NEWIDIEM

Best Practice Approaches to Achieving Parity of Esteem in Education and Training

Final Report

for:

DYSGU ac ADDYSGU CYMRU
ELWa
EDUCATION and LEARNING WALES

by:

EIESP

6 February 2003

Best Practice Approaches to Achieving Parity of Esteem in Education and Training

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Date: **6 February 2003**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

In Autumn 2002 Newidiem and the European Institute of Education and Social Policy (EIESP) were commissioned by the National Council – ELWa to

- **Identify best practice approaches from around the world that encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes of post-16 learning;**

- **Identify the means of transferring good practice.**

The aim is to give illustrations of the range of ways of tackling common problems in order to contribute to debate in Wales. A report of this nature cannot provide exhaustive analysis but focuses more on those aspects of other education and training systems which it may be interesting to explore further.

State of Play in Wales

The first phase of this project consisted of an ex-ante evaluation of the state of play in Wales concerning parity of esteem. Following an analysis of statistical data to map participation and attainment of young people in Wales, key institutional stakeholders were interviewed and an illustrative survey of higher education admissions services and employers carried out. This phase aimed to establish what the different constituencies and stakeholders understand by "parity of esteem" and to what extent this has been achieved in Wales.

The survey raised a certain number of questions and issues that were used as a basis for comparing policies and practice in other European countries and Australia.

Review of Policies and Practice across Europe and Australia

The second phase of the project was a review of policies and practice across Europe and in Australia. The European comparisons were based mainly on the work of four completed LEONARDO da VINCI projects.

- **Post-16 Strategies** (1996-1997);
- The follow-up multiplier project **SPES-NET**: Sharpening Post-16 Education Strategies by Horizontal and Vertical Networking (1997-2000);
- **INTEQUAL** (1995-1997)
- The follow-up multiplier project, **DUOQUAL** (1997-2000).

To broaden the research, selected examples were taken from recent policy developments in Australia, drawing mainly on OECD reviews and government reports.

The examples outline how other countries have dealt with those issues highlighted as important for improving parity of esteem in Wales. Rather than providing ready-made solutions for direct transfer to Wales, the examples illustrate a range of ways of tackling the issue of Parity as a starting point for debate in Wales.

Given the traditional divide in many European countries and also Australia between the academic and vocational routes, achieving parity of esteem is a **long-term aim**. It is not surprising, therefore, that no EU country has fully achieved parity of esteem. It is, however, one of the positive (if sometimes indirect) effects of a combination of initiatives designed, for instance, to enhance vocational provision and build better progression routes.

The most difficult factor to influence is the perception of the families, students, employers and higher education institutions. There appears to be a lack of information for the general public about the reality of labour market opportunities, and the effects of new measures concerning vocational provision could be enhanced if they were accompanied by information and communication campaigns.

This report also summarises the recommendations of the working groups at the seminar organised by ELWa on 27 November 2002 (World Class Learning in Wales. Case Study: Parity of Esteem – in Search of the Holy Grail?). The outcomes of the working groups' discussions, combined with the desk research led to a number of **actions** being identified which are considered to be effective in improving parity of esteem:-

Effective Actions to Encourage Parity of Esteem

1. **Funding must encourage partnership rather than competition among institutions, and be founded on regular and structured mapping of all stakeholder needs and strategic planning.**

2. **In addition to actions to strengthen vocational routes it is essential to help students, employers and the general public to make informed decisions on learning, career routes and recruitment based on clear, up-to-date information.**

3. **Enterprises in particular need to be better informed about the competences and standards which the different vocational and academic awards will offer.**

4. Measures should be introduced which improve the status and reliability of work-based routes. Training places gain credibility if they are with a respected employer and the training scheme has that company's seal of approval.

5. The status of vocational teachers in terms of training, positive recruitment and salaries should be at least on a par with academic teachers.

6. It is important to assure the quality of programmes and of training providers – and raise awareness of this quality commitment.

7. Successful measures for dealing with and reducing dropping-out (and therefore increasing participation) often also seek to develop work-based routes and expand the number of places in firms, i.e. tackling parity from a number of angles and producing a cumulative impact.

8. Targets appear a useful measure provided they are linked to improving provision and expanding learning routes.

9. Vocational exam results should be published alongside academic results to raise media and public awareness.

10. Actions to expand higher education opportunities for vocational education and training do not necessarily improve parity of esteem unless the courses are suitable.

11. Monitoring and evaluation - the effects of any measures introduced need to be clearly monitored and evaluated.

A General Guide to the Transfer of Good Practice – Part B

The third phase (set out in a separate report, Part B) of this study takes the identification of good practice a step further to the 'valorisation[1]' (identifying issues and replicator potential, adapting, transferring, mainstreaming and evaluating) international good practice in a range of education and training.

Wales can learn from good practice approaches in its own country but also from its neighbours. Lessons do not emerge in terms of ready-made, quick-fit solutions. Transfer of good practice is not about detecting good ideas and

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[1] The term 'valorisation', which is French and means to give better and more value to something, is used in the EU context to mean the processes by which benefits from collaborative work in European projects and networks can be maximised and shared. It entails the following aspects: identifying issues, adapting, transferring, evaluating and mainstreaming

modifying them to fit. On the contrary, it is about setting up structured development processes that will enable key organisations involved in education and training in Wales to identify the main "problems" to be tackled, to select relevant examples to be investigated and compared, and to establish success factors. It is worth remembering that the less successful policies also contain valuable lessons.

Next Steps

Finally, the report sets out a series of recommendations for Wales to follow up the initial findings in this report and from the seminar. It is recommended that implementation include the following aspects:

- Constitution of (thematic) working groups of key actors on specific issues, bringing in recognised specialists from other countries, for in-depth exchange of information and to delve behind the rhetoric.

- Short, targeted study visits to investigate how policies and strategies work in practice, the achievements and pitfalls.

- Thematic seminars in Wales to disseminate outcomes and formulate proposals.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project Context

In Autumn 2002 the National Council - ELWa commissioned Newidiem and the EIESP to:

Identify an effective model or process for 'valorising' (identifying issues, adapting, transferring, mainstreaming and evaluating) international good practice in education and training to Wales, as a tool for continuous improvement.

The project is part of the National Council – ELWa's contribution to the work undertaken by EARLALL (the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning). Its aim is to maximise the benefits from collaborative work with partners in other European regions by sharing and transferring best practice approaches to developing lifelong learning strategies.

EARLALL has received funding from the European Commission to identify means of transferring and adapting good practice from one European region to another. This 'valorisation' process was to be tested through the examination and transfer of completed products/outcomes from the EU vocational training programme, LEONARDO da VINCI. Wales chose the topic of Parity of Esteem and based its research on lessons from four completed LEONARDO reports on aspects of this topic:

1. **Post-16 Strategies** (1996-1997);

2. The follow-up multiplier project, **SPES-NET** (1997-2000): Sharpening Post-16 Education Strategies by Horizontal and Vertical Networking;

3. **INTEQUAL** (1995-1997), which compared ways of developing parity of esteem through qualifications;

4. The follow-up multiplier project, **DUOQUAL** (1997-2000), which also considered the effectiveness of dual and double qualifications.

This was supplemented by selected examples of recent policies and practice in Australia, based on OECD reviews and governmental reports.

Parity of esteem is examined in this project as a broad concept which involves the construction of coherent and comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning. Whilst the report focuses on the 14-19 age group, parity of esteem applies to all ages.

1.2   Why Parity of Esteem?

In its Strategic Document, 'The Learning Country', the Welsh Assembly Government stated that the breaking down of barriers between vocational and academic pathways is crucial to transforming the provision of education and training for 14 – 19 year olds. In response the National Council – ELWa has committed itself to "developing a range of approaches to encourage **parity of esteem**".

The debate on parity of esteem raises issues concerning desirable aims for education and training as a whole, and the potential for conflict. This demonstrates that such debates cannot be effectively dealt with if divorced from the wider picture. That said, parity of esteem is examined in this project as an important enabling concept in the construction of coherent and comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning.

1.3   What is Parity of Esteem?

Rather than attempting to pin the term down, the following indicators are proposed as benchmarks to help policy makers assess to what degree parity of esteem has been achieved in a region's learning system:

1. People are able to reach equivalent levels of qualification and therefore employment having taken different (academic and/or vocational) education and training routes.

2. Society should value equally these different choices, which would mean, for example, that families would make a positive choice of vocational routes.

3. HE institutions accept in practice both vocational and academic awards.

4. Employers recruit candidates with both vocational and academic qualifications to similar levels of employment and financial reward.

These indicators are grounded in well-established debates. In a special issue of the **European Journal of Education** ('Recent Trends in Vocational Education and Training', Vol. 28, No.2, 1993, Guest Editor: David Parkes) the articles explored the issues around giving academic awards higher status, dual track awards, the role of non-university higher education, the issues around social prestige of academic routes, etc. Many of the points examined presaged the debates that took place in the 4 LEONARDO projects on which the European comparisons of this report are based.

1.4   The Project in Brief

The project was divided into three phases; the **first phase** (Section 2) of this project consisted of an **ex-ante evaluation** of the **state of play** in Wales with regard to parity of esteem. This first phase aimed to establish what different stakeholders understand by "parity of esteem". It was constructed around the following key questions or 'prompts' assembled from the findings of the 4 LEONARDO reports:

- What do the Higher Education (HE) institutions accept as entry qualifications and do they value vocational awards?

- What are employers looking for in (young) entrants? Is there still a divide between the "level" provided by a general education route and the "skills" or competences provided by a vocational route?

- What influences family choice?

- How can the careers service better promote parity of esteem?

- Can the Welsh Baccalaureat contribute to improving parity of esteem and, if so, how?

This first phase was carried out in three parts:

1. An analysis of **statistical data** available to map participation and attainment of young people in Wales;

2. An illustrative **survey** of higher education admissions services and employers (mainly of sector skills councils);

3. A **survey** of the key strategic institutions, both sets of surveys were carried out by means of telephone interviews, using semi-directive interview guidelines (see Annex 3) .

As part of examining the key mechanisms necessary for parity of esteem to be improved in Wales, the surveys sought to take into account how progress is monitored, the roles of the information and guidance services, labour market expectations and existing progression routes, qualifications and funding mechanisms. The outcomes of this phase provided the set of issues in Wales taken forward to the comparative phase.

