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14-19 Education Reform under New
Labour:
An exploration of how politics and the
economy combine with educational
goals to affect policy.

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

The area of 14-19 education and training was a significant priority for the Labour Government of Tony Blair and New Labour. Reforms such as the 14-19 White Paper (Feb 2005) were seen as key to this government's 'third term' agenda. This research has at its heart the desire to identify the true drivers for 14-19 education and training reform, and critically analyse the results against alternative 'aims' of education. Much of current policy for this phase of education mentions the economic imperative of providing young people with the skills which both they and businesses need to compete in the global economy. This research intends to question the fact that economic goals appear to be inexorably entwined with this area of education, and analyse if this is an appropriate philosophy on which to base reform of the 14-19 phase. To achieve this, document analysis was used to identify the drivers for education reform contained within five policy documents in an attempt to understand the goals of New Labour's 14-19 education and training reform policy between May 1997 and February 2005. The conclusions which came from this analysis point to a consistency in the 14-19 reform programme of New Labour around the theme of the economy, with much of the content of the reforms focusing on adapting the phase in order to promote economic objectives. It is argued that by accepting economic objectives as a basis for educational reform, New Labour confused the influence of the economy for an educational aim.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

It has been more than 30 years since Callaghan catapulted education onto the political stage with his speech at Ruskin College in Oxford. Since that time until 2005, four Prime Ministers and thirteen Secretaries of State for Education have attempted to formulate policies with which to tackle the concerns he raised. Following Callaghan's sparking of the debate over education and its future direction, his own Government did very little to change the system which existed, (Adonis, 2006) and it wasn't until the Conservative Governments of Thatcher and Major that the education system of the country began to be altered to any great degree, with the introduction of the National Curriculum and National Inspectorate. Within the 14-19 sector, the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), and Modern Apprenticeships were all responses by the Conservative Government to various points raised in the 'Great Debate', but most specifically the need to equip young people with the required skills for the world of work. Since 1997 there have been a series of initiatives aimed at the 14-19 phase from New Labour which were intended also to address some of the issues raised in the 'Great Debate'; for example, the extension of the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, Education Maintenance Allowance and most recently the development of Diplomas. Despite these initiatives and countless reviews and reports such as Dearing in 1996 and Tomlinson in 2004, the issues raised over 30 years ago at Ruskin College are still with us today.

“Employers have expressed real concerns about whether those who leave school at 16...really have the basic skills...which they will need for work.” (DFES 2005, p. 21)

More recently, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published a report entitled ‘Time Well Spent’ (CBI, 2007) in which they set out the need for work based experience for school age pupils to be used wisely in order to increase the employability of young people. In this report, the argument that school leavers do not have the required skills for employment is expressed.

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... Competencies such as self-management, basic literacy and numeracy, and generic employability skills are critical to equip workers for the changing roles that are such a feature of today’s employment market.

(CBI, 2007, p.8-9)

In June 2007, the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) was set up to explore ways to encourage a 'world class education system' in England and Wales. In October 2008, the NCEE published its recommendations for encouraging this world class educational system, as well as producing guides for teachers and business to foster business-school links, under the title "Building Stronger Partnerships." In the forward to the recommendations, Ed Balls and John Denham describe their vision, explaining the need to improve the education of young people in terms of the global economic imperative.

We want this to be the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up, where all children go as far as their talents will take them, and where background is no barrier to a young person's future success. This aspiration requires a world-class education for every child, and is the only way we can compete with rising economic powers and within the increasingly globalised market.

(NCEE, 2008, p.3)

Time and again then, we see the argument for the need to improve the effectiveness of the education system in order to deal with the economic conditions in the world. However, the idea that there is an economic imperative to skill young people for the world of work as a way of safeguarding Britain's economy against global threats was not a new one even when Callaghan spoke at Ruskin College in 1976.

The subject was raised formally as early as 1882 in a report by the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, led by Samuelson. (Maclure, 1965, p121-127) As Maclure describes in his comment on the report,

The Samuelson Commission was set up in 1881 as a result on one hand of the widespread concern about the capacity of English industry to stand up to European competition, and on the other, of the unregulated growth of various forms of technical education in England.

Maclure, 1965, p.121

Therefore, the matter of educating young people for the world of work, and the imperative to do this as a result of a perceived gathering global economic threat has been something which has been debated in Britain for over 100 years and an issue which has been regularly at the top of the political agenda for the past 30 years.

Writing in 1985, Brockington, White and Pring commented on the resurgence of the view that not only is there a positive link between education and employment prospects at an individual level, but also that education explicitly benefits economic buoyancy within a community. (Brockington, White and Pring, 1985, p. 13) This view was one which was ascribed to by the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, partly in response to the economic difficulties at the time, most clearly seen in the rise in youth unemployment.

Unemployment and shifting industrial needs pose a challenge for those who educate and train young people because many young people know they have few job prospects once leaving compulsory schooling at 16.

(ibid, p. 6)

And so, given the prevalence of the belief that education can be used to deal with economic and social difficulties, the fact that much attention has been focused in the 14-19 phase can be understood. It is against this background that the 14-19 education and training sector has come under the spotlight as an area of the curriculum which can be moulded in a way to provide societal as well as economic benefits.

This reform agenda, by which is meant the belief that education should prepare pupils in such a way that the country can compete in a global economy as described above, has, particularly since TVEI in 1983 and various youth training schemes throughout the 1980's and the early 1990's, been concentrated on the last phases of both voluntary and compulsory training and education.

While there have been many prior age-related divisions for the 14-19 education and training phase, it is now well established, at least as a concept, as the 14-19 phase and includes those teenagers and young adults in schools and colleges, but also those in work-based training. In this study the term 14-19 education will be used to mean both education and training directed at 14-19 year olds.

However, while the term 14-19 education is well known and used, it is not at all clear that there is, in curriculum terms, a single phase, mainly because there still exists the division between compulsory and non-compulsory education at the age of 16. As Higham points out, the curriculum does not effectively span this divide.

In qualification terms, there is currently no such thing as a '14-19 curriculum' and only ever so rarely has a single set of curricular aims or experiences, much less a course of study, spanned the divide between compulsory and post-compulsory education.

Higham, 2003, p.1

Nevertheless, despite this divide, and lack of coherence which can be argued exists around 14-19 education, this phase still attracts the idea of a strategy because of the convergence of several non-education related forces. These forces, linked to the age of the pupils within it and the fact that their choices in this phase and their success or failure once they leave it, have ramifications for the economy, society and communities.

Between the ages of 14-19, pupils experience great physical growth and change. This is accompanied by emotional development, which may encompass a pupil's need to find a place for herself within society, and the formation of personal goals relating to adulthood.

The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training (2004) believes that changes in education and wider society, and also the need for greater 'continuity of learning experience and provision' mean that the 14-19 phase is both distinctive, and one which many people identify as requiring particular attention. (Hayward et al, 2004, p. 19) Indeed, the fact that there are so many competing forces at play which affect this phase of education, adds to the interest in this phase and contributes to the reform zeal which surrounds it.

The aims of education and training are often articulated in terms of their value in personal fulfilment, and their value to society as a whole, including its economic function. The history of the post-14 provision reflects the interplay and tensions between these aims, which remain relevant to the current reform agenda. The concerns, agendas and priorities of a number of stakeholders in the 14-19 arena contribute to the complexity of the debate about the nature of provision.

Simms and Meeking, 2004, p. 8

With the unrelenting focus on this phase of education from New Labour and before that from the Conservative Governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and taking into account the emphasis placed on this phase as described by the Nuffield Review and other commentators, it is significant that the debate begun in recent times by Callaghan still resonates today, and indeed that the arguments which he used are still being used as a reason for the reform of 14-19 education.

This study is drawn from questioning why the ‘Great Debate’ is still occurring, despite a period of reform which has been unprecedented in its strength and in the volume of initiatives and policies produced. In an attempt to answer this question, the detail of some of the major reforms aimed at this phase produced by New Labour between 1997 and 2005 were analysed with the aim of identifying the drivers behind these reforms.

This analysis looks to understand the internal and external problems which are said to exist around the 14-19 phase and put these into a political and historical context. The desire is to understand the reasons, or drivers behind reform of the 14-19 phase by classifying these drivers, and thereby identifying the Labour Government’s motivations behind the reform policy. In addition, after these drivers have been identified the intention is to compare these reform drivers with alternative aims of education or educational goals.

To begin, an understanding of New Labour and its attitudes towards 14-19 education will be considered here briefly with a fuller and more detailed exploration of New Labour, its rise to power and attitude to education occurring in the literature review.

1.2 New Labour and 14-19 Education

Before its election in 1997, the revamped Labour party, branded New Labour, was talking about the importance of education within its governing agenda. At the party conference in 1996, Tony Blair declared that there were to be three main priorities for his first government; 'Education, Education, Education' (Blair 1996a) and in terms of the volume of policies and initiatives which were produced in the first years of the new Labour administration, this commitment appeared unchanged throughout the time period being considered here. However, in 14-19 education, fundamental and structural change was not evident. Indeed many of the changes which occurred in the 14-19 system during the period being considered in this study can be traced back to the years preceding Labour's victory, and the Conservative policies implemented during that time.

The Conservative Governments of John Major and Margaret Thatcher, in the years prior to Labour's 1997 victory, had begun to make considerable changes to the education system, creating a system led by market forces,

to be achieved by parental choice, establishing central government control over curriculum and assessment, further eroding the powers and responsibilities of local authorities, teachers and their trainers, demanding accountability from individuals and institutions, especially universities, and encouraging selection under a rhetoric of diversity.

Tomlinson, 2005, p. 50

A great deal of energy and effort was put into reform of the 14-19 phase of education by previous Conservative Governments, and New Labour willingly took up this mantle, with 37 acts and reports relating just to post-16 education between 1997 and 2005 (Tomlinson, 2005, p 143).

Although New Labour, in many respects, followed a similar agenda to the Conservatives once in power, believing in the values of competition and market forces within the education system, their policies also highlighted an adherence to the belief that education is one of the main levers which governments can utilize in order to deal with societal and economic problems linked to poor job prospects.

In the document *Is New Labour Working?* (1999) David Blunkett talks of the need to build 'a world class education service', devoid of barriers which prevent children from achieving their potential.

By giving everyone a good education-including the capacity to be creative-we will open the gateway to work for every young person, we will lay the foundations for a successful economy and we will liberate literally millions of individuals from the agonising sense of low self-esteem and low confidence that has sapped the energy and damaged the lives of so many people in previous generations.

Blunkett, 1999, p. 8-9

Tomlinson describes the overall aim behind Labour's educational reform agenda as being one of improving the skills of young people in order to respond to a competitive global economy, with

education and training ...subordinate to the needs of the economy, expressed in most documents as the needs of national and local employers and businesses, underpinned by anxieties about the skills required for competing in the global economy

Tomlinson, 2005, p141

She then goes on to suggest a two-fold problem with this focus on economic viability.

First that from the 1970's to the 2000's education policy has not had much effect on most parts of the British economy (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 203), and additionally, the fact that the link between a highly skilled workforce and national 'economic competitiveness' remains problematic. (Tomlinson, 2005 , p. 209) To illustrate this she cites Robinson (1997) who argues that pupils in Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic do well in maths and science tests but their economies do not prosper, while US pupils do poorly in maths scores, and yet the United States is the most successful economy in the world. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 207)

Hodgson and Spours see New Labour's focus on the 14-19 reform agenda as an attempt to control the system centrally. They argue that this desire to control the system in such a centralized way relates to wider economic policy. In addition they assert that as proponents of 'Third Way' politics New Labour saw education policy in this phase as being able to promote social cohesion and social control as well. (Hodgson and Spours, 1999, p.68). Here we see the beginning of an educational agenda where the education of 14-19 year olds is not limited to the 'educating' of young people, but instead one where the system is loaded with expectations to do with the global economy, social control and inclusion. These themes have been highlighted by commentators such as Pring (1997) and Hodgson and Spours (1997) and are ones which are considered when analysing the specific policies chosen for this study.

When considering the basis on which the many reforms and initiatives developed by New Labour throughout the period being discussed in this study, it is possible to see a clear link between the ideas outlined in the pre-election document *Aiming Higher* (1996) and the policies which are analysed here. Labour were widely accused of 'spin' during their time in office, and as such the accusation of having little ideological basis on which their policies were based is one criticism which they faced. (Hodgson and Spours, 2005, p. 1)

However, as this study will show, there was a consistent policy message throughout the time period being studied here, which has the potential to be based on a particular ideology. But a distinction must be made between ideology and policy, and the question posed whether New Labour policy was based on a particular ideology, or developed because of the political atmosphere within which it was created?

There is a legitimate argument to be made which supports the idea that there was indeed little ideology behind the development of New Labour policy beyond doing what was needed to gain power, suggesting that they simply adopted a pragmatic approach to developing ideas and policies and were not afraid to co-opt policies from other parties (the Democrats in the United States and the Conservatives for instance) (Pimlott, 1997, p. 328, Demaine, 1999, p.17, Hodgson and Spours, 2005, p.1).

In addition, many saw little difference between *New Labour* policies for 14-19 education and those of the previous Conservative Governments, suggesting that New Labour simply 'hi-jacked' policies in a pragmatic way, without consideration for the basis upon which they had been developed. (Marples, 2001, p. 119, Whitty, 2002, p. 137) The reasons for this possible lack of ideology will be explored in chapter 2 and 5 in further detail, but can possibly be attributed to the nature of the election victory and the need to stabilize the country following 18 years of Conservative Government; the last five of which saw a weak party in power, and a lack of willingness to debate or tackle broader education issues and reform.

Nevertheless, it is also possible to argue that New Labour did indeed have an overriding ideology where 14-19 education was concerned, and that was the need to develop the economy. In this task, 14-19 education was a major player, with constant calls for this phase of the education system to respond to the needs of business, rise to the global economic challenge and help to create a prosperous country.

The New Labour belief in the importance of 14-19 education can be seen in the pre-election document *Aiming Higher* (1996) In this plan for reform of 14-19 education the Labour Party listed five aims which this reform would hope to achieve; maintaining and improving standards, developing core level skills in every student, creating a coherent exam system, recognising career advice as central to a student's chances and developing a high status qualification framework.

Beyond these five aims, there are four clear themes which run through the document, and which can be traced through the time period being considered in this study. These four themes are: the need for urgent reform; the idea that the country's poor economic progress can be attributed in part to the education system; the attempt to create a coherent 14-19 phase, and the desire to develop a single framework for qualifications in the 14-19 phase. For instance, many of these points formed the basis of the last document which was analysed in this research, *14-19 Education and Skills* published in 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills, which saw the introduction of a limited group of Diplomas, a move intended to bridge the academic/vocational divide and create a clear route through the 14-19 phase for students.

The themes and details of this document will be explored in greater detail in the literature review chapter, and how these ideas and themes are developed and placed within a policy agenda by New Labour once in government will be considered in full in the results section. For the purposes of this overview however it is interesting to note that these themes continued throughout the time period being considered in this study.

New Labour then, from the time of its election and even before, were focused very clearly on the education system. Initiatives for primary schools such as the Literacy Hour and the Numeracy Hour were brought in, and over 60 acts, papers and initiatives between 1997 and 2005 were directed solely at 14-19 education.

The reason for this relentless focus on the education system of the country was described by Docking when he outlined the argument made to justify the reform zeal of New Labour.

1. In order for Britain to survive as a prosperous nation, we must be able to compete in world markets.
2. Success in this enterprise depends on having a highly numerate and literate workforce

3. However, standards in our schools are not rising fast enough, and in this respect England compares unfavourably with many other countries, especially those in the Pacific Rim
4. The Government must therefore raise expectations among teachers by setting challenging targets for students' achievement.
5. In order that these targets be realised within a few years, the Government needs to shake up school pedagogy through initiatives that ensure everyday classroom practice is in line with the best methods available and that ineffective strategies are discarded.

Docking, 2001, p. 3

Here then we see the development of the idea of education as an 'instrument for shaping the economy' (ibid) rather than for its intrinsic value. This is a theme which runs through this study, and is explored at length in the conclusion.

Having provided a brief introduction to the themes surrounding New Labour and 14-19 education policy, the next section will set out the basis for the study by considering the research question, key questions and methodology which were employed in this research.

1.3 Research Question, Method and Key Questions

1.3.1 Research Question

At the heart of this study is the following question.

What were the drivers of Labour's 14-19 education reform between 1997 and 2005, and how do these drivers complement or work against educational goals?

The objective of this research was to investigate the aims of 14-19 education reform as conceived by Labour between 1997 and 2005. For the purposes of this study, aims can be understood as the purpose of education. While it is necessary to identify these aims contained within Labour's 14-19 education policies to the extent possible, this study is more concerned with identifying the *intention* behind the aims, namely the drivers. It is these drivers, the less explicit policy pressures and motivations, which were explored here, as a way of understanding the reform of the 14-19 phase more fully. In the first stage of the research policy documents produced by New Labour within the stated time frame were analysed in order to identify the policy drivers. The second aspect of this work was to compare the identified drivers in New Labour's 14-19 reform agenda against educational goals identified by philosophers and academics, and question if the identified drivers and goals are complementary. Supplementary research questions emerged as the research progressed. These included 'What was the ideological basis for New Labour reform of 14-19 education. These questions are identified in more detail later in this chapter.

1.3.2 Key Questions

The key questions presented here were used to direct the focus of the research, and provide useful markers as to the direction the research was taking.

1. What are the aims of education?

This question follows directly from the main research question. In order to understand the policies of New Labour and the aims encapsulated in them, it is necessary to have an understanding of possible aims of education with which to contrast those policies. Therefore, within this study, the aims of education are discussed both from a philosophical perspective and from a utilitarian point of view.

2. What have been the main reforms for the 14-19 phase since 1997?

Since New Labour came into power in 1997 until the publication of the 2005 White Paper 14-19 Education and Skills (DfES, 2005) there have been in excess of 60 significant policies relating to 14-19 Education in England (Wright and Oancea, 2005). Given the volume of policies and policy documents produced by New Labour, it was necessary to limit the number of documents for analysis, and at the same time it was essential that important policy texts were not omitted. Therefore, the main reforms within this time period needed to be identified in order to ensure that the research findings are valid, and can be said to accurately represent the Labour government's reform agenda.

To determine which documents to use, the qualitative non-probability method of purposive sampling was employed, and a deliberate choice was made to include some documents and exclude others. This sampling was based on a consideration of the literature surrounding Labour's policies, and an examination of many of the documents themselves. As a result, those policies which dealt directly with the 14-19 education offer and which could be considered significant policy developments were studied. This method led to the choice of four White Papers and one Green Paper to be examined (see appendix 4).

3. What is the historical context for these reforms?

By placing New Labour's 14-19 education policy within an historical context, it is possible to identify recurrent themes as well as changes in policy direction. This is important to this study, because the processes of government policy making are subject to pressure and influences from many sources. These sources can often be identified by looking at past policies, political climate and world events which may have influenced the policy making process and therefore the policy, and so allow for an identification of the drivers behind this policy. This key question was explored in the literature review. Works explored included those concerned with the process of policy formation, such as *Educational Policy Making* by Kogan (1975) and Dale's *The State and Education Policy* (1989), as well as studies of the education system such as *Dearing and Beyond* edited by Hodgson and Spours (1997) and *TVEI and Secondary Education* by Gleeson (1987). This reading informed the choice of categories for the document analysis and provided a context from which to look at the policies of New Labour as they relate to 14-19 education.

4. What are the specific drivers behind these reforms?

Using a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss,1967) four categories were arrived at through which the policy documents could be analysed and the aims behind the initiatives which they contained investigated.

Applying these categories within the framework of document analysis, the documents were analysed through a combination of content and critical analysis in order to capture the purpose and intentions of the author (in this case the Labour Government).

The justification for the combination of these two strands of document analysis is derived from the complementary benefits each methodology provides to the researcher, and the acknowledgement that by just choosing one method, important data may be overlooked. While content analysis allows trends to be identified within a document, critical analysis focuses on questioning among other things the document's purpose, the intentions of the author, the type of document it is and what has been left out of the document. When carrying out this type of review the documents are not taken at face value and if bias is encountered it is used to understand more fully the context of the document rather than meaning the document should be deemed unreliable. By using content as well as critical analysis it is possible to counteract some of the disadvantages that exist when using content analysis alone. In particular, the context of the document can be examined.

This is particularly relevant in the case of this study due to the fact that the documents being analysed are political ones, and therefore may be said to be subject to issues regarding public opinion and political intentions.

5. What are these drivers based on? Is there an overriding ideology upon which New Labour based its educational reforms?

Having completed the document analysis, any emergent trends between the documents which relate to the aims behind reform of the 14-19 offer were identified and any key drivers which were evident were discussed.

If, as stated earlier, the drivers can be seen as the motivations for policy change and reform which lie behind expressed policy aims, then the issues which these reforms are attempting to remedy can be understood through this close investigation of the solutions, namely policy documents. Here then it becomes possible to link the aims, motivations and drivers of 14-19 education reform with the issues facing the phase, as expressed by the Labour Government in policy documents.

This is useful, as it allows for an exploration of policy, and how pressure within the political process and events within the country and globally can affect the reform initiatives which are developed for the 14-19 phase. By following this line of investigation, the ideology upon which New Labour based their approach to 14-19 education reform can be explored, and an understanding of the political process within which policy is formed can be developed.

Having discussed the basis for this study through a statement of the research questions and key questions which have guided the research, the next chapter will explore the literature around the topic being investigated, and consider the nature of policy, 14-19 education and New Labour, among other topics, in order to inform this study.

1.3.3 Research Method

Five documents, produced by New Labour between 1997 and 2005 relating to 14-19 education, were studied. The documents comprise a mixture of Green and White papers chosen through purposive sampling and provide a narrative through which to view the development of New Labour policy as it related to 14-19 education. The methodology used to analyse these documents was a mixture of content and critical analysis methods, the decision being made to combine the two methods of documentary analysis to gain a fuller understanding of the aims and drivers behind the policies being investigated. The results of this analysis were then recorded in categories, the coding categories having been arrived at through pre-reading of the documents. Following the collection of the data, the results were weighted according to the length of each document in order to allow for comparison. From this analysis, themes within and between the documents were identified. While document analysis was the main source of data, the results chapter also includes a section where the data captured in this study are compared to selected other data, including Select Committee minutes and key policy pronouncements in order to strengthen the conclusions made in the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This introduction section of the literature review will provide an overview of the reading undertaken to inform this study, and explain how this chapter will be organised into five sections, reflecting the central question which underpins this study. These sections, and the sub-sections contained within them are explained in more detail below; the first section dealing with the purpose of education.

The first section of the literature review will try to understand the arguments which exist around the idea of developing a set of aims for education. The initial focus of this section will look at the philosophical debates about the purpose of education. R.S. Peters dispels any attempt by other authors, educationalists or politicians to unequivocally pronounce that they understand what education is for when he says “it is not possible to say that there is one overall aim for education”. (Peters, 1973, p. 27) Others however, take up the mantle of defining what they believe the aims of education should be, including Power (1982) and Pring (1997) and these will be discussed in detail in this section. Understanding the ideological and philosophical ideas behind the aims of education are important in this study, as they serve to underpin the analysis of the five documents under investigation, by providing a basis for the category choice; an aspect of the document analysis method fully explained in the methodology, and in particular in section 3.4.

The second section of this chapter is concerned with policy. While policy can be understood in a number of ways and be different depending on the context, within this chapter the concept of policy will be considered from three specific angles. The first will deal with policy formulation; the process of policy making. This section will consider the competing influences on policy, including society, intellectuals, politicians, researchers and journalists. (Kogan, 1975, p.56), but focusing on what are considered here to be the two most significant drivers behind education policy creation, namely politics and the economy. Secondly, this section will also discuss the idea that policy is constantly evolving and changing, through not only formal statements or clarifications of policy in the form of official publications and announcements, but also through the multiplicity of interpretations which are generated through a multiplicity of readings (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992, p. 15). This is an important point to consider in light of this study, which has at its core an intention to interpret policy documents in terms of meaning and intentions, and is one which must be fully investigated if the findings presented here are to be considered robust and defensible. Finally, by exploring the different forms which policy can take, a definition of policy to be adopted in this study will be determined, allowing for a clear understanding of the methodological assumptions on which the analysis will take place.

The third perspective from which the literature will be explored is the area of education policy in England and Wales. Here, an historical perspective will be adopted, allowing for an exposition of how the themes and movements within society as a whole can be seen to be manifested in the educational policies which are subsequently produced.

As Dale argues, using Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in 1976 as an example, it is possible to see how changing requirements of the state lead to a change in education policy (Dale, 1989, p.45).

Tony Blair reiterated this idea in a speech also at Ruskin, but 20 years later in 1996, explaining that Callaghan's speech reset the balance between the government and the education system.

James Callaghan had the courage to challenge the orthodoxies of his time...He questioned the existing set of relationships between government, parents, employers and teachers and pointed the way forward."

Blair,1996b.

While this section will develop the idea that Callaghan's speech brought education firmly into the political sphere it will also focus on the Conservative Government's policies from 1979. The economic and social changes which were taking place in the 1980's will be considered, and educational policies produced by Thatcher's government will be explored, particularly in relation to the idea that these policies can be seen both as a reaction to, and an attempt to solve some of the problems which these changes created (Thacker, Pring and Evans, 1987, p. 24), by allowing for an understanding of the interconnectedness of the political process and education policy.

With this broad focus on policy making and an attempt to provide a narrative of the policies produced in the 30 years prior to the time period being considered in this study, this section of the literature review will provide a context within which the five documents on which this study focuses can be understood and analysed.

This fourth main section of the literature review will set out to provide an understanding of both the purposes of education from a policy standpoint and the different forms which education, in particular education for 14-19 year olds, can take. Specifically, consideration will be given to what is often described within the education system of England and Wales as the academic/vocational divide. This section will consider the past and current system of 14-19 education, and attempt to understand the lines on which its organisation is drawn. Here, the Nuffield Review annual reports (2003-2004 and 2004-2005) provide a good basis on which to conduct this investigation, setting out as they do various aspects of the learning landscape, and detailing what they call the 'unofficially bipartite system' (Nuffield, 2004, p. 40) of academic and vocational pathways, the participation rates in this system, and the providers who are offering these pathways to students. An understanding of the particular needs of the 14-19 age group and why this area of education has received so much targeted attention, both under New Labour and earlier, will be examined, taking into account the perspective that 14-19 education has both personal relevance to the student and particular relevance to the economy and society as a whole being an important aspect of this debate. (Higham, 2004, p.8)

Establishing the place of 14-19 education within society and the political sphere is a crucial aspect of this study, because it allows for an understanding of the themes and issues contained within the five documents under analysis, not just at the basic policy level, but at a countrywide, and even global level.

The final section will look specifically at the Labour Government's policy between 1997 and 2005, focusing specifically on 14-19 education. This will follow on from the previous section, showing links and common themes between Conservative and Labour policies. As Marples explains, New Labour's policies for 14-19 education were located squarely within what he calls 'the incoherent and reactive' policies of the previous Conservative Government. (Marples, 2001, p.119)

With the purpose and aims of education being at the heart of this study, an exploration of the issues surrounding the definition of the aims of education form the first section of this chapter.

2.2 The Purpose of Education

To ask the question ‘what is the purpose of education’ is to encourage as many responses as there are respondents. The extent to which anyone can reliably determine what education should do is very limited, and will depend on their experience of education, their ideological background and any number of other variances in life experience as it is possible to conceive. Nevertheless, both within the political sphere, and separate from that, an attempt to explore the aims of education exist. Some writers on this subject are more willing to provide a list of what the aims of education should be, while others, perhaps coming from a more philosophical perspective are less willing to be as definite. It is the latter position which will be investigated here first.

As described in an earlier section, Peters is clear in his belief that it is not possible for anyone to determine one overall aim for education. (Peters, 1973, p. 27) On the other hand, he is clear that there is such thing as ‘an educated man.’ (here we will presume that he also includes women in this definition!) The qualities possessed by an educated man are described by Peters as

- a. Someone who pursues an activity for what there is in it as distinct from what it may lead onto or bring about,
- b. Someone who possesses an understanding of the ‘reason why’ of things, rather than simply being well informed, and

- c. Someone who is not too narrowly educated in a specialised area

Peters, 1973, p. 18

This idea of what it means to be an educated person then, does not provide an example of the aims of education, but instead describes what an educated person would look like. Useful though this is, it does not get to the heart of defining 'aims of education' and indeed Peters is unapologetic about the lack of a set of educational aims in his writing, arguing that his discipline of philosophy can offer a set of ethical foundations for education, but cannot give relative weight to these principles, and so therefore cannot classify one or other as more important than the rest. (Peters, 1973, p. 28)

Attempts to define the aims of education is historically something which educational philosophers did not engage in. (Power, 1982, p.8) Instead, as he describes, there were four areas of educational philosophy. These begin with the inspirational, where an ideal model for the system of learning is presented; the analytical, where educational practice and meaning were interpreted; the prescriptive where directions for educational practice are given; and the investigative, where justification or rejection of educational policies and practices are considered. (Power, 1982, p. 5-15) However, he argues against this shying away from goal setting by educational philosophers when he says,

...educational philosophy should have both formal and informal education as part of its purpose, but most emphasis is and should be given to educational philosophy defining the goals for formal education.

