# Preparing students for the new world of work: critical reflections on English Work-Related Learning Curriculum policy in the 21st century

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### Introduction

How education prepares young people for the future, and in particular for their future working lives, has become an increasingly central concern both for national governments and for supra-national agencies such as the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)](http://www.oecd.org/) and the European Union (EU). The perception that a ‘knowledge economy’ places different demands on education systems, and that competitiveness in a high-skills knowledge economy is essential for post-industrial Western economies such as the UK, has led to expansion and reform of all forms of educational provision, with compulsory schooling at the heart of change.

This chapter examines how the vision of a changing world of work has influenced curriculum policy in England in the first decade of the 21st century. During this period, a wide range of policy initiatives have sought to strengthen connections between education and the economy, involving extensive reforms to the school curriculum. The chapter focuses on just one example of these reforms: Work-Related Learning. Although Work-Related Learning is not new, it only became a statutory component of education for 14-16 year olds in 2004 (DfES, 2003).

The official definition of Work-Related Learning, as provided by the UK’s Department for Children, Schools and Families[[1]](#endnote-1), is:

Planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work. (DCSF, 2009: 6)

The apparent simplicity of this definition glosses over a much more complex terrain. Work-related learning stitches together a diverse and ad hoc range of activities, qualifications, skills, attitudes and aptitudes. These have emerged over the past 30 years since the first wave of mass youth unemployment in England in the 1970s. The various forms of ‘new’ vocationalism introduced since this time, of which Work-Related Learning represents just one example, are associated with claims about the lack of technical and vocational skills developed by schools, leading to attempts to prepare young people for future work through various initiatives and vocational curricula which have come and gone over time, and which have received much critical attention (Avis, 1991; Bates et al, 1984; Dale, 1985; Ecclestone, 2010; Gleeson, 1990; Moore and Hickox, 1994; Pring, 1995; Yeomans, 1998). There are clear continuities between current policy and the past. Huddleston and Oh (2004: 83) describe Work-Related Learning as a ‘magic roundabout’, suggesting that government policy continually repeats the same promise, that Work-Related Learning will be ‘the elixir to cure some of the supposed failings of the education system’, and will produce young people ‘able and willing to fit the demands of the labour market’ (2004: 85).

At the same time, changes to the wider economic and labour market context have refocused policy around two key goals. The first is raising levels of achievement amongst all school students for employment in a high skills economy. The second, somewhat contrasting goal, involves preparing young people for the uncertainties of the new world of work, where all must expect not just employment*,* but *un*employment and *under*-employment to be part of their future[[2]](#endnote-2). Both these concerns inform and shape current policy.

This chapter offers a critical analysis of English curriculum policy at a particular moment in time. Just after the chapter was completed a Conservative-Liberal Democrat government came to power in the UK, whereas the first decade of the 21st century was a period of New Labour government (1997-2010). Under New Labour, the connection between education and economic success was seen as central. Nevertheless, English Work-Related Learning policy over the past decade cannot simply be read as a reflection of New Labour policy. As various policy analysts have argued, there are considerable continuities between the earlier Conservative governments and New Labour (Ball, 1999; Hill, 2001; Hodgson and Spours, 1999, Power and Whitty, 1999). New Labour’s tendency to combine continuity and change by adding new policy developments on top of old, is a visible aspect of Work-Related Learning policy, creating an overload of often conflicting intentions and practices. Furthermore, national policy is increasingly framed by global discourses (Ball, 1999). Grubb and Lazerson (2006) talk of an Education Gospel that pervades education internationally. They argue that there is a global trend towards the vocationalisation of schooling, based on ‘an article of faith’, whereby education will lead to ‘social and individual salvation’ (2006: 295), by enabling competitiveness and growth in a high skills economy, along with upward individual mobility in the labour market.

While policymaking at macro level forms only one part of the policy construction process, an analysis of policy at this level plays an important role in critical policy analysis (Ball, 1997). Policies project an image of how things should be and act as an operational statement of values (Ball, 1990: 3). An analysis of policy formulation and policy statements therefore provides a means of holding policy values and visions up to scrutiny. However, the translations and transformations of policy through enactment play a significant part in constructing what policy is, and this chapter makes brief reference to examples of the reworkings of policy in local school contexts, based on an evaluation of Work-Related Learning in one region in England in 2008-2009 (James, Bathmaker and Waller, 2010).