The second phase (Section 3) of the project was a review of policies and practice across Europe and in Australia. The European comparisons were based mainly on the work of four LEONARDO da VINCI projects. In Section 3 below we present selected examples outlining how other countries have dealt with the issues highlighted as important for improving parity of esteem in Wales. Some further feedback was gained through the experts invited to the ELWa seminar (27 November 2002). The aim is to give illustrations of the range of ways of tackling common problems in order to contribute to further debate in Wales.

The third phase (Section 4) takes the identification of good practice a step further, to explore a model or process for transferring good practice in the field of education and training. The aim of this section of the report is to provide a general guide which can be useful to ELWa staff and their partners for investigating practice elsewhere and reflecting on whether and how to apply it in Wales.

The concluding section (Section 5) draws together lessons learned about parity of esteem and makes recommendations for further, in-depth investigation and transfer of good practice to Wales.

SECTION 2: THE STATE OF PLAY FOR WALES – PHASE 1

2.1　Background

Parity of esteem is not a new or recent preoccupation in the UK. In the 1970s the approach to achieving it was based on curriculum content - designating certain subjects which were considered important for all young people (e.g. "design education"). A decade later during the 1980's, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) pilot project focussed on a notion of "curriculum entitlement" and technology. In the framework of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the two track exams which were taken at the end of compulsory education, 'GCEs' and 'CSEs', were replaced by a unified certificate, the 'GCSE', designed for the whole ability range. So, parity of esteem has been at the forefront of many debates over recent decades that have focussed both on content of provision and the form of assessment.

The first phase of this project consists of the ex-ante evaluation of the state of play in Wales concerning parity of esteem. The aims, audience and methodology are described in the previous chapter. This section presents firstly a summary of the statistical survey and, secondly, the results of the interviews carried out with the stakeholders and key strategic bodies and organisations.

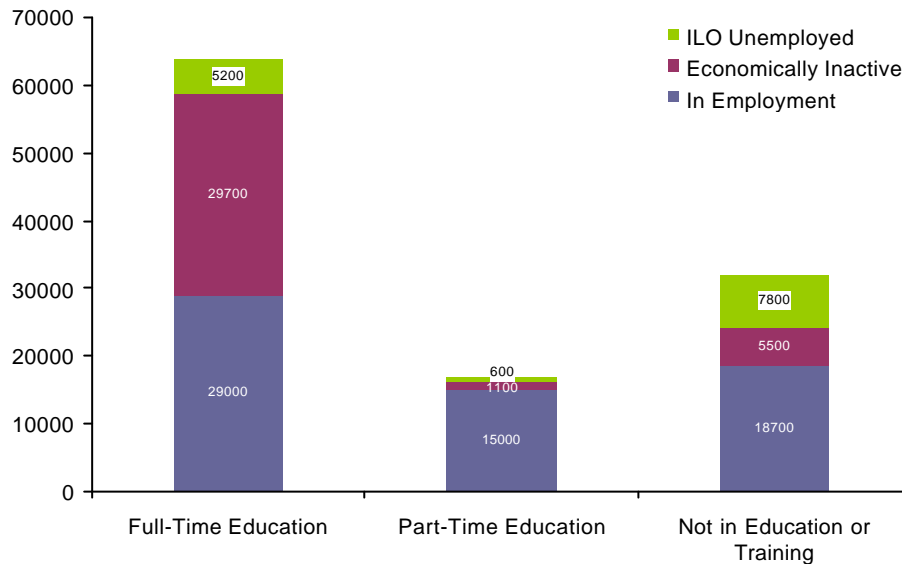### 2.2　Statistical Overview – the Extent of the Challenge

A glance at some baseline figures (see Annex 1) indicates the extent of the challenge to improve parity of esteem in Wales. The PISA survey, coordinated by OECD, reported that 25% of students in the UK "switch off" at age 14. 'Future Skills Wales' reports that employers consider that 50% of school leavers do not have appropriate skills for the job. These data, combined with comments from the stakeholders surveyed, indicate a high level of concern about the quality and relevance of education and training for today's economy.

This section tracks the destinations of young people in Wales post compulsory education in Wales, comparing them with the rest of the UK. Further information on routes and destinations is contained in Annex 1.

Participation

Though not immediately evident, the link between participation and parity of esteem is important. Experience in most European countries over the recent period shows that increases in staying-on rates and in qualifications obtained depend strongly on the capacity of the education and training system to encourage young people.

There are several examples, some of which are discussed in Section 3, of how the increase in the percentage of young people obtaining qualifications has been achieved through the development of better progression routes for those following vocational routes. A contributing factor is the ability to demonstrate that vocational routes can, and will, lead to qualifications which are respected in the labour market and which improve job prospects and career development.

Improving the participation post-16 is one of the major issues examined in Assembly document currently out for consultation, "Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19". In the period 1999/2000, just over half (57%) of 16-18 year olds in Wales took part in full-time education and training, whilst between 15% and 19% took part in part-time education. This leaves a figure of at least 24% who did not take part in any form of education or training, although participation varies between local authorities (See Annex 1, Table 1). Most of those who do not take part in education or training are employed, although some 12% of 16-18 year olds are not taking part in any form of training, education or employment.

Figure 1: Participation of young people in learning and the labour market in Wales, 1999/2000 (numbers)

Source: Labour Force Survey

Learning Routes

The most popular mode of study for the 16 to 18 age group is via Further Education (FE) colleges: out of a total of 63,800 in full-time education, 41% studied at school and 44% studied at a Further Education college. Around

11,200 (approximately 10%) of 16 to 18 year olds take part in Government supported training for young people.

Routes to HE

Currently A-levels remain by far the most popular route into university or higher education, and 64% of Welsh accepted HE applicants did so via A-levels. GNVQs were the second most popular route, followed by 9% of Welsh students, while 8% of Welsh accepted applicants used the BTEC route into university. Vocational qualifications are more popular amongst the male population. 20% of male university applicants from Wales in 2001 studied GNVQ or BTEC, compared with 16% of females.

The route taken to university varies by social class. Those in the professional group were more likely to study A-levels than any other group. Those outside the Professional and Intermediate social class groups were less likely to study A-levels as a means to university entrance, and were more likely to study vocational qualifications. Further details and tables are contained in the Annex.

Qualifications

With regard to the working age population as a whole, Wales currently lags the UK population in terms of resident qualifications. Only 12.3% of the working age population in Wales is qualified to degree standard or higher, compared with 15.2% of the UK population. The proportion of the working age population in Wales without any form of qualification stands at 20.8%, compared with 16.4% for the UK average.

2.3   The Views of Welsh Stakeholders

The issues raised during the interviews cover:

- Parity of esteem as an issue of perception and attitude
- Structure of awards – transparency and comparability
- Work-based routes
- Progression routes to HE
- Provision planning and funding

Perceptions and Attitudes

Among the interviewees from the key strategic institutions, no-one considered that parity of esteem was a reality in Wales. For some it was an issue which had constituted a major problem for many years, primarily attributed to the perceived low status and credibility of vocational education and training contrasted with academic qualifications.

Parity of esteem was defined by one interviewee as "how the client group view opportunities between academic and work-based routes". It was seen to reflect such aspects as the different types of manufacturing and/or white collar occupations available through different education and training routes, expected future salaries, career progression, etc.

Interviewees considered that schools continue to be judged (aided by the media) by their academic performance alone. It was also believed that parents (and, indeed many teachers and careers advisors) do not understand (or are not sufficiently informed about) vocational routes or pathways and the benefits they can offer. As a result, they are seen as second-class routes for less able students.

Similarly, it was reported that studying at an FE college is considered in many areas (where the choice exists) as a second choice to Sixth Form. These entrenched attitudes continue to undermine any attempt to improve the parity and credibility of vocational routes. It was also felt that low demand was not helped by the difficulties schools and FE colleges face in attracting staff with valuable vocational experience from industry and commerce.

In summary, the issues of perception are possibly the most important and resistant to change. Perception is in issue shared by the other countries researched for this report (See Section 3). It remains critical even when extensive policies such as the improvement of progression routes, employment prospects or higher education entry have been implemented.

Structure of Awards – Transparency and Comparability

There appeared to be a high level of expectation that the Welsh Credit Framework will provide, among other purposes, a mechanism for checking and monitoring parity. However, there appeared to be little awareness of the Scottish credit framework and whether or not it has improved parity of esteem.

Interestingly, there was quite a lot of reflection on the structure and "size" of awards with the belief that this influences parity of esteem, at least from the point of view of being able to measure comparability. It would be interesting to compare this approach in more detail to that of other European neighbours with the aim of assessing the influence of the architecture of awards on the perception of level and difficulty.

Discussion also revolved around the Vocational Certificates of Education (VCEs) and the Welsh 'Bac' (baccalaureat) and their potential contributions to improving parity of esteem. The issues raised are presented below:

▪ Interviewees emphasised that **VCEs** have been developed to be directly comparable to "A" levels and the "gold standard"[2]. They both have the same structure and architecture - the 6 unit model. This approach is intended to provide a more objective means of measuring and should make it possible, as several interviewees emphasised, to measure "parity" in the coming years. The "esteem" will, however, remain subjective.

The take-up of VCEs was expected by the interviewees to be good but may depend on how they are presented in schools - as "A levels" or as a specifically vocational route. It is feared that in the latter case this could lead to the less-able pupils being steered to VCEs. This links back to the perception by some of the stakeholders that vocational provision provides a "softer option" rather than being seen as multi-disciplinary and challenging. It also raised questions about the type and quality of vocational options.

Strategies for encouraging esteem were mentioned, such as schools not using the specific term "Vocational" when referring to some of the "A" levels. It is believed by some that the introduction of a common "label" will encourage families to choose subjects across the academic and vocational range.

▪ The **Welsh Baccalaureat** is being designed to provide an overarching framework for all the different types of awards. Currently it targets the 16-19 age group but is likely to be extended to address the 14-19 age group.

It is designed to broaden choice and flexibility, built around a core of essential skills (communication, numeracy, IT) and generic skills (working with others, problem solving, ability to make progress). It has been designed so that the core and obligatory elements can be combined with all other forms of provision available to that age group, whether totally academic, totally vocational or a mix.

It is not intended to be in competition with the "gold standard" but, in a sense, to enhance it. However, others are more sceptical about its ability to improve parity. As it is still in its pilot form it will take some time for its relative success or otherwise to be concluded. It is also too early to assess the interest of employers and universities.

