

How to Motivate (Demotivated) 14-16 Year Olds (with special reference to work-related education and training)

Executive Summary

Introduction

This paper summarises the main points that have emerged from an ESRC-funded seminar series that focused on a question of national concern – namely re-engaging de-motivated young people. The series was organised by the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) at the London School of Economics, in collaboration with colleagues at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), and was linked to the *Skills for All* Research Programme, with which the two organisations are engaged.

The prime aim of the seminars was to examine the research evidence that vocational learning can re-engage into the system disengaged and de-motivated young people, and what the most effective levers might be. Disengaged learners fall into two categories for concern, and for which different solutions may be needed:

- Those who are disengaged but are achieving at or above potential – many of these can also be classified as ‘disaffected’
- Those who are disengaged and under-achieving.

The six seminars followed a sequence by first examining the joint historical contexts for disengagement and the growth of the work-related curriculum in schools and then looking for international comparators and solutions that may be applicable to the British situation. The third seminar provided characterising data on disengaged youngsters and the variables or levers associated with worsening or improving the situation. The last two seminars examined different responses to disengagement through national policies and local programme initiatives.

The Historical Dimension

As Richardson stated, the post-war, secondary modern curriculum catered for 70 per cent of the cohort, and included those who were, arguably, most at danger of under-performance and disengagement. It started out with freedom for innovative and more practically oriented teaching, but became progressively more prescriptive and academically orientated, with the introduction (in 1965) of the CSE as a ‘sub-GCE’ examination and, after 1988, the National Curriculum. In the 1950s and 60s, vocational learning was not widespread in secondary education, except in the small minority of technical schools which were abandoned by both political parties after 1959.

Although quite a significant proportion of the cohort was not very interested in school, pre 1970, they saw it as the gateway to work and a wage. There was increasing concern, post 1960, that schooling was failing to meet the full range of students’ aptitudes, interests, aspirations and abilities, and was not sufficiently preparing young people for adult and working life. Disengagement and disaffection amongst young people were not, at the time, seen as major issues.

They did not become a policy concern until the late 1970s and 1980s when youth unemployment rose and this was accompanied, for the first time, with increased proportions of ethnic minority groups among the cohort of school leavers. Only then did the ‘disaffected’ teenager, who saw little prospect of securing a good youth wage, become a public reality.

In response to worries about the relevance of schooling and both growing youth unemployment and disaffection, there were renewed attempts to increase practical and work-related learning component in schools with, in particular, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). TVEI, originally intended to introduce a vocational element into the curriculum, was actually mostly about the introduction of new teaching styles and approaches for all learners, and, although some important legacies remain, it was largely eclipsed by the National Curriculum (Franklin; Bayliss).

In the 1990s, rising requirements for literacy, numeracy and social skills meant that the result of disaffection - i.e. problems with school discipline and failure to acquire basic skills at school - moved up the policy agenda. In the more demanding social and labour market context of our current decade, the failure to engage with learning in school is now perceived as a major challenge. Since 2002, New Labour has stated repeatedly that it is set on transforming this legacy of post-war policy failure.

International Comparisons

Findings from the OECD’s PISA study

As Schleicher reported, the UK shows a relatively high performance of 15 year olds on practical literacy tasks, but socio-economic status is more strongly associated with performance in the UK than in other countries at a similar level. There is also a relatively long tail of under-performance in the UK results.

The proportion of students in the UK, showing both a sense of belonging to their school community and participation in education, on the OECD measures, is somewhat surprisingly, rather lower than the OECD average. However, the relationship between poor participation (truancy; missing classes) and low socio-economic status is the strongest in the whole of the OECD.

Around one quarter of UK students feel that teachers are not helpful or understanding of their problems, and this is in line with many other European countries and much lower than in some countries that have very high PISA scores.

The UK has fallen behind most other countries in reducing the proportions of 19 year olds with qualifications below NVQ Level 3, and the lack of well framed apprenticeships and other vocational programmes has been put forward as one possible explanation.

14-16 in Switzerland and US

These two countries offer contrasting approaches. The **Swiss** 14-16 school provision does not include vocational learning (except for careers advice), but is conditioned by the expectation that almost all young people who do not proceed to university will enter an apprenticeship of 3 or 4 years duration. Much stress is placed on:

- getting the early years right

- setting attainable goals
- maximising success rather than failure
- nurturing self-esteem
- creating a stable and safe environment for learning (Whitburn).