The analysis focuses on four key features of Work-Related Learning policy. Firstly, the wide diversity of practices, which are brought together under the umbrella of Work-Related Learning, render the concept of ‘Work-Related Learning’ and its meaning as a form of ‘vocational’ education almost impossible to define. Secondly, Work-Related Learning is overloaded with an increasing number of different and potentially competing aims; thirdly, current policy is based on a rationale which reflects a particular interpretation of work and work futures. In these three respects, Work-Related Learning demonstrates key long-term features of policymaking in the area of broad vocational education in England, where there is no strong version of, vision for, or agreement about what ‘vocational’ means in this context. Instead, there is a constantly shifting terrain, that reflects the interests of different stakeholders in different times and places.

A final aspect of Work-Related Learning considered in this chapter is the development of employability and enterprise skills. Both employability and enterprise have been key themes within vocational initiatives since the 1980s in England and elsewhere (see Smyth, 1999). In England, they are now promoted within an overarching Work-Related Learning framework as essential components of the school curriculum for all students. Whereas the framework appears to allow for considerable diversity of interpretation, the reification of employability and enterprise suggest a more concerted attempt to achieve a ‘colonisation’ change of secondary education (Ball: 1997: 261). Ball, drawing on McLaughlin (1991), defines colonisation change as ‘major shifts in the cultural core of the organisation’, where reforms change substantially the values, culture and practices of an organisation. Understood in this way, the purpose of Work-Related Learning might be seen as orienting schools and young people towards business interests. What is at stake is the subject formation of young people in the interests of the economy, centred on notions of employability and enterprise.

### Defining Work-Related Learning

Work-Related Learning as a means of preparing young people for the future of work is not confined to courses or subjects that are specifically vocational or occupational in orientation. Instead, Work-Related Learning in England is defined as ‘a way of delivering learning’ right across the curriculum (DCSF, 2008a: 10). An official definition published by the UK’s Department for Children, Schools and Families suggests that Work-Related Learning concerns activities that will directly prepare students for entry to the labour market, stating that every young person should be able to:

* Learn through work by direct experiences, such as a part-time job or work experience
* Learn about work by providing opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding, for example through vocational courses and careers education
* Learn for work by developing employability skills, such as mock interviews and work simulations.[[3]](#endnote-3)

However, the official Work-Related Learning Guide for schools (DCSF, 2009) expands considerably on this definition, listing nine element of provision and thirteen different types of activity that come under the umbrella of Work-Related Learning. These bring together a wide range of ‘linkage mechanisms’, intended to ‘narrow the distance between education institutions and employment.’ (Grubb and Lazerson, 2006: 300 and 299)

Firstly, there is careers information, advice and guidance, including mock job interviews, intended to inform students about employment and help them make choices. Secondly, there are opportunities to experience the ‘real’ world of work. These involve on the one hand students going out into the workplace, for work taster sessions, work shadowing and work experience. On the other, they involve employers coming into schools, to teach or lead discussions about the ‘realities’ of work, and to act as mentors to students. Thirdly, there are various forms of curriculum projects. Within school these are listed as business projects and challenges, work simulations and industry days to analyse and solve business-related problems, alongside practical and applied job-specific tasks within different curriculum subjects. Out of school, they involve curriculum-linked workplace visits, and world of work events, where the information and experience gained from the visit is incorporated into the student’s learning. Finally, there is enterprise education as an area in its own right, which embraces enterprise skills, financial literacy, economic and business understanding, and understanding of entrepreneurship.

This diversity is reflected in the wide range of practices found during the course of an evaluation of Work-Related Learning conducted in one region of England between 2008 and 2009 (James, Bathmaker and Waller, 2010). Alongside work experience (usually one to two weeks for students at the age of 15), and careers advice and guidance work, there were examples of many different types of projects that linked the curriculum to the world of work. These included:

a school with a fully-functioning community radio station on site, where students were given real responsibilities (up to and including being a radio presenter)

a school where young people, as part of a Media programme, carried out a commissioned project to make a film with a local history focus for a local community organisation

a school where young people following a Creative and Media course painted new murals outside the school buildings, and set up a website with a blog for student commentary on their course and links with industry

an English teacher using communication in workplaces as a driver for organising part of the curriculum, such as student visits to a range of settings used for in-class activities which classified and differentiated use of language

a Maths teacher who visited businesses as well as using materials on dedicated websites to construct new, differentiated teaching plans and materials to locate Maths learning in the context of a garage, a pub and a hairdressing salon

vocational conferences with a focus on vocational subjects such as Health and Social Care, Media, Performing Arts and Sport, where students could experience the range of occupations available, and do activities that generated evidence for their vocational qualification.