From the employers' perspective there appears to be confusion due to lack of information amongst many over the content, purpose and rigour of the range of

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[2]The gold standard can be defined as a standard of measurement of quality and perceived social value attached, in general, to the higher education entry certificate: A levels in England and Wales, the *baccalauréat* in France, the *Abitur* in Germany, etc. The value of other awards tend to be *de facto* measured against it.

academic qualifications, vocationally-related and pure vocational qualifications, occupational qualifications and modern apprenticeships Admittedly, the numerous changes over the last 15 years have not simplified the situation for employers and sector bodies. Thus, information and continuity of programmes seem to play essential roles in the search for Parity – a message reinforced below.

Work-Based Training

Several issues were raised about provision of vocational routes in relation to the number of apprenticeships places, work placements and unhelpful funding mechanisms. All of these issues were felt to have a directly negative influence on parity of esteem.

Employers who traditionally recruited large numbers of young people at age 16-18, such as the banks and insurance, now recruit at higher levels. Other employers who were interviewed considered it very difficult to promote work-based training at present in Wales, particularly routes linked to manufacturing, as many jobs have been lost over the recent period. This may explain why, over the last 25 years, the employment opportunities for young people have become transformed into "training opportunities", often without any guarantee of a long-term contract. Consequently, it is difficult to convince parents and young people to follow that direction.

However, other interviewees argued that employers are more attracted by work placements than apprenticeships as in the former case the young person receives an allowance through the training programme, 'Skill Build'[3]. In addition, the trainees are provided via the training providers and there is no burdensome recruitment process for the employers. Furthermore, the training provider is also naturally tempted to offer the more easily achievable – and hence financially rewarding - route of Skill Build (NVQ level 1) the funding of which is based on successful outcomes.

It was also reported that, although a Modern Apprenticeship leading to a NVQ Level 3 provides a solid qualification, there is a high drop-out rate due primarily to the amount of personal work required in order to prepare the portfolios which document skills learned.

Whatever the reality, fewer, high quality apprenticeship places means that many young people who choose the work-based route are more or less obliged to accept Skill Build, whatever the level of the trainee, previous qualifications and ability. This practice also encourages others to stay on at school rather

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[3] Skill Build is a National Council-ELWa funded programme which provides 16-17 year olds training in basic business skills through work placements

than attempting the work-based route, which may further discredit work-based routes.

In general the academic route is seen as providing narrow awards that develop good, high level analytical skills. Yet, certain interviewees felt that the broader-based vocational awards equip young people better for making their future decisions and are more likely to develop the key skills considered important to employers and the future needs of the Welsh economy.

Yet it is interesting to note that interviewees representing a variety of Sector Skills Councils reported that experience was an essential factor in recruitment, and that degrees were preferred or even obligatory for certain levels of occupation. Surprisingly, only two (very different) sectors emphasised the importance and usefulness of vocational qualifications.

These interviews suggest the need for three related actions: firstly ensuring the quality and reliability of information available to young people; secondly, examining how providers and employers can work more effectively together to ensure that training schemes are relevant, of a high standard and not overly burdensome; thirdly, encouraging employers, through improvements to the funding mechanisms, to offer a larger number of high quality apprenticeship places.

Progression Routes to Higher Education

It would appear that the new UCAS tariff system will be used by most higher education institutions across the UK. Hence there was a certain cautious optimism amongst interviewees that VCEs (Vocational A-levels), and in the future the Welsh Bacc, will be accepted for entrance to higher education – it is currently being scrutinised by UCAS who will soon decide its currency value. The increasing number of vocational degrees may also increase take-up of VCEs and their acceptability to HE.

The perceived differences between the "old" and the "new" universities may prove highly significant in coming years. Some research underway suggests that the "unified but stratified system" of higher education in the UK[4] could lead to acceptance of vocational awards but essentially in the universities with lower prestige on the labour market. It would also prove interesting to explore the acceptance of vocational awards by the professional accrediting bodies.

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[4] Michael Young, "Improving Vocational Education: Trans-European Comparisons of Developments in the late 1990s", in Strategies for Reforming Initial Education and Training in Europe, Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskyla, 2000.

Flexible Provision and Funding

Provision in Wales for 14-19 year-olds is undergoing substantial review at present. There are potentially very interesting developments underway in terms of qualifications, frameworks and routes. The National Assembly's ambitious policy objectives for 14-19 year-olds (Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19) set out to tackle energetically the issues identified such as low participation, low achievement, parity of esteem, establishing the basis for lifelong learning, etc. are highly commendable.

There is cautious support for the Welsh policy aim to **broaden the curriculum** for 14-19 year-olds with "structured balanced learning pathways.. which include **flexibility and choice** from a wide range of course options"[5]. Yet there are still questions of quality and the capacity of teachers to deliver, as well as the extent to which these changes can overturn perceptions. It is clearly too early in the process to assess the extent to which the main objectives will be achieved.

Vocational provision in schools tends to be viewed by schools themselves as those which could be integrated without any substantial investment (in staff or equipment), e.g. technology, health and social care, business studies, tourism.

Between ? and ½ of the pupils in Wales are estimated to have no direct experience of vocational education pre-16. One suggestion was made that it would be useful to provide vocational tasters for the 14-16 group and even that some vocational study should be compulsory for all as part of a broader 14-16 curriculum, in order to lead young people to make more sensible choices at 16.

It is also recognised that the current **funding basis** has actively contributed to discouraging collaboration between learning institutions. In terms of parity of esteem, it is not conducive to encouraging a range of flexible, post-16 learning routes.

Finally, a general impression in Wales at the moment is that the amount of proposals and changes happening at the same time may be confusing to the stakeholders (practitioners and users alike). This accumulation of measures, terminology, proposals, etc. is more common in the UK system(s) than in other European countries and is not conducive to gaining the support of employers and others and will not enhance parity of esteem.

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[5] National Assembly for Wales, "Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19", 2002

2.4   Summary of the Key Issues for Wales

The interviews and the statistical analysis raise a series of very interesting issues which are summarised below. These were agreed as the basis for the comparative analysis in Section 3.

<u>**Policy and perception:**</u>
- **Does a clear policy on parity of esteem make a significant difference?** What else is needed for effective implementation?

- **How do you change the perception of the stakeholders?** On what does it depend: Progression routes? Labour market opportunities?

<u>**Awards – transparency and comparability:**</u>
- **Is it necessary for awards to have the same structure and architecture to be viewed as comparable?** What is meant elsewhere by comparable? How far is the name rather than content important?

- **Does a credit framework help to really measure parity?** Does it give an objective measure and contribute to changing perception?

- **Does a group/umbrella award help solve the problem**?

- What experiences have there been in demonstrating that **vocational awards are not the soft option**?

<u>**Work-based routes:**</u>
- **Is the issue one of the work-based route itself** or of the type and level of provision, the funding, etc.?

- **Vocational experience pre-16:** what experiences are there, of what type, duration, quality? How do they fit in with other provision? Could a less academic approach help reduce absenteeism of the 14-16 group?

- Does the **lack of enterprise experience of many teachers and career advisors** hinder parity of esteem in so far as it influences the advice they provide?

<u>**Progression to HE:**</u>
- **What examples are there of HE accepting vocational awards?** What are the difficulties encountered and the outcomes?

<u>**Provision planning and funding:**</u>
- **What is the role of funding and planning** in reinforcing parity of opportunity? How useful is it to have a provision "map" for an area?

SECTION 3: COMPARATIVE APPROACHES – PHASE 2

3.1   Background

This comparative section draws directly on the work of four LEONARDO da VINCI I projects described below. The main aim of this Section is to present examples illustrating how the issues highlighted as important for parity of esteem in Wales are tackled in other European countries.

In order to review the approaches from a non-European country, we draw attention to some selected examples from Australia. The material for this section is drawn mainly from OECD reviews, government statistical and other reports, and various research reports.

The authors also draw on the broader experience and international project portfolios of Newidiem and the EIESP. Further background was provided by articles published in a special issue of the European Journal of Education on parity of esteem in several European countries referred to in the Introduction[6].

3.2   European Trends

In a comparative article, Michael Young highlighted some of the general trends which the SPES-NET team considered were emerging across Europe[7]. They provide a useful background to this comparative section as they demonstrate that, whilst education and training systems retain many specifically "national" characteristics, some common trans-European trends can be detected in the search for parity;

- More standardisation of qualifications for students and teachers;
- Greater emphasis on work-based learning and the potential of the work-place for learning;
- Efforts to increase employer involvement in all aspects of VET provision;
- More choices for students and more autonomy for localities and individual institutions.

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[6] European Journal of Education, "Recent Trends in Vocational Education and Training", Volume 28, Number 2, 1993.

[7] Michael Young, "Improving vocational Education: Trans-European Comparisons of Developments in the Late 1990s", in Strategies for Reforming Initial Vocational Education and Training in Europe, Institute for Educational research, University of Jyväskylä, 2000.

Young also mentioned trans-European **problems** facing attempts to raise the standing of vocational education and training qualifications and routes. They were:

- The status of occupations for which VET prepares which do not usually have the status or the rewards associated with those occupations which require entrant to have higher education qualifications.

- The fact that vocational programmes are frequently a second choice.

- Employers, especially in very small firms, tend to be unwilling to invest time and money in vocational education and training, even in countries with a strong tradition of employer involvement.

- The emergence of some very low skill jobs within an overall situation in which skills required have tended to rise, undermining the perceived need for higher level skills and thus locking regions into a vicious circle.

- Some of the traditional divisions between types of occupations are disappearing, increasing the need for more emphasis on generic skills and knowledge - thus raising new pedagogic and assessment challenges.

These issues have an effect on parity of esteem and are all relevant to the Welsh situation and present in "The Learning Country" and "Learning Pathways 14-19".

3.3 Prior Research - LEONARDO da VINCI I Projects

The European comparisons have focused on four projects implemented during the first phase of the LEONARDO da VINCI programme (1995-2000). They were comparative studies on the strategies developed in the partner countries to enhance parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes, especially at post-compulsory level. They brought together partners from the majority of the EU Member States, Norway, and some of the candidate countries. In both cases the follow-up projects continued and deepened the comparisons undertaken during the first project period with more partners. They were:

- The **Post-16 Strategies** project (1996-1997) and its follow-up multiplier project **SPES-NET: Sharpening Post-16 Education Strategies by Horizontal and Vertical Networking** 1997-2000, which focused on the

policies and strategies implemented by education and training systems to enhance the perception of vocational education and training alongside the academic route. Their approach was broad and they sought to examine a range of very different types of strategies and initiatives.