In the post-war period, on average, between a quarter and a third of all **US** 17-18 year olds fail to gain a High School Diploma, mostly as a result of early drop-out. This proportion has hardly changed over the past 30 years. Most students still take some vocational options which contribute to the award of the High School Diploma, but these have lower status and are often poorly-resourced.

Some alternative 'whole school' or 'school-within-a-school' approaches, with a vocational focus, appear to motivate and re-engage American students. The evidence suggests that they have a range of gains in terms of motivation, re-engagement and commitment to further education, but do not necessarily lead to increased student achievement, as measured by traditional indicators. These approaches also help to create, it is said, a more coherent and directed secondary school experience, which has been criticised for permitting student to haphazardly mix and match courses in ways that fail to relate to vocational goals (Stanz).

Profiling Disengaged Young People

Labour Force Survey results in 1996 revealed that just under a fifth of young people aged between 17 and 19 in 1996 claimed to have no GCSE passes. Following this pseudo-cohort through to age 23-25, only a small proportion of the group claiming no GCSE passes in the teenage years, subsequently improved their qualifications when they became adults. However, an important finding was that vocational qualifications at all levels can improve the employment chances of unqualified school leavers.

Unqualified men who gained a vocational qualification at Level 2 had an employment rate similar to those who had gained five or more GCSE passes at Grades A-C. Unqualified young women who gained vocational qualifications at Level 2 or above also had much better employment chances, but proportionally more women remained unemployed or inactive than men. The main effect of vocational qualifications was on employment chances. Unqualified men who gained vocational qualifications did not reach the same wage level as the five or more GCSE Grades A-C group at the same vocational level (McIntosh).

Evidence from **two longitudinal cohort studies, the NCDS (born 1958) and the BCS (born 1970)**, presented by Schoon, showed that persistent socio-economic disadvantage results in an accumulation of risk factors which predispose individuals towards poor school performance. Yet, in both cohorts, some individuals have demonstrated the capacity to overcome adversity, and to show positive achievement and motivation in the face of that adversity, a phenomenon also described as '*resilience*'. There are three broad sets of variables operating as protective factors that may reduce the impact of adverse experiences and enable the individual to fully develop his or her potential:

- attributes of the young people themselves
- characteristics of their families
- aspects of the wider social context.

Within school variables, in particular teacher expectations, were found to have a positive effect on student achievement, but also parental encouragement and support for further education are important protective factors. For those exposed to a large number of risk factors (socio-economic disadvantage), however, the proportion displaying resilient behaviour is relatively small. Whilst early intervention is important, every stage of the life course is important. There is an increased risk effect during the transition from late childhood to adolescence, at age 16, when important decisions about future careers are made. Clearly, this is a stage at which intervention could help to mitigate risk and boost resilience.

Further analyses demonstrated that even highly competent (above average academic attainment and high aspirations) young men from less privileged background do not achieve to the same extent as their more privileged peers. Popular beliefs in equal opportunities, and being rewarded for demonstrating abilities and competences, will evaporate when young people believe that their training or schooling is not leading to a career, when they attribute their failure to find work, or to enter a career, not to a lack of effort on their side, but to circumstances beyond their control.

Programme Responses and What Works

Several presentations related the evaluation evidence available on a range of programmes that have been aimed at 14-16 year olds in Years 10 and 11 from the early 1990s onwards. Estimates suggest that the whole 'disengaged' group ranges from about one fifth to one third of any cohort. A specific estimate from OFSTED identifies perhaps 10,000 individuals in any one cohort (between one and two per cent) who can be classified as the most disengaged and lost to the school system. For these, OFSTED concluded, provision was far too often unsatisfactory.

An evaluation, by Kendall and Kinder, of six alternative education initiatives for members of this difficult group, however, suggested that the following programme elements were, to varying degrees, successful in meeting the diverse needs of disengaged young people:

- Providing a safe, unstressed learning environment away from school
- Establishing adult-like and respectful relationships between students and teachers
- Ensuring that students experienced success through their programme activities
- Providing a safety net of pastoral support
- Providing sufficient flexibility to accommodate the changing needs and circumstances of the young people.