Power, 1982 p. 227

And indeed he is not so reticent to set out the aims of education when considered from an education philosopher's perspective, although as can be seen by the list below, these goals are still of the general type, and would still require detailed consideration of the process by which these aims are to be achieved.

Purposes of Education as Defined by Contemporary Education Philosophy

1. Education for Character

The preparing of youth to meet the standard of adult life.

2. Education for Life

To prepare children to live effectively in society when they attain maturity

3. Education for Growth

Children must be helped along the path to growth, and shown how to deal with obstacles so they can grow

4. Education for Personal Fulfilment

To be educated in such a way that we are capable of making a judgement for ourselves about what will make us happy

5. Education for development and refinement of aesthetic aptitude

Education should prepare persons to appreciate beauty in all its forms.

Power, 1982, p. 228-250

Pring considers possible aims for education, and described three possible responses to the question, “what is the aim of education?” The first answer is to consider the benefits which education may bring; education is a means to an end. You are educated *for* something. (Pring, 1995, p. 108) A second answer may be to suggest that the aim of education is to learn or acquire knowledge and skills, considering education to be more than just the conferment of a certificate or award.

A third understanding of the aims of education could be seen to be the value which is found in learning something which itself is considered valuable, meaning education can be seen as an evaluative term. (Ibid, p. 109)

Ultimately though, the aims of education are difficult to define, and many are unwilling to set out a definitive list of educational aims. The reasons for this inability of not just thinkers on this subject but also practitioners (Raven, 1977, p. 30) and governments to come to definite conclusions about the aims of education lie in the idea of *individual* advancement. If it is accepted that education should be suited to the individual, then it becomes infinitely more difficult to create a set of overarching aims of education which will cater for all.

The purpose of education, therefore, the content of educational programmes, the standards by which educational progress is judged, the idea of the educated person itself are all permeated by feelings and judgements of value. Ultimately it all depends upon one's view of the life worth living.

Pring, 1995, p. 135

The difficulty of setting out aims of education also stem from the type of aim required for a particular educational institution.

Is a general aim such as producing a person who shows the characteristics of 'commitment' as suggested by Peters (1973, p.18) sufficient for a Design and Technology teacher instructing a class of 30 Year 8 pupils, or does that teacher need specific aims which allow her to assess whether a pupil is achieving in that particular subject on that particular day? Or is the solution a combination of both? Possibly the answer is that an educator requires a set of overarching beliefs about the purpose of education, and the values and objectives which are commonly held as being desirable, as well as being clear about specific, subject or topic related aims, which day by day feed into and encourage the development of the overall aims.

If the overall consensus achieved by exploring the idea of educational aims from the philosophical perspective is that there is no real consensus on the aims of education, then within the capitalist global economies of the west, it seems unsurprising that political and economic forces, as described previously, play such a huge role in the creation of educational policies. As Dale contends, “the aims of education in any society can neither be plucked from the air nor developed in hermetically sealed units.” (Dale, 1989, p. 63). Instead, as he goes on to explain, there is every reason to expect that in a capitalist state, the aims of the capitalist class will make their way onto the official agenda and therefore become part of what is expected from the education system as a whole. (Ibid) Furthermore, if as Pring states, there is a constant argument about *what* should be taught to produce an educated person (Pring, 1997, p. 26) and that this inability to come to a consensus does not undermine the principle of finding value in life, it can also be said that this uncertainty about the aims of education does not aid the politician whose role it is to implement educational reform. It has become the case since The Great Debate that a policy-maker’s role is to determine the curriculum and decide what should be included and what should be excluded from an educational agenda.

Therefore it is unsurprising, in a world where globalisation is understood by many as a threat which must be engaged with in order to ensure economic prosperity, that the principles underlying educational reform which are most focused on by policy makers have an economic focus. Perhaps the principles of ‘skilling student’ and making education more economically relevant are easier to quantify than the aims encapsulated in the study of art and literature. As such then, educational goals can be seen as a reflection of the times in which they are defined.(Dale, 1989, p.63)

While Dale argues that economics is an understandable and to some extent not a disadvantageous agenda item when it comes to education policy, he also recognises that the aims of educational reform in recent times have been born out of a political agenda which has as its focus the protection and expansion of the capitalist state.(Dale, 1989, p. 45). That education policy is influenced by politics will be considered in detail later, but here we see a different perspective on the political influence on education, with political aims becoming educational aims. The accepted political agenda of education being economically relevant, through an improvement in standards against a backdrop of social inclusion, forms the basis of the aims which underpin educational reform, despite these being political aims, and not necessarily educational ones. In addition these aims form the basis of educational reform, with policy documents failing to discuss the basis on which they are introduced or clearly state what educational aims should be.

(Nuffield, 2004, p. 21)

Having considered the purpose of education, and the way in which aims can be developed into policies, the next section will look at the policy making process, and the forces at play within this activity.

2.3 Policy Formation in Education

In considering the process of policy creation and formation, it is necessary to understand what is meant by policy. The purpose of this study is to attempt to analyse policies produced by New Labour between 1997 and 2005 which relate to 14-19 education. However, before this analysis can be undertaken, an understanding of policy, both the possible definitions which could be considered as well as that which will be used here, must be undertaken.

An overarching understanding of what policy is has been expressed by Kogan (1975) when he describes policies as 'operational statements of values' (Kogan, 1975, p. 55) Here we see the idea that policies are the tools by which a body can express its desires and beliefs through what Kogan refers to as 'programmatically utterances'. (ibid) The form which these 'utterances' take are various. It may be accepted by some that policies in their most ubiquitous form, exist as text; policy documents. These may exist in any organisation; as exemplifications of working practices to employees, descriptions of corporate strategy to shareholders, or promise of levels of service to customers. However, policies can take other and more varied forms, shaped by the creator as well as the reader. As described by Ball, 'policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended' (Ball, 1994, p. 10)

This allows for the consideration that policy can be captured in many forms, including less formal text than published documents, informal discussions, formal interviews or public speeches.

Within this study the policies to be analysed are produced by governments, within the boundaries stated earlier. This source of policy follows clearly from the research question and as such is the most justifiable source from which to collect data; this point being discussed in full in the methodology section. What is less clear, and therefore an issue which must be addressed, is what form the policy to be analysed will take. As explained above, there are many ways in which policy can be conveyed, with governmental 'utterances' on policy not falling solely into the category of text, but also speeches and interviews to name but two. All of these forms of policy contain useful information which would go some way to answering the research question posed in this study. Therefore, the narrowing down of 'policy' to mean those produced by government is not sufficient, and makes the matter of pinning down the idea of what is policy for the purposes of this research more complex. Indeed, the concept of defining a policy becomes even more slippery when you consider Ball's further explanation of policy within the political sphere as a shifting and changing entity.

Policies shift and change their meaning in the areas of politics; representations change, key interpreters (secretaries of state, ministers, chairs of councils) change (sometimes the change in key actors is a deliberate tactic for changing the meaning of the policy)...Policies are represented by different actors and different interests

Ball, 1994, p. 17

Policy, even within government, can be used to describe a wide range of activities, such as setting priorities, defining objectives, describing a plan or specifying decision rules (Gordon, Lewis and Young, 1977, p.29) The authors go on to argue that policy is “ an essentially dynamic set of construction of the situation” and occurs both before, during and after the policy making process. (ibid) Indeed, even the idea that policy formation is a defined, rational and stepped process is undermined by Lawton when he discusses the term ‘policy development’

One of the problems in writing about educational or curriculum policy is that the word ‘policy’ normally has connotations of careful thinking and planning; the additional word ‘development’ should reinforce that impression. ‘Policy development’ sounds good as rhetoric, but unfortunately policy in practice tends to be contaminated by ideology, expediency and even by personal ambition.

Lawton, 1993, p. 59

These considerations must all be taken into account then, when attempting to define what is meant by policy for the purposes of this study, and a choice made about the most complementary ‘form’ of policy available to answer the research question. With the above points in mind, as well as constant reference to the research questions and key questions being addressed here, for the purposes of this study policy will be taken to mean the documents, or texts, produced by the government which relate to 14-19 education between 1997 and 2005, in the form of official publications. This definition excludes speeches, television or newspaper interviews or other forms of policy ‘explanation’.

This narrow definition arises from the need to limit the possible interpretations of the policies which are analysed, taking into account the idea expressed above that the policy can 'change' depending on the interpreter, in this case the person giving the speech or being interviewed.

While speeches and interviews are used by governments to advertise as well as explain a certain policy direction, and therefore can be considered as important policy instruments used by any government, the purest form of any given governmental policy can be seen to be White or Green papers produced on a particular subject, lacking as these statements of policy do, so much of the shifting and changing shape which Ball describes. Accepting that texts provide a constant policy message (although the earlier point that different readers bring to these texts different interpretations will be discussed further in a subsequent section), and if text can therefore be seen to represent policy, then these representations can take various forms and therefore produce the formal and informal commentaries, in the form of speeches and interviews. (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992, p. 21)

In this study then, these 'commentaries' on policy have consciously been avoided in the main data analysis process as a way of limiting the influence of personality, speaker fluency and charisma, or reinterpretation of the policy on the analysis being conducted. By carefully restricting the type of policy to be studied here, in line with the research question, and building a clear methodological framework for the analysis of the chosen policies, the intention is to limit erroneous conclusions which could be drawn if this analysis were to be carried out on an interpretation or re-telling of the policy in question.

However, to provide greater weight to the results obtained from the five documents through documentary analysis, additional sources have been used selectively. While these sources do not provide the main basis upon which the conclusions are drawn, they allow for a deeper explanation of the findings in this study. A fuller account of the reasons for the narrow definition of policy as government publications (in the form of documents) and the selective use of additional sources being used in this study can be found in the methodology section.

While the premise of this study is that policy in the form of documents can be considered the most stable of policy instruments when compared to speeches and interviews, it is also recognised that this stability is relative, and that all forms of policy are unstable, shifting and changeable. If a continuum of policy stability were considered, speeches and interviews would be placed at the 'unstable' end, with text at the most stable, but with the understanding that instability exists within all of these instruments. The instability which exists within the policy document can be seen to exist at two stages. The first is during the creation process and will be considered below, having been termed 'Drivers in Education Policy'. The second stage of instability of policy documents exists when these documents are read or interpreted. This aspect of instability is one of great relevance in this study and is looked at in depth within the methodology section, where the attempts to limit flawed interpretations of the policies under review within this study are explained through the careful choice of analysis techniques.

2.3.1 Drivers in Education Policy

This study is considering the education policies of the Labour Government, and as such, must recognise various influences or drivers on the policy making process. Policies are not created in a vacuum, and in particular policies produced by governments must be seen as being subject to political, economic, and societal influences.

If we accept Kogan's belief that 'policies are operational statements of values' (Kogan, 1975, p.55) then the assertion that

In order to understand properly the significance of policy texts in the process of educational reform it is necessary to explain the material conditions within which such texts are produced...

Olssen et al, 2004, p. 72

suggests that it is not only desirable, but necessary to be aware of the pressures and influences, both in the political and the wider world, which are brought to bear on the process of policy making. However, precisely because of the range of competing influences which exist around policy-making, the process is hard to characterise and without clear pathways.

Indeed, the act of policy-making can be seen to be mired in “the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism” (Ball, 1990, p.9) Additionally, competing influences such as the political system, machinery of government and the media can have a dramatic effect on the policy making process. As highlighted by the authors of the CfBT trust report on evidence based policy, “The level of complexity inherent in the policy formation process should not be underestimated.” (Perry et al, 2010, p.23) The pace of the ‘policy-making world’ should also be taken into account, with the volume of legislation often being unhelpful, making implementation of previous policy impossible. (Perry et al, 2010, p. 40)

Taking these difficulties into account, and being aware of the inscrutability of some of the policy making methods, it is nevertheless still possible to discern key influences at play on the policy making process as it relates to education within the last thirty years.

The following section, detailing two of these influences, does not provide an exhaustive list, but instead considers those which are the most relevant in terms of this study. The first of these influences which will be explored here is the effect of politics on policy making in education.

2.3.2 Politics and Policy Making

At the most basic level, education policy can be said to be influenced politically because it is the state which, through the collection of taxes and the funding of state education, provide the mechanism by which education functions. However, it is clear to even the casual observer that governments within the UK exert a much greater level of influence on the education system than simply providing for the monetary requirements of schools and colleges.

In recent history, this influence can be said to have begun with James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College in 1976 when a clear link was established between the needs of the state, politicians, and the political system and corresponding requirements being demanded of the education system. (Dale, 1989, p. 45) With the intervention of politics into the educational arena signalled by the Ruskin College speech, and the initiating of the Great Debate about education's role in the economic development of the country, the Prime Minister began the concentration of power over the education system by government and the state.

While another influence in education policy making, the economy, will be examined later in this section, and while it will be argued that it is influential on the education system, and particularly 14-19 education, it can be seen that at the policy creation level politics is a main influence behind education policy formation because it also influences others.

This stems from the fact that the state is the conduit through which all these drivers must pass, and especially since Callaghan's speech, power over education policy has rested here.

This political influence on policy sees the Education Department (whatever title it is given at any particular time) of a particular government occupying a position which it has held for many years, with one significant difference. In the past the education department was described as a post-box through which the teachers' unions and LEAs communicated, with the education minister happy to be in a position where he 'knows nowt about curriculum.' As such it is possible to see that central government exerted very little influence on the education system as a whole. (Spours, Hodgson and Yeomans, 2007, p. 61) It is being argued here that the *position* which the education department occupies is still the same, namely the 'post-box' through which influences and drivers on education policy must pass, but with the important difference that the Great Debate legitimized the intervention of the state in education policy on the grounds of economic need, endowing politicians with greater power over the education system. "The Ruskin speech did not initiate the discourse around the links between education and the economy, but it gave legitimacy to them within the education policy community." (Ball, 1990, p.71) Therefore, in modern times, the 'politicisation' of education policy making can be seen to have begun with the Ruskin Speech, and the power held by politicians in the area of education having been granted initially on a small scale, but which the potential for future growth, at this time.

If the Great Debate opened up the possibility of political influence on the education system, the tool by which this influence could be exercised is policy. This idea is expressed by Olssen et al when they say that because the state controls the education system in most modern societies, the way that governments communicate on issues within education, is through the medium of policies, which they term 'instruments of power' (Olssen et al, 2004, p.67) Here we see that politics is an important driver in education, for the purpose of exerting power.

Policy here is taken to be any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values, or the allocation of resources.

Fundamentally, policy is about the exercise of political power, and the language that is used to legitimate that process.

Olssen et al, 2004, p. 71 and 72

Politics, and the politicisation of the policy-making process, are described as having clear disadvantages for policy-making by Spours and Raffe. In their chapter on policy making and policy learning in education, they explain three models which attempt to capture the policy making process. One of these models is the politicised model, and is described as being the least desirable of the three models (the other two being the rational model and the collaborative model, the latter being considered the most advantageous) (Raffe and Spours, 2007, p. 12-13)

New Labour policies in England as they relate to 14-19 education are considered to be examples of the politicised model of policy making, and as a result it is 'a difficult time for policy learning (ibid, p. 19) by which is meant little understanding of the impacts of policy exist, or future advances in the effectiveness of new policies is limited. In the search for 'what works' in education policy, a single review of available research to determine a policy process is not sufficient. (Boaz and Pawson, 2005, p191)

Nevertheless, this type of pragmatic approach to policy making was adopted by New Labor. This is obviously a point of tension in the policy making process, where the fast political world, and overriding policy making process which exists has little time to evaluate past policies and consider appropriate evidence in order to inform future policy. However, Pawson believes this precise process of building initiatives by learning from past successes and failures (a realist methodology approach) is vital to successful policy creation. (Pawson, 2002, p. 356)

Additionally, the Raffe and Spours point to several negative effects of the politicisation of policy making, including policy 'busyness' where there is continuous innovation but a lack of substantive change, (Raffe and Spours, 2007, p. 2) as well as policy tension, where compromises and trade-offs are made not on the basis of policy learning but instead because of political dissention.(ibid, p. 19)

Policy can also suffer from too great an influence of politics because of the ever changing nature of the political arena. Because politics and governing is conducted in an atmosphere of pressure and intense outside scrutiny, policies themselves are also subject to these pressures. A continual atmosphere of change pervades policy making as well as politics, as described by Ball earlier.

In this atmosphere it is easy to imagine at least some of the time, the possibility that policies, because they are affected by politics, are not formed in the best circumstances or with the best available information.

Indeed, Finegold sees the short term nature of politics as a distinct disadvantage to coherent policies which ultimately succeeds in limiting the effectiveness of the initiatives.

The inability of government policy makers in the US and UK to adopt a long-term perspective towards skills creation is largely a product of the institutional - situation in which they are placed. The time scale for reforms needed to elevate education and training levels does not synchronise with the short-term political demands created by the electoral cycle.

(Finegold, 1992, p.71)

While the above are important arguments against the politicisation of the policy-making process, and therefore an argument against politics being too dominant an influence in the realm of education policy-making, there can be said to be some areas where politics has a useful influence on policy.

The first is explained by Bowe et al when policy texts are described as 'expression[s] of sets of political 'intentions''. (Bowe et al, 1992, p. 19) As such the authors go on to see these texts as being a resource for encouraging and continuing national debates on the subjects contain therein. (ibid) Politics then, has the ability to bring important matters of policy into the public sphere, and thereby allow for an exchange of views.

Another area where policy may be positively influenced by politics is in determining the values and principles which are important to society as a whole at the point that the policy is being created. Peters describes some general aims of education, which could be considered within any society as the fundamental basis on which policy is formed. He is quite clear though, that while philosophy can provide foundations for education, it cannot say which aim is more important than another;

It is one thing to give arguments for general aims; it is quite another to say which particular one should be emphasised in contingent circumstances. Philosophy has an important contribution to make to political wisdom, but it is no substitute for it.

Peters, 1973, p.29

So here can be seen a positive role for politics within the sphere of educational policy making; to act as the means by which society's priorities for education are determined by considering the issues which face a country and framing the solutions in ways which are appropriate to the culture and era within which the policies are being formed.

This section has considered the nature of the influence of politics on the development and formation of education policy, arguing that it has a significant influence in this area. By looking in detail at this area of policy making, an attempt has been made to understand the influence, both positive and negative, which politics has on the education system. The next section will investigate economic considerations as a major influence on education policy.

2.3.3 Economics and Policy

The argument that greater economic prosperity can be secured and advanced by the development of a skilled and flexible workforce, is one which has become an accepted truism in the political discourse of modern times. The idea that ‘the key to national economic improvement and prosperity’ is held in the system of education and training can be linked directly with the Great Debate and the Ruskin College speech of 1976, and is one which has clearly influenced the reform agenda of New Labour . (Esland and Ahier, 1999, p. 1) Looking at this point from another perspective, Keep argues that one of the key elements of the current narrative around education policy is that the “over-riding goal of publically-funded education and training is to further economic aims and to boost competitiveness.” (Keep, 2009, p.6)

To understand the role the economy plays in the formation of education policy, and why economics remains a key influence on educational policy-making, despite over 30 years having passed since the sparking of this debate, it is necessary to consider the economic conditions which have both prompted and sustained this debate.

Chitty observes that when, in the early 70’s, the price of oil quadrupled and fixed exchange rates collapsed, a climate of hopelessness engulfed the country, and teachers and schools became a convenient place on which to focus anger about the inability of governments to deal with the economic downturn. (Chitty, 2004, p. 10) This anger prompted the development of the arguments contained in the Great Debate, particularly that industry required a well skilled and flexible workforce.

If schools could achieve the required education of their pupils, responding appropriately to the demands of the manufacturers and producers, the health of the economy, and the ability of Britain to compete in the world markets would be enhanced greatly (Callaghan, 1976). On a global scale, the oil shocks of the 70's encouraged the globalization of world markets by escalating economic competition between firms, regions and nation-states (Dicken, 2003, p. 140) Therefore, the ability of a nation's education system to respond to the global economy is seen to hold the key to future prosperity. (Brown and Lauder, 1999, p. 31) The reasoning behind Brown and Lauder's assertion is that in the new global economy competitive advantage is gained through finding new sources of productivity, and creating unique or customised products. This requires that each country look to what will single it out from its competitors, and in this model, the prime area where economies can develop this uniqueness is by focusing on its workers-their human capital. (Brown and Lauder, 1999, p. 34) Therefore, the authors describe the new raw materials of international commerce as 'knowledge, learning, information and technical competence' (ibid)

A similar argument is put forward by Reich (in Finegold, 1992, p. 60) when he links globalisation and the movement of raw material and capital to the focus on a well trained workforce. He explains that in the fast moving economies of modern times, materials and capital are able to be distributed around the world more freely and quickly than before.

As a consequence, the relatively slow moving and economically expensive capital of workers becomes a target for efficiencies, and in developed countries this focus translates into education and training.

Labour, the least mobile factor, becomes a central component in firms' search for a competitive advantage. Since the advanced industrial countries cannot compete with developing countries on the basis of labour cost, the survival of their manufacturing base...depends on superior labour quality and hence the skills of current and future employees

Finegold, quoting Reich, 1992, p. 60

The belief that economic prosperity could be influenced by the appropriate skilling of the workforce became a recognisable force on the development of education policy following the oil crisis in the 70's and the subsequent development of a globalised marketplace in which nation-states had to compete in order to maintain or increase their economic prosperity.

If economic crisis creates a force for change in the education policies of Britain by focusing politicians and industry on the need to increase productivity as described above, then poor economic conditions can be seen to be a driver of education policy in another way, by reducing the money available to governments to spend on public services. This effect is described by Brown and Ashton when they highlight the fact that large scale expenditure cuts in education as a result of a need to decrease public spending by governments, has been identified as a major contributory factor in Britain's economic decline and the high rates of youth unemployment. (Brown and Ashton, 1987, p. 1) This argument draws on the earlier point that economic prosperity is driven by schools, but considers the fact that funding by government plays a role in the quality of the education young people receive.

In times of economic difficulty, with less money available to give to schools, the cost effectiveness of the money schools do receive can be seen to come into sharper focus. As Dale observes, there is a two pronged effect of economically difficult times on education systems.

Economic conditions have two kinds of effects on education systems. On the one hand they affect the amount of public funding and resources available to support and develop the system. On the other, demands for education to be more economically relevant tend to be louder when the economy is doing badly than when it is doing well.

Dale, 1989, p. 95

Taking the idea that in times of economic difficulty education systems need to be more economically relevant, as suggested by Dale, and accepting that the prevailing belief held by governments is the idea that in order to increase economic competitiveness countries need to invest in the education of their workforces as explained by Brown and Ashton, it is clear to see the basis for the argument put forward by Ball explaining the move of education from the realm of reproduction into the area of production. (Ball, 1990, p.70-79)

Ball's argument describes how during difficult economic times, tax revenues fall and the government has less to spend on social welfare programmes and education. These programmes he terms as being in the sphere of reproduction. With this reduction in welfare programmes, unemployment rises, there is greater pressure on public services, and social welfare programmes become subject to new criteria of effectiveness. As such, the programmes are compared with industry and business, which are considered to be within the sphere of production. When this reasoning is applied to education, Ball argues that

Education has shifted out of its firm location within the sphere of reproduction into a closer relation to the sphere of production. Costs which were seen to be a drain upon the profitability of capital can as a result be presented as directly enhancing profit

Ball, 1990, p. 79

By drawing together the arguments as presented above, it is easy to see the lure of trying to create an education system which will be able to provide the supposed economic benefits described here. If you take these arguments on board, it can be argued that education is the solution to economic crisis or even economic under-achievement in two ways; by increasing prosperity through greater efficiency of human capital, and by creating a society less reliant on social welfare support. Education then, so the argument goes, benefits the economy in a more complex and multi-faceted way than simply by increasing a country's competitive edge through the skill and flexibility of its workforce.

Education can also be the catalyst for greater efficiencies in government spending, by increasing the value of each pound or dollar invested in the system with the efficiencies created when pupils 'properly' educated for a productive work life contribute to the economy through gainful employment. In addition, the need for social welfare assistance is reduced by ensuring people are educated in a way which is a good match for industry's needs. The prevalence of this argument in government policy (DfES, 1992, p. 12, DfES, 2002, p. 4 and DfES, 2005, p.3) making shows that the economy is a major driver in education policy-making. However, despite general acceptance of the idea that education benefits the economy, there are arguments against the automatic assumption that a better educated workforce equals a more prosperous and adaptable economy able to compete in a global market.

Esland (1991) argues that the education system in the U.K. has been vocationalised, based on a perceived need of industry who consider the poor economic performance to be a result of the quality of workers they are able to employ (Esland, 1991,p.ix). From 1976 and Callaghan's Speech at Ruskin College, the blame for this problem has been placed squarely at the door of educators. However, Esland argues that despite the education system having been taken over by industry concerns and the curriculum having been changed in favour of vocational education there has been little improvement in the economic performance of the country, suggesting that this policy is not the answer.

He goes on to point out that there are other factors, apart from education, which can affect the economic performance of a country, including underlying changes in industrial production and factors affecting local labour markets (Esland, 1991, p. x, xi). By focusing on education as the area which is responsible for the economic decline of the country he suggests that the debate about how to solve this decline has been stifled and that factors outside of education which have a bearing on the issue have not been considered.

Looking at this same issue of the relevance and apparent necessity of a vocational education system which serves the economy from a slightly different angle, Keep and Mayhew (1999) discuss the fact that there has been very little research designed to determine if there is a direct causal link between the quality and availability of vocational education and training (VET) and economic performance (Keep and Mayhew, 1999, p.114). However, they agree with many in presuming that there is a link but point out that the VET policy in the U.K. is based solely on this presumption. There are, according to Keep and Mayhew (1999) though, factors which influence the economy other than education, in line with Esland's (1991) beliefs. These other factors believed to affect the economic performance of a country are the distinctive national structure of education provision, methods of work organisation, and the style and institutional arrangements of industrial relations (Keep and Mayhew, 1999 ,p. 114).

While the existing structure of the education system, and institutional arrangements within industry are argued to be factors in the economic success of a country, by Keep and Mayhew, Levin and Kelley (1997) consider the effectiveness of any education system in improving economic performance to be predicated on the quality of complementary inputs. They describe the idea of education as a solution for many social challenges as being one which social scientists and economists hold true. The problems in society which it is believed can be alleviated by education include productivity, inequality, economic growth, health status, overpopulation, political participation, reduction of criminal behaviour and welfare dependency. (Levin and Kelley, 1997, p. 240)

However, the authors argue that there is no empirical evidence which suggests that education can solve these problems, *unless* complementary inputs (which include new investment, new methods of work organisation and new managerial approaches) are implemented contemporaneously. (ibid, p. 245) Education is therefore not the 'magic bullet' many believe it to be unless additional thought is given to what else can be done to increase the effectiveness of education.

Education has the potential for powerful impacts in each of these areas [economic competitiveness, levels of crime, public assistance, political participation and health] if the proper supportive inputs and conditions are present. It has the potential for a very nominal impact when the complementary requirements are not in place...we need to be realistic about what education can do and what other changes are necessary to maximise the effects of education and realise our aspirations for economic and social betterment.

Levin and Kelley, 1997, p. 250

This lack of empirical evidence to support a positive link between the effect of education and economic performance is expressed by Robinson when he contends that once literacy is established in the vast majority of the adult population, it is very difficult to demonstrate any connection between economic performance and attainment in literacy and numeracy. (Robinson, 1997, p. 17)

A similar argument is put forward by Worswick.

Early enthusiasts for the 'economics of education' may have muddied the waters somewhat by overemphasising a positive association found between the volume of education, measured by the number of years spent at school and at university and the level of income. We have no more reason to believe that all education is favourable to economic growth than that all scientific research will raise future national income.

Worswick, 1985, p. 1-2

A further layer to the argument that education requires complementary inputs in order to achieve the type of societal improvement which is often attributed to it is alluded to in Worswick's argument. This is the implication that it is not only the volume but the type of education which appears to be important.

With or without the complementary inputs as described by Levin and Kelly (1997), and notwithstanding that there is doubt about whether education can positively affect the economy in the way many policy makers believe, or at least declare, it is certainly by no means clear that education should be tasked with other responsibilities, such as solving societal problems, "It is not possible for the education system to fulfil all expectations" (Dale, 1989, p. 64), whether the necessary 'complementary inputs' are in place or not. Taking this further, it is even unclear whether education can or should play a role in the 'skilling' of people for industry, partly because schools are not always best placed to provide skill training, this task often being a better role for employers. (Carter, 1985, p. 7)

Additionally, Gleeson argues that educational reform should not be subordinated to the economy because education has a much wider potential influence on society than economic prosperity. By thinking of students and teachers at the forefront of education provision, the emphasis shifts from an employer and business led system to an employment and career related system, where the student is placed centre stage as the learner, rather than a skills carrier or a customer. (Gleeson, 1996, p. 98) In rejecting the economy as the main driver of education policy, Gleeson argues that

Genuine alternatives must embrace an active view of citizenship which links partnership and empowerment in personal education and economic relations, beyond market, qualification and employer-led consideration...Principles of democracy and social justice are involved here, in terms of how education and training helps shape, rather than passively reflect on, the future of industrial society.