- The **INTEQUAL** project (1995-1997) and its follow-up multiplier project **DUOQUAL** (1997-2000) focused specifically on upper secondary (usually post compulsory) qualifications which are either dual purpose or give two certificates. In both cases the young person obtains a certificate which attests to a vocational qualification, with the possibility of immediate labour market integration and access to higher education.

The four projects sought firstly to exchange information and understanding on those reforms or pilot initiatives introduced in the different countries which could improve the standing of vocational training provision and qualifications for young people. Projects were paired up and common frameworks and sets of criteria were developed for analysing recent trends in sometimes very different education and training systems.

It is important to note that the projects under consideration did not aim to draw out "good practice" from among the examples analysed, nor did they aim to address specific recommendations to the policy-makers in their own systems. They were comparative research projects and, as such, provide a wealth of information and a useful conceptual framework.

3.4   Framework for Analysis

Valuable follow-up work has been carried out via joint publications such as the contribution to the CEDEFOP Research Report II (2001) by Johanna Lasonen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) and Sabine Manning (Research Forum WIFO, Germany): "How to improve the standing of vocational as against general education – a comparative investigation of strategies and qualifications across Europe"[8], which synthesises outcomes of both sets of projects.

Lasonen and Manning propose an approach to comparative analysis of the "standing" of vocational as against general education. They suggest that qualifications should be analysed at three levels:

- the **course/curriculum**;
- the **education system;** and
- the **labour market**.

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[8] Available on the website: **www.b.shuttle.de/wifo/duoqual**

For each of the three levels, they suggested types of measures to analyse and criteria for assessing how they contributed to parity of "standing".

The first level of **course/curriculum** provided information on the development of personal competence, including occupational skills. Analysis of the curriculum allowed an assessment of the range and balance of general and vocational subjects in the curriculum in order to provide an indication of how well they are integrated.

At the second level, the research analysed whether or not the **education system** built mobility and progression into the provision. The "standing" was analysed in terms of whether or not the award holder would be able to chose to enter the labour market or a higher education or further training route. Higher standing accompanies the possibility of progression to higher education.

The third level analysed the **labour market** analysis. To assess the level of standing it is necessary to examine qualifications with a dual orientation towards employment and higher education in terms of the employment rate of graduates, competition among qualifications at job entry, and their level of initial job entry.

3.5   Review of Policies and Practices from Europe and Australia

In this section we present selected examples of the different ways other countries are tackling those issues highlighted as important for improving parity of esteem in Wales.

The aim is to give illustrations of the range of ways of tackling common problems in order to contribute to debate in Wales. A report of this nature cannot provide exhaustive analysis but focuses more on those aspects of other education and training systems which it may be interesting to explore further.

The issues raised by key actors in Wales during the first phase of this project provide the headings under which the examples are grouped.

3.5.1 Policy and Perception

Does a clear policy on parity of esteem make a significant difference or is it practice that counts? *What is needed alongside the policy for effective implementation?*

A comment by one of the authors of the European Journal of Education, "Recent Trends in Vocational Education", is particularly relevant to many systems facing issues of improving parity of esteem. Alison Wolf wrote that:

"Governments find it nearly impossible to develop a coherent long-term policy – in large part because they are trying to achieve a number of quite separate objectives. They are attempting to compress into a single national system programmes which imply very different sorts of education and training, to reconcile individual interests and ambitions with wider social concerns and to do so in a situation of inherent uncertainty about the future".

For this reason, governments' education policies tend to focus around more concrete problems which can contribute to tackling the longer-term issues of parity of esteem. For instance:

- improving the post-16 participation rates;

- raising the profile of vocational education and training;

- reducing drop-out rates;

- improving progression routes for vocational education and training award holders in further education or into higher education;

- increasing the proportion of an age-group that go onto higher education (which currently tends to include opening higher education to holders of vocational awards).

In fact, the existence or not of a clearly defined policy on parity of esteem does not appear, on its own, to be the determining factor.

On a positive note, in **Australia,** one of the key objectives of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which was phased in, then fully implemented in, 2000, is to "encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications". Although there is some way to go[9], there is evidence of a blurring of the boundaries between vocational and academic routes since the introduction of flexible pathways by the AQF, and there is a marked increase in participation in vocational education and training by the whole population[10].

In other examples, parity of esteem may be a desired effect of the above but not necessarily formulated as a definite policy concept or aim. In **France** the government recently used the term "*égale dignité*" (equal dignity) to capture the idea. During the nineties in France emphasis was placed on building solid progression routes for young people with a basic vocational qualification

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[9] AQU website - http://www.aqf.edu.au

[10] For example, in 2000, 13.2 of Australia's working age population were involved in some kind of vocational education and training within the publicly funded system, and increase of two percentage points since 1997. (NCVER Statistics 2000, Australian National Training Authority)

(equivalent to NVQ level 2) for them to access higher level qualifications, either through apprenticeship or school-based routes. Much work has also been undertaken at the level of qualifications and apprenticeship.

It appears from the above examples that concrete improvements to progression routes and provision may not always lead, in themselves, to higher parity of esteem for the vocational qualifications. The examples below suggest that a raft of approaches need to be co-ordinated towards the common aim of improving parity.

Target Setting

Denmark: In 1993, education policy reforms included setting a target for 90-95% of each youth cohort to complete upper secondary education. The Vocational Education and Training (VET) Reform of 2000 modified it to include 50% of the age-group going into higher education. The question is whether **targets** provide a stimulus to improving parity of esteem.

The Danish target can be compared with the recently announced **Welsh** target that 95% of young people should be ready for high skill employment or higher education by 2015. However, this is interpreted by the National Assembly as either a level 2 or a level 3 qualification. This makes the Welsh target significantly different from the Danish one, as a level 2 qualification does not give immediate access to higher education nor to high skill employment.

Another well documented example of target-setting is that of **France** where a target was set in the mid-eighties of 80% of an age-group to reach the *baccalauréat* (upper secondary leaving certificate giving access to higher education). Currently, 62% of the age-group obtain a *baccalauréat,* representing a substantial increase from under 40% two decades ago. Much of the expansion has been through the introduction of a vocational *baccalauréat*. Yet, in spite of a rise in the qualification levels of the relevant population there has been a fairly limited effect on parity of esteem. The target did, however, provide a stimulus for expanding progression routes and increasing further education and career opportunities.

These examples demonstrate that, whatever the exact terms of the policy statement, the key factor is the existence of a robust, well-resourced strategy, preferably with clear targets, and an arsenal of initiatives which attack the parity issue of parity from a number of angles. The mix of these approaches will vary according to the country's particular context but actions such as those targeted at improving pathways, and awareness raising through information dissemination appear to be central.

Stakeholders perception. On what does it depend? Progression routes?
Labour market integration?

The perception of the stakeholders (defined here as the young people, their families, employers and higher education institutions) appears to be a very powerful barrier to parity of esteem between academic and vocational provision. It is the final obstacle that remains once all the objective factors such as progression, labour market entry, higher education entry etc., have been improved. The examples below reinforce this view as across Europe the traditional academic awards which provide a "gold standard"[11] are holding onto their favoured position.

France: Since the late eighties the biggest increase in the number of students obtaining a *baccalauréat* (the upper secondary leaving certificate) has come through the vocational *baccalauréat*. There remains, nevertheless, a definite hierarchy among the three *baccalauréats*: in first place is general education, in second place, the technological route and in third place the vocational route. This may be partially due to the **lack of flexibility** in accessing the vocational route which can only follow on from a skilled workers diploma.

Germany and **Austria:** In both these countries with a successful Dual system of apprenticeship, the numbers following the academic route have nevertheless increased during the nineties. There appear to be several linked and complex explanations which include **insufficient progression routes** from the apprenticeship system to higher levels of qualification, **tougher entry requirements -** an increasing number of apprenticeship places requiring the upper secondary academic leaving certificate (the *Abitur* in Germany), and inertia in the system concerning the updating of occupational and training profiles.

In **Norway** 'Reform '94' focused on extending entitlement to upper secondary education to every young person reaching the end of lower secondary/compulsory education (age 16), either through an academic or a vocational route. The latter, called the "2 + 2" model, mixed school and enterprise training over three or often four years. An important aim of this model was to stop the horizontal flows and discourage young people from dropping-out before completion. It also aimed to encourage more take-up of apprenticeships and increase the number of places.

However, as enterprises are under no obligation to create training places, schools have had to set up training workshops in order to fulfil the entitlement requirement. The entitlement has been adequately funded to make it possible to provide enough workshop places in absence of enterprises. It is not clear

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[11] See footnote 3

that there has been any positive movement from academic to vocational routes, the success lying more in the **reduction of drop-outs** across all forms of education.

The Danish partner analysing the reforms for the SPES-NET project found it difficult to offer *any* explanation as to why notable improvements in **Denmark** progression routes for vocational awards and in the quality of the provision (see section on work-based routes) have not achieved better parity of esteem. The Gymnasium (upper secondary academic route) remains a first choice.

In the **Netherlands**, on the other hand, there is a "tradition" of a positive perception by employers and families alike of vocational education and training. Half the 16-19 year-olds attend vocational education at upper secondary level (the *MBO*). Unemployment figures for *MBO* award holders are lower than the national average. This route also offers good progression into higher education, taken up by almost one-third of award holders. The award can now be obtained via either an Apprenticeship Training Pathway or a Vocational Pathway.

The issue in the Dutch system is different from the examples above. On the one hand there is a high esteem technician route; on the other there are apparently **high drop-out rates**, though clear statistics are not easily available. In addition, very **early specialisation limits the progression and transfer** among routes.

This suggests that there is no single factor which can turn around perceptions and attitudes towards vocational education and training. The above examples tend to reinforce the message of a need for testing and evaluating a variety of approaches. Whilst some countries have the benefit of a tradition of high esteem for vocational routes, others suggest that flexible progression routes can play an important contributory role.

Implicit in the examples is an urgent need for more targeted measures in the area of information and guidance for all stakeholders, from employers and students to teachers, careers advisors and parents. Some sectors, such as construction, are heeding this lesson and carrying out extensive campaigns to modify the public image of their sector and occupations.

