

What does the 14-19 Wolf Report have to say about funding?

The Wolf Report was charged with considering how 'we can improve vocational education for 14-19 year-olds and thereby promote successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes'. It first explores the social and labour market context, and then the educational context of the English system. Part 4 is an audit of current provision and here it highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the current system. Part 5 puts forward **27 recommendations**, which seek to 'preserve and build on current strengths and achievements'. The Report is keen to emphasise that it did not concern itself with vocational qualification reform, indeed the 'serious problems in current provision' have not been 'created by individual vocational qualifications, or how they are taught'. Rather, it argues that the problems lie in the regulatory systems, and the 'perverse incentives created by current funding and accountability mechanisms'. Our current vocational education and training system it argues is not equipping young people with the skills they need for their future, and too often fails to recognise the specific needs of 14-19 year-olds compared to adults. The recommendations therefore go right to the heart of the bureaucracy surrounding our education and training system, and asks the fundamental question, what are the most important skills which every young person needs for progression? Funding is obviously a key to change within the system, so what are the main messages around funding; what changes can we expect to see if the recommendations are adopted?

The implications for funding are not always clear and direct, and of course we have no detail as to how any of the 27 recommendations would be implemented, which, when it comes to funding, is where the devil is always found. Precise impacts are therefore impossible to determine without further policy development, but some of the key headlines on funding are:

The recommendation that **16-18 funding to follow the learner at rather than the qualification** is probably the single most significant funding proposal in the Report. The current 14-16 funding methodology is used as the model to be followed. This, it argues, will allow more thought to be given to a learner's holistic *learning programme* rather than having to put funding considerations before learner needs, which the Report views as one of the 'perverse' side effects of the current 16-18 funding methodology. The Report recognises that weightings will still have a place - a school or college offering a high number of engineering courses would incur more costs than one offering purely A levels for example, as would considerations of the costs of part-time learners.

The inclusion of a **success factor** in post-16 funding calculations comes in for heavy criticism. It is argued that the current payment system gives 'institutions strong incentives to steer students into courses they can easily pass'. Payment by results, it is argued, also put pressure on awarding organisation and teacher-assessed standards.

16-18 learning programmes should be governed by general principles relating to content, structure, assessment arrangements and contact time, but should not involve the detailed prescription comparable to Key Stage 4. All learning programmes for this age group should include a large general education component; learners at this age should not follow entirely 'occupational' programmes (exceptions may be made for part-time or work-based learners). Institutions should be free to offer any suitable qualifications from awarding organisations, and should also be encouraged to include non-qualifications-based activity.

The Report argues that the QCF has meant that younger learners on vocational programmes have been forced to follow programmes designed for working adults. It argues that in future **learning programmes for younger learners should be substantially different from adult provision**. Programmes should include a general education component. This could lead to the availability of different qualifications for pre and post-19 learners.

English and maths GCSEs are singled out as the most important vocational qualifications a learner can achieve, and the Report recommends that any learners below 19 who have not already achieved these qualifications by the end of Key Stage 4 should be encouraged and funded to re-take them. It is clear that Key Skills are not seen as viable alternatives to GCSEs but it is unclear from the Report whether Functional Skills would be considered suitable replacements. The Report also recommends that a comparable requirement should be introduced into any apprenticeship frameworks for the 16-18 age-group.

A core and common curriculum at 14-16 should be followed by the majority of learners; no-one should specialise in any vocational area before the age of 16. Although there are no direct funding implications given that 14-16 year-olds are funded on a per-pupil basis rather than on a qualification

basis, this would have implications for what qualifications can be offered to this age group. Implementation would be driven by the list of qualifications available for pre-16 learners (currently Section 96), and the reformation of the performance tables, rather than by a removal of funding. The recommendation is that in general, no more than 20% of a 14-16 learner's programme should be vocational.

The Report is not supportive of **Foundation Learning** which it doubts will be a success; it argues that it provides qualifications that aren't valued by the labour market, and involves large numbers of separate teacher-assessed qualifications which are costly to run. It recommends that the lowest attaining learners, including many with LLDD and the disaffected should concentrate on the core academic skills of English and maths, and work experience. Funding should be amended to support this focus, and on employment outcomes, rather than building up qualifications. Wolf leaves any recommendations regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN) to the SEN [Green Paper](#) published on 9 March 2011.

Workplace experience, even outside apprenticeships, is considered highly valuable and the Report recommends that this must be considered a high priority for schools and colleges, for all learners; funding for it will inevitably have to be considered.

Apprenticeships come in for a great deal of praise and there is a call for an increase in the numbers of 16-18 learners. The Report notes that growth is not as high as expected for these learners, perhaps due to the reluctance of employers to take on younger employees. It recommends that employers that take on 16-18 apprentices should be eligible for payments, as long as the programme offers clearly identified off-the-job learning. It is envisaged that English and maths GCSEs be taken as part of apprenticeships if a learner does not already have these qualifications (it is unclear whether Functional Skills would be considered a viable alternative), and that all apprenticeships for this age-group should offer a substantial amount of off-the-job education. Apprenticeships for 14-16 learners are not supported; it is argued that in the main learners at this age should not be on vocationally specialised programmes. The Report doubts whether the current general education components of apprenticeship frameworks are adequate for 16-18 year-old apprentices who wish to progress, and question the appropriateness of the SSCs owning the frameworks. It also calls for increased flexibility within the frameworks so they can be modified to meet local labour markets and conditions. It recommends that contracting arrangements for apprenticeships should be reviewed to drive down costs associated with brokerage activities that do not add value, and that the DfE and BIS should look at ways groups of smaller employers could become direct providers of training (Group Training Associations are mentioned as a possibility).

The Report strays into the world of post-19 funding with recommendation 13 which suggests that learners should have a '**time-based' entitlement to education**, which, if they haven't used by the time they are 19, can be used at a later date.

Recommendation 19 suggests that **the legal right of colleges to enrol learners under 16 should be made explicit**. Any colleges taking on 14-16 learners would still have to offer the full Key Stage 4 curriculum, and be subject to the same performance monitoring regime as school.

The **bureaucracy and centralisation** of the qualification system comes in for very heavy criticism. The implementation of the recommendations around this issue would see the removal of the need for Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to approve qualifications for funding, and a move by Ofqual to regulate awarding organisations rather than qualifications. Too many non-accountable organisations are seen as being involved in the development and approval of qualifications; their removal would mean far more flexibility for employers, and schools and colleges, to work directly with awarding organisations to develop valued vocational qualifications. SSCs come in for particular criticism, not for the job they are doing, but for the fact that they have been given 1) an impossible task, i.e. to be the single voice of the employer, and 2) a task that is too narrow when it comes to 14-19 education, i.e. education for this age group should not be dictated purely by employer need but should also provide learners with a good general educational grounding.

The Report recommends **increased funding for CPD for English and mathematics teachers**, with particular attention given to staff who are teaching post-16 students, including apprentices, and adults, in colleges and schools.

It is yet to be seen how many, if any, when, and to what extent, the recommendations are adopted and the exact implications this will have on funding for schools, colleges, and training providers. What happens next will be followed with keen interest.