It was clear that the broad nature of Work-Related Learning allowed the schools in these examples to develop diverse and educationally worthwhile projects.

However, there were also examples where teachers floundered in trying to insert ‘Work-Related’ learning into the curriculum for their subject, and where establishing links with local employers and businesses was so time-consuming as to be of questionable value in relation to the outcomes that might be achieved for students. The evaluation also found that Work-Related Learning activities were regularly aimed at particular students, usually those who were below average achievers. This was partly in the hope of increasing the motivation of these students, but also to avoid jeopardising the progress of more ‘successful’ students, with activities that might divert them from focusing on achieving high qualification grades. A further issue that arose related to the ever-changing succession of initiatives, with no obligation on the part of employers to participate or contribute, which meant that practices remained episodic, and had to be constantly re-invented, with little continuity or learning from past experience.

### The multiple aims of Work-Related Learning

The wide diversity of practices outlined above is matched by the multiplicity of aims that the UK’s Department for Children, Schools and Families claims for Work-Related Learning. These aims include:

* develop the employability skills of young people;
* provide young people with the opportunity to ‘learn by doing’ and to learn from experts;
* raise standards of achievement of students;
* increase the commitment to learning, motivation and self-confidence of students;
* encourage young people to stay in education;
* enable young people to develop career awareness and the ability to benefit from impartial and informed information, advice and guidance;
* support young people’s ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills;
* improve young people’s understanding of the economy, enterprise, finance and the structure of business organisations, and how they work; and
* encourage positive attitudes to lifelong learning. (DCSF, 2009: 6)

This list reflects the diverse, sometimes competing aims that have gathered around broad ‘vocational’ forms of education over the past thirty years, where the goals of motivating ‘disengaged’ students to stay in education and achieve qualification outcomes take precedence, avoiding any serious consideration in national policy of what might constitute high quality, worthwhile vocational education (Ecclestone, 2010; Pring et al, 2009; Young, 2008).

One way of interpreting these extensive aims is to view Work-Related Learning as a condensation symbol (Troyna, 1994), which brings together disparate interests and concerns in apparent agreement, and which taps into the idea of enabling all young people to succeed through improved motivation and achievement. It also taps into a wishful vision of a high skills economy, where individuals may learn their way into prosperity (or as Hayward and James (2004: 3) put it, ‘learn their way out of poverty’), a vision which has been rehearsed regularly in English education policy documents.

### The policy vision of work and work futures for young people

Throughout the past decade national policy discourses in England have combined arguments about the globalisation of the economy with the need to increase skills levels in the population. These policy discourses construct a relational distinction between the past and the future. The future of work is presented in terms of a binary, which contrasts jobs that require high skills (the future) with jobs that do not (the past). The UK is positioned as competing with other countries for investment in high skills industries, and the strategy for success depends on the development of high skills in the population.

Education policy for secondary education continually reiterates this message, with the risks to the economy resulting from failure to develop high skills defined as growing ever greater. In 2001 a government education White Paper claimed that: ‘To prosper in the 21st century competitive global economy, Britain must transform the knowledge and skills of its population.’ (DfES, 2001: 5) By 2005, a subsequent White Paper stated:

currents of economic change in other parts of the world can quickly affect this country and technology increasingly means that even service industries serving one country can be sited in another. (DfES, 2005: 17)

Three years later, a further White Paperstressed that:

Economic activity will move to wherever in the world it can be carried out most competitively. As the impact of this grows, the skills of the workforce will be a decisive factor in our continuing to be a high wage economy. (DCSF, 2008b: 15)

The policy solution reiterated throughout is to achieve global economic competitiveness through high levels of education and training:

If we are to continue to attract many of the high value-added industries to this country, and to compete effectively on the global stage, then we will need far more of our population to have high levels of education. (DfES, 2005: 17)