Whilst the projects did not result in success for all, the outcomes for at least half of the young people attending the six programmes were:

- The award of some form of accreditation
- Increased motivation towards learning and to continuing in education and training
- Improvements in attendance, general behaviour and relationships with adults and family members

- Reduced offending activity
- Enhanced and more realistic career aspirations and planning.

Despite some apparent success, the key question arose of what support would be available to students once they left the programmes. Without this, would the observed gains be maintained or built upon, or would these young people regress and be re-lost to the system?

Since 1998, there have been several, school-based programmes geared towards helping the more underachieving and unmotivated learners from within each cohort. The Education (National Curriculum) (Exceptions at Key Stage 4) Regulations (1998) enabled targeted students to follow an extended work-related learning programme that included such elements as work placements, vocational courses and key skills enhancements, with accreditation available via NVQ or GNVQs, key skill awards and/or local certificates. A series of demonstration and action research projects were run as part of these Regulations in order to test out the best approaches to adopt. The Increased Flexibilities Programme, launched in 2002, built upon the experience of the Key Stage 4 Regulations and has given greater emphasis to increasing achievement through increased access to NVQ and vocational GCSE courses for those '*who could benefit most*'.

Five presentations (Hall and Raffo; OFSTED; Watson; Donovan; and Morris) reported the evidence available from different evaluations of programmes and vocational courses introduced under or alongside the **Key Stage 4 Regulations**. Key findings are given below:

- The increased curriculum flexibility was widely welcomed by schools, which often interpreted the new freedoms liberally and targeted the alternate programmes on different numbers and groups of students. They enabled schools to introduce a greater diversity of learning opportunities for less academic young people and to strengthen the status of work-related learning in their curriculum. Schools were, however, not always well equipped to offer high quality, well founded work-related learning, and there was a question of teachers' training and skills to do this.
- Targeted students often started out with negative views of themselves, as well as of their schools, and often had a poor self-assessment of their abilities and weaknesses.
- The impact of the programmes was mixed, with the programmes not being so effective with the most disengaged, or those with acute or entrenched personal problems.
- One key issue in engaging young people through work-related learning lay in building trusting and adult-like relationships between the students, their teachers and adults in the work-place. A second was to take account of the wider lives and experiences of young people in programme design.
- Students generally reacted positively to work-based learning, but there was a key question of the effective transfer of learning gains from the work-place into the classroom. Students participating in work-based activity could lose out on key classes, and could under-perform academically as a result.

- Schools did not always value achievement in vocational qualifications as much as in academic examinations, and young people could sense this.
- The evidence for the programmes having an impact on attainment is as follows:
 - Where work-related learning was connected to vocational qualifications, and well managed, it was associated with improvements in attainment by a proportion of learners.
 - Between 1992, when Vocational GCSEs were first introduced, and 2002, the percentage gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A-C in Barking and Dagenham rose from one third to one half of all 16 year olds in comprehensive schools, a far steeper rise than for other similar authorities.
 - The programmes increased the proportions of the cohort achieving some accreditation.
 - Some young people were highly motivated by the vocational strand in their curriculum and achieved their best GCSE grade in a vocational subject, but that these subjects were not ‘easy options’. Those young people who were attaining least in school were unlikely to attain markedly better in these GCSE courses than in much of what they attempted.
 - The programmes generally appeared to lead to improved attendance, motivation, behaviour and reduced levels of truancy and exclusion, although there was very considerable variability in the results.
- Young people gained in terms of increased preparation for, and confidence in post-16 education and training.

With regard to the new **Increased Flexibilities Programme**, a baseline study shows that participating schools are more likely to be 11-16 schools, with lower levels of Key Stage 3 and 4 attainment and higher levels of young people in receipt of free school meals. The profile of participating students is skewed towards males, those from white backgrounds, disadvantaged young people, lower attainers and those with some level of SEN. Amongst the participants, there are also differences in prior attainment, with higher achievers more likely to be following the new GCSE courses and the less able more likely to be pursuing an NVQ or other vocational option. Thus the Programme appears to be opening up new qualification routes to those who would not necessarily have fared well in traditional vocational pathways, but, at the same time, seems to be introducing or maintaining certain differentials (Morris).