Gleeson, 1996, p. 98

This argument links to aims of education which go beyond the utilitarian, rendering students with skills and abilities which are useful to the creation of a more equal, fair and inclusive society. An exploration of possible aims of education, both utilitarian and otherwise is contained in the earlier section 'The Purpose of Education'

Finally, in considering the possible implications of an education policy which has as its main focus economic prosperity, the possible *adverse affects* to that same economy must be considered. As Esland (1996) believes, not only is the linking of economic failure to deficiencies in the education system a mistake, but by following this type of policy, even greater damage to the economy is possible, and indeed in his opinion has already happened.

Although the explicit linking of Britain's economic weakness to the failure of the education system was a seriously misconceived analysis at the outset-even if its secondary purpose was to destabilize the educational community-its inadequacies have become more apparent with the economic failures of the 1980's, which have left Britain with a seriously depleted manufacturing base.

Esland, 1996, p. 69

Lest education be stripped of any value beyond the benefits endowed to an individual, as a result of the above points, it is important to consider the argument advanced by Power suggesting a value for education beyond that of personal development. While he argues against education as a social and economic panacea, he considers that "it is not unreasonable to expect education to make a positive contribution to social progress" (Power, 1982, p. 328)

That the economy is a significant influence on education policy is clear, but the basis on which this influence is promoted, namely that education is good for the economy, is in question.

The argument outlined by Dale earlier, that in times of economic difficulty the pressure on education systems to be more economically relevant is increased, adds to the point being made here that the economy is a major force on education policy and its development. However, it must be pointed out, that the desire for education to play a role in enhancing the economic position in Britain was a major plank in the education policy of New Labour, despite unprecedented levels of economic prosperity.

The booming economic conditions did not see a quietening of the calls for education to be more economically relevant as Dale suggests could be the case, but in fact the reverse, with an unprecedented level of education reform being justified by the need for Britain to compete globally and improve its economic position. (DfES,2005, p.3) The question as to why this may be can possibly be found in the idea that education policy reform under New Labour may not have been for the headline reason given by the government, namely economic development, but instead in order to fulfil some other objective. An investigation of the possible drivers for education reform under New Labour are the basis for the research in this study, and are explained in detail in the methodology and findings sections.

Now a consideration of education policy in Britain as a whole will be undertaken.

2.4 Education Policy

The purpose of this section is to set education policy in Britain into an historical context, and to explore some of the major themes of education policy in recent history.

It is almost commonplace that the educational history of the past 150 years or so has been marked by continuing attempts to tie the education system more closely to the economy, to make schools serve the needs of industry more effectively

Dale, 1985, p.1

This recognition of the influence of the economy on the education system, and particularly on education policy making has been discussed at length earlier, but what may appear surprising here is the fact that Dale argues that this mind-set, this attempt to link the education system with industrial needs has been a prevalent idea for so many years. When you consider the debate about a perceived failure of the education system in Britain to deliver the economic prosperity and advancement which politicians, industrialists, and the public at large may be said to expect, the type of education which this debate centres around is in reality vocational education. If the discussion is about ensuring that a school leaver has the necessary skills to get a job, vocational preparation is in the spotlight. Therefore, it is possible to discern a link between economic pressure on a country and a corresponding pressure on the education system, particularly vocational preparation of young adults. However, Dale's description of what could be termed here as the desire for a more vocational education system, has in fact been a feature of the British educational system for much longer than 150 years.

Indeed, in what Watts (1985) describes as the traditional bonds between education and employment, he argues that since the 6th century, education in Great Britain was mainly vocational, with the most prevalent form of education being that of the training of priests and monks.

Winch and Hyland agree with this assessment, commenting that vocational preparation “had pride of place in the development of formal systems” (Hyland and Winch, 2007, p. 4) and they quote Lawson and Silver who explain that even the liberal curriculum of early grammar schools had a specific vocational intent, working as these schools were to equip students with the skills to become teachers, canon lawyers and administrators among other things, (Lawson and Silver, 2007, p.4)

This ‘vocational’ education continued through the middle ages, where education was then organised on the basis of future vocation of its participants, such as craft apprentices, future knights and future clergy. This prevailing culture of vocational preparation continued until the industrial revolution in the 18th century. (Watts, 1985, p.9-10) This suggests then that education has historically had a clear link to the world of work and career preparation and that the desire to make education economically relevant, rather than being a recent obsession of policy makers, was indeed the model on which the education of apprentices and trainees was based for over 1000 years.

This question then, of vocational preparation and its place in the education system of Britain can be seen to be one of long-standing tradition, with roots back to the Middle Ages, but it is the recent past, and specifically the last 30 years which will be considered in detail here. However, before this analysis, it is important to be clear about what is meant by vocational education, as well as the term liberal education, which it is often considered to be its opposite.

Vocational education is widely understood to be instruction which has specific application in a work context. The idea of gaining skills for a particular job or career is considered the basis for vocational preparation, and the types of work or skills frequently considered to be vocational are often manual or practical skills. A liberal education, on the other hand is often considered to be based on the study of literature, the arts and history, and so therefore is often termed 'academic' in its focus, suggesting, to its detractors, that it has little value beyond the personal advancement of those involved in its pursuit.

In Britain, despite the long history of vocational education, which was itself embedded in what could be termed the liberal education system of the early grammar schools, a substantial divide now exists between academic and vocational education, with the former enjoying a protected higher status, and the latter being considered a second tier educational choice. It is this academic/vocational divide which will be considered next.

The divide between vocational and academic education is discussed by Pring (1995) when he says that it is deeply rooted in Britain's culture, with vocational preparation having little or no place in general education offered by schools, and "certainly not in the grammar school or in the top ability range of the comprehensive school" (Pring, 1995, p. 55) This has meant that vocational training has in the recent past been delivered outside of the compulsory school system. This situation has perhaps contributed to the low status of vocational education, as courses are often offered in institutions considered as non-main-stream by some. Additionally, the ethos behind continuing into higher education has been academic, with a public examination system and tradition of early specialisation which has been aimed at producing academic elite. (Keep and Mayhew, 1991, p. 202) creating a hierarchy of education, with practical, vocational education being placed at the bottom.

The origins of the academic/vocational divide are described by Watts (1985) as coming from an 'old humanist' perspective, where those trying to defend traditional learning against the new vocational enterprises of science and technical education which were looked down upon as a 'new' type of education and training fuelling these disciplines and providing workers for factories and industry. (Watts, 1985, p.10)

The divide between vocation and academic education has made its presence felt on the education policy of successive governments, and the tension between these two areas of education can be seen to be a backdrop to a great deal of the education policy which has been developed over the last 50 years. As Pring remarked in 1995,

The period since the mid-1980's has seen the most dramatic changes in secondary education since the 1944 Education Act...[this book] sees many of these changes to be but reflections of the perennial battles between liberal education and vocational training.

Pring, 1995, p.1

The argument against these battles which is forwarded by Pring, is that the divide is actually a false one. Drawing on the fact that vocational education is based on the acquisition of skills, and considering the role of a teacher, doctor, electrician or bus driver, Pring explains that without practical skills and training, (usually considered the preserve of a vocational education) these and many other workers would have great difficulty accomplishing the tasks required for their jobs.

He argues that training and education, currently considered distinctly different concepts, could actually be brought together in such a way that "one and the same activity could be both educational and training." (Pring, 1995, p. 189) He therefore calls for this dualism, this divide between the vocational and the academic to be made a thing of the past.

I argued [in this book] for the abandonment of these dualisms between education and training, between thinking and doing, between theory and practice, between the intrinsically worthwhile and the useful, which bedevils our deliberations on education. Surely if we focus on what it means to become full a person, and to render personal that which so often arrives in impersonal form...then there seems to be no reason why the liberal should not be conceived as something vocationally useful and why the vocationally useful should not be taught in an educational and liberating way.

Pring, 1995, p. 183

The tension between the academic and the vocational, particularly in reference to 14-19 education has been part of the fabric of the debate about education reform since 1976, with for example, battles over whether at 16 there should essentially be one route, namely an integration of vocational and academic courses, or two, meaning the retention of the 'A' and 'AS' level as an academic route, while widening the curriculum with vocational courses of an equal standard as an alternative, second route. (Lawton, 1993, p. 69)

The next section considering education policy will take a retrospective look at education policies and the themes and events which shaped them, but particularly consider policy creation in light of the constant tension between the academic and vocational approach to education as described above. This conflict has particular importance to this study as the debate and reform processes to do with vocational education are often aimed at those who will soon become part of the workforce, namely the 14-19 age range.

2.4.1 Labour to Conservative

Accepting that the debate about the economic imperative on education to produce a workforce capable of increasing national economic prosperity can be traced back to the 1800's (Maclure, 1965, p.121) in more recent times the Oil Crisis in 1973, the recession that followed, and 'The Great Debate' can be seen to be the beginning of the most recent calls for reform of the education system. These calls had a particular focus on producing an education system with a greater economic relevance.

Prior to this time, and following the 1944 Education Act, sometimes termed the Butler Act, there existed in Britain's education system what became known as the Post War Consensus. Chitty observes that this consensus was a uniquely British response to governing which had at its heart the rejection of the centralising tendencies of other European governments. (Chitty, 2004, p. 21) This consensus was built on the idea of

... 'a national system, locally administered', in which post-war ministers invested so much pride, involved the continuing operation of a benign partnership between central government, local government and individual schools and colleges.

Ibid

Under this system, schools were given rein to choose what was taught and how it was taught, and between the 1944 Act and the election of the Conservatives in 1979, there were only two further significant Education Acts (the 'Milk Act' of 1971 which removed the entitlement of school children to free milk, and the 1976 Act which required that secondary state school admission should be non-selective). While there were tensions in the system, and periods of conflict, it is possible to see that the period between the 1944 Act and the Conservative victory in 1979 was a time when there was little interference in school from central government, the management of schools being undertaken by Head teachers and Local Education Authorities. However, with the recession and the oil crisis in the mid and late 70's this picture changed, and schools became a target towards which the frustrations caused by the difficult economic conditions could be directed. Newspapers began to paint a picture of

...unscrupulous, unaccountable teachers delivering an increasingly irrelevant curriculum to large numbers of bored teenagers totally disenchanted with the business of learning an incapable of getting a proper job after 11 years of compulsory schooling

Chitty, 2004, p. 36

The 'Black Papers' (Cox and Dyson, 1969 a and b, Cox and Boyson, 1977) called for a return to the values enshrined in grammar and public schools because of the assertion that standards in schools in general were falling. (Pring, 1995, p.6), and several Conservative party 'think tanks' began to develop policies which rejected 'progressive teaching methods and a return to 'academic' principles. (Basini, 1996, p.2)

On the other side of the clamour against schools, industrialists were critical of the whole education system, and protested that what was important was the ‘relevance’ of instruction to the world of work. (Pring, 1995, p. 6)) Out of this tension came ‘The Great Debate’ and the forces of politics and economics were brought to bear on the education system in Britain, as discussed earlier. It is with this convergence of forces, that we see the Great Debate as the ‘pivotal date’ for the serious consideration of what was to be taught in schools. (Basini, 1996, p. 1)

What is interesting about the position which the Conservatives adopted while in opposition and then once in government, through the acceptance of the ‘Black Papers’ and the policy development begun by their ‘think tanks’, is that out of an economic crisis, apparently at least partially caused by the lack of suitable labour to support economic development and prosperity , their response was not to turn to a vocational or skills based reform of education, but instead was to develop what many consider a more academic education system, with ‘A’ levels strongly positioned within the system as the gold standard, and culminating in 1988 with the implementation of the National Curriculum. Indeed, while the Labour Government of James Callahan and the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher and John Major which followed (and the subsequent Labour Government of Tony Blair!) *both* believed that education held the key to economic prosperity, their responses to the economic downturn were very different.

Callaghan's solution, as encapsulated in the Ruskin College Speech was more vocationally guided. Education was to be more relevant to industry in four key ways

- the acquisition by school leavers of basic skills which they lacked but industry needed
- the development of more positive attitudes to industry and to the economic needs of society
- greater technological know-how so that they might live effectively in a technological society
- the development of personal qualities for coping with an unpredictable future

(Pring, 1995, p. 7)

In contrast, Conservative policy both before their election victory and after was to move educational reform in a more academic, didactic and traditional direction (Pring, 1995, p. 7, Basini, 1996, p. 6) with concentration on what Margaret Thatcher is understood to have had termed as the necessity for the effective teaching of 'the 6rs'; reading, writing, arithmetic, religious education and right and wrong. (Even if these particular 'core subjects' did not make it wholesale to the final curriculum.(Chitty, 2004, p. 104))

One Conservative policy however, stands out as being a unique, vocational solution to the economic crisis of the 1970's and 1980's; TVEI

Of all the educational initiatives since Callaghan's Ruskin speech, it could be argued that TVEI was the most significant both in its contemporary impact and in its long term effect on the education system of England and Wales. As Dale and his co-authors argue in *The TVEI story*, three major themes dominated the educational debate after 1976. These were standards, accountability and economic responsiveness. (Dale et al, 1990, p. 13) TVEI was a direct response to this and "in many ways was the most important education initiative of the post-war period" bringing an end to an education system which began with the 1944 education act. (Ibid, p.3)

For the purposes of this study, TVEI's greatest significance can be found in two main areas. The first is that the initiative clearly signalled that a two track system for 14-19 year olds, one vocational and one academic, was the favoured option of the Conservative Government from 1982 onwards and as such TVEI can be said then to perpetuate the academic/vocational divide within the education system of Britain. Secondly, TVEI is an educational policy where the forces of economics and politics can be seen to have been brought to bear on the education system, following as it did a business or commercial model for educational change, but actually constituting a political intervention in the system. (Dale, 1985, p. 44) The twin drivers of politics and economics were the begetters of this policy, born as it was out of the 'economic and political situation' which existed in 1982. (McCulloch, 1987, p. 22)

With rising youth unemployment a major concern for Thatcher's Government on the one hand, and the successful re-capture of the Falkland Islands endowing the Conservatives with a confidence and strength characterised as 'the resolute approach' on the other. TVEI embodied a bold and decisive approach to economic difficulties, with the strengthening wind of a strong political position to back the policy up.

2.4.2 Carry on Conservative

With a reputation for decisive action and strong government, largely established through victory in the Falklands conflict, the Conservatives under Thatcher were notably devoid of significant educational policies, excepting TVEI, for their first two periods in office. (Chitty, 2004, p. 47)

However, during the period of 1979 and 1987, a considerable amount of work was being done by groups such as the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Hillgate Group, which eventually were termed the 'new right' and which came to be understood, at least by Kenneth Baker, the Education secretary in 1986, as 'the real policy makers as far as the Prime Minister was concerned.' (Baker, 1993, quoted in Chitty, 2004, p. 105) Chitty also points to the philosophical origins of the National Curriculum as coming from the new right, eventually being embodied in the 1988 Education Act. (ibid)

This Act, 'described by its supporters as a great educational reform and one of its opponents as a 'Gothic monstrosity of legislation' took up 360 hours of parliamentary time and gave the Education Secretary 451 new powers. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 51) In its effect, Baker was understood to be pleased that the Act, because it gave schools their own budgets, diminished the power of the LEAs and teacher unions, and created a competitive market where some schools prospered and others struggled. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 53)

In implementing the National Curriculum then, we can see the Conservatives developing a policy which maintained the goals of the government to move away from comprehensive education and reinstate selection. (Ibid, p. 46), as well as clearly establish the predominance of an academic education over vocational education through selection, enshrined in the Education Act of 1988 and the competition which this Act introduced into the education system. (Ibid, p. 52)

The next section will consider overriding trends in education policy in the recent past.

2.4.3 Trends in Education Policy

The ‘problem’ of how to address the lack of status of vocational training and the linked problem (if the hypothesis that more and better training will be advantageous to the economy) that more education and training needs to be focused on equipping students for a job can be seen to be a major theme in the development of education policy under the Conservatives in the 1980’s and early 1990’s.

The pressing economic needs of the country, highlighted by the rise in youth unemployment in the early and mid 1980’s focused policy makers’ minds on the need for solutions. As described in detail earlier, education, from the time of the Great Debate, had become to be understood as a potent solution to the economic woes of the country, and the forces of both the Labour Government of James Callaghan and the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, in terms of education, were focused on achieving an improvement in the economic prosperity of the country; although their differing ideological backgrounds meant that they approached the implementation of the solution of educational reform from different perspectives.

Finegold discusses the policies of the Thatcher era, when he explains that Britain lagged behind other advanced industrial countries (AIC’s) in the provision of education and training, and that in fact the amount of education and training received by the majority of the population was significantly less than provided in other AIC’s. (Finegold, 1993, p. 40)

Acknowledging the economic strains on the British economy during Conservative Government of the 1980's, he explains that all AIC's reacted to this economic downturn in different ways, basing their responses on the existing institutional structures within that country. In Britain, his belief is that there were two assumptions made by policy makers which in fact were erroneous. These will be discussed below.

The first assumption which Finegold discusses is the idea that because of the tremendous economic and technological changes which affected the country for the two decades prior to 1992, governments believed they could mitigate the effect of these changes, and also move the country into a position where it can benefit from these changes and therefore prosper, by putting into place new and greater levels of education and training. (Finegold, 1993, p. 8) This assumption goes to the heart of the discussion presented earlier in this chapter where a belief was developed in the minds of policy makers that the 'right' kind of education coupled with well targeted reforms of the system would produce greater levels of economic prosperity. In fact, in terms of the direct benefits which may come from an education system (at least for 14-19 year olds) tailored to the needs of the country, it can be argued that there is little evidence that this link exists, (Keep and Mayhew , 1988, p. iv). Additionally, Bailey (1996) adds to this debate, suggesting that 'education for jobs' has detrimental results for students.

He explains that the hijacking of the education system by industry has had two major effects on these students, the first being that they fail to receive adequate industrial training, and the second that the attempts at a general liberal education for all pupils is frustrated. He also argues that the rate of industrial change means that there are no guarantees that a student who possesses the 'necessary' skills will actually secure the job he or she is trained for and that his or her skills may quickly become obsolete. This, combined with the need for 'complementary inputs' as suggested by Levin and Keeley (1997, p.249) calls into question the belief, or assumption as described by Finegold, that greater levels of education and training will have the desired benefit to national prosperity.

The second assumption made by policy makers which is questioned by Finegold is that government is in a position to alter the education and training system in order to improve outputs and thereby raise economic performance. (Finegold, 1992, p.8) As discussed earlier, in the past 30 years the position of the education system has shifted dramatically into the political arena, beginning with 'The Great Debate', and education remains at the heart of policy deliberations of whichever government is in power to this day. However, the nature of policymaking (as described earlier) is such that the process of policy formulation is messy and subject to many different influences, and therefore is difficult to quantify or pin down. In addition, policy can change at the implementation level, meaning that what is envisaged by the policy makers can actually be very different from what happens at the point that policy is put into practice. This change derives from the fact that different people and organisations naturally interpret policies differently (policies are as numerous as the number of readers (Codd, 1992, p.15), as well as the political nature of policy creation.

Policy is a form of political action. In this respect, political action over education is operative and effective at both the level of the state, where policy is formulated, interpreted and, in the final analysis, either set aside, implemented or imposed, **and at the micro-level of the school, the local community where policies are discussed, debated, resisted, recreated or adopted.** (emphasis added)

Olssen, 2004, p. 72

Here then it is possible to see that policies may not have the impact envisaged when they were created, and that the way policies are interpreted and implemented can have a vast effect on how they contribute to government objectives.

The fact that the implementation of a policy may mitigate against the second assumption described by Finegold above is one factor that means that the assumption is not supportable, but additional factors against the idea that governments can influence the education and training system directly to improve prosperity assumes that the content of the policies are based on sound judgements and are directly connected to the needs of industry and business.

To look at it from another angle, it is not difficult to argue that governments implement policies that do not work, that are based on erroneous thinking, are flawed in their assessment of the problem or are just simply unworkable. If this is the case just some of the time, given the fast paced and pressurised atmosphere policies are created in then it is possible to argue that the government of the day is not always in a position to affect changes within education systems to the extent required to have a direct and beneficial impact on economic prosperity.

Despite these arguments against the assumptions of policy makers put forward by Finegold, the policies of the Conservatives in the 1980's and 1990's continued to focus on linking education to the economy and this remained an important basis from which to develop educational reform.

While attempting to address the academic and vocational divide, the Conservatives were also faced with a growing tension between the requirements of schools and the requirements of industry, resolved through what Dale terms 'the new vocationalism.' (Dale, 1985, p7.)

The tension which spawned the new vocationalism as seen by Dale arises from the differing requirements of industry and school. The aim of schools was to prepare their pupils to get jobs, while employers wanted employees who were better prepared cognitively and attitudinally to the work place. (Ibid, p.4)

In this context then, the aims of the new vocationalism were clear; to provide young people with not only the training required to secure a job, but also to develop in these same students occupational versatility and personal adjustment. (ibid, 1985, p.7) As explained by Brown and Ashton, New vocationalism was an attempt to tighten the bonds between school and the labour market. (Brown and Ashton, 1987, p. 2/3) The Conservatives embraced this new vocationalism as part of their guiding philosophy towards educational policy; *excellence in education*. New vocationalism was adopted as part of this philosophy, and was interpreted by the government to mean the creation of curricula which were appropriate to the different groups of pupils based on their assumed place within the future jobs market. (Finn, 1990, p. 168) Here then is a retrenchment of the idea that education should be specific to the world of work rather than general in nature.

In conclusion to this section, then, it is possible to trace the development of the philosophy that education is the key to national prosperity throughout the time of the Conservative Governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. As Knight describes, by 1985 Conservative policy on education was being endorsed by Conservative educationalists who claimed that it was necessary for the prosperity of the country to follow an economic led model of educational reform

Conservative thinking on education [was being pointed towards] an acceptance of the only type of schooling system which might enable Britain to foster the talent to compete in the international market place; a system geared to the need of employers and industry, and not one which turned out a society of consumers quite unprepared for the world and disciplines of work.

Knight, 1990, p. 174

The message which was being espoused through the implementation of policies such as TVEI and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was one which called for greater and better training in order to meet the demands of an ever growing technological revolution. Brockington et al (1985), in considering the place of these and other Conservative schemes within the educational reform programme make this point clearly when they say;

...there is an implied assumption –which may or may not be accurate–that the work force generally needs to be better trained in preparation for the more sophisticated jobs that will come with the upturn in the country's economy, and through the technological revolution in industry and commerce.

Brockington, White and Pring, 1985, p. 9

Whether this assumption is correct is an argument for debate, with certain aspects having been covered here earlier.

What is clear though is that many believe that the effect of policies which subordinate the educational to the economic provide a less meaningful and worthwhile education for students, and that as a whole the education system becomes diminished. This idea is expressed by Gleeson(1985) in relation specifically to TVEI and in general to vocational training. Gleeson describes general education as having been sacrificed to generic skills training, creating a system where ‘employers, educationalists and others do not recognise the validity of contemporary skills training’ (Gleeson, 1985, p. 70) He further argues that the present arrangements (writing in 1985) with a focus on generic skills preparation and a lack of emphasis on general education that the young lose out in two ways.

...on the one hand they do not gain marketable or recognised skills, and on the other, they do not acquire knowledge and understanding, however broadly defined, which allow them critical insight into the political or economic workings of society.

Gleeson, 1985, p. 70

Whether the argument for the ‘vocationalising’ of education to serve the economy is one which can be supported, or whether it is acceptable to argue that the academic and vocational divide should be bridged or not, it is clear to see these arguments have informed a great deal of the debate around education policy since the 1970’s, even though it could be argued that there has been little interest in tackling the ‘problem’ of vocational education. This is a point made by Esland.

In spite of the lip-service paid to the importance of education and training to the British economy, the political reality has been one of underfunding, ideological containment and a fundamental indifference to the quality of vocational provision.

Esland, 1996, p. 69

The emergence of the new vocationalism and the debate around economic prosperity and education was a feature of the Tory governments of the 1980's and 1990's, and continues to this day; and indeed this continuation will be discussed in the later section on New Labour Policy. Now though, the spotlight will be turned on the 14-19 phase of education; the phase which has arguably been most affected by the themes and pressures discussed here, if for no other reason than the students in this phase form the group who will be the newest recruits to the world of work.

2.5 The 14-19 Curriculum

With over 100 Acts, reports and initiatives aimed at all areas of the education system in England and Wales between 1980 and 2000 (Tomlinson, 2005, p.30,p.50,p.73 and p.92) it is clear to see that in recent years there has been a great deal of political activity in the area of educational reform. As discussed in detail earlier, this can be traced back to Callaghan's Ruskin speech, and the continuation of the politicisation of the educational agenda. While the Acts and initiatives mentioned above cover all areas of education, from the establishment of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1992 to the National Childcare Strategy in 1998, a great number are aimed at 14-19 education. (Indeed, between 1980 and 2005 there were 145 major policy initiatives and acts directly focusing on 14-19 education.(Wright and Onecea, 2005)) The place of 14-19 education within the reform agenda of governments from the early 1980's has been increasing, and the pressure on this area of education to deliver heightened. An attempt to understand the reasons for this persistent and relentless focus on the 14-19 phase of education will be considered later in this section. Firstly though, an understanding of the 14-19 landscape, how it has developed, the structure of the phase, and some of the issues contained therein will be looked at.

2.5.1 The development of 14-19 education

From a policy perspective, it is possible to see that apart from the unique focus on 14-18 education encapsulated in TVEI, it was not until relatively recently that the term 14-19 was used in policy documents. It is interesting to trace the development of the terminology around this phase through a study of government policies. Below is an outline of how the use of the term 14-19 developed in the titles and main points within a sample of government policy documents, as well as a brief description of the main points contained in the documents, although this description is not intended to be exhaustive.

1978- White Paper (DES) *Secondary School Examinations: a single system at 16 plus.*

GCSE proposed at 16+ as a single examination to replace 'O' level and CSE. Intended to cater for top 60% of pupils; earliest date for introduction 1985.

1979- Education and Training for 16-18 Year Olds. A Consultative Paper

Discussion points included: varied needs of young people, requirements of employers and arrangements for curriculum development and coherence.

1983- Technical and Vocational Education Initiative.

Project to provide education and training for 14-18 year olds, with the aim to make what was taught in schools relevant to the world of work and employers.

1983- Education and Training, 14 to 19 year olds

Derived from TVEI initiative, the Science and Art committee considered the education and training of 14-19 year olds with the aim of extension of technical and vocational education “across the ability range”

1985- DES White Paper-*Better Schools*

Suggested a broad programme of education for pupils up to the age of 16, and an explicitly vocational programme for post 16 education

1988- Education Reform Act.

End of Key Stage test at 14, GCSE at age 16, A levels at 18. Introduction of the National Curriculum and Local management of schools.

1988-DE White Paper-*Employment in the 1990's*

Described government policy around who was to bear the responsibility of the education of 16- 18+. The state is responsible for an individual's education until the age of 16, the education of 16-18 year olds was the joint responsibility of industry and government, and the education of 18+ students was the responsibility of the individual and employers.

1994-DTI publication *Competitiveness. Helping business to win*

Listed the need for pre-vocational options for 14-16 year olds, apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds and accelerated apprenticeships for 18-19 year olds. One initiative suggested here which unified two of the age groups (16-18 and 18-19) was the Learning Credit scheme.

1996- Dearing Review, *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds*

Recommended introduction of national framework for qualifications at four levels, with six core skills incorporated into the post-16 curriculum. Applied vocational courses for 14+ pupils who did not find school relevant.

1996- DFEE White Paper *Learning to Compete; Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds.*

Proposes introduction of national traineeships which are to be 'employer designed and led' and re-launch a plan for disaffected 14-19 year olds to provide them with key skills for employment.

1999- DfEE White Paper *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*

Reform of post-16 leaning into a single structure, to include sixth forms. TEC's to be replaced by Local Learning and Skills Councils.

2002- Green Paper (DfES): 14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising

Standards. This document produced the first major proposal for an overarching 14-19 award in the form of a matriculation diploma, as well as closer collaboration between schools, colleges and training providers through Pathfinder projects

2003- White Paper (DfES): 14-19: Opportunity and Excellence

Reduce compulsory national curriculum subjects for 14-16 year olds, consideration of vocational and hybrid GCSE's and the appointment of a 14-19 Working Group under Mike Tomlinson.

2003- Working Group on 14-19 Reform: Principles for Reform of 14-19 Learning Programmes and Qualifications.

Recommended a coherent 14-19 programme with a common template for all 14-19 programmes; a general core, specialist training, supplementary learning, and a 'baccalaureate' style system.