The belief expressed in the demand for high skills has not waned in the face of the recession which hit the UK in 2008. Instead, the government’s 2009 Work-Related Learning Guide for schools claims:

In the current economic downturn, it is even more important to ensure that all young people gain the skills, qualifications and experience they need to meet the demands of the future workforce. (DCSF, 2009: 5)

However, the Future of Work research programme, undertaken during the same period as these policy claims were made (Nolan, 2003), suggests that these assertions construct a future imaginary, which even before the recession in the UK, did not match up to analyses of the changing nature of the labour market offered elsewhere. Nolan uses the example of dot.com businesses to show that while such companies require software engineers and management consultants, they are not the main occupations that result from the dot.com industry:

The priority list with respect to occupational growth is dominated by shelf-fillers, warehouse keepers, drivers and telephone operators, the employees that have prime responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the books, groceries and other tangible commodities that represent a primary element of the core business of e-commerce companies. (Nolan, 2003: 478)

Researchers for the Future of Work programme conclude that in practice ‘the majority of the workforce do not depend on high skills to perform their occupational roles’ (Brown et al, 2003: 109).

While the above policy constructions of work focus on skills needs, a further aspect of work futures rehearsed in current education policy documents concerns the uncertainty involved in changing patterns of employment, also presented in terms of a contrast between the old and the new. Firstly, the (former) idea of a job for life is juxtaposed with considerable movement between jobs:

No longer is there an assumption that the sector in which a young person starts work is the one in which they will end their career. For most, movement between jobs is the norm; for many, movement between entirely different sectors of the economy a realistic prospect. (DfES, 2005: 15-16)

Secondly, the developing shape of the labour market at the present time is defined in terms of a contrast between growing and diminishing forms of employment. The future is said to involve more self-employment, and work in small companies, set against decreasing numbers of jobs in large firms or the public sector, once thought of as the ‘good jobs’, offering reasonable pay and security (Roberts, 1993).

The Davies Review (2002), which has been influential in shaping current Work-Related Learning policy, paints the following picture of the UK labour market in the 21st century:

The number of public sector jobs has fallen by almost two million, offset by four million new jobs in the private sector. The fastest growth has been amongst small businesses which now account for over 4 in 10 of business jobs, and in self employment which accounts for almost one in eight jobs in the economy as a whole. (Davies, 2002: 15)

Past responses to labour market uncertainty and lack of employment for young people have been various forms of vocationalism, which have been criticised for doing little more than ‘warehousing’ young people, until job opportunities arise (Ainley, 1999). Despite past experience the changing nature of work is used by policymakers once again to underline the need to strengthen the link between education and the economy, and to establish particular priorities for schools, linked to an economic agenda. The top priority is the achievement of credentials, as a proxy for high skills. The second priority is the need for employability and enterprise ‘skills’, as preparation for a constantly changing and flexible labour market.

### Constructing enterprising and employable subjects

Enterprise and employability have formed key threads in English Work-Related Learning policy since the rise of the ‘new’ vocationalism at the end of the 1970s. Discourses surrounding both concepts are associated with a number of assumptions about young people and schooling, which are reiterated in the present policy context, particularly in reports from the UK’s Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2007) and the Davies Review (2002), commissioned by the UK Treasury, which have been influential in shaping recent policy.

Firstly, young people are defined as lacking the skills required by employers. So, for example, the CBI’s 2007 report on employability and work experience states:

Time and again, UK businesses have expressed frustration with the competencies of many of the young people emerging from full-time education. Most recently, in the 2006 CBI Employment Trends Survey, over 50% of employers reported that they were not satisfied with the generic employability skills of school leavers, and almost a third had the same issue with graduates. (CBI, 2007: 8-9)

Secondly, young people are described as lacking ‘enterprise’. In current formulations, this means the capacities that will enable them to be enterprising in the face of insecure of work futures. According to the Davies Review, young people have ‘a limited ability to handle uncertainty and manage risk effectively.’ (Davies, 2002: 26)

Thirdly, schools are seen as not adequately preparing young people for work futures, both in terms of ‘generic employability skills’ (CB1, 2007: 11) and in relation to developing ‘enterprise capability’. There is, according to the Davies review ‘too little activity that specifically aims to develop young people’s enterprise capability.’ (Davies, 2002: 25)