Lessons for Wales

In summary, a number of lessons can be deduced:

Wales should consider:-

- The development of a specific policy to encourage parity of esteem, backed up with a well-resourced strategy comprising a range of co-ordinated initiatives. Such strategies must recognises that individual initiatives may, quite legitimately, be implemented with other aims in mind (e.g. reducing drop-out) but may often have a positive albeit indirect impact on parity of esteem.

- Further investigation into the advantages and disadvantages of broad, flexible learning pathways to age 16, compared with earlier specialisation which reduces options for progression and transfer. The pursuit of parity may undermine other laudable education and training aims.

- Enhancing, broadening and improving the quality of vocational progression routes as potentially effective key elements in encouraging parity. These, however, must be combined with other actions and tested for their impact on parity of esteem.

- As a central plank of the strategy, the provision of targeted, up-to-date information campaigns to inform and alter the perceptions of students, families, teachers, careers advisors and employers to vocational education and training.

- Gathering more comparative data between academic and vocational routes on follow-up labour market entry and career development to demonstrate to the general public the real changes brought about through enhancing vocational routes.

3.5.2. Awards – Transparency and Comparability

> **Structure and architecture of awards.** *What is meant by comparability of awards? How far is the name/label important as opposed to the content?*
>
> **Credit frameworks and "measuring" parity**. *Do they give an objective measure? Does an objective measure contribute to changing perception?*
>
> **Group/umbrella award:** *does it help solve the problem?*

Comparing the broad and complex notions of a credit framework, a qualifications framework and the "structure" of awards is very difficult within the limited scope of this project.

Transparency

Credit frameworks (or similar approaches) appear likely to become more common as accreditation of formal and informal learning increases. In some education and training systems, increasing effective transparency of <u>qualifications</u> within the system is seen as an important mechanism to improve parity of esteem.

One aim of the recently created *Répértoire National de Certifications Professionelles* (National Register of Vocational Certificates), established in 2002 in **France**, is to increase the real comparability of qualifications and, by so doing, to move towards a more level playing field.

Other countries have developed/are developing either a "credit framework" **(the UK)** or a "curriculum framework" **(Denmark)** as the basis for comparison of the different types of provision. More targeted analysis would be needed to assess the effect of these different approaches in practice on parity of esteem.

Double/Dual Qualifications

Double or dual qualifications have been introduced in some countries as an alternative to a credit framework and the need to compare awards. Depending on the country these awards either confer two certificates or one dual purpose award.

In **Denmark,** for instance, a dual purpose upper secondary qualification has been introduced to make vocational education and training more attractive as it gives a vocational qualification and also the qualification necessary for entry into higher education. It is based on a similar **Finnish** model. **Austria** has also introduced specific double qualifications at the end of upper secondary

education. The **French** vocational *baccalauréat* shares similar characteristics but within one qualification.

The question raised is whether it is necessary to make the qualifications more responsive to vocational content or whether there is a risk that the vocational specificity is lost when there is dual certification.

Group Awards

The academic awards at the end of upper secondary education in all other European countries except the UK (but see 'The Welsh Bac' below), are "**group**" or "**umbrella**" awards. This means that the student is obliged to take and pass a group of subjects in order to obtain the diploma.

The **Welsh** initiative of designing and piloting a Welsh Baccalaureat moves in the same direction as many other European partners, establishing a broader-based award which accommodates both academic and vocational options as well as some common elements. It is designed on a premise of parity of esteem as "equal value will be placed on vocational and academic qualifications"[12] and it is intended to promote breadth and depth through the mix of core and optional elements. Yet the other example of a broad-based award in the **UK,** the GNVQ, is likely to disappear in favour of vocational "A" levels and GCSEs.

There is a debate of long-standing in the UK about whether or not this group or umbrella award contributes substantially to improving parity of esteem. The issue is complex, as parity of esteem is just one of the reasons for developing "group" awards. Other reasons, for example the advantages and disadvantages of whether a system aims to provide a broad-based education for 16-18 year-olds or in-depth specialisation, fall outside the scope of this report.

One example illustrates the difficulty in competing with the traditional academic route. In **France** the three types of *baccalauréat* have a theoretically comparable level in that they all give entrance to university. In reality there is a clear hierarchy perceived by families, teachers, higher education institutions, partly based on the theoretical content of the curriculum and partly on traditional recruitment practices.

Unified Systems

Other countries have not sought to bring about parity of esteem by putting different types of provision under the same umbrella but by creating the conditions under which vocational students also obtain the higher education entry award.

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[12] The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, Information and Guidance. Published by the WJEC and the National Assembly for Wales.

Australia: Traditionally the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Australia was distinct and separate from Higher Education, until the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established in 1995 and phased in during the following five years. It is a **unified system of national qualifications** in schools, vocational training by state and private providers, and higher education.

This single system is intended to provide for maximum flexibility and a range of pathways between schools, vocational educations and universities, and allows for the provision of more and higher quality vocational qualifications. However, many now argue that the differences between academic and vocational programmes have actually been accentuated by the rigidity of the new framework, and that TAFE is still viewed as a residual option by school leavers.

Perception of vocational awards as the soft option: *What experiences have there been in demonstrating that the broad-based characteristics of the vocational awards are challenging?*

A significant linked issue is how to demonstrate that vocational learning routes are challenging and not a soft option.

France: Successive reforms have been undertaken to attempt to enhance the perception of the robust nature of vocational awards. Progression routes have been well-developed from skilled worker level through to higher education. This has brought particular success in stimulating new interest in apprenticeships - 12% of the age-group now obtain their vocational qualifications through this route.

Yet such initiatives by other countries such as **Austria** and **Germany** suggest that no amount of 'bolstering' will work unless it can be demonstrated that such routes can lead to good employment chances in terms of level of entry, salary and progression opportunities.

In summary, qualifications are increasingly being expected to provide a challenging programme of study, real opportunities for progression whether for future study or for work, "breadth" and "core" elements, while still providing in-depth study in some areas.

This suggests a general preference in Europe for overarching awards which accommodate some choice and flexibility while opening up to various progression routes. However, an assessment of their relative effectiveness could only be accomplished over a period of several years with cohort studies to evaluate success in higher education and labour market integration. Comparative data of this type are not currently available.

Lessons for Wales

- There are no clear-cut answers in this area. More work is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the various approaches.

- The effectiveness of the credit framework currently under development in Wales should be monitored. Other such frameworks need to be explored in greater depth to assess strengths and weaknesses.

- There is a debate of long-standing in the UK about whether or not group or umbrella awards contribute substantially to improving parity of esteem. Nevertheless, there is a growing preference for **overarching awards** which accommodate some choice and flexibility while opening up to various progression routes.

- Dual qualifications run the risk of diluting their specific vocational nature – there needs to be a fine balance between vocational and general and academic content.

- The ultimate test of the value of vocational awards in the eyes of the user is the employment outcome it can bring.

3.5.3   Work-based Routes and Work Experience

Work-based routes: *Is the issue one of the quality of the work-based route itself or of the type and level of provision, the funding, etc.?*

Employer involvement in the vocational curriculum: *type and level?*

Three trends can be distinguished: firstly the countries with a traditional dual system of apprenticeship (Austria and Germany), secondly the countries which have given an impetus to work-based training (Denmark, Norway and Finland) and thirdly, countries which have improved progression routes (France and the Netherlands).

Austria: Despite the strong vocational traditions and good labour market prospects for award holders, there was a decrease in the number of applicants for the Dual system of apprenticeship during the nineties and increases in enrolments in academic routes and for more general vocational education courses. Until the early 1990s, enrolments in apprenticeship represented about 40% of a cohort. A similar pattern is emerging in **Germany**. Employers criticise the **low level of qualification and poor quality** of school-based vocational education and training.

Finland: Recent reforms have sought to increase the number of places in work-based training, which is not a traditional route in Finland. There have also been considerable attempts in **Denmark** to improve the quality of vocational provision, for example through establishing a process of **vetting** and **approval of firms** which wish to take students for on-the-job training. It is undertaken by the relevant trade committees in order to guarantee the standard of the placement.

France: In the last decade progression routes have been developed for apprenticeships with the possibility of undertaking an apprenticeship for qualifications at three levels (skilled worker, technician, higher technician) within a structured and regulated framework. As a result (and as noted above) the number of apprentices has increased.

The "Apprentice Training Pathway" established in the **Netherlands** since 1998 allows those who have obtained their vocational qualification through an apprenticeship to progress to vocational higher education, while remaining apprentices (evening classes and other part-time modes).

Employer Involvement

One issue raised by the Austrian researchers in the SPES-NET project was whether or not the education system and the employers are working together

towards common goals. This raises a further question about the conditions for developing successful work-based routes over a long period.

In all countries which either have a tradition of work-based training (e.g. Austria, Netherlands or Germany) or have reformed it (e.g. France), there is a highly structured system of consultation with the social partners who play a role in the creation and modernisation of qualifications. In all these cases the social partners are defined as representatives of both employers and employees and in many cases consultation takes place within tripartite structures in which the state is also represented.

France has highly structured and regulated social partnership processes but difficulties of traditional mutual mistrust between the education sector and the employers remain, even if relations have improved in recent years with a move to competence-based awards.

In **Denmark** and **Norway** there are high levels of participation of the social partners and a well-established practice of seeking a consensus in decision-making. However, subsidies for employers who offer training places in Norway do not seem to have increased the number of training places sufficiently.

Dual systems of apprenticeship as in **Germany** and **Austria**, are based on a certain level and type of social partnership, but these suffer from a lack of consensus concerning common goals.

The effectiveness of these partnership structures, the real role of the social partners and their level of satisfaction varies from country to country. None of the situations is ideal, and all have difficulty in keeping abreast of change. However, the key factor is that raising the credibility of work-based training depends on close consultation and joint agreements between all concerned parties.

> **Vocational experience pre-16:** *what experiences, type, duration, quality? How do they fit in with other provision? Is the policy to continue or phase-out? Could a less academic approach help reduce absenteeism of the 14-16 group?*

Confronted with the severe difficulties encountered in lower secondary schools in **France** (disruptive behaviour, etc.), the Minister of Education has recently announced measures to introduce a number of post-14 'vocational taster' classes to prepare students for vocational training. The aim is to move away from the vocational route being considered the route for those who fail in academic studies.

The teachers' unions are, however, sceptical of the capacity of this measure to combat disaffection and achieve this aim. They believe that these new classes will continue to recruit among the lower achievers and those young people who

are most likely to drop-out, i.e. those who would be guided onto vocational courses at age 15 anyway. Careful monitoring and evaluation of this measure over a period of time will identify its effectiveness and any inherent weaknesses.