2004- 14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform. Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform

Recommended replacing existing framework of qualifications taken by 14-19 year olds with framework of Diplomas at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels

2005- White Paper (DfES) 14-19 Education and Skills-

Proposed 'specialised' Diplomas to be introduced in 14 subject areas at 3 levels (Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3)

Compiled from Wright and Onecea, 2005

These proposals, initiatives and Acts make it clear that 14-19 as a rational and workable phase did not come into being (at least in policy terms for the Labour government) until at least 2002, with the two exceptions of TVEI in 1983, which was a clear attempt at creating a programme which took pupils from 14 through to 18, and the 1996 White Paper *Learning to Compete* which made an attempt to view the phase as a whole. Indeed, even now, it can still be argued that the 'dream' of a coherent 14-19 phase still does not exist. In addition, this list of political events shows that there has been, and still remains, a strong break in the curriculum at 16, and policies tend to focus on either the compulsory phase or the post-compulsory phase of education for young people, but rarely consider the phase as a whole.

This break in both qualifications and programmes at 16 can be seen to entrench the academic/vocational divide, with an overwhelmingly academic set of options available for students between the ages of 14 and 16 and with many more (indeed most) vocational pathways only available post 16.

This academic/vocational divide, fostered at 16, can be seen explicitly in the White Paper *Better Schools* where an academic curriculum was muted for 14-16 year olds, and a vocational curriculum was suggested for those over 16, and again implicitly in the 1988 DE White Paper-*Employment in the 1990's* which makes clear that the responsibility for the education of 16+ year olds falls to differing combinations of industry and the individual depending on the age of the student.

Taking these points into account, it is difficult to argue that a discrete 14-19 phase exists. In reality, 14-19 education as a unified phase is at best a vision for the future, and at worst a hopeless dream, especially when the institutional structure and qualification framework which currently exists is considered.

As Higham declares in his consultation document for the Nuffield Review

In qualification terms, there is currently no such thing as a '14-19 curriculum' and only ever so rarely has a single set of curricular aims or experiences, much less a course of study, spanned the divide between compulsory education and post-compulsory education, even in schools with sixth-forms where arguably the institutional infrastructure would support such provision. On the contrary, in many areas the curricular division at 16 is reinforced by an institutional break at 16, either necessarily so because of institutional organisation or *de facto* because of student movement (Higham, 2003, p. 1)

Accepting this and other arguments against the existence of a system which provides a unified educational programme for students from between the ages of 14 and 19, this study will, however, consider initiatives affecting this age group as belonging to one phase; the 14-19 phase, if for no other reason than to encourage clarity as well as to recognise a gradual move on the part of policy makers to consolidate the educational experiences of pupils in this age group and consider this phase as a continuum, based on greater uniformity and progression for students.

The next section will consider the nature of the reform process as it relates to 14-19 education, and question the reasons behind the ad-hoc and disjointed nature of the reform initiatives affecting this phase.

2.5.2 The Reform of 14-19 Education

To be clear, as discussed earlier, when speaking of 14-19 education, the term is used in this study to encompass both education and training of 14-19 year olds. The process by which reform of 14-19 education has been carried out mirrors the fact that the phase is not coherent in its implementation, or even philosophy, with a logical framework hard to discern from the initiatives which have been put into place and which have affected this phase over the past 30 years. Stanton, in discussing the risks to education policy which occur if patterns of development which are damaging, are not recognised, explains that one risk comes from a failure to view the system, in this case education, as a whole.

In policy terms there has been a tendency to see each initiative in isolation from others, even though each could affect the success or failure of the rest'

(Stanton, 1997, p. 53)

In characterising the 14-19 phase Hodgson and Spours describe the educational reform process in England as reactive and piecemeal when they say

One of the reasons for problems of incoherence in English qualification arrangements has been the tendency for additions to, rather than rationalisation of the system.

Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p. 19

Here then, we see the idea that rather than a wholesale re-working of the system as a way of ensuring it could respond to the pressure and demands now being placed on it, instead policy makers chose what could be argued as the easy but not necessarily effective solution of 'bolt on' policies. This has led to a complicated system, the result of "the cumulative impact of multiple, well intentioned initiatives" (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009) Discussing in particular the White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* published in 2005, and in general the 14-19 education system as a whole, Jephcote and Abbott explain that the White Paper is just another in a long line of government initiatives which simply 'tinker' with reform, rather than tackling it head on.

Rather than provide a solution to long-standing problems the White Paper represents an episode in the ongoing evolution of the curriculum.

Jephcote and Abbott, 2005, p. 198

Lumby and Foskett, consider there to have been a great number of policy initiatives in 14-19 education which many point to as proof that the phase has been subjected to a period of constant change. However, the authors argue that a deeper investigation of the reform process having been underway for the past 30 years reveals a lack of real change in 14-19 policy, and instead an excess of policy 'busyness'

...the conviction that change has been persistent and significant is not fundamentally valid, and challenges accepted perceptions of policy change and its effects...the busyness of policy change conceals the steady state of underlying values and calculations of advantage to those groups with most power.

Lumby and Foskett, 2007, p. 86

This unwillingness to tackle structural change within the 14-19 curriculum can be seen to have its roots in the academic/vocational debate. Wholesale reform of the system would require the abolition of A levels which personify the academic route, but could also viewed as unrepresentative, divisive and exclusive. In 1995, the Conservative government, in commissioning Sir Ron Dearing to review post-16 provision both recognised the need for reform, but also made clear the need to add to the rigour of A-levels and thereby maintain them as the 'gold standard' of qualifications. (Halsall, 1996, p. 81)

Halsall points out that this position was reiterated at the Secondary Heads Conference held at Warwick in 1996, where the 'Secretary of State made it clear that the three-track qualifications system was here to stay.' (ibid) Equally, to many, especially employers, A-levels remain the most recognisable and understood qualifications, and as such have great currency.

The qualification [A levels] retains enormous influence with employers, who are still relatively ignorant of other qualifications, and almost all policy-makers and senior educationalists have reached their present positions via A levels

Tomlinson, 1997, p. 7

While it can be argued that this position may have changed somewhat, and that New Labour Government increased the visibility and understanding of other qualifications available at 16 and 18 (such as GNVQ) the rejection of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Review (2004) which called for the abandonment of GCSE's and A levels in favour of an overarching diploma, confirms the point that A levels are considered important enough to be protected, and as such are a main obstacle to wholesale reform and unification of the system.

The picture of significant and effective reform of the 14-19 system looks little better in the 1990's according to Tomlinson (1997), where she contends that 14-19 education cannot be described as a cohesive system, and that during this decade the government made the wrong choices in relation to this area of education, with policies which only served to deepen the academic and vocational divide, thereby intensifying the fragmented nature of the system. (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 1) In the years before the 1990's, a tri-partite system existed in the 14-19 phase, discussed by Gleeson in 1989 when he describes the three routes; the academic route, the apprentice route and the tertiary modern route.(this final route consisting of the unemployed and the unemployable who were involved in 'skills training') (Gleeson, 1989, p. 90) By the 1990's, this three track system was being consolidated through the Conservative policies, with the academic route being characterised by A levels, the occupationally specific route embodied in NVQ's and the vocational or applied education track encompassing GNVQ's (Higham, Sharp and Yeomans, 1996, p. 6). With this divided system becoming so entrenched, it was becoming more and more difficult to create a system where cohesion, and a smooth route from the age of 14 to 19, encompassing both vocational and academic elements were possible, thereby avoiding the economic and social damage caused by this division.

Lawton details how the Conservatives' determination to maintain separate vocational and academic routes delayed the development of the phase, and enshrined a divided and disjointed system.

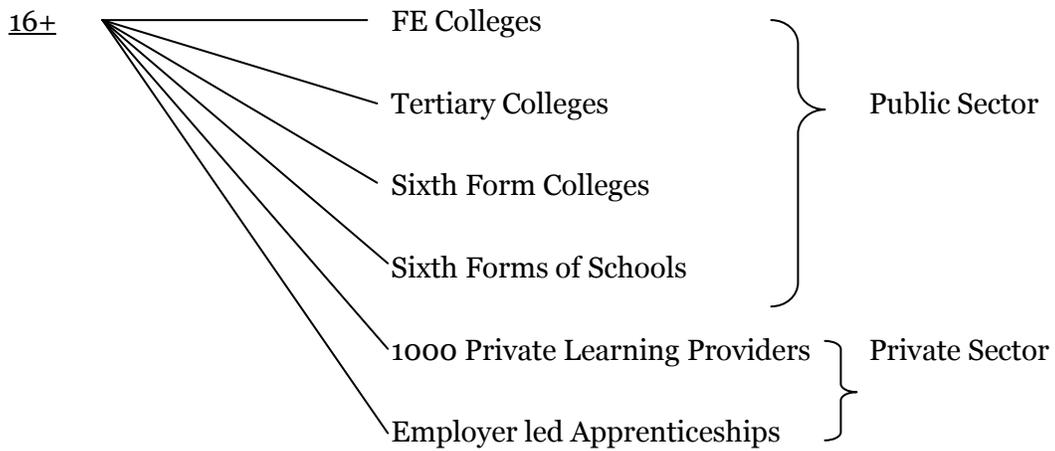
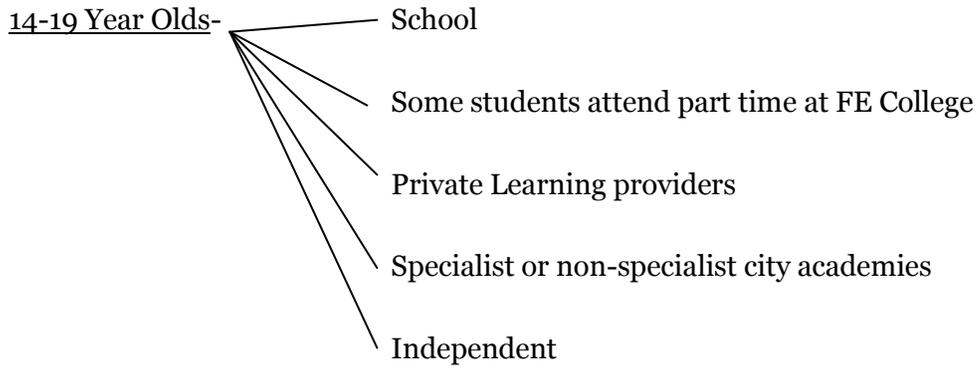
In summary, it has to be said that curriculum policy since 1987 has been divided in two (5-16; 16-19) when it should have been unified. The 5-16 curriculum has been distorted by gross political interference; the 16-19 opportunity has been delayed by the worship of the sacred A level cow.

Lawton, 1993, p.71

While the Nuffield Review stated in 2004 that the 14-19 system was performing better than 20 years previously, and that through the implementation of key initiatives coming from New Labour such as the Tomlinson working group, Skills for Life and Success for All there was a more strategic approach to reform of the 14-19 phase, nevertheless the system continued to perpetuate the academic and vocational divide, and was “in a state of considerable flux” (Nuffield, 2004, p. 9, 38 and 87).

One reason for this flux can be identified by looking at further aspects of the Nuffield Review’s work, when the number of possible pathways or qualifications which a student could take, or that employers could provide were described as ‘bewildering’ (Nuffield, 2004, p. 29). Simply by looking at the number of providers (as shown below), and considering the different perspectives which these groups or institutions bring to the process of 14-19 education and training it is possible to see the possibility of a lack of uniformity of provision, thereby perpetuating this impression of unclear pathways.

Who Provides the Education



Compiled using Nuffield Review, 2004, p. 37

Another explanation for this state of flux, and the ad-hoc nature of the reform of the 14-19 phase can be seen as the influence of the force of politics as discussed earlier. The education system has come under pressure in the last 30 years through threats from a) the world economy and competition, b) changing patterns of employment, c) the low skills equilibrium and inadequate training and d) the question of the destination of 16 year olds (Crombie-White et al, 1995, p. 7-8). These threats are then being faced within the political sphere where policies are made quickly and are subject to the pressures described earlier in this chapter in the section 'Politics and Policy'. Therefore, it is not difficult to envisage policy choices being made which require small and relatively simple additions or 'fixes' to the existing system for the sake of political expediency or to mitigate political pressure, instead of reforms being implemented which may entail a significant restructuring of the system. Additionally, because of the wholesale acceptance of 'the reform narrative' (Keep, 2009) policy makers have few options available to them which will not bring the whole system upon which their positions have been built.

Because the shape of the narrative has been derived from fundamental ideological choices about what forms of state intervention are possible and acceptable, it is an extremely rigid and perhaps brittle construct-it is hard to effect significant change to any individual element without undermining the rationale for the whole edifice.

Keep, 2009, p. 21

Of course, the irony of this situation is that the problems of the academic and vocational divide and the need for greater economic relevance which have occupied government policy for at least 30 years since Callaghan's Ruskin Speech in 1976, are argued by many to have their solutions in structural reform. Yet, despite claiming the desire to solve these problems and directing huge amounts of time and energy to this project, the solutions which are offered end up being piecemeal, disruptive, arguably lack success and themselves ultimately contribute to the ongoing need for reform. Is this a case of a lack of political will, an unwillingness to grasp the nettle and make the big decisions, or is there another agenda at play here?

Is it possible that the real reason the 14-19 system is still embroiled in the same issues and debates which were current in 1976 is the need for economic relevance within the system, or is there another, less obvious agenda at play? What are the real drivers behind reform of the 14-19 education? That is the central question this study seeks to answer and through document analysis it is hoped that these drivers can be identified in later sections.

Having made an attempt to describe the development of the 14-19 system over the past 30 years, and to characterise some of the aspects which make it up, the next section will attempt to answer the question 'why 14-19 education'? What makes, or has made, 14-19 education so significant in the reform agendas of governments since Callaghan's time, and how can this significance be described in relation to the themes and ideas already discussed.

2.5.3 Why is 14-19 such a hot topic?

The spotlight has been turned on 14-19 education in recent years through a number of factors. In a general sense, the Nuffield Review (2004) considers that the need to re-think 14-19 education has occurred because of three specific changes in society. The first is the changing nature of the labour market, where the 'threat' of globalisation is ever present and the economy becomes more service oriented by moving away from the traditional manufacturing base of the past.

The second is that there is a longer transition from education to work with 75% of 16-18 remaining in training or education (as of 2003) and the third is that public sector reforms have created a need for a re-think of the organisation and funding of public services. (Nuffield, 2004, p. 12) All of this, the authors argue, requires an educational response.

There is a need to think afresh about 14-19 education and training and about how it is organised to determine what would be appropriate and beneficial both for the young people themselves and for the economic and social world which they are entering.

Nuffield, 2004, p. 12

In line with the pressures on 14-19 education described in the preceding section ‘The reform of 14-19 education’ and in fact at times mirroring these pressures, the Nuffield Review identifies three specific reasons that 14-19 is under such direct scrutiny and particular attention from policy makers: lower than desired levels of post-compulsory education; lower than desired levels of achievement and; significant levels of disengagement among students in this age range. (Nuffield, 2004, p. 12) These arguments all make sense in light of the earlier points made in this study around the economic imperative which affects educational reform as detailed in the earlier section ‘Economics and Policy’.

The argument, in short, suggests that by ‘solving’ the problems in the education system and creating a better educated workforce able to cope with the demands placed on them by the 21st century global economic environment, you create greater prosperity in your country, reduce the welfare bill and reduce low-level crime by making sure young people are gainfully employed. Of course, all of this is contingent on the acceptance of the argument that education can have a direct impact on economic prosperity, and although it has been shown here that this argument has been swallowed wholesale by politicians and policy makers as well as many in business, it has also been shown that this argument does not stand up to detailed scrutiny. However, it is clear that that the economic imperative as it relates to educational reform has become the accepted wisdom amongst policy makers, and indeed is little questioned.

There has been little inclination...in national policy circles to reflect on the overall direction of policy or to question its underlying assumptions.

(Pring et al, 2009, p. 189)

It follows then, that 14-19 education will receive a great deal of the focus for this reform. 14-19 education touches the wider economic and social world in a more obvious and direct way than many other areas of education. Those who feel they have reason to be involved in 14-19 education, such as businesses, also feel they have the right to express opinions about the nature of the provision being offered.

They are in the position of stakeholders, and indeed successive governments have encouraged this, through the creation of parent governors and the linking of schools to Local Strategic Partnerships and Lifelong Learning Partnerships. Indeed, Chitty cites the Secondary Heads Association General Secretary, John Dunford, who in 2003 published an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* which pointed out that Head Teachers are accountable to 21 different bodies, meaning 5,000 people have the right to investigate school practices. (Dunford 2003, in Chitty, 2004, p. 204) By adding so many people into the decision making process, who link education to the greater political and economic debates occurring outside of education, and considering the level of accountability required from Head Teachers, 14-19 education is put under the microscope in a very clear and targeted way.

Beyond the political sphere of 14-19 education, the developmental stages which pupils go through during this phase of their education also add to the significance of this phase, and the needs of these pupils create complexities and tensions within the system.

The needs of 14-19 year olds are both personal, in terms of fulfilment and self-worth, but also hinge on the need for employment. If the possibility of valuable employment does not exist, attitudes towards behaviour, work, education and training can suffer. (Thacker, Pring, Evans, 1987, p. 24) Balance this against society's need for a better trained workforce and social stability, then we can again see the importance of the 14-19 age range to any reform agenda.

In the example given by Thacker et al above, when one of these needs is met, i.e. the personal, the possibility exists that the needs of society will also be met through a more focused and better trained workforce. However, recognising that these two needs exist simultaneously also leads to the realisation that there is an inherent tension in any system attempting to satisfy both. Personal needs can be seen to be fulfilled for a particular student if their talents are allowed to develop to the full. These talents may involve a subject or a skill which does not have direct business or economic links, possibly an art based or sport related subject, and so, at least on the face of it, this personal fulfilment cannot be seen as providing direct economic benefits to society as a whole. This tension between individual and societal needs is highlighted by Sims and Meeking when they say,

The aims of education and training are often articulated in terms of their value in personal fulfilment, and their value to society as a whole, including the economic function. The history of post-14 provision reflects the interplay and tensions between these aims, which remain relevant to the current reform agenda. The concerns, agendas and priorities of a number of stakeholders in the 14-19 arena contribute to the complexities of the debate about the nature of provision.

Sims and Meeking, 2004, p.8

While the above points provide an understanding of the reasons that 14-19 education is in the spotlight when it comes to educational reform, they do not address the question of a unified system, and its desirability or otherwise. As stated earlier, 14-19 as a cohesive phase does not exist, with significant breaks at 16 and 18, and a qualifications system divided down academic and vocational lines. Sims and Meeking argue though, that there is a need for a unified system again on the grounds of economic prosperity, and in many ways, it is an argument that we have heard before.

The rationale for having a strategy for 14-19 is to some extent based on the view that this phase of education is critical to equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding required to perform effectively in further and higher education, training and employment, and social life. For example, economic concerns about the competitiveness of the UK and its standing in relation to other OECD countries have concentrated policy makers' minds on improving opportunities for young people to gain the type of skills that are relevant to and required by employers.

Simms and Meeking, 2004, p. 6

Beyond this economic argument is the need for a unified 14-19 phase on the grounds of participation. In the 1980's, education and training for those over 16 was considered to be a 'low participation/low achievement system' (Finegold et al, 1990) with participation rates below 50 percent.

In addition, many 16-19 year olds were on training schemes such as the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) which in comparison to other European economies gained the reputation for being a low quality qualification, leading to the assessment that the UK system was producing fewer vocationally qualified young people. (Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p. 4) This in turn lead to the desire to improve participation rates in post-compulsory education as identified earlier. By 1994 these participation rates had increased to near 70 percent (Ibid) but this rate of increase was not sustained, and by 2001 participation rates for the 15-19 age group in the UK were still lower than many OECD countries as shown below.

Participation of 15-19 age group 2001 (either full or part-time)

UK-	75%	
Belgium-	91%	
Germany-	89%	
Czech Republic-	88%	
France-	87%	
Holland-	86%	
USA-	78%	(OECD, Education at a Glance, 2003)

Without a unified 14-19 system, it becomes more difficult to increase participation beyond the post-compulsory stage, as most students will be encouraged to remain in education post-16, but may have difficulty seeing the relevance and value of further courses, or be able to link the curriculum pre-16 to that which is offered post-16.

As discussed earlier, the transition between pre and post compulsory education has long been a dividing line in the system, and only relatively recently has this line begun to be addressed. Edwards cites Gillian Shepherd, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment responsible for the 1996 DfEE White Paper *Learning to Compete* who celebrated the fact that this document failed to treat 16+ as a natural transition point, and he explains that the logical reason for treating 14-19 as a critical educational phase was linked to the issue of participation.

The end of compulsory education is no longer the end of full-time education for most young people, a fact evident in what the White Paper (1996) records as ‘dramatic improvements’ in participation and achievement since 1985.

Edwards, 1997, p. x

A final factor to explain why the 14-19 phase has “attracted the interest of government, trade unions, employer representatives, educationalist and the increased participation of students themselves” (Gleeson, 1996, p. 11) can be seen in the politicisation of education. There are three strands to this argument which will be discussed here.

The first deals with the opening up of the education system to outside stakeholders. The political driver in education, as discussed earlier, focused on the benefits that education could bring to the economy, as a response to the economic downturn of the 1970's and 1980's. Because the economic crisis affected society as a whole, greater parts of society were aware of the situation, and became involved in the debate.

In response to the economic crisis, politicians and think tanks began to argue that the solution lay in school reform, (the effectiveness of this argument being still visible today) and it can be argued that through bringing this debate into the national arena, and because the effects of the economic crisis were being felt in all parts of the country, more people than ever felt they had a stake in the education system than before. Through a greater awareness then of the arguments, and also because of specific policies which encouraged business and industry to become involved in education to counteract the effects of globalisation and economic decline, a greater number of stakeholders became involved in 14-19 education, (as described earlier by Gleeson (1996)) and were becoming aware of this phase of education, and its potential effects on them. Therefore, the opening up of the education system to outside scrutiny, as begun by Callaghan in 1976, and the subsequent politicisation and debate of educational reform can be seen to be a factor in the greater visibility of the 14-19 phase.

There is a second strand to the argument suggesting that politicisation of education has lead to the currency of the debate around 14-19 education. This is that through the inclusion of a greater number of stakeholders in the educational system, politicians themselves were more aware of the support that could be garnered for their party through the placating and inclusion of these stakeholders and their wishes.

Therefore, a cyclical situation occurs whereby stakeholders are more aware of the arguments around 14-19 educational provision and how they have the potential to impact their businesses, children's lives or society. This in turn means that they become a more vocal group, putting pressure on politicians to enact reform, with the effect that these reforms have a more direct effect on the stakeholders and so the cycle continues.

While the arguments about the politicisation of education as linked to the economic imperative have been discussed in detail here, the third aspect of this politicisation, which means that 14-19 education remains high on the political agenda, comes from nature of politics, embodied in the constant flow of Secretaries of State in and out of the education department, which itself is in a perpetual state of change through reorganisations and name changes. In the period being discussed in the study, there were four Secretaries of State for Education and the 'education department' was named the Department for Education and Employment and the Department for Education and Skills. Lawton makes the point in relation to curriculum development when he says,

Cynical observers of education policy since 1976 might suggest that every new education minister 'needs' a bandwagon of some kind; in the case of curriculum since 1988 'development of the National Curriculum has been confused by the politicisation of curriculum and by individual ministers wishing to set their stamp on one aspect of policy or another.

Lawton, 1993, p. 59

Therefore, as described by Finegold earlier (1992) a situation which whereby educational reforms, because they are within the political sphere, are not by their nature long-term, and so end up being short-term, politically expedient initiatives. As Estelle Morris commented “Politicians almost always underestimate the time needed for education interventions to be properly introduced into schools and to yield results.”(Morris, 2008)

These short term initiatives can be seen to have the effect of keeping 14-19 education high on the agenda because, as discussed earlier, these ‘tinkerings’ with the system do not produce lasting or effective solutions, meaning that the same problems still exist within the system, and so new initiatives and policies must be developed, in order for politicians to be seen as doing something by the stakeholders which they invited into the education debate in the first place. With power centralised to an ever greater degree under New Labour, ministers strengthen their position with each new piece of legislation (Keep, 2009, p. 13) and through this perpetuate the overriding ideology behind education reform while being seen to be ‘doing something.’

In conclusion then, 14-19 can be seen to be a phase of education which has come under the spotlight for a number of reasons. Changes in society and culture as explained by The Nuffield Review have seen a greater focus on 14-19 education, along with recognition of the personal need of students within the phase.

The pressure on successive governments to improve post-compulsory participation has meant that 14-19 education has been subject to reforms attempting to unify the system, and the political process has played its part in keeping 14-19 at the top of the educational agenda for successive governments. In the end though, it could be concluded that the main reason why 14-19 education is, and has remained, a hot political topic for the last 30 years, stems from the economic imperative. The three reasons why 14-19 requires reform and is a high priority on the political agenda given by the Nuffield Review (2004) (raising standards, social inclusion and economic relevance) can be justified in light of the economic. 1) Raising standards; in order to produce a well qualified workforce which allows the country to compete in the global market. 2) Social Inclusion; to ensure that the young become contributing members of society, and as such become part of a more prosperous economy. 3) Economic Relevance; that what is taught in schools and higher education institutions provides students with the tools they need to obtain jobs and contribute to the economy.

While other benefits can be derived from these three goals, such as greater societal cohesion and reduction in welfare requirements, the greatest benefit is to economic prosperity (so the argument goes!) and as such this can be seen as the reason that successive governments, no matter their ideological persuasion, have kept the reform of 14-19 education front and centre of their agenda for education as a whole.

Having considered Conservative education policy, and looked at the 14-19 sector in particular, the final section of the literature review will focus on the policies and outlook of New Labour.

2.6 New Labour Policy

Having considered education policy as a whole and examining the particular forces and issues at play within 14-19 education, this section will focus specifically on New Labour's education policy, with particular reference to 14-19 education. While the content analysis which forms part of the data within this study focuses on the themes and policy patterns within 14-19 education which exist (or not) as part of New Labour policy documents, in an attempt to answer the research question, this section will explore general themes within New Labour's education policy.

The election of New Labour in 1997 ended eighteen years of Conservative Government. Eleven of those years were characterised and dominated by the formidable leadership of Margaret Thatcher, and while Britain had moved away, in some respects, from the Thatcher Years, with John Major and the more 'pragmatic and consultative era' (Hodgson and Spours, 1999, p. 130) his election heralded, the election of New Labour nonetheless saw a fundamental change in politics and government.

With the landslide victory won by New Labour, the new government was in the enviable position of being able to command a huge majority in the House of Commons, being sure of a large public mandate for their message, as well as facing an opposition party in the form of the Conservatives which was decimated and divided following its resounding defeat in the election. As Pimlott observes;

The election of a Labour Government with a huge majority after eighteen years in Opposition in itself constitutes a watershed, however the new Government comports itself...Even if the Blair administration crashes unexpectedly in its first term...this year's result will always be remembered alongside 1906, 1945, 1964 and 1979 as a defining political moment.

Pimlott, 1997, p. 325

This 'watershed' moment then, came with high expectations; with a feeling that New Labour really was new, both in terms of distancing itself from previous incarnations of the party and also in terms of the Conservative Government and the policies which had gone before.

What will be argued in the next section though, is that in terms of education policy, close examination reveals that rather than being the instruments of change, New Labour in fact not only adopted, but actually solidified and entrenched Conservative policies.

This position will be considered in detail later, but first, in order to understand the context of Labour's education policy once in power after 1997, a consideration of the origins and shape of New Labour policy *before* coming into power will be undertaken.

2.6.1 Aiming Higher-New Labour's Pre-election policy

In March 1996, the Labour Party published its plans for the reform of 14-19 education in a document entitled 'Aiming Higher'(1996). The stated five aims of this paper were to

- maintain and improve standards
- ensure every student reaches high level core skills
- build coherence in the exam system
- recognise the importance of good career advice
- develop a qualification framework with high status

Aiming Higher, 1996, p. 1

Ideas and arguments which were to be played out and developed over the course of the period under investigation in this study were presented in this document, with low participation rates, early specialisation, low achievement rates and high drop-out rates being cited as problems with the 14-19 education system. (Ibid)

A quote from the first page of this document highlights the belief system on which the Labour party made their case for reform. Close reading of this quote is not required to see the clear similarities with the arguments made by the Conservatives under John Major and Margaret Thatcher and before that by Labour under James Callaghan.

If we are to retain social cohesion and build economic prosperity for our nation in the 21st Century, we must face up to this challenge in education.

Aiming Higher, 1996, p.1

Looking in detail at *Aiming Higher* there are four significant themes expressed in this document which can be seen to extend through the next eight years of government. (Some of the evidence for this assertion will be presented in the results section of this study, while a great deal has already been discussed within this chapter) The four main themes, which provide an understanding of the justification for reform of the 14-19 education system as expressed by New Labour before their election will be discussed now.

The first theme which is evident in *Aiming Higher* is the belief that the reform of post-16 education has not been tackled, and that the need for reform is urgent.