These discourses reiterate a long-standing rhetoric that constructs a deficit view of young people and schools. What has altered in current iterations, is that the future of work is defined as having undergone major changes, which are used to justify renewed efforts to embed employability and enterprise within the curriculum. The Davies Review argues:

we have given the development of enterprise capability particular attention. This is because we believe that it could play a bigger role than at present in preparing all young people for the changing economic and technological environment, and in developing the confidence and self-reliance they need to manage their own careers in this context, whatever their career choices (not only those who choose to start up their own business). (Davies, 2002: 20)

Current constructions of enterprise and employability are heavily influenced by the voices of particular business interests, notably the UK’s Confederation of British Industry, whose influence has become dominant in vocational policy (Raggatt and Unwin, 1991). The definition of employability is quoted directly from this organisation (CBI, 2007). This definition states:

‘Employability’ is a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. (DCSF, 2009: 32)

The CBI framework for employability is then presented in full (see ), consisting of a mixture of what appear to be basic skills in numeracy, literacy and Information Technology, alongside soft skills such as problem-solving, and the management – or perhaps control – of the self, through ‘self-management’.

Table : The CBI’s seven point framework for employability

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| **The attributes, skills and knowledge that make up ‘employability’** |
| Self-management | Readiness to accept responsibility; flexibility; resilience; self-starting; appropriate assertiveness; time management, and readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning. |
| Team working | Respecting others; co-operating; negotiating/persuading; contributing to discussions, and awareness of interdependence with others. |
| Business and customer awareness | Basic understanding of the key drivers for business success, including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks, and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty. |
| Problem-solving | Analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions. |
| Communication and literacy | Application of literacy; ability to produce clear, structured written work, and oral literacy, including listening and questioning. |
| Application of numeracy | Working with numbers and general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g. measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae). |
| Application of information technology | Basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines. |

Source: DCSF 2009: 33

Enterprise involves a different but overlapping collection of skills, concepts, attitudes and qualities, all taken from the Treasury-sponsored Davies Review (2002: 17-18), comprising the following elements:

* know and understand important enterprise concepts
* demonstrate enterprise skills, including decision making, leadership, risk management and presentation
* demonstrate enterprise attitudes, including a willingness to take on new challenges, self-reliance, open-mindedness, respect for evidence, pragmatism and commitment to making a difference
* demonstrate enterprising qualities, including adaptability, perseverance, determination, flexibility, creativity, ability to improvise, confidence, initiative, self-confidence, autonomy and the drive to make things happen. (QCA, 2008: 21)

These two sets of attributes, attitudes, skills, and knowledge move a considerable way beyond Work-Related Learning as a means of delivering learning across the curriculum. They propose curriculum priorities which entail a form of ‘social literacy’ (Gleeson, 1990: 191), oriented to the development of knowledge, behaviours and attitudes that, it is claimed, are desired in the business world. Whereas Ball (1990: 72) has in the past suggested contradictions in the schools/industry discourse between ‘the encouragement of assertive, independent entrepreneurs, who would found their own businesses, as against fostering attitudes of deference within a body of potential employees’, now enterprise and employability appear as complementary aspects of Work-Related Learning policy, functioning together to construct an ideal, ‘enterprising’ and ‘employable’ subject. This ideal subject is not necessarily employed, but must be always ‘employable’.

Beneath the condensation symbol of Work-Related Learning therefore, which foregrounds increased motivation and achievement through practical and applied learning, one way of understanding current policy is linked to a deeper project of orientation to ‘employability’ and ‘enterprise’ as defined by business interests, which are presented as essential features of preparation for the future of work.

### Old solutions for new times

Despite claims about the changing nature of work in new times, the solutions offered in English Work-Related Learning curriculum policy at the start of the 21st century are far from new. Instead, they might best be described as a repackaging of old solutions, which have been the subject of critical concern amongst researchers for many years.