Connexions and its Support Role for Young People

The final seminar paper, by Hughes, raised issues relating to the introduction of the new Connexions Service that is seeking to provide enhanced guidance and personal support for progression for young people. As part of this a new professional cadre of Personal Advisers has been established.

Connexions is as wide-ranging and highly complex policy initiative. The Connexions context and how it reaches out to influence young people, Personal Advisers, and the relationships to be formed between them, has yet to be fully established. Three categories of need amongst young people can be identified:

- ◆ Those facing multiple problems
- ◆ Those at risk of non-participation and under-achievement
- ◆ Those needing minimal intervention.

An interim analysis of emerging issues related to Connexions work in schools and other modes of delivery suggests that the universal service provided by Connexions is thinly spread over a large population of young people. The targeted service highlights the need for timeliness of intervention, the quality and training of the new Personal Advisers and the importance of outreach work. There are particular challenges posed by working with young people with multiple difficulties who need a high level of resource and skills. At best, the input from Advisers can probably help young people to manage their problems in ways that cause least damage and disruption to their lives, and which keep them integrated into education, training, or employment as part of that process.

The overall pattern of impact appears largely determined by the structural characteristics of the service, the level of resources available to Connexions and how they are deployed. So far, there is little evidence to confirm that young people's capabilities, context and needs are being assessed accurately by relevant stakeholders. The service is driven by processes that rely centrally on the interactions between its staff and the young people in its client group. The context, mechanisms and outcomes require detailed exploration in order to help determine new ways of reaching out to young people and linking effectively new initiatives to young people's needs and aspirations.

Conclusions and Implications

The disengaged – needs and provision

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.

The disengaged are located within the broad group who achieve less than five GCSE passes at A*-C grades at 16. This is made up of:

- A very small group, the '***out of touch***', (1-2 per cent) who have practically lost touch with school between 14 and 16. This group appears to make some progress in individualised alternative provision which provides one to one contact, an adult approach and atmosphere and new opportunities to mark progress through certification. However, success on even the best of these programmes is mixed and OFSTED have expressed deep concern about variability in quality of provision.
- A larger group, difficult to estimate, but possibly to be identified with the roughly 20 per cent of the cohort who *claim* to have no GCSE qualifications at age 17/18/19, could be characterised as the '***disaffected but in touch***' group. They appear to respond to a wide range of initiatives which often take them out of school, into FE or into a work-related or some other setting associated with leisure and cultural activities. Progress was mixed, as were experiences of work placements, which were of variable quality. There was also mixed evidence on

improved attainment and progression to further education and training. OFSTED was cautious on this type of intervention, stressing the need for careful planning and monitoring of work placements. With this proviso, and based on relatively small quantities of pupil-level achievement data, OFSTED considered that well configured work placements might indeed contribute to re-engagement and improving performance.

- A further group, also difficult to quantify, but perhaps close to the proportion who gain 1 or more, but less than five, Grade C or higher passes at GCSE, would account for up to a further 20 per cent. Within this '*1-4 A-C Grade*' group, some may have reached their full potential, but others will be capable of much more if interest and enthusiasm can be aroused. This group has been targeted throughout the 1990s by initiatives to re-engage students' interests through the provision of vocational subjects and qualifications. These have been felt to be more in tune with hobbies and out-of-school interests and allow students to demonstrate aptitudes and capabilities that are not called upon in the more 'academic' subjects. OFSTED expressed concern about the capacity of schools and teachers to offer such courses to the standard required. Nevertheless, the overall judgement has been that such vocational courses can have a highly motivating effect on students' performance. Systematic and robust evaluation of the impact of studying vocational subjects on student motivation, achievement and progress has been lacking. It is too early to learn from the IFP evaluation, but it should provide some of the hard evidence that has been lacking until now.

Concerns and questions

Issue 1. Doubts were expressed at the seminars about the underlying assumption that work-related learning **is** inherently more motivating for young people switched off by the existing curriculum. Could it be that the real issue is one that is more to do with pedagogical style, learning preferences and the provision of adequate support? We learned from the paper on the Swiss experience, for instance, that less academic youngsters appear to flourish more routinely in Swiss schools where the curriculum is broadly-based for longer, is more nurturing in delivery style and has more safety nets built into the system.