As described in earlier sections of this chapter, the assertion that reform of 14-19 education is needed is based on many factors, the most prominent of these being the argument that an improvement in skill levels among the workforce is required in order to deliver growth within the economy. The development of this point of view, and its ubiquitousness within the political sphere has been shown in detail here through the arguments of Ball (1990), Dale (1989) and others, and the validity of these views have also been questioned. These points will not be reconsidered here. What is significant about the appearance of this theme within the writings of New Labour, even while in opposition, is precisely the fact that the argument was not new.

Particularly in relation to 14-19 education, Conservative policies, specifically from 1983 on, centred around the idea of 'new vocationalism' (Finn, 1990, p. 168) where schools were expected to be more responsive to employers, with study focusing more strongly on new technologies and subjects and lessons to be relevant to the world of work. (Knight, 1990, p. 168) Education, and its importance to the economy of the country, was a clear Conservative policy 10 years before the publication of *Aiming Higher* by New Labour. This first theme was therefore not a 'new' idea when New Labour was elected, and it also was little changed during the period 1997 to 2005.

The second major theme in *Aiming Higher* has links to the first theme, making it clear that the poor economic progress of the country can be attributed to the failure of the education system to provide suitably skilled workers to 'feed' the needs of the economy. In a quote that could have been taken from any of Labour's White or Green papers during the period 1997 to 2005, *Aiming Higher* describes how a 'broken' education system has let down both individuals and the country.

In today's global economy, our national prosperity depends above all else on the skills and abilities of our people; on a multi-skilled, creative and adaptable workforce. But at advanced levels of education and training we have fallen behind our competitors. We can no longer tolerate the waste of talent and potential which characterises under-achievement and which results from the complex and inadequate organisation of 14-19 education.

Aiming Higher, 1996, p. 5

To look at this point from another angle, the suggestion is that through a 'world class education service' as desired by New Labour, economic prosperity and social justice will follow. Education is the solution to all ills, but particularly economic ones. Not only would this argument have been at home in any number of Labour policy documents, such as Learning to Succeed (1999) where the confident vision of 'The Learning Age' is that 'lifelong learning could enable everyone to fulfil their potential and cope with the challenge of rapid economic and social change.' (DfEE, 1999, p. 3) it would also, barring the reference to 14-19 education, have been indistinguishable from the arguments made by Callaghan at Ruskin (and subsequently in Great Debate), when he asserted that

In today's world, higher standards are demanded than were required yesterday and there are simply fewer jobs for those without skill. Therefore, we demand more from our schools than did our grandparents.

Callaghan, 1976

The third theme which is evident in *Aiming Higher* is the desire to link more strongly the 14-16 and the 16-19 areas of the curriculum. In an argument which again hinges on the above two, a chaotic and disorganised education system has led to a situation where reform of the system must be tackled in order to meet the needs of the economy and counteract the threat of global competitors. As with most political parties, Labour lay the blame for the disorganised 14-19 education system on the Conservatives, who failed to tackle the system as a whole (*Aiming Higher*, 1996, p. 2) and as such didn't recognise the fact that, a good 14-16 study experience leads to a good 16-19 experience. (ibid) While the aim of a coherent 14-19 provision is clearly stated in the document,

The current provision of post-16 qualifications lacks coherence and does not serve the needs of individuals or the economy. It has grown in a piecemeal fashion with no attempt by the Government to date to reach agreement on the development of the curriculum that will meet the needs of individuals and employers in the 21st Century.

Aiming Higher, 1996, p. 5

The previous section on the development of the 14-19 education system has argued that there is little coherence in the provision within this phase, and that despite attempts to change this situation, most notably the Tomlinson Report (2004), this continues to be the case. However, this policy point has remained a significant part of New Labour's educational agenda. There were, however, clear periods of what could be termed political cowardice in the face of huge pressure to retain A levels from certain employers. (Pring et al, 2009, p. 137) When the huge parliamentary majorities which the first two Labour Governments commanded are taken into account, this unwillingness to tackle structural reform and take on A levels, seems even more baffling, but perhaps the reasons lie in a 'lack of settled will in England as to how to reform 14-19 education and training.' (Pring et al, 2009, p. 189)

The final theme within the policy document *Aiming Higher* is that of the need for a single framework for qualifications for the 14-19 phase. Again, this theme ties in with the other themes within the document, whereby the 'need' to build a stronger economy means more is required of 14-19 education, which in turn requires better organisation of the sector and a universally recognisable qualification which recognises both vocational and academic achievement.

This theme highlights the point made in the earlier section on 14-19 education in relation to the academic/vocational divide within the 14-19 education system. New Labour argue in this document, that this divide is not helpful, with the academic 'A' level route being too narrow, and the more skills based vocational route suffering from low status. Their solution to this problem is to develop an over-arching qualification, within which students can take both vocational and academic courses, providing both flexibility as well as a broader educational experience.

Within a single framework, students will be able to study for 'A' levels, vocational qualifications or a combination of both, but their achievement will be recognised in a single overarching certificate at Level 3. All advanced level education, whether academic, vocational or a mixture of the two, will lead to the award of an advanced diploma.

Aiming Higher, 1996, p. 12

Indeed, as with the other three main themes in this document, this policy of attempting to bring together the vocational and academic routes for the 14-19 phase is one which was never abandoned by the Labour party while in Government, and although the eventual solution which was adopted, namely Diplomas, as laid out in the 2005 White Paper, does not go the whole way towards developing an overarching qualification, it can be seen as the first step on the road towards this goal.

So while Labour have been criticised for their lack of newness in the approach it took in the reform of 14-19 education, it is clear that from at least a year before their election, and as will be argued later, even as far back as the 1970's when they were in power, the policy course was laid out, and while the implementation may not have been as successful as hoped, many of the ideas and initiatives which were laid out in *Aiming Higher* survived through three terms of government.

It is difficult then to be critical of New Labour's policies simply on the basis of a lack of 'newness' then, when the course that was followed, in particular the maintenance of a two track system (albeit under the umbrella of an advanced Diploma) was one which was described even before they came into power. New Labour then, has been shown here to not be entirely new, at least in terms of education policy, and may indeed only be new in the way that policies were implemented, and the degree of emphasis which was placed on one strand of policy over another. To question the record of the Labour Government on the basis of not providing new answers to the same old questions then may not be fair; their aims for education were clearly stated while in opposition and many of these policies were still being pursued in 2005.

To question the Labour Government's record on the basis of not asking *new* questions about the education system, not moving political thinking and policy considerations away from entrenched paradigms which were in circulation at least since 1976, may be a more sustainable argument, and a failure which could be laid at the door of *New* Labour. The political sea change which was Labour's election victory occurred because Labour was termed new; both in terms of the party, and in terms of providing an alternative to the Conservative Government which had been in power for 18 years.

However, in terms of 14-19 education policy, much of what New Labour was saying about the reform of this phase both before the election and once in power, was based on accepted political truths which were espoused by first James Callaghan, then Margaret Thatcher, then John Major. This point is made by Keep when he says,

...New Labour has not moved in a direction that fundamentally diverges from education and training policy under the Thatcher and Major administrations.

Keep, 2009,p.13

The question then becomes one of whether New Labour was just a re-packaged political party (remembering here that this study is concerned with education policy) who were able to 'spin' old policies in such a way that they appeared new? This question addresses the main purpose of this study, to identify the aims of the reform of the 14-19 education system, and as such will be explored in the results section, along with an examination of the ideology behind New Labour policy. The next section though, will consider the idea that New Labour had a clear and strong view of the purpose of education, and that much like the idea that a great deal was sacrificed by New Labour in the lead up to the 1997 election on the basis of the overriding need to win, much is sacrificed within the 14-19 education system in order to serve the god of economy.

2.6.2 A Clear Vision

In writing for the Fabian Society, David Blunkett, as the then Secretary of State for Education, listed the four main policies upon which the development of the education system must rest. These were; creating the best primary education possible, improvement in the whole school system, a 'drive for social inclusion' and modernisation of the comprehensive system. (Blunkett, 1999, p. 5-7) While all of these have been expressed in the document as aims, it can be argued that in fact they are policy objectives, and rather than provide us with an understanding of the ideological basis, or the reason for these policies, they simply tell us what New Labour intend to *do*. In order to find the 'why' behind these policies, it is necessary to look to the end of Blunkett's article, where a clear ideological justification for this reform is stated.

Over the next three years education will get the most sustained boost in spending in our history. It must deliver the results on which the future of the British economy and British society depend.

Blunkett, 1999, p. 11

All roads then, in terms of educational reform, lead to the economy. As argued earlier, education, in the eyes of New Labour, was subordinate to the needs of the economy, and the overriding objective was to produce skilled and flexible workers to contribute to the economy and protect Britain from the global economic threat. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 141)

Ball details the prominence of ‘New Growth Theory’ developed by economists such as Robert Reich, and their adoption into the policies of the US Democratic Party in the United States, which as we saw earlier, New Labour borrowed from in the development of their party before and after the 1997 election. These theories sought to get rid of the divide between social and economic policies, essentially meaning that ‘social and educational policies are collapsed into economic and industrial policy’ (Ball, 1999, p. 201) As such then, all policies can be viewed as economic, and are built around achieving greater prosperity within the global market.

In taking the point made earlier where Pring and others describe a lack of discussion around aims of education beyond the economic, it can be argued that in reality Labour government policy doesn’t simply ignore educational aims because of a lack of understanding of their importance or through the lack of an ideological standpoint from which to argue, but instead because the educational aims of New Labour *are* economic aims, and therefore this is New Labour’s educational ideology. The educational aim of reform is economic relevance, and as such the other factors which Pring refers to, such as the type of learning to be experienced by a young person, the values in a person which are to be desired and developed, do not need to be addressed. Of course, this is the precise point of the research being carried out here; to try to identify the aims, the ideological position, from which New Labour policy as it relates to 14-19 education comes from, and to identify this through detailed analysis of specific policy documents.

Despite what has been termed here a ‘clear vision’ when it comes to education policy, New Labour have been accused of a lack of ideology upon which reform of the 14-19 education system was based. This question will now be discussed here.

2.6.3 What does New Labour Stand For?

In discussing the ideology behind New Labour's reform programme for 14-19 education a distinction must be made between ideology and policy. As described earlier, certain key policies have been adhered to consistently, and have a long heritage (all the way back to 1976 in some cases!) but the attempt in this study is to look behind the policy to the belief system upon which its formation is based.

This is particularly important because policies can be developed without an ideological grounding, simply by governments reacting to events and creating policies to fit the 'current' need. This is linked to the argument also made earlier that the political process can hi-jack the policy making process, simply by the nature of the environment in which policies are formed. Nevertheless, the question still remains; on what did New Labour base its education policies?

Hodgson and Spours question whether there is indeed *any* ideological basis upon which New Labour approached the reform of the 14-19 phase, questioning also whether the Government has any real commitment to the phase at all, (Hodgson and Spours, 2005, p. 1) carrying out reform in a haphazard and ad-hoc way . They base this belief on that fact that the Government, in producing the 14-19 White Paper in 2005, rejected the recommendations of the Tomlinson Final Report (2004) to unify the system, and instead settled for "a pragmatic set of policies...which do not constitute the foundations of a distinctive 14-19 phase [but instead] signal the continuation of the existing order." (ibid)

Furthermore, Hodgson and Spours see the 14-19 White Paper (2005) as being light on concrete policy proposals, and they attribute this to the attempt by the Labour Government to maintain the status quo and preserve the existing qualifications system and the two-track options. (Hodgson and Spours, 2005, p. 4)

Another justification for the belief that New Labour, between 1997 and 2005, lacked an ideological framework for their policy on 14-19 education derives from the fact that many commentators saw little difference between Labour policies after 1997 and the Conservative policies that went before. It may be more accurate however, not to consider that New Labour had no ideological standpoint but rather that their political beliefs were not unique, and were essentially borrowed from eighteen years of Conservative Government. Marples discusses the fact that New Labour's policies for 14-19 education were 'located firmly within the context of the largely incoherent and, for the most part, reactive policies of the previous administration' (Marples, 2001, p. 119). Indeed, while there was a great outpouring of policy from the very start of the Labour administration, actual substantive changes in policy were thin on the ground, were essentially 'cosmetic' (Whitty, 2002, p. 127) and where changes did occur, only served to strengthen existing Conservative policies.

The central thrust of the policies was probably closer to that of the Conservative agenda than to Labour's traditional approach. Furthermore, some of the Conservative education policies most detested by the 'liberal educational establishment' were maintained and even strengthened by New Labour.

Whitty, 2002, p. 127

A similar point is made by Docking when he talks of New Labour's policies as being 'fundamentally the Conservative's dressed up in New Labour clothes.' (Docking, 2001, p. 32). He goes on to suggest that the acceptance of Conservative education policies on the part of New Labour could be considered as evidence of the lack of a genuinely fresh approach to education policy, and by implication that a dearth of ideological uniqueness can be seen in the fact that there were few outright reversals of previous policy. (Ibid)

If then, for the purposes of this discussion, we accept that there was a lack of ideology behind the policies introduced which relate to 14-19 education, based on the fact that a) Conservative policies were adopted by the new Labour Government, b) that very few Conservative policies were reversed and that later into the time period being studied here, and c) policies which were put forward simply had the effect of entrenching the status quo, then what are the possible reasons that New Labour, in terms of 14-19 education policy, seem to be anything but new? Here three possible reasons will be explored.

The first possible reason why Labour's education policies may not contain a strong ideological basis may stem from the nature of the New Labour project. As described earlier, the election of 1997 was a watershed moment in political history, and the majority which New Labour received was so huge as to allow the new Government full rein over the legislative process. The new Government was however very new, and after 18 years in the political wilderness, were, according to Pimlott, concerned above all with getting elected. (Pimlott, 1997, p. 326)

In order to do this, he contends, the New Labour winning formula of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Peter Mandelson and Alistair Campbell used other successful parties and policies, particularly the US Democratic Party, as a blueprint from which to build their new party, with the overriding and all encompassing aim of being elected.

Because it [New Labour] was primarily concerned with survival, its principles, in so far as they involved an element of newness, were largely borrowed from other, more successful parties in Britain and elsewhere.

Pimlott, 1997, p. 328

This pragmatic approach to politics is discussed by Demaine where the acceptance of previous policies is linked to an understanding of the political climate.

...Labour's education policies involve an overriding *pragmatism* which takes advantage of the prevailing political conditions. If Blair's way is neither old left or new right, and proves acceptable to such a wide range of voters, this is at least in part due to the effects of the policies of previous governments.

Demaine, 1999, p. 17

If this argument is accepted, then it is possible to see here a reason for a lack of ideology on the part of New Labour.

Successful policies were adopted from other parties and integrated into New Labour's political agenda, and a *pragmatic* approach was taken towards previous policies, which lead to a certain willingness to maintain and even strengthen Conservative policies. New Labour believed Conservative policies to be working, and therefore adopted them as part of their programme of reform.

The second argument as to why New Labour may seem ideologically weak, could be based on a deliberate attempt to stabilize both the new Government and the country. Given the absolute failure of the Conservatives in the election, five years under John Major as the weak heir to Thatcher and the 1992 economic crisis, New Labour took power under a great burden of high expectations. In this situation, as Blair describes, the need to secure the foundations, 'stop the rot' and create the basis on which 'real progress' can be delivered. (Blair, 1999, p. 1) existed. Here then, rather than a lack of political will or ideology, we see the contention that the slow pace of change is due to a measured and deliberate strategy to create a strong base from which to move forward in the future.

Indeed, if you compare the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government with the 1997 election, you see that a similar situation existed, in that there were relatively few policy changes in education in the first two administrations, and that despite the intellectual activity and preparation prior to the election, there was 'a remarkable degree of caution in the actual *implementation* of radical or innovative social policies.' (Chitty, 2004, p. 47) In addition, Barber argues that New Labour agreed in principle with Conservative policy, but ultimately disagreed with the method of implementation.

Under the Conservatives, what he terms a 'high challenge, low support' policy was followed, where testing, inspection and accountability were demanded by the Government, but that financial support to increase pay, buildings and equipment was lacking. Barber then argues that New Labour's approach is to maintain the high challenge within the education system, but back this with increased funding, thereby producing a 'high challenge, high support' policy (Barber, 2001, p. 19)

The question then, is did New Labour have the same ideological beliefs as the Conservatives, but simply disagreed with the manner of their implementation, or did they find it difficult to fundamentally shift the policy making and political machine quickly or effectively following their unexpected landslide victory? Perhaps a feature of any new government following political upheaval or major victory is that there is a period of bedding down. Given the earlier point that New Labour also had no experience of government and was as such a new project, possibly the bedding down period was inevitable in 1997.

The third argument as to why there appears to be little ideological basis for the educational reforms within 14-19 education as proposed by New Labour can be seen to stem from a lack of debate about what could be termed the broader aims of education. Pring discusses the fact that the debate around 14-19 education simply does not broach arguments about the aims of education.

...in all the documents referred to and in all the practical measures put in place, there is no clear statement of *educational* aim or purpose, hardly any reference (except in the introduction of citizenship) to the kinds of qualities and values which make young people into better human beings, no vision of the kind of society which a more skilled workforce should serve, no idea of the kind of learning which one should expect of an educated person in the present economic, social and environmental context.

Pring, 2005, p. 82

This argument is mirrored by Fielding, when he talks about the need, within the New Labour project, of the 'practical necessity of philosophy' and the fact that there is little understanding about whether the primary concern within educational reform is economic with social concerns tacked on or whether economic considerations are there to serve human development. (Fielding, 2001, p. 10) The argument made by Fielding is that the ideological basis on which these two views of education exist are profoundly different, but New Labour "show no evidence of having...acknowledged or properly understood [these differences]" (ibid). Therefore, a possible reason for what seems to be a lack of ideological strength in terms of 14-19 education reform on the part of New Labour could be that there was a lack of debate around the issues within education.

The question of the ideological beliefs of New Labour will be returned to in the conclusion, where the key questions in this study will be addressed.

In summing up this chapter then, the ideas discussed here focused first on the purpose of education. What should the educational experience of young people be based on? Is the purpose of education to impart knowledge, develop the individual, create good citizens or provide pupils with the skills to take up jobs? Should governments approach this question from the point of the individual or of society as a whole? The question that faces governments, the providers of this education, is the emphasis which is placed on all of these different aspects, and as we saw in this section of the literature review, pinning down philosophers on which of these aspects is the most important is problematic.

Because of this difficulty governments have, in modern times, taken up the challenge of setting educational goals. It was argued that this was for two reasons. The first stems from the movement of the education system into the political sphere, policies therefore becoming subject to the political process, and the pressures and forces which exist within that area of public life. The second derives from the fact that the overriding belief within Governments over the past 30 years has been that increased economic prosperity, and dealing with the global threat of competition requires that education (at least 14-19 education) must be responsive to the needs of the economy. Therefore, educational aims are subsumed into economic aims, and become just another aspect of economic policy.

The second section of this chapter explored the idea of policy, and the pressures which exist around the policy making process. The two specific forces at work on education policy, in the context of this study, were defined as economic and political. Within these two ideas, the discussion centred around how policy could be distorted, and potentially, have a negative effect on policy outcomes.

The third section looked at the history of education policy, considering the politicisation of education policy, the academic/vocational divide and how these themes influenced the development of educational policy from Callaghan to Major, all of this providing a contextual background for this study.

The fourth section considered 14-19 education and the policy surrounding this phase, with the economic imperative for the reform of 14-19 education discussed, as well as the high-profile position 14-19 education occupies within the policy making process.

Finally, New Labour policy was considered, with some emphasis being placed on the ideological basis on which New Labour developed their reforms of the 14-19 system. The possibility was put forward that in fact rather than lacking an ideology, New Labour did indeed have an ideology for 14-19 education, namely economic relevance, and this overriding ideology produced policies where other possible aims of education, such as personal development were secondary to economic ideals. It was also shown that under New Labour, the way in which the problems were perceived, and the ideas developed to face these problems were not new.

This section went further in expressing the idea that the solutions which were adopted by Labour could not even be attributed to the previous Conservative Government, but instead stretched back to the time of Callaghan, and the call for teachers and schools to rise to the economic challenge which faced the country. The solutions adopted by New Labour then, actually had their origins in the policies of the previous Labour Government, 20 years before.

Specifically, what has emerged from this exploration into the development of education policy, was that from the time of Callaghan through to 2005, economic considerations were at the forefront of political considerations, and the belief that education could influence in a positive way the economic prosperity of the country was a belief which remained for these 30 years, and indeed became persistently stronger, to such an extent that Tony Blair could claim on the No 10 website 'Education is the best economic policy we have.' (Blair, 2005)

In conclusion to this chapter, then, is a final thought on the nature the policy process as it exists today. Given the strength of the forces of politics and economics on the policy making process, as well as the nature and heritage of New Labour, with their pragmatic and expedient approach to government, it is possible to argue that these forces have actually become accepted as educational aims. What is meant by this, is that New Labour have become so influenced by the political and economic forces which they encounter, as to come to believe that these forces represent the solution, the aim behind the policy process. The question is should the aims of education correspond and be developed from the forces at play on policy making?

If this approach is followed, which is being argued here, the possibility exists that economic difficulties and crises are viewed through the prism of economics. In terms of education, the strength of the economic driver behind policy making means that economic aims become paramount, and all solutions lead towards an economic goal. Because of this, other considerations, such as personal development become secondary, or are not even addressed, policy becomes skewed by the political and the economic, and the driver of economics becomes mistaken for an educational aim.

The focus of the research carried out within this study is to try and identify the drivers which were in play and exerting influence on the policies which New Labour developed for 14-19 education between 1997 and 2005. The following chapter which details the findings of the document analysis will attempt to add to the arguments explored and developed here within this literature review. First though, the methodology and theoretical framework upon which the research for this study was based will be discussed in full in the next section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the methodology chosen to complete this study. In the introduction to this chapter, an overview of the methodology will be presented. In the subsequent sections of this chapter the theoretical frameworks which were employed, the process for document selection, the research methods which were undertaken and the research design which governed the study will be explained in detail.

The starting point for determining the best method of research for this study was the research question, and subsequently the key questions. While the research question evolved in terms of wording as the research progressed, the single most important factor which remained constant throughout was the desire to understand the true drivers behind New Labour's reforms for 14-19 education between 1997 and 2005. This meant attempting to determine the intentions behind the reforms as a way of understanding the desired outcomes, thereby giving an insight into the drivers which had prompted the reforms in the first place. By considering policies as 'statements of prescriptive intent' (Kogan, p55, 1975) the idea of approaching the question of what drivers lay behind the Labour government's reforms through an examination of policy allows for an examination of its intentions. Therefore, the most appropriate source of data for this study was determined to be Labour policy.

The next stage of the methodological process was to define the type of policy to be investigated, and use this definition to choose a data set from which to begin the analysis. Policy can be seen to have many forms, and indeed, as Ball says, “policy is both text and actions, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended.”(Ball, 1994, p.10)

Policy statements can take the form of speeches, interview answers (both written and spoken) as well as legislative documents. Therefore, simply defining the data source for this study as ‘New Labour policy’ is too broad a definition, and lacks the focus required to answer the research question effectively. In order to define more clearly the type of policy which would be suitable for this research, the next step was to examine the key questions, and use the broad answers which were generated by this examination as a guide to the methods required to answer them more fully. The first key question “What have been the main reforms for the 14-19 phase since 1997?” points firstly to a confirmation that in order to understand what the main reforms within this educational phase are, an investigation of policy is the correct course for the study, allowing as it does for a ‘list’ of reforms to be compiled. Secondly, in trying to answer this question in broad terms, it can be seen that by examining policy documents, the main reforms of the period can be studied in detail. While speeches and interviews could provide some information to answer this question, policy documents, being unchangeable and possibly less prone to outside influences can be seen to provide a more stable and less interpretive explanation of the reform agenda.

This idea will be explored in more detail in the next section of the chapter when the process of documentary analysis is discussed, as is the need to include other supplementary data beyond the five policy documents chosen. Following this process then, the source of data for this study was defined more clearly as policy documents published by the Labour government between 1997 and 2005, with additional data being used to lend weight to the findings.

The third key question “What are the specific drivers behind these reforms?” provided the next step in the process of determining the appropriate methodology for the study. Having established that policy documents were the best source of data, the appropriate way of investigating them would be determined by what information they were expected to provide. By trying to understand the aims of New Labour’s reforms for 14-19 education through policy documents, it is necessary to view these as expressions of intent (as Kogan says) with many layers. Their analysis would therefore have to encompass both what was explicitly said as well as trying to gain an insight into the intentions behind the reforms.

The most appropriate method to investigate these policies was document analysis, utilizing both content analysis and critical analysis methods as they provide a way of quantifying the meaning and messages contained within a document. (Bryman, 2001, p. 180) Both the advantages and disadvantages of these methods will be considered in the later section on documentary research.

Having determined the data source, namely policy documents published by the Labour Government between 1997 and 2005, and the method of analysis, document analysis, a return to the second and fourth key questions was required in order to determine which documents should be studied. This narrowing of the document choice was necessary for two main reasons. The first was because between 1997 and 2005 there have been 72 substantive policy statements, documents or programmes relating to 14-19 education produced by the Labour government (Wright and Oancea, 2005) and the sheer volume of documentation that corresponds to these policies would be too great to analyse within the confines of this study.

The second main reason for narrowing the documents to be analysed is that that many of these 72 policies, while relating to 14-19 education, may focus too narrowly on one aspect or another of the offer, limiting their ability to provide a broad overview of the aims and motivations behind the reforms of this phase.

The process of narrowing the documents into a manageable selection was carried out through purposive sampling, namely the deliberate seeking out of data with particular characteristics. (Morse, 2004, p.885). By employing purposive sampling a deliberate choice was made to both include and exclude various documents. This form of sampling is in direct contrast to probability sampling where selection takes place randomly, and every member (or in this case document) in the population to be sampled has an equal chance of being included in the study. (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007, p. 110).

By 'hand-picking' the documents for inclusion it was possible to ensure that a variety of documents was analysed and that these documents were pertinent to the research question. (Denscombe, 1998, p.15) Without careful choice of the documents through purposive sampling and the decision not to employ probability sampling, it would be possible to foresee a situation where, due to the sheer number of publications, key documents were not included for analysis. Therefore, through purposive sampling, five broad-based policy documents (see appendix 4) to analyse were selected from Department for Education and Employment and Department for Education and Skills publications covering the period under investigation. These documents deal with many aspects of the education system in England for 14-19 year olds, and can be seen to detail major reforms within the 14-19 phase.

The research methods for this study flow directly from the type of data to be analysed and the nature of the information which it was hoped the data could provide. With documents as the main source of data, two forms of document analysis were chosen, namely content analysis and critical analysis, with the intention that these, when used in combination, would illuminate both the explicit and implicit aims of the Labour government as they related to 14-19 education. As will be explained in detail later in the chapter, content analysis is 'the summarising and reporting of written data and their messages' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 475).

This summarising occurs by reducing the text into units of analysis, systematically scanning the text for occurrences of these units of analysis and then applying them to previously defined researcher created categories. A tally of the instances that each unit of analysis is found in the document is taken and this information is then used as a way of quantifying the document and what it is saying. In addition, content analysis can provide not only a summary of the concepts within a document but also,

...some other important features...for example, examination of the interconnectedness of units of analysis, the emergent nature of themes and the testing, development and generation of theory.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.476

This form of analysis is relevant to this study as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to quantify the document in terms framed by this study, as well as make comparisons between documents, allowing for the illumination of the aims of the 14-19 reforms, expressed in the five documents chosen for this study. However, content analysis can provide more than a mere counting of words because it also has the potential to draw out themes and requires the researcher to 'look outside the physicality of texts' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 23) thereby allowing the researcher to study documents with a finer appreciation of the nuances contained therein.

The second form of analysis used in this study was critical analysis. This type of analysis of a document is derived from historical methods of analysis and can be split into two forms. (Bell, 1999, p.112) The first is external criticism, which seeks to establish whether a document is both authentic and genuine. While this is an important step in the analysis of many documents, it was not necessary to go through the process of external criticism within this study due to the nature of the documents. Therefore, the analysis of the five government publications focused more strongly on the second branch of critical analysis, namely internal criticism. This branch of critical analysis focuses on questioning, among other things, the document's purpose, the intentions of the author, the type of document it is and what has been left out of the document. When carrying out this type of criticism the documents are not taken at face value, and if bias is encountered it is used to understand more fully the context of the document rather than meaning the document should be deemed unreliable.

Having examined the theoretical framework for document analysis, and considering this in light of the key questions the most valid way to carry out the document analysis was to combine both critical and content analysis. This approach served several purposes. The main one is that by using critical analysis it is hoped that some of the disadvantages that exist when using content analysis alone can be counteracted. Additionally, because of the focus of this study, to ignore the purpose of the documents and the bias that may exist within them would mean there would be little evidence with which to answer the main research question, namely to identify the drivers behind New Labour's 14-19 education reforms.