The **Netherlands**: It is argued that early streaming limits students education and careers options in Holland. Though bridges exist between different streams the transfer rates are quite low and not very well monitored. The new VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education) theoretically allows for transfer to secondary general education but observers note that transfer rates are low. Again, further research needs to take place to pinpoint the reason for this.

Austria sets great store by high-level coordination between the schools and firms as a means of enhancing the school-based vocational routes. Special experimental projects designed at local level by schools, local authorities and enterprises in which the pupils carry out real projects in the community (e.g. constructing a wooden pedestrian bridge) with technical help from the local firm appear to improve school/enterprise relations and the perception that the employers have of the vocational students. Projects are currently being monitored by the Ministry of Education for possible mainstreaming but no results were available at the time of writing the project reports.

In **Australia** one significant current development is the growth of "portfolio systems" to enable students to identify work-related competencies that they develop through their school subjects and other learning. The New South Wales' 'School to Work' programme has been extended from students at risk of dropping out of education to all students – students keep an Employment Related Skills Logbook, which can be computer based, from Year 9 onwards.

Thus, school-industry links and pre-16 vocational tasters appear to be a positive move towards encouraging parity, provided there is real commitment from the employers. Unfortunately, the examples given are at in their initial phases and do not allow us to draw recommendations. Further investigation into effective ways of gaining employer support would be valuable.

> **Teachers and career advisors:** *does the lack of enterprise experience hinder parity of esteem in so far as it influences the advice they provide?*

A number of European countries such as **Germany and Austria** have prided themselves on a tradition of attracting vocational teachers with experience in the occupation or trade they taught, hence increasing their credibility. The problem in **Austria** is raising the status of vocational teachers who come from industry but who do not necessarily have any teacher training.

Indeed, **Denmark** lays importance on both job experience and obligatory teacher training for vocational education and training teachers Conversely, other countries are still facing difficulties in enticing potential vocational teachers away from attractive industry salaries.

In some countries, such as the **UK and France**, many teachers are not suitably equipped to advise pupils on vocational routes as the majority of them have followed academic routes and have little or no experience or knowledge of industry and commerce. The same difficulties occur with information and guidance staff in secondary education in France, which often colours the advice given to students on learning routes and careers.

All over **Australia** the improvement of school-industry links has been a national priority. However the recent increase in students taking part in Vocational Education and Training (including structured work experience) options in Australian schools is reducing the availability of teacher and careers staff for preparation and delivery of pre-16 vocational experience to students following more academic routes. This capacity problem is being compounded by the requirement of VET teachers to have and maintain business or industry experience.[13]

This is a capacity and/or quality problem faced by all of the above countries – to date, no solutions have been found. It is clear that innovative ways need to be found of enticing potential VET teachers away from industry. In addition, greater commitment should be given by schools, colleges and employers alike to the professional development of these teachers to ensure that both the providers and the curriculum are relevant to the changing needs of business.

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[13] OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies: Australia Country Note May 2002

Lessons for Wales

- The perceived and actual quality and relevance of both school-based vocational education and training and work-based provision need to be raised.

- Pre-16 vocational tasters should not be sold as 'second-class'.

- Better and up-to-date intelligence needs to reach employers, teachers and careers advisors to enable them to make informed judgements and provide objective advice.

- Wales needs to reassess the role and value of its social partners in improving parity of esteem. It has been proven that the credibility of work-based training can be significantly raised if close **consultation** and joint working can be demonstrated between planners, providers and employers can be between all concerned parties on curriculum content, standards and delivery.

- Relationships with employers need to be built up and incentives introduced to encourage employers to offer work insights and develop links with schools.

- New ways need to be tested to attract high quality vocational teachers and keep them in touch with industry's needs. This requires commitment (pacts?) from both the school and firms.

3.5.4 Progression to Higher Education

Access to Higher Education with vocational awards: *difficulties encountered, outcomes, evolution*

Dual purpose qualifications have limitations as concerns entry to higher education and success rates. This is well demonstrated by the example of the **French** vocational *baccalauréat* which gives the holder the right to register at university. When the diploma was created in the mid 1980s, the Ministry of Education estimated that less than 10% of the award holders would enter higher education. In reality the percentage has tended to vary over the years depending on the state of the labour market.

Although vocational *baccalauréat* award holders have the right to enter university (as there is no selection process) it has been discovered that they do not necessarily have the relevant intellectual tools to follow academic-biased higher education routes. Consequently, there are very high failure and drop-out rates; well over half the vocational *baccalauréat* holders do not obtain a first university diploma[14]. (See also the experience of Finland and Holland, below).

Moreover, the higher education routes which correspond better to their profile (i.e. the equivalent to the UK higher national diploma) have become popular with general education *baccalauréat* holders. The current debate in France includes discussion on whether or not a certain percentage of these places should be reserved for holders of the vocational *baccalauréat*.

Unification versus Separation

For many years there has been a debate in Europe between the merits of **unifying higher education** (as was carried out in the UK in the mid-1990s when the Polytechnics obtained university status), or maintaining and even developing what is called a binary system with universities and polytechnics, **separating** the more traditional higher education provision from the more vocationally-oriented higher education.

It is interesting to note that unifying the system, as in the UK, especially during a period of expansion, may in fact lead to an increase in the differentiation between the high prestige universities and those more open to non-typical students or new student groups. Such a situation will clearly not lead to better parity of esteem for vocational award holders.

During the 1990s countries such as **Finland, Austria and Spain** opted for increasing the opportunities for vocational award holders to undertake higher

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[14] It should be noted that some of them are not dropping out completely as they move to alternative non-university courses.

education by creating vocationally-oriented higher education, Polytechnics (e.g. *Fachhochschulen*). Proponents of the binary system believe that targeted vocational higher education provides more appropriate, dedicated progression routes and sought after qualifications. However, this approach has not been without problems of its own.

For instance, in **Finland** there is a target for the 2000-2004 period that 35% of those obtaining a vocational qualification should enter higher education in the Polytechnics. The Finnish researchers in the SPES-NET project noted that students actually appeared more motivated for progression to higher education when they had taken a dual qualification at secondary level. However, they noted that a "disparity of esteem" remained in tertiary education, since the introduction of the polytechnics as higher education institutions continue to be selective in student admittance.

Higher vocational education in **the Netherlands** (accessed now also via the apprenticeship route) was considered by the DUOQUAL/INTEQUAL projects to retain an overly academic orientation, which was not highly suited to young people who had taken the vocational pathway. There is a proposal by the Ministry of Education to integrate vocational higher education with the universities.

In **Australia,** although each HE institution has its own admissions policy there is an increasing number of partnerships between registered vocational education and training providers which have been set up to enhance the pathways from an industry qualification to a higher education certificate. Credit transfer between Technical and Further Education institutes (TAFE) and HE does occur, for example a Diploma in Information Technology is a route into Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Computer Science and Bachelor of Business degrees in some universities, and it is widely accepted that a TAFE diploma gives students 1.5 years of credit towards a three year degree.

In summary, there is currently no overwhelming evidence to indicate whether a unified or separated higher education system is preferable. It is, however, clear that changes to the system must be accompanied by a raising of awareness of tertiary education staff of the merits and value of vocational awards.

Lessons for Wales

In addition to the above summary:-

- Efforts should continue to focus on developing common recognition systems for the relative 'values' of different qualifications.

- Selection criteria should also become more transparent and objective.

3.5.5   Planning Provision and Funding

> **Funding**: *role of funding in reinforcing parity of opportunity? How useful is it to have a provision "map" for an area to ensure good coverage and range without unnecessary competition? What is the best funding system for institutions in order to put "the learner first"?*

Finland: In the late 1990s in **Finland** new legislation expanded inter-institutional cooperation in order to make optimal use of educational provision and allow students to mix general and vocational courses through dual certification (30-40% of studies can be from other institutions in region).

This new legislation required education providers to cooperate regionally and design curricula that enable students make individualised course choices. The system relies on a high level of commitment and investment of local authorities. It is based on student-centred approaches as the central principle of Finnish education is allowing students to construct a personal study programme. The dual certification concerns quite small numbers for the moment but an increasing number of local authorities are participating.

The **Norwegian** system also allows upper secondary students to follow some courses in different institutions in order to offer a broader choice. Being able to mix courses should lead to better parity of esteem but the Finnish researchers point to the difficulty in both the Norwegian and the Finnish systems of mixing different learning cultures which limits the effective choices of students.

France has established "education and training provision maps" as the basis of planning for education and training at all levels – similar to plans in Wales. They aim to ensure that the full range of routes are available to all young people whether they live in urban, rural or mountain regions. This raises implications for planning and funding (capital investment, staffing, geographical spread of provision with travel to study areas, boarding arrangements, etc.).

Lessons for Wales

This is clearly an area where more in-depth exploration needs to take place.

- Although the Finnish approach has been difficult to implement this appears to be the way forward – the National Council-ELWa's development of a national funding system and networks should further explore the lessons learned from the examples above.

3.6   Conclusions

The ex-ante evaluation which constituted the first phase of this project suggested that parity of esteem was not strongly evident in Wales. Similarly, an analysis of the outputs of the four LEONARDO projects (as well as the experience of the authors in working in and with most other European countries), suggested that efforts in other European countries have, to date, not achieved full parity of esteem wholly successful. This begs the question whether or not there is anything to be learned from other European countries.

The authors of this report believe that Wales *can* usefully learn from experiences in other European countries in two ways. The first involves the "processes" by which education and training strategies are formulated and monitored. Further work would involve the investigation into the ways major questions and issues are formulated in other systems, the approaches to monitoring progress and change, target setting and the mechanisms for involving all the social partners.

The second involves aspects of what is implemented i.e. the 'content': This would include specific approaches such as collaborative provision rather than competition, education and training provision mapping, teacher training and teachers' status and tracking of students who have left the system. These issues are taken up and dealt with in more detail in the final section (Section 4).

SECTION 4: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey of the state of parity of esteem in Wales raised a certain number of questions and issues that were taken forward for comparison with policies and practice in other European countries and Australia within the context of Parity of Esteem. This section summarises the outcomes of the project, highlighting the types of policies and measures which contribute to improving parity of esteem.

The recommendations of the working groups at the seminar organised by ELWa on 27 November 2002 are also presented, together with recommendations on examples of practice which could be further explored in other European countries.

