

POLICY WATCH

2007/87

29 November 2007

'Insights from Diploma pathfinders.' Messages from the 14 - 19 front line

There are a number of useful messages in this recent Report from QCA but the central one is familiar, namely that if the 14 - 19 system is to work effectively then collaboration is essential. It's a message that the eight carefully selected pathfinders have all embraced with customary pioneering zeal but how strongly do they make the case for collaboration and what do their experiences tell us about how to make such collaboration work?

Collaboration has become the axiom on which the whole 14 - 19 delivery system is being built and has been so ever since the 2005 Implementation Plan argued that no school would be expected to go it alone. The current Education Dept is keen to see more of it and to encourage "enduring collaborative models" where it can. Indeed the overall 14 - 19 vision is of an integrated system of provision and support for young people built on collaborative strengths but tailored to individual needs. The learner at the centre of a network of services with 14 - 19 consortia acting almost as mini LEAs of old in channelling those services.

The expectations of the new 14 - 19 qualification framework alone highlight the need for a collaborative approach for here some difficult decisions may need to be made. The Secretary of State may be proposing the Diploma as the eventual qualification of choice but as this Report suggests, it may take time. *"At this stage it is difficult to judge how quickly the Diploma will become established and what impact it will have on other qualifications."*

For the present therefore we have a four pathway model, one that will require careful consortia steerage to ensure appropriate choices are available let alone taken. The respective pathways as described in the Report are: the general education offer of GCSE and A level "with major changes in the qualification and assessment regimes;" the "more occupationally orientated" apprenticeship regime; the school and college based "general vocational learning opportunities" including BTECS, OCR and City and Guilds qualifications; and the Diploma, "an innovative offer of general applied learning for 14 - 19 year olds." The qualification model has not always been presented as plainly as this but to deliver it, *"new forms of collaboration will be needed as new providers enter the education and training system and new ways of providing learning through collaborative partnership develop."*

As to what these "new forms of collaboration" should be, the eight pathfinders in this Report offer their own variants.

The ideal variant, or at least the one offered in the official text of Gateway 2 this year is where *"consortium partners, including employers and HEIs, are already working well together on shared delivery of provision, with detailed agreements in place on management of learning delivery and student achievement and*



progression. " A further model can be found in the written submission offered to the Select Committee Inquiry into Diplomas earlier this year by the then DfES. *"Our analysis of the pathfinder and IFP programmes show there are five key characteristics that are needed for the development of successful partnerships,"* they wrote. These include: a shared sense of ownership, strategic leadership and vision, clear objectives and organisation, recognition of individual strengths, and access to professional advice.

Most of these features are exhibited in some form by these eight pathfinders.

Thus a shared sense of ownership can be seen in the quality assurance system developed by the Cumbria Strategic Partnership where Diploma Lines of Learning Management Panels are being created "to assure quality by actively involving employers in the moderation process." A further example can be seen in the various consortium management structures being adopted. York, for example, has a large membership that includes 7 11 - 16 schools, 4 11 - 18 schools, a special school, a Pupil Referral Unit, 2 colleges and range of other partners including training providers, Connexions and the LSC grouped within a Learning Board. Wolverhampton has separate Lines of Learning development groups and its own Deputy Head Teachers Network. In most cases, management structures consist of a strategic grouping, an operational grouping and Lines of Learning groupings.

All of the pathfinders exhibit high levels of strategic leadership and vision. In Wolverhampton's case, it can be seen in its 'seven pillars' system, in the case of Barrow in Furness, its lines of management accountability and in Southwark in its Guarantee. Two words seem to be key here: energy and trust. Energy because quite simply 14 - 19 reform is a high octane activity requiring a great deal of stamina, *"an inexhaustible supply of collaborative energy fuelled by the passion of key players"* as the Report breathlessly puts it. Trust because such intensive working together over such a range of bodies requires considerable leaps of faith. Self interest may be reduced but not always eliminated which is why the Report concludes that *"ultimately trust may be better cemented by adopting one of various forms of new governance such as 14 - 19 trusts, 14 - 19 companies limited by guarantee or 14 - 19 collegiates."*

Such forms of governance might be especially useful when it comes to funding particularly when 14 - 19 funding comes together in due course. In the three pathfinders in the Report charged with looking at funding issues, a buyer - supplier model was already in place. The most advanced of these appears to be Kingswood where *"the costs of managing and running the partnership are met by agreed, equal, annual contributions from each partnership institution."*

Separate arrangements are in place for pre and for post 16 provision. For post 16, and based on LSC weightings, a proportion is retained by the home institution for admin costs, fees and so on and the rest follows the learner. Data is collected three times a year with fees collected at the same point. The intention is to apply a similar model to pre 16 once actual costs are agreed.

As to be expected, funding remains one of the key variables in effective collaborative provision but there are plenty of others. As this Report shows, keeping up with them all is just half of the story. This is a front line that sees a lot of action.

Edexcel Policy Watches are intended to help colleagues keep up to date with national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.