How to motivate (demotivated) 14-16 year olds, with special reference to work-related education and training

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Seminar papers, final summary paper and executive summary available for downloading on http://cep.lse.ac.uk/events/seminars/motivation/default.asp
The problem

• A first estimate suggests that the disengaged are located within the broad group who achieve less than 5 GCSE passes A*-C and comprise at least 20% of the cohort

• International comparisons (PISA) shows UK disengagement below the OECD average

• But the UK has the strongest link between socio-economic disadvantage and disengagement
The analysis

• We identify a very small (1-2 %) ‘out of touch’ group who have practically lost touch with school.

• A larger group – possibly to be identified with the 20% who claim to have no GCSEs (McIntosh) could be characterised as ‘disaffected but in touch’.

• Finally, we identify a further group, the ‘1-4 A*-C grade’ group located within the 20% of the cohort who gain between 1 and 4 GCSE passes at Grades A*-C who have not reached full potential as a result of loss of interest in learning.
Historical evidence – issues raised

• Historical evidence (technical secondary schools; TVEI, Advanced GNVQ) show vocational/technical subjects and programmes as being particularly vulnerable to pressures to academicise content, to problems of quality and to the absence of natural champions i.e. employers and trade unions.

• How can we ensure that the GCSE in vocational subjects will receive the sustained support necessary for survival?
Issues from International Comparisons

• The OECD PISA study showed even our poor-performers scoring better than their counterparts in some other countries.

• Yet perhaps half the English students scoring at Level 3 on the PISA tests may have failed to gain a Grade C GCSE pass in English (if we map directly across from PISA to GCSE). Are we setting the bar too high too early?

• Or perhaps we can move more quickly towards de-coupling Key Stage 4 assessment from GCSE and encouraging a variation in length of preparation for GCSE?
Issues from pseudo-cohort analysis

• The (20%) claiming no GCSEs at 17 are unlikely to gain further qualifications.
• For the few who do, those with NVQ Level 3 have the same employment prospects as those with 5 GCSEs at A*-C
• Young women in this group are highly marginalised
• This group should benefit most from Connexions guidance and support.  *There is concern that Connexions is not fully meeting the needs of this – or indeed any - group of young people effectively.*
Issues from review of evaluation

- It was argued that *nothing that we have heard in the seminars offers an obvious way forward for the ‘disaffected but in touch’ group*, targeted by work-place learning measures.

- For the ‘1-4 Grade C’ group, there is something of a magic bullet; namely better vocational options. *The danger is to try to apply the vocational options solution to the ‘disaffected but in touch’ for many of whom it is far from optimal.*
And finally…. 

- Disengagement is not new, but changes in the demand for skills, and the importance of lifelong learning together with a more inclusive employment and social agenda have made it a high priority policy area.
- Estimating the size of the challenge presented by disengagement and distinguishing the variety of needs of those in this group is still under-researched.
- We believe that our work in this series of seminars has helped to clear some of the ground and achieve greater clarity.