The final section proposes concrete steps to follow up this work and implement the recommendations.

4.1 Summary of Issues Arising from the European and Australian Comparisons

The comparisons suggest strongly that no EU countries have fully achieved parity of esteem for vocational qualifications in comparison with academic qualifications at post-compulsory level. Some policies and measures contribute to improving the situation. Given the traditional divide in many European countries between the academic and vocational routes, achieving parity of esteem is a long-term aim. It is one of the positive effects of policies designed to enhance vocational provision and build better progression routes.

Over recent decades, all European countries have sought to bring about improvements in post-compulsory education and training provision, but taking different approaches. The research concludes that the following types and combinations of measures *do* contribute to improving parity of esteem:

- **Targets** appear to contribute in so far as they are linked to improving provision and expanding routes. They therefore contribute to broadening opportunity, If they are accompanied by a strategy which includeS adequate resourcing and planning.

- **Funding which encourages partnership** among institutions rather than competition. It broadens the choice for students while embedding provision in a "needs plan" for the area. Institutions are not competing for students in order to survive and it moves education and training away from a market model.

- It is not sufficient to strengthen vocational routes even though it is a necessary condition. It is also essential to **inform the general public**

who tend to make choices based on their own, often out-of-date experiences and partial knowledge It would be useful to provide information for teachers and careers advisors on all routes available to young people and, in particular, on further training, higher education and future labour market opportunities of all the routes.

▪ **Better information to enterprises** on the competences which the different awards will offer. In some European countries this type of information comes through participation in tripartite bodies designing and updating qualifications. As the general model is one of social partnership, i.e. representation of both employers and employees, the information is available at several levels in a firm.

▪ There are several **quality issues**:
  o Approval of firms to offer **high quality training places**. Linked to this is an issue of how to ensure there is an incentive for enterprises to train. In some systems it appears to be at least partly linked to real participation in design and updating of qualifications.
  o This also requires a system for **quality assuring the provision** of training.
  o **Teacher status** needs to be raised through on-going training, positive recruitment and more attractive salaries.

▪ Measures for dealing with and **reducing dropping-out** (and therefore increasing participation) also seek to develop work-based routes, expand the number of places in firms and improve rates of achievement. Thus there is a cumulative effect.

▪ Expanding **higher education opportunities** for vocational award holders increases the numbers entering higher education but may not improve parity of esteem in so far as **access** to some higher education courses or institutions may be restricted. Monitoring the success rates of students with vocational qualifications and the reasons for any difficulties will be an essential contribution to raising parity of esteem. It is a good example of an area in which change cannot come in a short period and will need monitoring over a long period.

▪ A final point concerns **monitoring and evaluation.** European countries have implemented substantial numbers of measures in recent years with a view to expanding and improving vocational qualifications. It is vital that the outcomes and impacts of these measures are adequately monitored and evaluated and the findings published.

4.2   Seminar Conclusions and Recommendations

This section brings together the recommendations of the working groups at the seminar organised by the National Council-ELWa on 27 November 2002 (*World Class Learning in Wales. Case Study: Parity of Esteem – in Search of the Holy Grail?*). The seminar was an integral part of exploring the key issues for improving parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes in Wales and brought together representatives of a broad range of institutions and bodies involved in education and training in Wales provided the forum for discussion of the issues for Wales and other European experiences.

The outcomes of the working groups' discussions cover seven main areas with recommended follow-up activities. In each of the following sub-sections, the main recommendation formulated by the working groups is presented, followed by examples of practice in other countries which it is recommended to investigate further for Wales.

It should be noted that the recommendations focus on areas in which the authors of this report consider that it would be effective to examine further practice and policies in other countries and so certain aspects of the debates have not been dealt with in detail.

The conclusions and recommendations are:

1.   The working groups recommended strengthening mechanisms for moving away from competition for funding for education and training, in particular post-compulsory, towards collaboration in order to encourage horizontal partnerships at all levels as an important step in improving parity of esteem among different routes.

It was suggested that further examination of specific funding issues linked to quality of provision and strategic resourcing was important in order to clearly link all improvements in quality to the implications for resources or as one participant called it: "intelligent funding".

Concerning horizontal partnerships, the main issue was funding inducements and it was considered essential that the CCETs be given the means to fulfil their mission of establishing effective partnerships at local level. One route to improving parity of esteem is ensuring that "choice" exists for all young people wherever they live in Wales. This raised the importance of funding at systemic level and provided over a sufficient period of time to ensure continuity.

A further issue raised was whether or not funding should "follow the student" (see The 14-19 Review). Discussion suggested that this criterion needed further debate as it may not lead to a balance between funding individual choice and ensuring quality provision.

Recommended examples of good practice for further exploration:

- **Finland and Norway:** It is recommended to examine how the Norwegian and Finnish systems deal with allowing post-compulsory students to follow some courses in different institutions in order to offer a broader choice. The main areas of investigation would be planning (timetables, staff) and funding (courses, sharing resources).

- **France:** It is recommended to examine the "education and training provision map" approach to planning in France which aims to ensure that the full range of routes are available to all young people whether they live in urban, rural or mountain regions. The main areas of investigation would be the implications for planning and funding (capital investment, staffing, geographical spread of provision with travel to study areas, boarding arrangements, etc.).

2.   The working groups underlined the importance of continuing strategic planning based on regular and structured mapping of all stakeholder needs.

Discussion placed importance on moving away from strategies which are too heavily based on one of the stakeholder groups, and away from a "consumer-led" influence on planning and funding. This was in order to seek the best balance among firstly the requirements of higher education institutions and employers; secondly what and how young people appear to want to learn and thirdly the policy aims and objectives for young people and for Wales put forward in The Learning Country and the 14-19 Review.

One issue raised in discussion was the link between providing a solid and regularly updated bank of information on skills needs in enterprises (i.e. the work undertaken by Future Skills Wales), particularly in the Welsh economy which has a very high number of SMEs and raising the status of work-based training routes. These issues include the discussion on whether or not there is a link between the "esteem" employers have for certain vocational qualifications and their participation in their design. A question raised was that of the processes of "social partnership" in contributing to enhancing the standing of vocational provision.

A further area of discussion focused on the need to increase information exchange between the education sector and employers to contribute to better advice for young people.

Recommended examples of good practice:

- **The Netherlands and France**: It is recommended to investigate further the processes of consultation of social partners (employer and employee representatives) in other European countries to

examine how participation in the development of vocational qualifications contributes to higher standing of qualifications by employers. In the Netherlands and France there is structured tripartite representation (employers, employees, education sector) for developing qualification, the organisation of training (including apprenticeship) and on funding bodies. Denmark also provides a useful example of aiming at consensus.

3. Raising awareness of good practice from Wales

The working groups suggested that "transfer of good practice" should include making more and better use of good practice in Wales. This entails a high level of monitoring of innovative and pilot work in order to evaluate whether or not and how the innovative experience should be mainstreamed.

4. Strengthening the professional development of teachers, trainers and lecturers in FE

The working groups put forward a series of recommendations concerning teachers, trainers and lecturers.

Firstly, they emphasised the need to reflect on how the training and recognition of teaching staff affected the parity of esteem of particular courses, qualification and/or routes. This was considered to be the case for vocational teachers. The groups recommended systematic provision of up to date labour market information to schools as a tool for teachers in advising young people about employment prospects, salaries and career development. It was suggested that this type of information could be provided rapidly by the WDA and ELWa and did not entail high levels of resources to make it work.

Secondly, the groups emphasised the importance of developing the capacity of teachers in secondary schools to advise young people on possible vocational routes, especially those which are work-based. Workshop groups suggested the need to examine teachers' professional development and the status of teachers of vocational subjects. The groups suggested more two-way exchange processes between schools and enterprises. It was not just a question of organising more work placements for young people or encouraging teachers to undertake work placements, but also using the organisation of work placements to establish more dialogue between schools and firms.

Thirdly, the issue of pay was discussed but without a clear recommendation emerging. Some participants believed that teachers of vocational subjects were disadvantaged by pay scales, while others underlined the difficulty in bringing into teaching people with industry experience because teaching salaries were

too low. Parity of esteem was also linked to the perceived status of teaching staff.

Recommended examples of good practice:

- **Denmark**: It is recommended that Wales examine further the approach to teacher training for vocational teachers in Denmark where it is obligatory and takes into account both the industry experience and pedagogy.

- **Finland and Austria**: In Wales, Further Education staff are not obliged to be registered with the General Teaching Council. It is recommended to investigate examples in other countries of how the status of vocational teaching staff has been enhanced and its contribution to parity of esteem of the vocational qualifications. In this area Finland and Austria could provide useful examples of strengthening vocational routes and teacher training concomitantly.

- **France** provides an example of a common training framework for teachers who will be going into the different types of secondary provision.

5.   Tracking students and monitoring progress

The groups criticised the absence of information on students once they have left a school. They expressed a high level of interest in systems for tracking individual students and monitoring their progress. The essential factor underlined by the groups was that of designating responsibility and allotting resources. As noted earlier, the issue for parity of esteem is one of finding out whether or not different types of qualifications and progression routes lead to equality of opportunity in the labour market.

Recommended examples of good practice:

- **Sweden:** It is recommended to investigate further the responsibility of schools to track their former students up to the age of 20. What are the exact responsibilities, how is the mechanism funded and what are the results.

6.   Status and reliability of work-based routes

The working groups highlighted three aspects in particular: the need to increase the number of work-based training places available, to provide better and more information on career routes, to ensure quality of provision. The groups

recommended that employers via the Sector Skills Councils be encouraged to provide better information on career development within their branch.

Recommended examples of good practice

- **Denmark:** Concerning ensuring quality of placements it is recommended to investigate practice in Denmark whereby firms have to obtain formal approval through their sector body for taking young people on work placements.

- **France, Denmark, Austria, Germany**: It is also recommended to investigate what the advantages are for employers in other countries that encourages them to provide training places for apprentices. It would be useful to examine the factors which have led to an increase in the number of apprentices in France in recent years as compared the factors encouraging small firms in Denmark, Austria and/or Germany as countries with a strong tradition of work-based training.

7. Media coverage and perception issues

A recommendation put forward by the working groups for rapid implementation concerned media coverage of exam results. It was recommended that a small but useful contribution to parity of esteem could be made by increasing the media coverage for vocational results.

