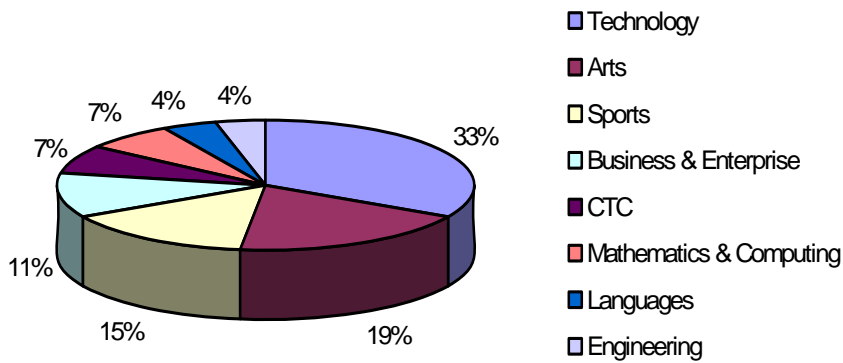
Small schools (less than or equal to 128 students in year 10)	17%
Medium schools (greater than 128, less than 186 students in year 10)	28%
Large schools (greater than or equal to 186 students in year 10)	52%

59 per cent of the schools were 11–16 schools
 38 per cent were 11–18 schools and
 one school (3 per cent) was an 8–16 school

School specialism

Ninety-three per cent of the schools we visited already had or had applied for specialist status. The most common specialism of the schools in the sample was technology (33 per cent). None of the schools in the sample had specialisms in humanities, music or science and two of the schools said they had no specialism.

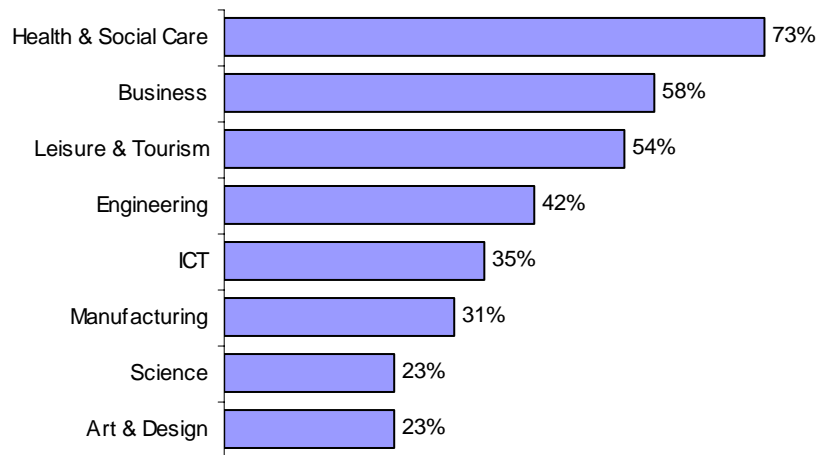
Nationally 41 per cent of secondary schools have a specialism (based on figures from the SST website and SCU, 2002 data). Like the schools in our sample, the most common national specialism is technology (33 per cent).



Vocational provision

Vocational provision	% of schools
Offer GCSEs in vocational subjects	90
Offer NVQs	5
Offer 'other' vocational subjects	97

The most commonly offered GCSE in a vocational subject was health and social care, offered to key stage 4 students by 73 per cent of the schools. The least commonly offered subjects were science and art and design (each offered by 23 per cent of the schools).



Focus Groups

We originally intended to hold subject-specific focus groups at QCA drawn from teachers delivering GCSEs in vocational subjects to identify any subject-specific issues not identified elsewhere in the investigation.

Two meetings were held at QCA in March 2005, one for engineering and one for science, but not enough teachers were available to attend the other planned meetings. An alternative approach was therefore used for the other subjects. We contacted LEA and LSDA networks to identify scheduled meetings that QCA could attend. QCA attended meetings in Coventry, Stafford, Rotherham, Worcester, Wolverhampton and Portsmouth from May to July 2005.