The analysis of the documents began with a general reading of the five documents. This meant that a general understanding of each of the documents could be obtained, and that an early assessment of their place within the reform agenda of New Labour could be established. From this first reading, the categories for the detailed analysis began to emerge, using a grounded theory approach. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) This approach has significant advantages as they relate to this study. The main one is through the use of open coding, whereby a text is read and the researcher allows the categories and meaning to emerge. The use of open coding provides a good fit between the research question being asked here and the research methods employed because open coding allows common threads that exist or don't exist within these documents to be highlighted, without the researcher imposing pre-ordained categories on the data, as would be found in a hypothetico-deductive approach. (Kelle, in Bryant and Charmaz, 2007, p. 191) Because the categories come from the data, a clearer and more reliable comparison between the five documents, produced over a period of eight years, could be attempted.

Following this general reading, and further close readings, four categories to be used in the close analysis of the documents were identified. (see appendix v)

The units of analysis to be applied were sentences, providing a superior way to interpret meaning from the text than through the use of key words. The content analysis took the form of a close reading of each of the documents, with any sentences which related to one or more of the four categories being recorded on a tally chart.

Alongside this simple search for instances where the words within a document match one or other of the categories, was an analysis based on identifying those sentences or lines of text where a description of a system or policy within a document does not match a category at text level but serves as a lever on a particular aspect on the education system, which in turn could be seen to create an outcome which can be matched with one of the categories. For the purposes of this study, these were termed direct and indirect references respectively. This idea will be looked at more fully in the research methods section of this chapter but this is one example of where the use of content and critical analysis were combined to provide a fuller and more in-depth view of each of the documents.

The final stage of the analysis took the form of an examination of the findings from each of the documents, and an attempt to highlight trends, themes and connections between them. These themes were important steps towards an attempt to answer the research question and identify the aims of the government's reform agenda.

While a brief overview of the methodology employed in this study has been provided here, the following sections within this chapter will explain in more detail the processes employed, and the theoretical basis upon which the research was undertaken.

3.2 Documentary Research

Documents can take many forms, from field notes and correspondence to archives and stories. Cohen et al, when describing the act of documentary analysis refer to it as a method of research where no written source is ruled out (Cohen et al, 2007, p.201)

While accepting that text is an important source of data, Prior (2003) goes further and suggests a broader and more inclusive definition of documents, one which goes beyond seeing documents as 'coterminous with text' but instead taking into account the fact that contemporary documents express their contents in many forms, including pictures, diagrams and even, in the case of electronic documents, sound. (Prior, 2003, p. 5)

Documentary research then, is the process by which these many and diverse materials are viewed and analysed as sources of data.

Documentary Research is an overarching term for the study of documents, and the gaining of meaning from these documents, whether that is derived from the content or the context of the document, or both. Given the wide range of data which can be considered 'a document' it is perhaps unsurprising that the analysis techniques which can be applied to the data are complex, varied and numerous. Within the document analysis tradition there are many ways in which the body of the document can be analysed.

Often these are divided between what are termed quantitative and qualitative approaches. Bryman describes the main qualitative approaches as being qualitative content analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics and discourse analysis. (Bryman, 2001, p.380) and considers pure content analysis as being a form of textual analysis which can be labelled as quantitative. This is made clear when he says,

Content analysis is firmly rooted in the quantitative research strategy in that the aim is to produce quantitative accounts of the raw material in terms of the categories specified by the rules.

Bryman, 2001, p. 178

However, it can be argued, and it is believed here, that content analysis is not merely a quantitative act, because for the most part it is searching for meaning. This search has to have a theoretical base, and the measurement that occurs in trying to quantify meaning can be understood to be the process of coding and classifying data (Scott, 1990, p. 9) Therefore, the application of coding procedures to text can be seen to have both a qualitative and quantitative element. In this study this combination of methods is crucial to try to understand the aims of the Labour Government in the reform of 14-19 education, and the application of pure content analysis *plus* the more subjective and qualitative critical analysis to achieve this understanding will be explained in detail later in this section.

While it may be possible to list various types of documentary research and describe their philosophy of approach, when looking at the methods by which documents can be analysed, 'there are very few pronouncements on methodology available' in stark contrast to the wealth of textbooks and manuals available to the qualitative researcher who wishes to collect data through the method of interview or questionnaire. (Prior, 2003, p. ix)

Within this environment of few definitive texts on documentary analysis though, there are some which provide a useful framework from which to construct a methodology for this study, allowing for an explanation of why documentary analysis is the most appropriate methodology available to answer the research question. Robson (1993) describes the fact that within a document there are two types of evidence, the first being *witting* and the second being *unwitting*. Witting evidence is that information which the author intended to provide to his or her readers in producing the document in the first place. Unwitting evidence is information which can be obtained through a close reading of the document but which was not necessarily intended or which is provided despite the intentions of the author. The fact that this distinction can be drawn about the types of evidence which a document can provide, and that documentary analysis is able to highlight these two sources of data within one document, are important to this study, because they allow for the opportunity to investigate the motives and intentions, hidden or obvious, behind 14-19 educational reform as it is described in policy documents, thereby addressing one of the key questions posed at the start of this study.

Documentary analysis also has the ability to allow a researcher to make a longitudinal study of the issue being researched, as well as provide the basis for historical research (Bailey, 1994, p. 294) Both of these attributes make it ideal for this study as the research is designed to provide a picture of the reform agenda within 14-19 education over a period of eight years. Documentary analysis means that themes and trends can be extracted from policy documents, and the intentions and motivations within these documents made clear. In terms of studying policy, documentary analysis is considered a particularly suitable method Ozga when she discusses her belief about the usefulness of the method.

Using policy texts as a research resource is one of the most accessible forms of research on education policy, and is to be commended not just for its accessibility, but because close reading of policy texts helps to generate critical, informed and independent responses to policy. Reading and interpreting texts can be an act of engagement with policy, for the researcher and those with whom she or he works.

Ozga, 2000, p. 107

While the attributes of documentary research which are detailed above are key to the choice of this particular methodology for this study, and the arguments made highlight the complementary nature of this methodology with the research question, the most significant reason for this choice of methodology lies in the nuances of analysis within the documentary analysis tradition, and the ability of the researcher to utilize the underlying tenants of documentary research and adapt them to the research question at hand.

3.2.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis has been defined variously as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14), “the process of summarizing and reporting written data” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007 p. 475) or “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18) This wide range of attributes which have been ascribed to content analysis provides an understanding of the variations possible within this research method. Indeed, Franzosi describes content analysis not as a single technique but rather as “a collection of different approaches to the analysis of texts, or, more generally, of messages of any kind.” (Franzosi, 2004, p. 186).

With reference to this study, the fact that content analysis can be applied to documents in many ways and for various reasons is one of the method’s main attractions.

Krippendorff describes content analysis as being able to provide the researcher with new insights and increase the researchers understanding of particular phenomena (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). He explains that content analysis has four particular features which distinguish it from other research methods. These are:

1. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique
2. Content analysis can handle unstructured matter as data

3. Content analysis is context sensitive and therefore allows the researcher to process data texts that are significant, meaningful, informative, and even representational to others
4. Content analysis can cope with large volumes of data.

Krippendorff, 2004, p. 41-42

While there are drawbacks to content analysis, in the same way that there are with other research techniques, including problems with reliability which will be elaborated on later, these four features which Krippendorff identifies as being particular to content analysis show why this technique is central to this study. The aims behind the reform of 14-19 education can be examined in an unobtrusive way, free from extraneous influences of personal beliefs and views.

The data, in the form of documents, can be compared despite the fact that they are presented in different formats, and the size of the documents does not make their analysis more difficult or problematic within the context of this method. Where this technique is at its most relevant to this study though is in regard to Krippendorff's third feature of content analysis, where this method allows the researcher to consider the context within which the data is produced, and process data which is significant and meaningful to the study as it exists. This is crucial to answering the research questions presented here, particularly because a significant part of the data collection process involved determining exactly which documents were relevant to the study. Content analysis allows for this type of selection and the comparison of data in a meaningful and significant way.

The reasons listed above, as well as the natural fit between the research question, the choice to answer it through the analysis of documents and the attributes of content analysis, all serve to explain why the research method of content analysis described here was chosen for this study.

The research method of content analysis is not without its difficulties, and, as with any research method, it is important to take these into account, both within the research design and during the analysis stage. How these difficulties relate in particular to this study is examined within the research method and design section of this chapter, but here a general overview of the problems which may be encountered when using content analysis is presented.

3.2.2 Sampling Bias

With “the universe of available texts”(Krippendorff, p.2004, p.111) in the hands of the researcher it is elementary that some form of sampling of texts or documents needs to take place in order that the data collection within a project is manageable.

At this point in the research, to avoid bias in the choice of documents, it is necessary to follow a sampling technique which best fits the specific research question being studied (Krippendorff,2004, p.113) Often, it may be advisable to employ a multi-stage sampling design, involving as many as three stages; selecting sources of communication such as which form the documents may take, for example newspapers or books, sampling documents from ‘within’ this type of communication, and sampling within the chosen documents. (Holsti, 1969, p.131-132) Holsti cautions that to avoid bias within the sampling procedure, “the analyst must ensure that his sample of documents, whatever its size, is free of idiosyncrasies which may bias his findings.” including but not limited to seasonal variations and political schedules. (Holsti, 1969, p. 133) Overall, in order to obtain a sample of documents which is most efficient and useful to the researcher, the sampling technique must be linked to the research question.

..it is impossible to identify a single sampling procedure for all content analysis research. Sampling decisions will vary according to the type of documents and the analyst’s purpose.

Holsti, 1969, p 132

3.2.3 Coding Issues

Intercoder reliability relates to the reliability of measurement within the coding process and encourages the researcher to question the coding scheme which they have devised. In order to ensure the greatest reliability, the coding scheme by which all the documents are analysed should avoid categories which are too abstract or theoretical, and try to ensure that if two people were coding the same document with the same categories, would they record the same results. (Franzosi, 2004, p.187) Of additional importance is coding categories “should reflect the purposes of the research, be exhaustive, be mutually exclusive, independent, and be derived from a single classification principle.” (Holsti, 1969, p. 95)

3.2.4 Latent and Manifest Content

While content analysis is particularly suited to identifying themes between documents, care must be taken to ensure that latent content (that which is embedded in the text) is not identified within the document unless it is gained through systematic analysis of the text. Manifest content, which relates to the surface meaning of the text, can be identified through simple counting techniques within the content analysis tradition, but latent content is more difficult to quantify in this way. For this reason, when latent content is assumed or inferred without reference to theory or procedure, the possibility of invalid inference exists. (Bryman, 2001, 191)

Having explored content analysis as an overarching research technique, and considered its advantages and disadvantages, the following section will look at one area of content analysis, namely critical analysis, and consider its usefulness as a method within this study.

3.2.5 Critical Analysis

Within content analysis, which as explained earlier can best be described as a set of techniques for the analysis of text (however broadly text may be defined), one approach is to *critically* analyse texts, questioning their meaning, intentions and origins as a way into understanding more about the information and messages they contain.

As Bell (1999, p. 112) describes, the critical analysis of a document can be divided into two forms, *external* and *internal* criticism. External criticism seeks to establish whether a document is both authentic and genuine. To do this, questions need to be asked about the author of the document as well as where and when it was written and whether the facts within the document hold true. While this is an important step in the analysis of many documents, particularly historical documents of unknown provenance, within the parameters of this study, this type of analysis was not necessary to a great extent, the documents being Government publications, within the public realm, and so in that respect genuine. While it may be necessary to look at the content of the documents and question the facts or assertions within them, it is not possible to argue against the fact that they are authentic.

The analysis within this study therefore, has focused more strongly on the second branch of critical analysis, namely internal criticism, where the document's content is looked at very carefully.

The other aspect of critical analysis, internal criticism, focuses on questioning, among other things, the document's purpose, the intentions of the author, the type of document it is and what has been left out of the document. When carrying out this type of criticism the documents are not taken at face value. For instance, if bias is encountered it is used to understand more fully the context of the document rather than meaning the document should be deemed unreliable. Questions which may be asked during this stage of the analysis may be:

- What kind of document is it?
- What does it actually say?
- Who produced it?
- What was its purpose?
- When, and in what circumstances was it produced?
- Is it typical or exceptional of its type?
- Is it complete?

Bell, 1999, p. 113,114

By asking these types of questions, the researcher aims to understand more fully the context within which the document was written as well as understanding the intentions and possible hidden meanings embedded in the words and sentences which it contains. This type of analysis is particularly relevant for this study because the documents under scrutiny are political ones, and therefore may have many issues regarding public opinion and political intentions surrounding them. Through utilizing critical analysis techniques, it is possible to construct a reliable methodological framework within which the meanings and intentions within the chosen documents can be explored. Indeed, if documents are to be considered in the way May describes below, it is important, if not essential not to take these texts at face value.

‘[Documents] are approached in terms of the cultural context in which they were written and may be viewed as ‘attempts at persuasion’

May, 1993, p.186

3.2.6 Content and Critical Analysis Combined

This study, as detailed in the research question, requires a methodological technique which is able to reliably capture the purpose of reform initiatives within the 14-19 education sector.

As described above, documents were deemed the most reliable, unchanging and useful objects of this research, and so the methodology of document analysis was the logical choice for the data collection. Content analysis provides a theoretical framework which is compatible with the research question being looked at here, allowing as it does for the researcher to understand in depth the content within the documents, both in latent and manifest form. Indeed, as Denscombe says,

Content analysis has the potential to disclose many 'hidden' aspects of what is being communicated through the written text. The idea is that, quite independent of what the writer consciously intended, the text carries some clues about the deeper rooted and possibly unintentional message that is actually being communicated.

(Denscombe, 1998, p.168)

In this respect, and those mentioned earlier, content analysis is a good methodological fit for this study.

While content analysis is a good fit for this study, this does not mean that other forms of analysis should not be used, and critical analysis, with its focus on understanding meaning, both by what is contained within the text and what is left out, is particularly useful in the search for meaning within documents. To understand the 14-19 reform program of the Labour Government by looking at policy documents, this aspect of documentary analysis can be seen as central to producing relevant and useful data to answer the research question.

Recognizing the value of both content analysis, and the particular tool within that tradition, namely critical analysis, this study combined these two complementary methodologies (indeed, it is possible to see critical analysis as a method under the overarching methodology of content analysis) in order to provide a strong framework with which to answer the research question, and understand to the greatest extent possible the motivations and reasons behind the 14-19 reform agenda between 1997 and 2005.

The format which this combination of methods took will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter when analysis and data collection methods as they pertain to this study will be explained, but a brief overview of how these methods proved complementary is useful here.

While the main plank on which the data collection, within the content analysis tradition rests, is the unit of analysis (determined by the researcher; can be a word, phrase or sentence), critical analysis looks at the document, paragraph or phrase as a part of the whole, questioning both what is explicitly said, as well as using other factors such as the documents authorship or time of publication, and what is implied or not said within the text, in order to provide greater insight into the meaning of the words contained therein. To combine these two approaches within this study, the document was first assessed as a whole, considering its place within government publications, and then in detail, looking for key words or phrases, and critically, where meaning was deliberately ambiguous, considering the bias that may exist within the document, and not disregarding that finding because of the bias encountered, but recognizing it and using that as another piece of information which can be analysed.

This approach requires close reading of the document, and strict adherence to the coding categories (which will be explained later) by the researcher, but provides a more in depth and rich set of data than would be possible if just a single method were used.

The specific analysis methods and the process which was used in this study will be explained in section 3.4 and a further section here will deal with document choice, both as a technique within document analysis and as it relates specifically to this study. Next however, the use of a Grounded theory approach within document analysis and how this methodology was used in this study to define the coding categories will be explored.

3.2.7 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, first developed and explained by Glaser and Strauss in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, published in 1967, and subsequently expanded on by numerous authors, describes a process where theory is derived from data

...systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another.

Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 12

As Corbin and Holt later explain, when Glaser and Straus published their ideas on grounded theory in their 1967 book, there was little mention of methodology, and in fact, the book did not define grounded theory as a method. Instead, the ‘method’ of grounded theory, as we understand it today, ‘evolved over time as a result of that text.’ (Corbin and Holt, 2005, p. 50) Indeed, grounded theory cannot even be described as a single, straightforward or even fixed research method, but is instead ‘a method in flux, and a method which has different meanings to different people.’ (Corbin and Holt, 2005, p. 50)

However, through the development that has occurred since its conceptualization, grounded theory does include certain ‘tenets’ which are cornerstones of the research method and flow from the original writings. These include category saturation, memo writing, theoretical sampling and concept identification. Concept identification is also known as ‘open coding’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 195) and begins with the process of initial coding. It is this open coding, and its stages, particularly the process of initial coding, which is most relevant to this study and which will be looked at in detail now.

Concept identification, or coding, is the process undertaken by the researcher to split the data into discrete parts,

breaking the data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. At the same time, one is qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions

(Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 195)

The association of open coding with grounded theory comes from the fact that a researcher should approach this aspect of the research method with an open mind, being willing to entertain “all possible theoretical directions indicated by your reading of the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). A researcher employing grounded theory needs to approach their initial coding through a process of ‘comparing, conceptualizing and categorising’ the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 61).

Following this, the coding may be refined using focused coding, through further reading and examining the coding already undertaken. Later, through still further reading and understanding of the data, this process of coding becomes one where concepts are revealed which later may be turned into categories. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 61) In this way, the categories which are created following the initial coding process, can be said to clearly come from the data, and have therefore been arrived at through the processes of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss are keen to point out that it is important that this type of research should be carried out systematically, and with constant attention by the researcher to the process that is being employed. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

The use of grounded theory to develop the categories for analysis within this particular study has significant advantages. Alternative approaches, whereby researcher defined categories are developed, and subsequently forced onto the data, are open to distortions, and it is possible in this situation for the researcher to skew the results through their choice of categories. The onus, therefore, is on the researcher to avoid and be aware of bias in their choice of categories. David Silverman explains that this potential problem is significant because the choice of categories is based on a given set of beliefs 'create[ing] a powerful conceptual grid' within which the researcher can easily be trapped. (Silverman, 2001, pp.123-124)

Open coding, (allowing the categories to emerge from a reading of the data), as opposed to determining the categories prior to analysis, better fits with the aims of this study, as here the researcher is attempting to determine the key drivers for education reform over a period of eight years and across five documents. Open coding, achieved by applying grounded theory to the process, therefore, allows the common threads that exist or don't exist within these documents to emerge from the data, in a way that can be seen to mitigate at least some of the issues with bias described above.

3.2.8 Issues with Document Analysis

When undertaking document analysis through the use of content analysis, recognition of the disadvantages pertaining to that methodology are an important consideration for any researcher, as is the case with any research method. In this final section relating to the methodology of document analysis, these disadvantages as they relate specifically to this study will be discussed.

Coding

Holsti explains that the categories for coding

Should reflect the purposes of the research, be exhaustive, be mutually exclusive, independent, and be derived from a single classification principle

Holsti, 1969, p. 95

If these criteria are not carefully followed, the researcher is in danger of collecting data which has little meaning, as the results could easily be interpreted in a different way by a different researcher. This gets to the main issue which a researcher must consider during the coding process, which is that it is very difficult to devise coding manuals which do not contain some aspect of interpretation on the part of the researcher (Bryman, 2008, p. 291)

This issue is of specific relevance to this study, as the research question explicitly questions the drivers behind 14-19 reform, and the chosen method of analysis to answer this research question is to look at documents. A grounded theory approach to the coding process can be seen to alleviate some of the issues, approaching the coding process from the documents themselves, rather than by using researcher created categories which are then forced onto the data. A much fuller explanation of the processes used in this study as they relate to coding can be found in section 3.4, but it is important here to note the above issues with the coding process.

Sampling Issues

An abundance of data available for this study (over 70 policy documents produced between 1997 and 2005) mean that some form of sampling was necessary. As Bryman points out, “a content analysis is only as good as the documents on which a practitioner works.” (Bryman, 2001, p. 191)

Therefore, close attention was paid in this study to the choice of documents to analyse and the system by which this sampling was undertaken. This process is described fully in section 3.3.

Assessing a Document's Meaning

The documents in this study are all government publications, and as such, have a specific purpose within the overall objectives of the department responsible for their publication, and within the government as a whole. These purposes do not necessarily correspond with the research question which is being asked here, and therefore it is possible to see a disconnect between the question this study is trying to answer and the data which is being studied. This is a difficulty which document, and particularly content, analysis as a methodology encompasses as a whole; researchers finding it difficult at times to ascribe a certain meaning or insight into a text which has been published for an entirely different purpose. As Robson explains “The documents have been written for some purpose other than for the research, and it is difficult or impossible to allow for the biases or distortions that this introduces.” (Robson, 1993, p. 280). However, this can be seen as a very narrow view of content analysis, where texts are seen as having a single meaning, and are *reader independent* (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 22)

Krippendorff is clear on the point that texts have no objectives that are independent from the reader, and so “a text does not exist without a reader, a message does not exist without an interpreter, and data does not exist without an observer.” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.22) Additionally, texts do not have single meanings, and Krippendorff considers analysts who believe they do as ‘naive’, seeing “messages as containing but one content, all other meanings being deviant, wrong or subjective, and hence excluded.” (ibid)

Taking this into account and applying it to this study, it is important then for the researcher to be aware of the purpose behind the publication of the document.

While it is essential that results are not burdened with meaning which may not exist, it is also worth recognising, themes and latent content which emerge from the data through careful application of sound methodology, as having significance within the broader understanding of a document.

The following section will look at the process behind the selection of five documents for analysis from a sample size of over 70.

3.3 Document Choice

Having followed the steps explained above in order to determine the best process by which the research question could be addressed, document analysis was established as the most appropriate methodology, and government publications were determined to be the best data source.

Wright and Oancea (2005) list 72 ‘influential’ policy documents and programmes for 14-19 education between May 1997 when Labour took power, and 2005, which is the last year being looked at in this study. They explain in the introduction to their chronology that the policies listed are national level policies. Because of the size of the remit (the chronology tracks policies for 14-19 education from 1976) they are clear that they can only include key proposals. With this many policy initiatives produced by the Labour Government in the time period being studied here, it was clear that the sample size needed to be reduced for the purposes of this research. The sampling technique which was employed to obtain this reduction in policies was purposive or relevance sampling. Its use in this study and reasons for this choice of sampling method will be explained in the next section.

3.3.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling, meaning the units within the sample are not chosen randomly, and therefore some units within the population have a higher probability of being chosen than others (Bryman, 2008, p. 168) Whereas the method of selecting the members of a population in probability sampling means that those units which will be analysed are chosen based on the theory of probability (Som, 1996, p.7), those included in a non-probability sample are there because of a choice made by the researcher. Examples of non-probability sampling are convenience sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling, as well as purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, sometimes known as relevance or judgement sampling, the researcher makes a choice about the sample for analysis in order that specific elements are included within the study. (Black and Champion, 1976, p.304)

Within the sphere of document and content analysis, purposive sampling “aims at selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions.” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 119). When considering the type of sampling available for this study, the number of policies available to analyse meant that random sampling may have created a group of documents which were not relevant and so which had little chance of helping to answer the research question.

Even if the population was limited by certain criteria, for instance policies which related to 14-19 education, a random sample within this population would still have had the potential to produce a result where pertinent policies were not studied. In discounting probability sampling, the issue of generalisability of the results needs to be considered. Because of the lack of statistically based sampling methods within non-probability sampling, the results gained through this method cannot be said to be representative in the statistical sense. (Black and Champion, 1976, p.305) and therefore, it is possible to question the generalisability of the results. While these points are valid, particularly within the sphere of quantitative research, it must be recognised that they may not carry such weight within a qualitative study. As Flick explains, “generalisability is not in every case the goal of a qualitative study.” (Flick, 2002, p. 69) This point can be seen to apply to this study, where an investigation of the long-term themes and drivers in education policy for 14-19 year olds is the objective, making use of purposive sampling is one which can be defended.

In addition, purposive sampling can be applied to any unit of data, and allows the researcher to match closely the data set with the needs of the study expressed in the research question. (Bernard, 2000, p.176-177) The advantages and disadvantages of purposive sampling are explained more fully below.

3.3.2 Advantages of Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling then, as a non-probability method, has particular advantages which relate to this study.

The first is that it guarantees that elements which are relevant to the research design will be included in the study. (Black and Champion, 1976, p. 305) Given the number of policy initiatives introduced by the Labour government, it is easy to foresee a situation where significant policy innovation is not included.

Secondly, from a content analysis perspective, purposive sampling is a complementary sampling methodology, because the researcher approaches the sampling process by actually studying the texts to be analysed, possibly only superficially at first, and often in a multi-stage process. (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 119) This means that the researcher becomes intimately acquainted with the sample, hopefully mitigating the possibility of a significant document or piece of text being omitted from the sample. Taking this point further and linking it to the grounded theory approach to coding which is pursued in this study, the fact that the researcher becomes intimately acquainted with the sample can be said to influence in a positive way the emergence of the coding categories.

A third significant advantage of the purposive sampling technique is that the weakness created by the charge of 'bias' in terms of population choice which exists around non-probability sampling in a quantitative study becomes a strength in a qualitative setting because it allows for the researcher to choose 'information rich' data sources. (Patton, 2002, p. 230) This, explains Patton, means that the researcher can choose cases which deal with the issues of central importance to the study at hand, 'yielding insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalisations' (ibid, p. 230) Indeed, in this sense, the sample may be considered representative, as it can clearly be seen to be linked to the research question. (Rao, 2000, p.7) This advantage benefits this study by allowing the researcher the ability to match the numerous documents with the research question in such a way as to produce the most meaningful answer to the research question.

3.3.3 Disadvantages of Purposive Sampling

The most striking disadvantage often quoted about purposive sampling is the inability of the researcher to generalise the results as the sample lacks a statistical basis. (Som, 1996, p. 7; Black and Champion, 1976, p. 305) As discussed above, while this is an important consideration, in this study, because of the nature of the research question, it is more advantageous to employ purposive sampling than not, and in fact this disadvantage becomes a strength as it allows for the analysis of information rich sources which are well matched to the research question.

The next section will consider the documents which were available for analysis, and explain in detail the process of choosing which documents would be studied in depth.

3.3.4 Understanding the range of policies

Stephen Ball comments on the number of education policies produced by Labour when he says, “Whatever else one would want to say about Labour’s education policies there is certainly no shortage of them!” (Ball, 1999, p. 195) The process of sampling the documents was tackled in stages, each one reducing the list of documents available for analysis.

To get an understanding of Labour policy, the first step began with the article published by Oancea and Wright, which lists all policies 14-19 education and training in England from 1976 until November 2005. This is a comprehensive chronology, and the authors explain that it details the substantive and ‘influential’ policy documents and programmes issued during the time period under study. By influential, Wright and Oancea mean that the policies and documents which were included in their chronology “result in significant policy developments or are referred to in or have clear influence on later policy documents.” (Wright and Oancea, 2005, p.1) In compiling the chronology the authors looked at Green and White papers, reports and reviews, legislation and policy documents from non-departmental public bodies.

Using this chronology, a preliminary list of 72 policies, published between 1997 and 2005 and relating to 14-19 education was compiled. This list can be seen in appendix i.

The policies in the first list detail such programmes as the ‘Investing in Young People’ initiative, later re-named ConneXions, the Dearing Report, the establishment of QCA, introduction of Curriculum 2000, vocational and Hybrid GCSE’s and the proposal of the introduction of a Diploma framework across the 14-19 age range.

This first list provided clear narrative of all of the policies enunciated by the Labour government relating to 14-19 education within the time period under investigation in this study, and as explained earlier, Wright and Oancea only listed major national policies.

While a certain amount of sampling informed the creation of this list (namely Labour government policies were selected based on their date of publication (1997-2005) and whether they related to 14-19 education) purposive sampling as described in the previous section was not employed to its full extent at this stage. However, because the list contained major policy initiatives within the time period being studied and relating to the 14-19 phase, it provided a good basis from which to begin the process of purposive sampling.

3.3.5 Document Sampling Stage 1

The first stage in the process of purposive sampling involved consideration of the policies and initiatives detailed on the list shown in appendix 1.

The aim of the scrutiny was to reduce the number of documents in the list by discounting any which were automatically irrelevant. This sampling meant that initiatives which were listed by Wright and Oancea, such as 'New Start' (1997) and the 2000 campaign 'Don't quit [school] now!' were immediately eliminated either because they had little to do with an enunciation of policy, or because it could be seen that they did not address the research question about the aims of the Labour government in relation to 14-19 education reform.

Following this initial study of the list of 72 policies and the elimination of the most obvious ones which were not relevant, an examination of the remaining policies meant a consideration of the nature of policy, and how this fitted with the research question. Having argued earlier that policy can take many forms, this consideration had to be brought to bear on the remaining policies. Were they policies which could be considered to be major reforms, as required by the key questions? Looking carefully at the remaining policies exposed the fact that policies which were still on the list for analysis consisted mainly of Green and White papers.

The idea that these contain major policy is widely understood. Indeed the House of Commons website defines these two types of government publications in the following way

White Papers are issued by the Government as statements of policy, and often set out proposals for legislative changes, which may be debated before a Bill is introduced. Some White Papers may invite comments. Green papers set out for discussion, proposals which are still at a formative stage.