The groups recommended that the term "vocational" be dropped from GCSEs and A levels as it immediately designated the qualification as different. In general it was felt that the term "vocational" still tends to convey the rather outdated distinction between "vocational" (linked to manual work) and "professional" (linked to higher education qualifications). In most other European languages no distinction is made.

Finally, the cumulated changes in qualifications over the last 15 years have not contributed to credibility or a high level of understanding. Participants considered that the multitude of evolving terms did not create an impression of stability or rigour.

4.3   Implementing the Recommendations: Next Steps

This study has demonstrated that parity of esteem for vocational qualifications with academic qualifications is not an easy objective to implement. All the EU Member States have, in recent years, implemented some policies and measures designed to improve parity of esteem in terms of access to higher education and labour market opportunities. This type of project provides an excellent "snapshot" of the situation in over 10 European countries.

Wales can learn from its neighbours, though not in terms of recipes or ready-made, quick-fit solutions but, rather in terms of strategies for funding and planning provision, support for horizontal partnerships, involvement of employers in the design of qualifications and quality assurance for work-based training. Furthermore, over and above specific examples of policy or practice, the areas in which policies have not completely achieved their objectives and the gaps in information also suggest important conclusions.

There is a clear need for regular, careful and well targeted monitoring of all new initiatives. Reforms in other European countries demonstrate the importance of the time factor: time to pilot, time to implement and check results.

Transfer of good practice is not about detecting good ideas and modifying them to fit. On the contrary, it is about setting up structured development processes that will enable key stakeholders in education and training in Wales to identify and formulate the main issues for the "problem" to be tackled, select examples to be investigated, carry out a targeted investigation and interpret results in the light of the Welsh objectives.

The above sections have set out a series of areas for Wales to investigate further practice in other European countries. The following concrete steps are recommended to complete the analysis initiated by this research report:

1.   **Constitution of (thematic) working groups of key actors on specific issues with a clear mission, objectives and timetable;**

2.   **Organisation of seminars in Wales bringing in recognised specialists from the other country for in-depth exchange of information on all the relevant aspects in order to understand "what makes it work " and delve behind the rhetoric. The invited specialists would need careful briefing in advance on the Welsh system.**

3.   **Short, targeted study visits to investigate how policies and strategies work in practice, the achievements and pitfalls.**

4.   **Thematic seminars in Wales to disseminate outcomes and formulate proposals.**

ANNEX 1: STATISTICAL SURVEY

Evaluation of the current position of Wales

Around 57% of 16-18 year olds in Wales took part in full-time education and training during the period 1999/2000, whilst between 15% and 19% took part in part-time education. This leaves a figure of at least 24% who did not take part in any form of education or training.

Most of those that do not take part in education or training are employed (17% of the total 16-18 population)– which leaves 12% of the 16-18 year old population not taking part in any form of training, education or employment.

Figure 1 illustrates the numbers taking part in education, training and employment in Wales as calculated via the Labour Force Survey.

Figure 1: Participation of young people in learning and the labour market, 1999/2000 (numbers)

Source: Labour Force Survey

Participation in post 16 education in Wales varies between Local Authority areas. Cardiff has the lowest level of participation in Wales, at 82% of the expected level for Wales. Conwy and Monmouth have the highest rates of participation in Wales.

Table 1 illustrates the standard participation rates for the 16 to 18 year old age group in Wales. The table represents the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds participating in education and training by local authority, expressed as a percentage of the Welsh participation rate.

Table 1: Standard Participation Rates for Post-16 Learners Aged Under 19(excluding Higher Education) in 1999/2000 (Index, Wales = 100)

Isle of Anglesey	117	Caerphilly	103
Neath Port Talbot	104	Powys	113
Gwynedd	95	Blaenau Gwent	89
Bridgend	101	Ceredigion	97
Conwy	124	Torfaen	100
Vale of Glamorgan	101	Pembrokeshire	115
Denbighshire	111	Monmouthshire	124
Rhondda Cynon Taff	88	Carmarthenshire	117
Flintshire	100	Newport	101
Merthyr Tydfil	120	Swansea	93
Wrexham	92	Cardiff	82
Source: ELWa			

The most popular mode of study for the 16 to 18 age group is via FE colleges. Out of a total of 63,800 in full-time education, 41% studied at school and 44% studied at a Further Education college.

As shown in **table 2** below, around 11,200 16 to 18 year olds take part in Government supported training for young people. This figure equates to around 10% of the 16 to 18 year old population. The total figures imply that at least 27,900 16 to 18 year olds in Wales do not take part in any education or training.

Table 2: Participation of 16-18 year olds in education and training in Wales 1999/2000

	Population	Percentage
Total Population Full-Time	112,600	100%
Schools	26,200	23%
Further Education	27,900	25%
Higher Education	9,800	9%
Total	63,800	57%
Part-Time		
Further Education	8,900	8%
Higher Education	700	1%
Total	9,700	9%
Government Supported Training for Young People	11,200	10%
Implied lowest figure not undertaking education or training	27,900	25%
Source: ONS, HESA, ELWa		

The South Wales Valleys have the poorest rates of participation in Higher Education in Wales. These are also amongst the poorest parts of Wales in terms of income.

A-levels remain the most popular route into university or higher education. 64% of Welsh accepted HE applicants did so via A-levels. GNVQs were the second most popular route, although only 9% of Welsh students followed the GNVQ path. The BTEC route was almost as popular as GNVQs, with 8% of Welsh accepted applicants having used the BETC route into university.

Vocational qualifications are more popular amongst the male population. 20% of male university applicants from Wales in 2001 studied GNVQ or BTEC, compared with 16% of females.

Table 3 highlights the main qualification routes taken into university.

Table 3: Welsh accepted applicants: By main qualification and gender 2001			
	Males	Females	Total
Main Qualification	%	%	%
2 or more A level passes	61	66	64
Access	2	5	4
Baccalaureate	0	0	0
BTEC/SCOTVEC	10	7	8
Deg/Partial Degree Credits	1	1	1
Foundation	1	1	1
GNVQ	10	9	9
Scottish Highers	0	0	0
None	9	6	7
Other	6	5	5
Source: UCAS			

There is significant variation in the patterns of study when comparing the various institutions of study available to the 16 to 18 year old group. A-levels are far more popular in schools than in Further Education colleges. 71% those at school used A-levels as their route into university, compared with only 43% of those in FE colleges.

Vocational qualifications are far more popular in FE colleges and sixth form colleges than in schools. BTECs were the route of entrance into university for 12% of those who had studied at a FE college or sixth form college, compared with only 2% of those who had studied at school. More students had studied GNVQ at FE colleges and sixth forms in comparison with those that had studied at school.

Table 4 illustrates the differential in routes taken into university by those who had studied at school, and those who had studied at university.

Table 4: Welsh accepted applicants: By institution of study 2001		
	Schools	FE Colleges (Inc Sixth Form Colleges)
2+ GCE/VCE A Level passes	71%	43%
Access	1%	8%
BTEC/SCOTVEC	2%	12%
Baccalaureate	0%	2%
Deg/Partial Degree Credits	1%	2%
Foundation	0%	3%
GNVQ	14%	19%
None	3%	3%
Other	7%	8%
Scottish Highers	0%	0%
Source: UCAS		

47% of accepted applicants from Wales in 2001 came from the Professional or Intermediate social classes. Only 2% of accepted applicants in Wales came from the 'unskilled' social class, as illustrated in **table 5** below.

Table 5: Welsh Accepted Applicants: By Social Class 2001	
Social Class	%
I Professional	11
II Intermediate	36
IIIN Skilled Non-manual	11
IIIM Skilled Manual	16
IV Partly Skilled	8
V Unskilled	2
Unknown	15
Source: UCAS	

The route taken to university varies by social class. Those in the professional group were more likely to study A-levels than any other group. Those outside the Professional and Intermediate social class groups were less likely to study A-levels as a means to university entrance, and were more likely to study vocational qualifications.

Table 6 illustrates the route taken into university by social class and main qualification.

Table 6: Welsh Accepted Applicants by Social Class and Main Qualification 2001						
	I Professional	II Intermediate	IIIM Skilled Manual	IIIN Skilled non-Manual	IV Partly Skilled	V Unskilled
2+ GCE/VCE A Level passes	64%	55%	53%	49%	45%	47%
Access	1%	4%	5%	8%	9%	5%
BTEC/SCOTVEC	5%	7%	8%	8%	8%	10%
Baccalaureate	3%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%
Deg/Partial Degree Credits	3%	3%	2%	1%	2%	1%
Foundation	1%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
GNVQ	13%	14%	17%	15%	17%	21%
None	4%	4%	4%	6%	6%	6%
Other	7%	9%	9%	11%	10%	6%

Source: UCAS

ANNEX 2: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Face to face interviews were conducted with individuals from the following key strategic institutions:

- ACCAC - Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales

- Careers Wales

- National Council - ELWa

- Welsh Assembly Government – Youth Policy Team

- WJEC - Welsh Joint Education Committee

Additionally, the admissions service of several Welsh Universities were consulted along with representatives of employers (mainly the new sector skills councils).

1. What percentage of applications come from people who do not have standard academic qualifications and what percentage (approximate) have vocational qualifications? Which qualifications would you expect to be represented? Is there a tradition in your university of accepting students with non-standard qualifications? Does it vary from department to department?

2. Do you know what percentage of students accepted hold vocational qualifications? Which departments/faculties?

3. Do you data on success rates include information on the entry qualifications of students?

4. Are you familiar with the new UCAS Tariff and was it used here this year? Has it changed /Will it change practice?

5. What do you see as the major changes for you? Are they welcome? Why or why not? Would you expect there to be "pockets of resistance" to accepting vocational qualifications equally to academic qualifications?

6. What do you understand by parity of esteem? Should it be improved? How could it be improved?

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and employer organisations

We would like to discuss recruitment policies in your sector and whether you feel there is parity of esteem for vocational and academic qualifications.

1. Does the SSC have a position or a policy statement concerning recruitment? Would it include any reference to qualifications?

2. Do firms look at (formal) qualifications when recruiting? Does it vary depending on the type of post and level? What are they looking for?

3. In which occupational areas would you expect a preference for academic qualifications and in which a preference for vocational qualifications? Why?

4. What do you understand by parity of esteem? Do you think it exists in your sector? If yes, how? If no, why not?

5. Should it be improved? How could it be improved? Does the responsibility lie with the education and training system, employers, individuals, the qualifications, the government?