Enterprise education was first introduced in England under the Conservative regime of the 1980s and 1990s, as part of attempts to promote ‘enterprise culture’. It is associated with a project of cultural reconstruction, involving a process of changing norms, attitudes and values, and re-imagining society in terms of entrepreneurial and neo-liberal principles (du Gay, 1996; Peters, 2001), seeking to move individuals from a culture of dependency to a culture of self-reliance. Yet research has questioned not just the intentions of enterprise culture, but the effects of the initiatives that were introduced in the past. A study by MacDonald (1991) in the 1980s highlights how young adults who attempted to join the enterprise culture by setting up new, small businesses met with very varied degrees of success. Coffield’s (1990) research into enterprise initiatives in the same period disputes whether there is such a thing as a generic skill of enterprise whose essence can be distilled and taught, and a study by Ashford and Bynner (1991) found that despite efforts to promote enterprise values in the 1980s, young people sought good pay and prospects in preference to the pursuit of ‘enterprise’.

The introduction of ‘employability’ skills, attributes and attitudes as part of the curriculum for young people has also raised serious concerns. Keep and Payne (Keep, 1999; Keep and Payne, 2004) have questioned the meaningfulness of ‘skill’ in relation to employability in England over a long period. Payne (2000) argues that recent usage of the term skill, particularly core or key skills (now also known as functional skills), is more applicable to a vision of a low skill than a high skill economy. Other researchers have argued that the introduction of generic and transferable skills to replace dedicated occupational skills training has more to do with developing the attitudes, behaviours and dispositions desired by employers, than developing the skills that might be needed in employment (Halsall, 1996; Holt, 1987). Nevertheless, enterprise and employability continue to be presented as a magic elixir (Huddleston and Oh, 2004), which will prepare young people for the future of work.

### Conclusion

Preparing young people for the future of work is a significant concern in English education policy at the beginning of the 21st century, and Work-Related Learning represents just one of a whole range of approaches intended to address this concern by creating stronger linkages between school and employment. However, an analysis of policy reveals the myriad, conflicting purposes and functions associated with Work-Related Learning, which is overloaded with a plethora of attributes, behaviours, skills, and knowledge that are supposed to be developed. While there is a broad claim that these will contribute to young people’s preparation for work futures, the extensive range of goals and intentions in current policy adds to long-standing difficulties in constructing any meaningful definition of work-related ‘vocational’ education.

Whilst some aspects of Work-Related Learning policy are concerned with gaining specific work-related skills, considerable emphasis in the detail of policy texts is placed on developing appropriate dispositions and attitudes towards participation in education and the labour market, as preparation for the (uncertain) prospect of the future of work. In particular, the pursuit of enterprise and employability, which form a core part of Work-Related Learning, may be seen as attempts to change the values, culture and practices of formal education, orienting both schools and young people towards an unquestioning and uncritical acceptance of business and industry interests.

There are important implications here for educational practice, particularly if education is to enable young people to actively shape their future working lives. Firstly, the lack of a strong definition of what work-related vocational education means leads to very uneven practices. It allows Work-Related Learning to slip easily into ways of motivating ‘disaffected’ students through more practical and applied activities, where the development of general personal and social dispositions and attributes for work and life become prioritised over the learning of meaningful vocational knowledge. Secondly, the emphasis on skills and attributes that employer representatives claim are needed in the workplace leads to a completely uncritical view about the world of work, and the values and practices therein. Thirdly, the framework specification of what WRL involves translates quickly into a set of requirements to be checked off as part of management and inspection regimes (see Ofsted, 2004; QCA, 2004, 2007).

Finally, while policy rhetoric combines an optimistic and ‘consensual’ notion of a high skills, knowledge economy (Brown et al, 2003) with an agenda of motivating students to achieve qualification outcomes as a basis for future prosperity, this does not match the likely future of work facing many young people in schools today. A belief in what appear to be very basic ‘employability’ skills, coupled with can-do ‘enterprising’ attitudes and behaviours, which will supposedly enable all young people to prepare successfully for the future of work, is both simplistic and unhelpful. Yet by acting as a condensation symbol, which brings together diverse interests and concerns in apparent agreement, dissent about Work-Related Learning becomes very difficult. This allows more subtle shifts to take place without challenge, so that schools become increasingly oriented to the values of business and the economy, with little debate about how these construct a particular and impoverished understanding of the roles and purposes of education in the 21st century.

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1. The UK Department for Children, Schools and Families was replaced in June 2010 by the Department for Education [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Under-employment here refers to the under-utilisation of skills (or over-qualification for jobs) and also to patterns of part-time working and moving in and out of work, not out of choice, but due to a shortage of full-time employment. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. DCSF website, <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=46&pid=404&ctype=None&ptype=Contents> Accessed 20 August 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)