Houses of Parliament website

Balancing the list as it was, following the first stage of sampling, against the focus of the research question meant that the next stage of sampling led to a significant reduction in the number of documents to be analysed.

3.3.6 Document Sampling Stage 2

The choice was made after the first stage of sampling to include only White and Green papers in the list of documents to be analysed. The purpose of this was to align more clearly the needs of the research question with the policies available.

These parliamentary publications, and particularly White papers, are strong policy statements issued by any government, and the particular ones which relate to 14-19 education between the dates being studied here can be said to embody the reform agenda of the Labour government. Therefore, the list of 72 policies, having been through a first stage of sampling, was further reduced to a list of all of the White and Green papers issued between 1997 and 2005. This took the number of possible policies to be analysed down to 15. This list is reproduced in appendix ii.

3.3.7 Document Sampling Stage 3

The list of 15 White and Green papers as shown in appendix ii, can be considered to be the major cornerstones of Labour's policies as they relate to 14-19 education reform in document form.

This list though, still contained too many policies to allow for an in-depth analysis within the confines of this study. Therefore, all of the documents had to be looked at in terms of how they matched the need of the study as expressed in the research question. When considered from this perspective, the White paper from 2003, *The Future of Higher Education* could be seen to provide little understanding on the overall aims of the Labour government, focusing as it does on just one aspect of the 14-19 offer. Likewise, the 1998 Green paper *Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change*, can be seen in the same light. Following this process, a list of 7 White and Green papers was settled on. This list can be seen in appendix iii.

3.3.8 Document Sampling Final Stage

The final stage in the sampling process was to reduce the 7 documents one further time. Although within purposive sampling there is no lower limit required for analysis purposes, nevertheless there needed to be a reasonable number of documents to analyse to allow for breadth within this study. Therefore, the selection was reduced by a further two, with the two White papers *Excellence in Schools (1997)* and *Schools Achieving Success* removed from the list. The final five documents as listed in appendix iv can be seen to span the period of the study well, and can claim to be exemplars of the major reforms during the time period under examination. It can also be said that the final five documents are representative of 14-19 policies put forward by the Labour Government.

With the final list of policy documents for analysis in place, as well as a sound methodology having been decided upon whereby these documents would be analysed, the following section details the specific analysis steps taken, including data collection methods and analysis of the findings.

3.4 Research Methods

In this section the analysis and data collection methods will be described, beginning here with the process by which the categories were chosen and defined.

3.4.1 Category Choice

Following the selection of the five documents for analysis, the processes of category definition could be embarked upon. As explained earlier the theoretical basis upon which this process was based was through the use of grounded theory. This means that the categories are not pre-imposed on the data by the researcher, but instead are allowed to emerge from the data through careful reading of the text.

The first step in this process was to read the documents in a general, if almost superficial way. The researcher should, as with all stages of this process of category choice, approach this with an open mind, and avoid the temptation to burden the data with premature expectations as to the themes and topics which are contained therein.

This first reading, described as pre-coding by Saldaña (2009, p. 16), within this study took the form of a general reading accompanied by basic note taking identifying areas within the data which related to the research question, namely parts of the documents which addressed the idea of 'the aims of education' as viewed through the Labour Government's eyes.

The second stage of coding, leading to the emergence of coding categories, was to take these concepts, identified in the first stage of coding, and attempt to group them to try to understand if there were certain categories which were recognisable across all five documents. Appendix vi shows the main ideas which were expressed in the five documents and recorded by the researcher. These statements about the documents' content were then coded by identifying similarities. Therefore, points which emerged from the second document, *14-19 Extending Opportunities (DfES, 2002)* such as 'personal confidence' and 'whole person' were grouped together and 'meets the needs of the economy' and 'broaden skills to improve employability' were put together in a second grouping.

Following this grouping, four distinct categories emerged, although at this stage their titles were not clear. A further reading of the documents allowed the concepts to become more delineated, and the categories were set. They were

- Economy
- Participation
- Personal Development
- Society

These categories came from a close reading and re-reading of the texts, even before it was coded, and meant that the researcher could be confident that the categories would allow the research question to be addressed, and the data produced to be rich and meaningful. The final stage in the choice of coding categories was to define clearly what was meant by each one. With the question “what are the goals of the Labour Government in relation to 14-19 education” as the first stage of the process, the four possible answers identified through a grounded theory approach to coding were economy, participation, personal development and society. What was contained within these categories though was important to define, so that when the close coding of the documents occurred, it would be clear which category a sentence within the documents should be included in.

The categories were defined as follows.

- Economy –The section of society which relates to the production and exchange of goods and services. Include references to economy, the world of work, skills, productivity and employability
- Participation-The inclusion of 14-19 year olds in education and/or training. Include references to citizenship, crime, delinquency, attendance.

- Personal development-To enhance an individual's talents and potential and improve the quality of life through education. Include references to personal development, fulfilment, self-worth, self-esteem, lifelong learning, personal achievement. Only included in this category if the above relates to the individual as affected by education.
- Society-The maintenance of the culture of a country; recognition of the need for a populace to exist in a group bounded in their behaviour by a social order. Include references to society, community, social cohesion, social improvement. Above included in this category in relation to society, and how education impacts the group-not individuals.

What was produced in terms of category definition as detailed above, constituted a coding manual. (Bryman, 2008, p.25) This essentially acts as a set of instructions for the researcher to use when coding the data, allowing for a clear understanding of the categories, with the intention of taking away any uncertainty about whether a certain sentence or idea as expressed within the document should be coded, and if so, which category should it be placed into.

Therefore, with the coding categories defined through a grounded theory process, several general readings of the documents having been undertaken, and a coding manual developed, the next stage in the study was to embark on the coding. This data collection is described in the next section

3.4.2 Data Collection Methods

The process of data collection proceeded in a systematic fashion through the five documents. Appendix vii shows the data recording sheet which was used for each document. First the title, publisher and date of publication were recorded.

Following this, a brief summary of the main points made in the document were recorded. This process was aided by the document description listed in Wright and Oancea (2005) but the comments made on this recording sheet also came from the pre-coding reading and researcher made notes as described in the previous section. Next, a close reading of the document was undertaken. As described earlier, the coding units were defined as sentences. This meant that ideas or concepts could be fully captured, and instances of text which needed to be coded could be placed into the correct category, allowing for a full understanding of the point being made. The content analysis undertaken entailed a systematic reading of the text, with close attention being paid at all times to the coding question 'what are the goals of the Labour Government in regard to 14-19 education'. Whenever this question was addressed, the sentence or phrase which contained this 'response' was compared against the coding manual, and highlighted appropriately. The number of instances that each category was mentioned was recorded on every page, and when this close reading of the text was complete, the number of times a category was mentioned within the whole document was recorded on the data recording sheet.

As this process of close reading and textual analysis proceeded, it became clear that there were obvious and clear coding units which related to a specific category explicitly, but also that there were sentences or ideas expressed in the texts which could be considered as indirect references to a coding category. These indirect references took the form of ideas expressed which could be seen as a lever on the coding category. Therefore, the coding took the form of recording both the direct and indirect references to coding category.

The number of times a category was encountered in the text was recorded in three ways on the recording sheet. The first number showed the total number of times a category was highlighted in the text, and the second two showed the breakdown of this number between the number of times there was a 'direct' or 'indirect' reference to the coding category.

This process was followed consistently across all five documents and the results recorded for each one on the recording sheet.

3.4.3 Analysis of Findings

When coding of all five documents was completed, and the coding results recorded, the findings had to be analysed. This started with the standardization of the results.

Once the analysis was completed and the raw data collected, it became clear that to compare the results of the content analysis across the range of documents would not provide an accurate assessment because of the wide variation in word length between the texts. Therefore, a measure of standardisation was employed to place all of the documents on the same base. This was achieved using the following formula where t = base length for that particular document, x = mean word length of all documents, n = number of words for a particular document:

$$t = x \div n$$

Once t was determined for each, the total number of references to a category which had been recorded was multiplied by t . This provided an even base from which to compare all of the documents as the results of being multiplied by t were to provide a total for each of the categories which could be legitimately compared with the other documents, and therefore reliable conclusions could be made about the document content. To add to these finding and add greater weight to the conclusions drawn, additional sources of data were used selectively. These included some policy papers, selective speeches and evidence gained from House of Commons Select Committee minutes. These additional sources of data are useful in confirming results gained through documentary analysis of the five policy documents but have not been used as the main supply from which conclusions have been drawn.

3.4.4 Avoiding Bias

This study contains two obvious areas where bias may occur. The first is in the choice of documents to study - sampling bias. The second can be seen to be as a result of the research method - content analysis - the bias here coming from the interpretation of meaning in a text which the researcher has to employ. These two areas of bias will be explored more fully in the following section.

Sampling Bias

The sampling technique and the way in which it was employed in this study has been explained in the above section. From a purely statistical standpoint, bias could enter the sampling procedure if the researcher were to purposely exclude a text from analysis on the basis that it failed to fit with his or her generalizations. (Prior, 2003, p. 154)

However, it has been clearly argued here that this study has not employed random sampling techniques for specific reasons linked to the research question, and in trying to avoid bias in this area has nevertheless attempted to be clear and consistent about the sampling procedure (purposive sampling) which has been applied. This point is explained by Krippendorff when he says;

In [relevance sampling] an analyst proceeds by following a conceptual hierarchy, systematically lowering the number of units that need to be considered for analysis. The resulting units of text are not meant to be representative of a population of texts; rather, they are the population of relevant texts.

Krippendorff, 2004, p. 119

Therefore, while it is always possible, even probable, that some sampling bias exists within this study, the intention has been at every step of the sampling process to mitigate both its existence and effects.

Methodological Bias

In the case of content analysis, the method has at its core an attempt to limit coder bias by creating a set of technical measurement procedures (Scott, 1990, p. 130) which can be said to create the basis for objective research.

This procedure underpins this study, with the creation of a coding manual and clear category definitions. However, some part of every textual analysis relies on contextual understanding of the text. A word may have one meaning in one context, and an altogether different meaning in another; it is incumbent on the coder to recognise the meaning within the context being studied and code it appropriately. This element of interpretation is what Scott describes as a limitation on the method of content analysis, and has an impact on the reliability of the results. (Scott, 1990. p 131)

The open coding process employed in this study, where the categories were generated directly from those data, and the acknowledgement that in the pure application of the method of content analysis a measure of essential interpretation would be lost, leading to the supplementing of the method with critical analysis of the text, is significant in relation to bias.

The effect of applying content and critical analysis in the way described actually encourages interpretation of the text, and indeed was designed to do just that in order to more accurately answer the research question. This inclusion of interpretation into the methodological structure, does then, have the potential to affect reliability. However, by use of the coding manual, strict application of the category definition and constant reference to the research question, this interpretation can be seen to be bounded by methodological limits, encouraging the limitation of coder bias.

The validity of the results produced, namely that the results provide evidence which backs up the conclusions being made will be discussed in the findings section. The final section in this chapter will look at the technique of computer aided content analysis, and why this method was not used in this study.

3.4.5 Computer Aided Content Analysis

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is a general term for the many programmes available to aid the coding of text. These programmes allow for large amounts of text to be studied, although as Saldaña points out

...CAQDAS itself does not actually code the data for you; that task is still the responsibility of the researcher. The software efficiently stores, organises, manages and reconfigures your data to enable human analytic reflection.

Saldaña, 2009, p. 22

While CAQDAS have significant advantages when it comes to dealing with a large volume of text, there are some disadvantages to their use. The first is that content analysis requires a degree of understanding of meaning. As explained previously, at a very simplistic level this means that a word or phrase must be understood and analysed in context in order for the researcher to gain meaning. At a more complicated level, an understanding of how texts are used, how other people view them and the events or otherwise that a text encourages needs to be considered (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 23). It is in this sphere that computer analysis is limited because computers can only work within the confines provided by the programmer, and are unable to draw inferences from text, operating as they do in a context created for them, without understanding those contexts, (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 23). Scott reiterates this point when he says that “this contextual determination of meaning is one of the crucial obstacles to the computerisation of content analysis” (Scott, 1990, p. 131). Given that in this study the research is attempting to understand motivations and intentions as expressed through political documents, the argument against using computer aided analysis here becomes a strong one, the research question requiring the researcher to “fall back on human interpretive abilities” (Shapiro and Markoff, 1997, p.11)

Finally, based on the size of the study it is reasonable to expect coding to be ‘a solitary act’ (Saldaña, 2009, p. 26) and ultimately the choice will rely on the size of the project,

the inclination of the researcher and the funds and time available. (Basit, 2003, p. 143)

Therefore, this study has relied on manual coding.

The discussion above has been concerned with the theoretical basis upon which the methodology for this study has been based, and with explaining in detail the process by which the data analysis was carried out. The next chapter deals with the results of this analysis on the five policy documents.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with each of the documents which were studied on an individual basis to begin with and will explain in depth each of the findings as they pertain to each document. Within the discussion major themes within the documents will be explored. While each document contains a number of themes, the ones which are most pertinent to this study, as well as the most significantly represented within the document will be considered in detail. The final section will attempt to bring together these results and consider themes which have emerged and which are evident in all five documents. The importance of these corresponding themes will be considered, and their relation to this study will be explored. Another important aspect of this analysis, within the final section where all five documents are considered, will be the recognition of any significant exceptions to trends or themes across the documents which may be contained in the data.

In presenting the findings, the section detailing the results for each document will follow a common structure. The title of the document and publication information will be presented at the beginning of each section in table form. This table will also include the word length for the document, and the base length. As described in the methodology, the word length for each document was derived from the average number of words per page, multiplied by the number of pages.

The base word length (t) was calculated by dividing the word length for a particular document by the average word length of the five documents.

So, in order to calculate the base word length for Document 1, the average word length of all of the documents (34, 223) was divided by the word length of that particular document (34,680) with the resulting base word length (t) for Document 1 of 0.98. The raw results of the content analysis were then multiplied by (t) to allow for comparison of the content analysis results across all of the documents.

The next section of the findings for each document will provide an overview of the document and the main points which it contains. Next, the numerical results for the content analysis will be presented. The next section will deal with the dominant themes which emerged from the document through critical analysis. Finally, the conclusion will draw together the content and critical analysis, and present the general findings for the particular document being studied as well as display a table which shows which of the main themes found throughout all five documents were found to be significant in that particular document.

Before each of the documents are described here in detail using the framework described above, an example of the process by which content and critical analysis are combined will be discussed here.

This example is presented in order to clarify how the two forms of document analysis were used within this study, and how their combination allowed for a more subtle and deeper understanding of each of the documents.

4.1.1 Critical and Content Analysis Combined

Critical analysis is concerned at looking below the surface level of words. It is concerned with the intentions and motivations which lie behind statements. On page 22 of Document 1, a list of objectives for the education and training of 16+ year olds is presented.

This list was of major importance to the analysis of this document, seeming to show the intentions of the Government as they relate to 14-19 reform. As such then, any instances which matched any of the four coding categories (appendix v) were recorded against the appropriate coding category during data collection using content analysis methods. However, a list of the weaknesses in the system as perceived by the government as shown on pages 16 and 17, cannot be seen to deliver such clear results when using content analysis methods alone. Through the use of critical analysis on this list of weaknesses as presented in Document 1 though, a rich source of data about underlying aims and objectives emerged.

The objectives for reform of education and training of 16+ year olds, as listed in Document 1, were analysed using content analysis as described in the methodological framework in Chapter 3. These objectives, along with the coding categories which they were included in (or not) are shown below.

Objective as listed in Document 1 DfES, 1999, p.22	Coding Category Ascribed to Objective
Promote excellence	Personal development
Give employers a substantial stake in shaping what is provided in post-16 education and training.	Economy
Create systems which are driven by and responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and their communities	Economy, society, personal development
Give everyone access to education, training and skills opportunities	Participation
Ensure people have access to support	Participation
Design systems which deliver efficiency	Economy, Personal development
Improve accountability and probity	None
Change in an evolutionary way	None

Table 1

These objectives then show a tendency towards economic aims, with personal fulfilment being high on the government's priorities. However, when considering the list of weaknesses within the system as explained in Document 1 on pages 16 and 17 using critical analysis, a different focus emerges.

The weaknesses which are discussed in chapter two of *Learning to Succeed* are not direct instances of statements of aims, but instead, as suggested before, can be used to discern the aims for reform. This is achieved by using the list, and considering that because the weaknesses are included within the document, the aim of reform could be said to be to achieve the opposite of those weaknesses. This process is shown below, with the possible aims being listed beside the weakness as detailed in the document and then linked to the coding categories for the content analysis.

Weakness of Education System according to Document 1 DfEE, 1999, p 16-17	Aim
Low rates of learning and staying on rates at 16	Increase participation
A cycle of deprivation and disadvantage. People with low skills are more likely to be excluded from society	Improve participation and create a more cohesive society
Particular difficulties faced by people with special needs. Disabled people are less likely to be in employment	Increase participation, improve the economy
Skills shortages and recruitment difficulties for employers. Gap between what employers need and the skills which people possess.	Improve the economy
Patchy support, advice and guidance for young people.	Provide better guidance so young people can remain in education. Increase participation
much learning provision which is unsuited to the needs of learners	Increase participation

Table 2

Here then is an example of where content analysis cannot provide answers to the research question but instead critical analysis becomes the main method of discerning meaning within a document. The main theme which emerges from this list is the need to increase participation within the education system, with the weaknesses of the system as listed in Document 1 showing a tendency to be focused on this aim. The combination of these two methods within this study means that significant indicators of government aims as they pertain to the reform of 14-19 education can be determined from close reading of the documents, with the economy and participation emerging as being high on the government's agenda.

A further instance where critical and content analysis combine to provide results not initially obvious through other methods is described next.

4.1.2 Indirect References to Coding Categories

An example of the process whereby indirect references to the coding categories are identified through the process of critical analysis, can be seen when considering the statement made on page 10 of document 1, where this quote was recorded during the data analysis as an example of an indirect reference to the coding category of economy

[employers] will develop new initiatives to improve the opportunities that individuals in the workplace have to acquire skills

DfEE, 1999, p. 10

This sentence was recorded as an indirect reference to the economy within this study, because although it doesn't directly reference the economy, the connection with improving skills within the workplace means that an argument can be made which sees that the acquisition of skills by individuals within the workplace would be encouraged in order to increase the prosperity of the business and in turn add to an improvement in the economy as a whole. This second level of coding, where indirect references to the coding categories were counted, plays a valuable role in trying to understand the aims of the reforms being discussed in this document. It allows for a deeper investigation of the intentions behind the statements contained in Document 1, and creates a situation where a more nuanced interpretation of the document can be achieved, and therefore the government's aims as they pertain to 14-19 education became more visible.

A detailed example of this sensitive content analysis using indirect references to the coding categories is discussed below.

4.1.3 Content Analysis, Critical Analysis and Indirect References

Beginning with the sentence on page 47, Document 1 explains the role of qualifications within the government's strategy.

Qualifications are a measure of success for both individuals and providers. They are the currency by which individuals achieve progression within education and employment.

DfEE, 1999, p. 47

When this statement is linked to the later paragraph 6.18, an understanding of the intentions behind the government's reforms emerge.

Standards are therefore at the heart of the Government's education agenda and any changes to the planning and funding arrangements will be designed to secure higher levels of achievement.

DfEE, 1999,p. 53

By taking these two statements and analysing them using both content and critical analysis methods, with reference to the research questions of this study, the following interpretation can be made.

Having identified that these statements were relevant to this study through the use of content analysis utilizing the idea of indirect references to the coding categories, the further application of critical analysis procedures leads to an understanding of the place of qualifications within the overall strategy for 14-19 reform. Namely, that from the government's perspective, a focus on standards leads to an improvement in the qualification level of students. This in turn improves achievement, thus creating the potential for an individual to have better job opportunities and thereby contributing to personal fulfilment alongside improvements to the economic prosperity of the country.

The five documents were analysed in date order, and will be presented here in that same order. While their title will be used initially as a descriptor, for ease the documents have been numbered. The analysis began with Document 1, the 1999 Department for Education and Employment publication *Learning to Succeed*.

4.2 Document 1.

Learning to Succeed; A New Framework for post-16 Learning

Name of Document	Learning to Succeed. A new framework for post-16 learning
Published by	Department for Education and Employment
Type of Document	White Paper
Date	June 1999
Secretary of State for Education	David Blunkett
Word Length	34, 680
Base Word Length (t)	0.98

Table 3

4.2.1 Overview of Document 1

This White Paper was published in June 1999, and was concerned with the skills acquisition of post-16 learners. A major policy announcement in this document was the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council.

The focus of this paper was to consider the mechanisms and institutional structures, both which existed at the time and which would be desirable in the future, to encourage an increase in skills among post-16 year olds. In addition, this paper explores the way that businesses and local authorities can work together to increase the skills of the post-16 cohort.

4.2.2 Content Analysis Results of Document 1

	Direct (raw)	Indirect (raw)	Direct (averaged)	Indirect (averaged)	Total (raw)	Total (averaged)
References to Economy	27	8	27	8	35	34
References to Participation	16	4	16	4	20	20
References to Society	9	0	9	0	9	9
References to Personal Development	18	2	18	2	20	20

Table 4

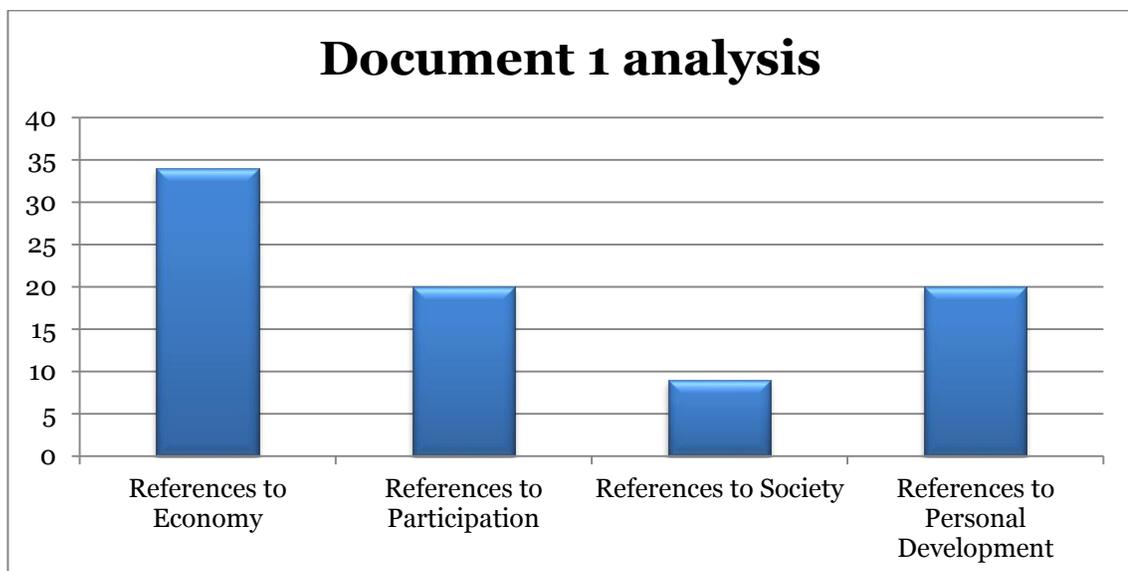


Table 5

As is clear from this content analysis, references to the economy are the most prevalent among the four categories as described in the methodology, which are intended to represent the government's aims behind the reform of 14-19 education. Even among the instances of indirect references to the four categories, within Document 1, economy is mentioned most. The incidence of references to participation and personal development are the same in number but are far fewer than references to the economy, and reference to society as an aim behind the reform of 14-19 education is the least often mentioned.

4.2.3 Themes in Document 1

There are three major themes which emerged from the analysis of this document and they are discussed below.

Economic Relevance

When looking at this first theme, an investigation of some aspects of the process of content and critical analysis is also included.

This document begins, on the very first page, with the statement that the challenge facing 16 plus education is urgent. (DfEE, 1999, p. 3) The reason for this urgency is based on the contention that

The skill needs of the future will be different from those of today and it is clear that we will not keep pace with the modern economies of our competitors, if we are unable to match today's skills with the challenge of the developing information and communication age of tomorrow

Ibid

This statement can be seen to set the tone for the document, and provides justification for the reforms and changes detailed in later sections. However, further into the document what could be considered the cornerstone statement of the government's policy direction is set out. Section 1.7 is titled 'Our Vision' and explains how the 'Learning Age' will benefit many areas of society.

Our vision of the Learning Age is to build a new culture of learning and aspiration which will underpin national competitiveness and personal prosperity, encourage creativity and innovation and help build a more cohesive society. We want everyone to benefit from the opportunities that learning brings both in personal growth and the enrichment of communities.

DfEE, 1999, p. 13

From a content analysis point of view, this section contains references to three out of the four coding categories; the economy, personal development and society, and as such clearly makes the link between education, a better society and personal fulfilment.

While this statement can be seen to clearly set out the aims of the reforms being suggested in this document, other sections are not quite so clear, but nevertheless provide clues about the possible reasons or drivers behind reform. One such section is contained in Chapter Two, titled 'Why Change is Necessary' where the strengths and weaknesses of the current system are listed. The inference to be drawn from this list is that the reverse or opposite situation is desired, although from the point of view of content analysis, this list cannot be counted as instances of references to the aims of 14-19 education reform and so were not recorded. However, based on the methodology being employed in this study, critical analysis means that the significance of this section can be considered, and the messages contained within it used to illuminate our understanding of the drivers behind education reform as conceived by the Labour government.

Two further themes emerged from analysis of this document and they will now be discussed.

Business Led Education

A significant theme which permeates Document 1, is that of business language. Throughout the document, ideas are discussed in terms of language which is most often associated with business and commerce, and the focus is on the value of business involvement within the 14-19 sector.

In describing the make-up of the Learning and Skills Council, the document says members will be drawn from 'the consumers of education and skills' (DfEE, 1999, p. 24) In the same paragraph the words and phrases 'demand', 'supply side of education', 'consumers' and 'customers' are all used. (Ibid) This focus on the use of business language meshes with the focus of the document on skills, as well as the business links which the government feels are essential to the development of the post-16 sector. The word 'skills' in this document is used interchangeably with the word education, and indeed 'skills' is often used instead of 'education.'

This is critical if we are to deliver a system which better matches skills to the evolving occupational requirements of employers and reduce the damaging impact of skills shortages.

DfEE, 1999, p. 35

In the same vein, the Learning and Skills Council is specifically designed to increase the links between education and business through greater cooperation, and increased links and communications between the two. In this respect, a significant aim of the government as portrayed in Document 1 can be seen to be the development of the economy through the reform of 14-19 education. This increased involvement of business in the 14-19 education system is epitomised in the make-up of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). At the local level, the greatest representation on the LSC is envisioned to be local business people. In this way, the local LSC's will 'take responsibility for raising standards and for securing provision to match local learning and skills needs.' (DfEE, 1999, p. 27) Two questions arise from this situation.

The first is the extent to which the encouragement of businesses to become more involved in the 14-19 system comes from a desire to share the costs of this phase of education, thereby reducing some of the financial burden of the government. The second is the extent to which it is desirable for business to have such an influential say on the curriculum of 14-19 year olds.

Structural Change

A further theme within Document 1 is that of structural change within the 14-19 system. By this is meant the funding arrangements for the phase, as well as the framework ensuring quality and consistency across providers.

At the very beginning of the document, this theme is highlighted as a priority when David Blunkett says

In March this year, I announced a wide-ranging consultation about the structure for education and training for people over the age of 16...This White Paper sets out our proposals and invites comments on a number of issues.

DfEE, 1999, p. 3

Later in the document, a justification for structural change within the system is expressed, with a damning paragraph listing the structural issues within the system.

These include the belief that there is too much duplication, confusion and bureaucracy across the phase, that there is an absence of effective co-ordination or strategic planning, and that there is too little focus on the skill needs of employers at national, local and regional levels. (DfEE, 1999, p. 21) The paragraph ends with why the Labour Government considered the system to be in need of reform.

Measured against the principles set out in *The Learning Age*, the current system falls short. It is incapable of delivering the improvements needed to achieve our goals.

Ibid

The changes required to the structure of post 16 learning, as set out in Document 1, hinge on the funding arrangements and partnership links which the White Paper envisions. Through the Learning and Skills Council, layers of bureaucracy will be removed, increasing efficiency and transparency within the system. Funding, through the LSC, will be demand led, and based on a tariff system. (DfEE, 1999, p. 34-35) This funding system will have also be able to respond to local needs, through the local Learning and Skills Councils, and thereby be flexible in responding to local skill needs and shortages.

Further structural changes are envisaged in Document 1 through the development of LSC partners, who will work together, guided by the LSC, to plan the provision of post 16 learning.