Issue 2. It was argued that nothing that we have heard in the seminars offers a cast iron way forward for the '**disaffected but in touch**' group, targeted by work-place learning measures, but improving the quality of provision, teacher skills and gaining a better understanding of need offer some ways forward. For the '**1-4 Grade C**' group, there *is* something of a magic bullet; namely better vocational options. Many countries offer sizeable vocational programmes, apparently to good effect, and leading many to gain Level 3 qualifications, whereas considerable numbers of this group in the UK spend only one year post-compulsory, with no advancement on their Level 1 at GCSE. The danger is to try to apply the vocational options solution to the more disaffected, with the result that it doesn't work for them and that it is discredited for the '1-4 Grade C' group by association with the more disaffected.

Issue 3. Much concern is expressed about the under-achievement of boys relative to girls. However, the McIntosh paper pointed to disastrous marginalisation or exclusion from the labour market of young women with no GCSE qualifications. The outcome for young women in this group was considerably worse than for young

men. Are 14-16 girls, particularly those having difficulties with basic skills, benefiting to the same extent as 14-16 boys from interventions to raise achievements?

Issue 4. It was found, both in the US and in England, that while motivation of groups targeted by work-related initiatives frequently improved, they failed to show consistent improvement on standard measures of achievement (e.g. GCSE points scores). Can motivation/engagement improve and yet not be translated into increased effort and therefore improved performance? Or has performance improved, but the improvement not been captured by the assessment process? Do the range of assessments used to try to capture improvement need to be broadened?

Issue 5. 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? Other countries with a more socially equitable distribution of educational achievement, (e.g. the Scandinavian countries) do not set a formidable hurdle at 16, and have fewer very high achievers, but also fewer very low achievers at age 15. What can we learn from this?

Issue 6. Can we move more quickly towards de-coupling Key Stage 4 assessment from GCSE and encouraging a variation in length of preparation for GCSE? Or, for example, could we demand the same standards as now obtained at C+ for the aspects of maths and English which are vital for future life, but be less insistent on all achieving the grade for things like geometry and English literature? Fewer 'failing', i.e. not getting 5 A*-C, would mean less disaffection and discouragement.

Issue 7. Some of the reasons for failure to progress are to be found in labour market characteristics and lack of transparent routes. Many of the disengaged appear to lack guidance and information about post-16 qualifications, training and subsequent labour market opportunities. There was general concern at the seminars that the Connexions service is having difficulty in meeting both mainstream and more specialist needs of young people. It was not clear what the considerable resources devoted to Connexions were 'buying'. There was a strong feeling that the Connexions service is trying to do too much and not meeting any need fully. These complaints have been made - particularly in regard to information on further education and training opportunities supplied by schools - for at least the last 20 years. What do we need to do to make more progress on this front?

Issue 8. Historical evidence (technical secondary schools; TVEI) 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. The papers also hinted at the fragility of the supporting infrastructure, and problems of maintaining high quality learning experiences. They also stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers have appropriate vocational experience and skills and the opportunity to make links with employers in relevant occupational areas. What safeguards are in place to ensure that the GCSE in vocational subjects initiative is supported by high quality appropriate course content and taught by appropriately qualified teachers? How is the need for

equipment and resources to provide for the practical elements in GCSE in vocational subjects being met? Can we be sure that this technical/vocational initiative will finally receive the sustained support necessary for survival?

This executive summary synthesises the main points from the paper prepared by Hilary Steedman (CEP) and Sheila Stoney (NFER), which itself is based on papers presented at the ESRC-funded seminar series. They include contributions from: W. R Richardson (Exeter); K. Franklin (Sheffield College and formerly DfES); V Bayliss (Consultant and formerly DfES); A. Schleicher (OECD); K. Stasz (Rand Europe); J. Whitburn (NIESR); I. Schoon (City University); S. McIntosh (CEP); D. Hall and C. Raffo (University of Manchester); A. Watson (SWA); J. Mattick (OFSTED); J. West (CLMS, Leicester); M. Morris (NFER); S. Kendall and K. Kinder (NFER); and D. Hughes (University of Derby). Many of these can be found at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/events/seminars/motivation/default.asp>.