These partners are the University for Life (UfL), Regional Development agencies, Local Education Authorities, local Learning partnerships and National Training organisations. The purpose of the structural change, with the creation of the overarching body of the LSC, is made clear when on page 34 these partnerships are projected to create a planning and funding environment where more effective provision is available for 16+ year olds, thereby creating a phase “which will better support higher participation and improved attainment and skills” (DfEE, 1999, p. 34)

In summary then, the findings for Document 1 in relation to the drivers behind educational reform are threefold; the need for economic relevance within the 14-19 phase, greater emphasis on the needs of business in relation to 16+ education, and the desire for structural reform of the funding and planning arrangements within the system.

The desire for reform of the 14-19 phase in order to make it more economically relevant is evident from the first page of Document 1, when it is stated that lifelong learning has the potential to ensure a successful economy. (DfEE, 1999, p. 3) This belief in the healing power of education for the ills which afflict the economy is maintained throughout the document, and as shown earlier in this section, even when other aims of reform are mentioned, such as participation or society (in line with the coding categories) these are often linked to the economic benefits of education.

This finding is borne out by the content analysis figures, which show that the number of references to the economy in the document is significantly more than any of the other categories. However, the figures for the number of references to society and participation show that these two drivers behind reform are significant, and indeed, this can be seen in the opening paragraph, the first part of which was referred to here, where personal development and being active citizens are mentioned.

[A love for learning] will ensure the means by which our economy can make a successful transition from the industries of the past, to the knowledge and information economy of the future. It also contributes to sustaining a civilised and cohesive society, in which people develop as active citizens, and in which generational disadvantage can be overcome.

DfEE, 1999, p.3

The second main finding for Document 1 is the clear belief in the value of business to the 14-19 phase. This is shown through the use of business related language and the focus on skills acquisition as identified through critical analysis and detailed earlier in this section, as well as the clear view, stated many times within the document, that it is important that the needs of businesses are represented within the system. While a closer relationship between businesses and schools is not presented as a one sided transaction where business are the only beneficiaries, it is equally clear that the government believes that businesses will significantly benefit from this increased partnership.

...business people will have a direct opportunity to feed into the education system...in addition to those business people who contribute their time as members of the local Learning and Skills Council, we expect the Council to ensure opportunities exist for the wider business community to contribute their views...which can, over time, offer real business benefits.

DfEE, 1999, p. 65

The third finding relates to the focus on a need to reform the structure of the 16+ system, to avoid duplication and bureaucracy. The main initiative designed to achieve this is the creation of the Learning and Skills Council, which was designed to 'drive forward improvements in standards and bring greater coherence and responsiveness' (DfEE, 1999, p. 7) In Document 1 it is envisaged that the LSC will have responsibility for, among other things, funding of colleges, developing adult and community learning arrangements, working with the pre-16 education sector to provide coherence across 14-19 education, and develop partnerships to create uniform and streamlined 16+ offer. (Ibid)

4.2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion then, Document 1 is focused on the education and training which is provided for the 16+ age group, creating a system where students can access a coherent and streamlined education, based on qualifications and high standards, in order that businesses and their employees can respond to the global economic pressure, ensuring a cohesive society where personal potential is fulfilled.

This is to be achieved through the refining of funding arrangements and planning structure, to minimize waste, and match provision to demand.

Themes Within the Document

Document	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	Coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
1	*	*	*				*

Table 6

Document 2, 14-19: *Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* will be considered next.

4.3 Document 2.

14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards

Name of Document	14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards
Published by	Department for Education and Skills
Type of Document	Green Paper
Date	February 2002
Secretary of State for Education	Estelle Morris
Word Length	29, 250
Base Word Length (t)	1.17

Table 7

4.3.1 Overview of Document 2

Document 2 is the only Green Paper which was analysed, and its inclusion in this study is explained in the Methodology section. As such it is more of a consultation document than the other four, and it contains a series of options which the Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris put forward as possible routes which the reform of 14-19 education could take. While this may seem to militate against the possibility of discerning any true drivers behind the need for reform, the potential exists that precisely because it is a consultation document, the ideas expressed in it are more forward thinking and perhaps less bounded by limiting expectations.

On the other hand, because it is a consultation document it could be argued that there would be nothing that was proposed within it which the government would not be prepared to carry out or implement.

Therefore, the points made within this document have the potential of being more closely linked to the dominant beliefs and principles behind the reform, and as such perhaps this document can be said to be illuminating in the way others are not. The numerical results for document 2 are shown below.

4.3.2 Content Analysis Results

	Direct (raw)	Indirect (raw)	Direct (averaged)	Indirect (averaged)	Total (raw)	Total (averaged)
References to Economy	25	4	29	5	29	33
References to Participation	24	1	28	1	25	29
References to Society	15	1	17	1	16	19
References to Personal Development	20	0	23	0	20	23

Table 8

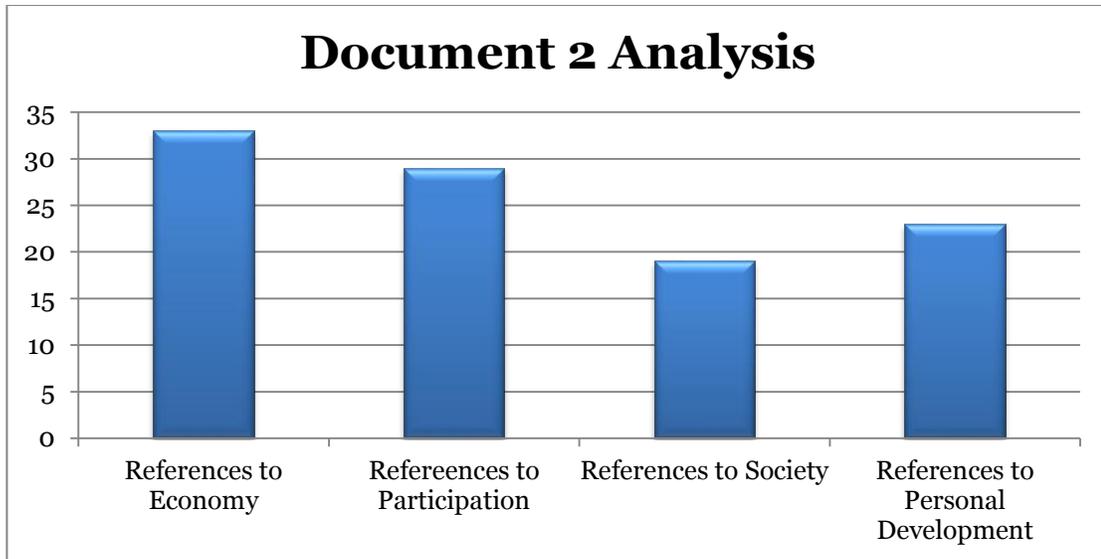


Table 9

Within this document then, the economy is referenced the most when linked to the drivers behind the reform agenda. As in Document 1 therefore, the majority of the references to the reasons for reform relate to the economy, but it is interesting to note that the references to participation and personal development come a close second and third, with the differences in the numerical results between the two documents being pronounced. In Document 1, the number of averaged references to the economy was 36, with a big gap between this number and the next most referenced drivers, participation and personal development which both had 20 references. This is contrasted with Document 2, where the number of references to the economy is significantly fewer at 24, but also where the gap between the next most referenced driver, participation with an averaged result of 20.85, is much smaller.

This suggests a shift in focus within this document. While the economy still seems to be the main driver behind the reform of the phase, participation and personal development appear to have a much more prominent place within the thinking of New Labour as expressed within this document.

A sentiment which is expressed many times in the document is that of social justice, albeit linked to the ultimate goal of economic prosperity.

[These aims (raising achievement, lifelong learning, broadening of skills and flexible provision) are] ambitious but essential to our overall mission of building a modern Britain based on economic success and social justice.

DfES, 2001, p. 8

Document 2 will now be considered in greater detail

4.3.3 Themes in Document 2

There are three particular themes which emerge from the analysis carried out on Document 2. Firstly, that the starting point behind the reform proposals presented in this document differ from previous documents and represents a change of focus on the part of the Government; secondly that despite this change of emphasis, all efforts of reform are based around the needs of the economy, and thirdly that there is a great deal of importance placed in the belief that there should be greater unity and coherence within the 14-19 phase. Each of these points will be looked at in turn.

Learner Led Education

The first theme has already been alluded to when considering the numerical results for the analysis of Document 2, namely the shift in focus from the constant reference to the economy which was evident in Document 1 , towards what could be described as a more rounded view of the aims of reform to include personal development and participation. The nature of the change can be seen in the numerical results as described above, but also through the analysis conducted using critical analysis, and indeed the shift in emphasis can be seen at the very beginning of the document, in the forward by the Secretary of State responsible, Estelle Morris. In the forward, the vision of a world class education service is set out, with the familiar claims that if the economic needs of the country are to be met, then the education of young people must be of a high enough standard to cope with these demands.

However, a subtle change in focus from the previous document can be discerned in Document 2 in how these economic benefits can be gleaned from the education system. In Document 1, the starting point was to identify the skill needs of the economy. The government took this as the first stage, and used it to devise the next step, which was to develop how these skills could be provided through the education system. Finally, this new skills development was to be delivered to the learner. In Document 2 however, this sequence can be seen to have been turned on its head. Instead of starting with the skill needs of the economy, the focus is on identifying the needs as well as the talents of the individual learner. With this understanding, the next step is to determine how individual institutions can help to develop these talents and satisfy the learning needs of these individuals. By following this approach, Document 2 suggests that the education system will allow individuals to prosper, thereby meaning that the economy will prosper too. This approach is exemplified in the following paragraph from the forward in Document 2

In the 21st century, to be prosperous, the economy will depend heavily on the creativity and skills of its people. In a knowledge economy, it is vital that we tap the potential of every one of our citizens...We must build a flexible system around the needs and aspirations of individual pupils.

DfES, 2002, p. 3

Here we can see the change in focus. The key driver behind education reform in this document is still the economy, as it was in Document 1, but the idea of personal development is very much more closely meshed with this driver, and has a place of greater prominence in the thinking behind the reforms outlined by the Labour Government. By starting with the individual, Document 2 argues that through an understanding of a person's aspiration and by developing their unique abilities, they in turn will become more productive and useful members of society.

In recognising this change in approach, a question which emerges from the critical analysis which has allowed for the identification of this change, is what has caused this adjustment in emphasis on the part of the Labour Government. As identified in the literature review, the forces on policy are great, and are often politically motivated. Using the aspects of critical analysis which allow a consideration of the whole document, as well as the factors which may have influenced its production, one answer to this question may lie in the political atmosphere within which Document 2 was produced. Following the 2001 election victory for Labour, Estelle Morris became the Secretary of State for Education, replacing David Blunkett who had held the post for four years in government and two in opposition. The name of the Department was also changed, from the Department for Education and Employment to the Department for Education and Skills. It could be argued then that the change in focus as evidenced in Document 2 can be ascribed to a change in Minister, taking into account the point made by Lawton (1993, p. 59) as explained in the Literature Review attributing some changes in policies to the desire by new ministers to make an impression on entering their new post.

A second possible reason for the change in direction could come from the nature of the document. As mentioned earlier, Document 2 is a Green Paper, a consultation document, and so may not be subject to the same restrictions or limits that are placed around a White Paper. The policies or ideas in a Green Paper may be able to be more forward looking and 'radical' because a consultation process is being entered into, and changes and amendments can be made with less difficulty than if it were a White Paper.

As such then a Green Paper could be viewed as an attempt to test the political water, where the electorate's appetite for reform of the type suggested within its pages can be investigated. The final and least complicated reason for a change in tone or emphasis on the part of the Government as displayed in Document 2 could simply be that there has been a change in policy. Where once the economy was paramount in all discussions, perhaps the shift in direction can be attributed to a belief in the importance of personal development, and the role this can play in the education of 14-19 year olds.

While the results which have been explained above show that there was a shift in emphasis within Document 2 away from the economic drivers behind education reform and towards the drivers of personal development and participation, the next theme which was identified through the analysis of this document shows that there was still great importance placed on the need for education to deliver improvements in the economy.

Economic Relevance

The second theme which emerged from the analysis of Document 2 was that despite an increase in the prominence of the ideas of participation and personal development as reasons for reform of the 14-19 phase, the economy, and how the 14-19 system can contribute to its growth was still the main driver behind reform of this phase.

Phrases such as ‘More people need to be better educated than ever before if we are to be a successful high-sills economy’ (DfES, 2002, p. 7) and ‘We must reap the skills benefits of an education system that matches the needs of the knowledge economy’ (Ibid, p. 5) are clear indications of the Labour government’s focus on the economy, and the economic prosperity which they believe will follow from the reforms to the education system which are proposed in Document 2. Phrases such as these were all recorded as references to the economy within the coding process during the content analysis stage of data collection. Using just that process during this study would have yielded the clear-cut results as detailed in the tables above.

These would have provided results which would allow for an investigation of the relative positions of the four possible drivers behind education reform, and led to a discussion as to their placement in relation to other documents.

However, critical analysis of the text, as applied here, allows for a more in-depth consideration of these results, and a more subtle understanding of the intentions behind the reforms suggested in Document 2. Through the use of a combination of critical and content analysis, it is possible to say that while the references to participation, personal development and society are numerically much more similar to that of the economy within this document, and particularly in comparison to Document 1 (with the number of references to participation being only 3 less than the number of references to the economy) these numbers hide the fact that the message which lies behind the references to other categories often remains the need to improve the condition of economy.

An example of this point can be seen in the following quote .

All, not just some, young people need to continue their education and training beyond the compulsory years. There will be rapid changes in the knowledge and skills required for particular jobs, so everybody needs to be motivated to engage in lifelong learning. At least half our young adults should at some stage enter higher education if our economy is to have enough people with higher-level skills.

DfES, 2002, p. 7

When content analysis is applied to this paragraph the results are as follows. The first part of this paragraph which is in bold, shows a clear instance as a reference to participation, and was recorded as such. The second half is an indirect reference to the economy, and again was recorded as such. Therefore, with just content analysis, this paragraph enters the results as one reference to participation, and one indirect reference to the economy. However, with the added layer of critical analysis, this paragraph becomes more revealing in terms of the drivers behind educational reform. This is because, it is possible to see that participation, namely the bold section of the paragraph, is here acting as a lever on another of the coding categories, namely the economy. Therefore, although participation is at first seen here as a discrete aim of the Labour government, the real desire and purpose behind increasing participation as described in this paragraph is to improve the economy. A further example can be seen on page 10, where the Government says that productivity needs to improve if economic performance is to improve, and so therefore “this requires fundamental improvement to our skills base. We must therefore increase retention and achievement post-16” (DfES, 2002, p. 10) Again, here we see the linking of a desire to increase participation with the economic goal of increasing productivity. Even the idea that education with ‘character’ must be promoted (DfES, 2002, p.5), with its sentiments about improving not only the student but also society, as shown below, is linked to economic concerns.

Academic achievement is essential, but education must also be a basis for citizenship and inclusion. It is important that young people learn to know right from wrong; get along with their fellow students; work in teams; make a contribution to the school or college as a community; and develop positive attitudes to life and work. This is important not only for their own personal development, but also because employers increasingly emphasise not just academic qualifications, but skills and attitudes such as enterprise, innovation, teamwork, creativity and flexibility.

DfES, 2002, p.5

It is clear then, that in many of the instances in which the drivers of participation, society and personal development are mentioned in Document 2 that they are not aims which are included for their own sake, but instead as a way of ensuring economic growth and development. However, the earlier point about a discernible shift in focus as evidenced in this document still holds. While it has been made clear here that the policies outlined in Document 2 still maintain an overwhelming focus on delivering reform to the 14-19 education system in order to ensure greater economic prosperity, it must also be pointed out that there is a noticeable shift in tone within this document, which, at least suggests a consideration of education beyond narrow economic benefits, but instead recognises the individual first, while also considering the social implications and benefits that can be derived from good schools and colleges.

A Coherent 14-19 Phase

The final theme which was evident in Document 2 is the desire for a coherent 14-19 phase. By this is meant a system which runs from the age of 14 to early adulthood (19) without the traditional break at 16, characterised by those who remain in education and those who do not. (DfES, 2002, p. 7) The argument put forward in the document for this kind of coherence is linked to the desire to increase the standing of vocational pathways, by

Break[ing] down the divide between education and training and emphasis[ing] that all pathways contribute to employability and responsible citizenship.

Ibid

In addition, the arguments for a coherent phase are also put forward as a solution to the problem of low participation rates, which are quoted as being well below European and OECD averages. (DfES, 2002, p. 8)

The vision for a coherent phase is described in Document 2, with the need to provide a flexible curriculum which allows for students to change courses easily (DfES, 2002, p. 13) as well as motivate and engage them in order that they remain in learning beyond the age of 16. (Ibid)

The challenges to this coherence, as seen by the government, come from the fact that there is a 14-16 curriculum and a post-16 curriculum, along with what is termed the ‘relative weakness’ of vocational pathways. Because of these institutional barriers to coherence the document suggests that it will take time to create a coherent system (ibid). However, according to the document there is a belief that there is a need for change in relation to creating a coherent 14-19 phase, as shown in this quote, which can only be described as vague and without substance.

We need some changes; we have to decide what needs to be done and how to do it and then put it into practice over a carefully planned period of change.

Ibid

Despite this lack of clarity, there are some specific proposals within Document 2 designed to increase the coherence of the phase. The first is to design the phase so that there is a distinctive beginning, middle and end. The beginning would be characterised by a pupil progress review identifying long-term goals and suggesting possible pathways to achieve these. The middle of the phase would be concerned with learning in order to gain qualifications, and the end would be marked by a Matriculation Diploma. (DfES, 2002, p. 16) Further proposals include the inspection of the 14-19 phase rather than 16-19 (ibid, p. 65) as well as a shift away from focusing on achievement at 16 through GCSE’s and instead make 19 the age of achievement. (ibid, p. 1)

4.3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the three main themes in Document 2, which have been identified through a combination of content and critical analysis have been described here. The first is a shift in focus away from skills needs within the economy to a greater awareness of the needs of the learner, and to create a system which keeps these learners motivated and participating in education and training.

The second finding comes directly from linking content and critical analysis, and identifies the tendency within the document to view other possible drivers behind reform as considered in this study, namely participation, society and personal development as means through which the ultimate aim of economic growth and development can be achieved. It is clear, that despite discussion of other possible reasons for reform of the 14-19 phase, economic considerations are paramount. The final theme identified in the analysis of Document 2 is that there is a great belief on the part of the Labour Government in the need to unify the phase, eradicating the natural break at 16, and creating a coherent learning programme for students which runs from 14 to 19.

Themes Within the Document

Document	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	A coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
2	*				*	*	

Table 10

The next document is the White Paper *Opportunity and Excellence* and will be considered now.

4.4 Document 3

14-19: Opportunity and Excellence

Name of Document	14-19: Opportunity and Excellence
Published by	Department for Education and Skills
Type of Document	White Paper
Date	January 2003
Secretary of State for Education	Charles Clarke
Word Length	15,870
Base Word Length (t)	2.15

Table 11

4.4.1 Overview of Document 3

This White Paper was published a year after the Green Paper *14-19; Extending Opportunities and Raising Standards* (Document 2) which was discussed above. Following a consultation period on Document 2, which ran for three months, *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (Document 3) represents the next outing of the proposals contained in the previous Green Paper, albeit with changed actors, namely a new Secretary of State for Education Charles Clarke. As such, there are changes, amendments and outright cuts in that previous set of reform ideas.

The main points contained in Document 3 are the desire to support students into higher education, prepare students for the workplace, and provide a good level of education to all. Of major significance is the setting up of the Tomlinson Working Group for 14-19 Reform which was announced in this paper. The numerical results of the content analysis are shown below.

4.4.2 Content Analysis Results

	Direct (raw)	Indirect (raw)	Direct (averaged)	Indirect (averaged)	Total (raw)	Total (averaged)
References to Economy	17	5	36	11	22	47
References to Participation	10	1	21	2	11	23
References to Society	3	1	6	2	4	9
References to Personal Development	15	1	32	2	16	34

Table 12

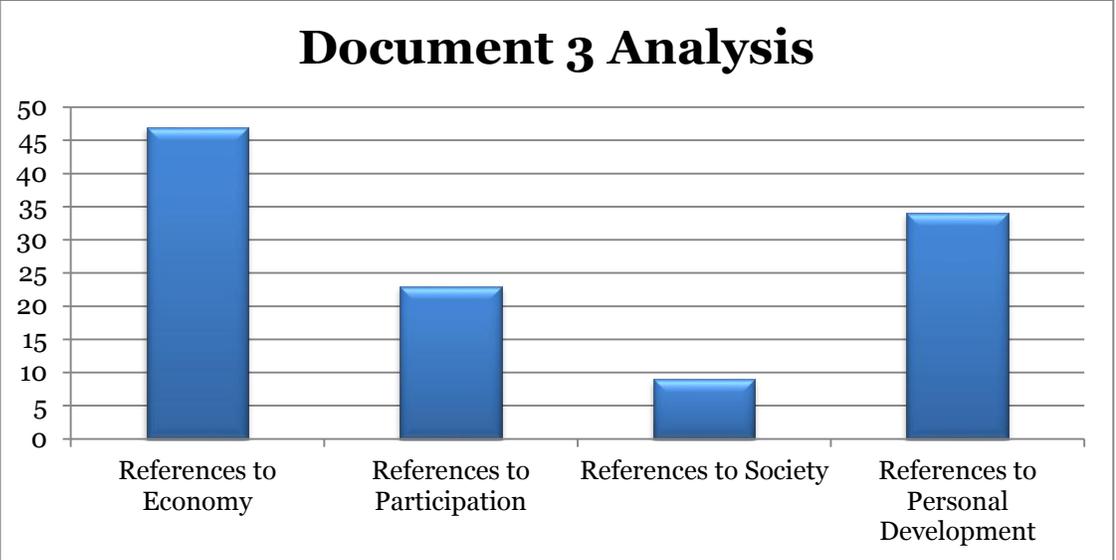


Table 13

As in the previous two documents, Document 3 shows clearly that out of the four possible drivers behind reform of the 14-19 phase which are being considered in this study, the economy is the one which is referenced most. Again though, the gap which exists between the economy as the main driver behind reform, and the next most frequent reference, in this case personal development is relatively small. The number of references to society is very few, and participation would seem to have become less important in Document 3 as in the two previous documents.

However, even with the averaged results which allows for a direct comparison between the documents, the difference in the pure number of references to any of the four coding categories is striking, with just 10 references to economy in Document 3, and 36 in Document 1. One aspect of the document which might explain this difference could be the lack of clear objectives within the document. Critical analysis of Document 3 showed that there were several points on which the document was vague, in particular the idea of achievement. On page 4 of Document three, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, Charles Clarke, finishes the foreword to the paper with the words

The key to higher achievement is to put the needs of students at the centre of 14-19 provision.

DfES, 2003, p. 4

Here the idea of achievement is vague. Based on earlier sections of the foreword, it is possible to understand achievement as the gaining of good qualifications. However, given the general direction of previous documents, and the obvious belief in the importance of the economy, this achievement could relate to the student securing gainful employment. Equally, achievement could mean an individual overcoming personal obstacles, which may not be represented in any form other than the student being able to read and write at an adult level. If then, the idea of achievement is lacking in definition within this document, it is perfectly plausible to suggest that the aims behind the reform, the drivers which this study is searching for, are poorly expressed or lacking in definition.

This study though, has been designed to try and get to the heart of what is behind reform of this phase, and the methods employed here are intended to discover hidden meaning and intentions. If this is the case, and the methodology is sound, then another possibility for the lack of references to possible drivers in education reform may be that those aims are simply not expressed within this document.

As such then, it could be argued that Document 3 contains fewer statements of aims than the previous documents. Through an examination of the dominant themes within this document, using critical analysis, this idea will be explored. A final reason for the lower than expected number of references which correspond to the coding categories is that of researcher error. While this cannot, in any study, be entirely ruled out, it is hoped that the methodology employed here, as described in Chapter 3, is sufficiently robust to mean this shift in the results are not simply based on researcher error.

4.4.3 Themes in Document 3

The three major themes which have emerged from the analysis of Document 3 are first the idea that the profile and standing of vocational education needs to be raised, second that the economic imperative is still a strong motivator for change, and third that there is again a change in tone in this document, away from that of Document 2, and back to the business driven tone which was evident in Document 1.

These three themes will be considered now, beginning with an examination of the place of vocational education as portrayed in Document 3.

Vocational Education

Within Document 3, a consistent concern is expressed about the strength of the vocational offer in 14-19 education. On the first page, this offer is characterised as 'weak' and this weakness is something which it is argued must be addressed. The problem with the vocational offer as it is described in Document 3 is that it does not enjoy the status that the academic route does. Instead, the vocational route is seen as having less value; "learning a trade has still to become a truly valued option." (DfES, 2003, p. 4) Contrasted with this is the point that the academic track, characterised by A levels is too narrow, and at the time of writing the White Paper, beset by worries over fairness in grading and examination procedures.

The first step in changing the perception of vocational education, as expressed in Document 3 is to attempt to blur the distinctions between academic and vocational, changing the terms which describe the two types of education to 'general' or 'specialist education'. This is based on the contention that vocational and academic do not adequately describe the two types of education. The example given in the White Paper is that law and computer studies are termed academic but contain clear vocational elements. (DfES, 2003, p.18)

In addition, the availability and opportunities for young people to obtain qualifications through the Modern Apprenticeship scheme would be tackled through the setting up of an employer-led Modern Apprenticeships Task Force . (DfES, 2003, p. 28)

The second aspect of changing the status of vocational education as described in Document 3 is to develop a coherent 14-19 phase. On page 17 of Document 3, it is argued that the system, if it is to become more coherent and thereby allow pupils to move through the system in a fashion which builds on existing knowledge and moves them forward, requires a unified qualifications structure which will meet the needs of all pupils. (DfES, 2003, p. 17) It is acknowledged that this would require significant structural change in the system, and that as such this must be viewed as something which could only be achieved in the long term. A suggestion which clearly had the potential to achieve the goal of a unified qualifications structure, with the ultimate aim of levelling the playing field between vocational and academic routes, would be that of the Diploma, or Matriculation Diploma as was proposed in the 2002 Green Paper- Document 2. However, in Document 3 it was decided that the Diploma idea would not be pursued. (DfES, 2003, p. 46) This decision was taken based on the negative response expressed by employers and universities towards the Diploma. So despite the clearly stated desire within Document 3 to create a unified and coherent 14-19 system, with a simplified examination structure which could encompass both vocational and academic routes, an overarching qualification which contained a core unit of skills including literacy and numeracy as well as elements of vocational and academic learning was not taken forward.

All was not lost however, for the much needed structural reform (according to Document 3) could still be achieved thanks to the setting up of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson.

This Working Group, could be considered to be the third prong in the attempt to raise the status of vocational education, through a remit to address three main areas.

- creating a much stronger vocational offer
- ensuring that assessment within programmes is fit for purpose
- developing a unified framework for qualifications suitable for all ability levels

DfES, 2003, p. 38

Document 3 describes the need for the Working Group on the basis that ‘radical change’ is needed in 14-19 education if a ‘transformation of young people’s experiences’ is to be achieved. (Ibid) While the changes proposed in Document 3 are designed to increase flexibility in the short term, the paper argues that a more substantive overhaul of the system is required.

The next section will consider the strength of the economic imperative within Document 3.

Economic Relevance

While the economic driver behind education reform seems to be less obvious in this document based on a consideration of the figures in table 6, it is nevertheless still clear that economic considerations, and how the 14-19 education system can contribute to economic growth and prosperity are still at the heart of this document.

A clear statement of the importance of the economy, and the role that the 14-19 sector is expected to play in its development is shown on page 29 of Document 3.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we can no longer tolerate an artificial divide between the world of education and the world of work. Our national success is heavily dependent on our capacity to develop a skilled workforce which can meet the challenges of both an increasingly competitive global economy and high-quality public services.

DfES, 2003, p. 29

Indeed, not only is this economic responsibility laid at the door of teachers, schools and colleges though, but also it is the duty of pupils to recognise the benefits of education as they relate to the economy.

And we hope students will more clearly see how their qualifications lead to further education or work.

DfES, 2003, p. 5

Within this document, the Government believes that there is a need not only to address the weaknesses within the education system, but also to be sure that the initiatives are working and the investment which is being made is showing results. In terms of participation and higher staying on rates this is relatively easy to quantify. However, the government is less sure on how to ensure that the proposed reforms are increasing prosperity and improving the economy. This is shown in the following paragraph.

...we need to see...students whose full potential has been developed through a broader education with the skills, experience and personal development to play a full part in society and to contribute to a productive economy.

DfES, 2003, p. 15

Exactly how it is proposed to determine if a person's full potential has been developed or whether they are playing a full part in society is not clear, and more importantly how to be sure that these laudable aims can be attributed to an improved education system envisioned through the reform process suggested in Document 3 is even less clear. Nor is it certain whether this kind of assessment is even possible. This point goes back to the one made at the beginning of the analysis of Document 3, where the vagueness and lack of clarity which surrounds many aspects of Document 3 was noted.

In concluding this section relating to the need for the education system to productively feed into the economy of the country, a link between Document 2 and Document 3 is evident, beyond the fact that one was the consultation document for the other. The similarity between the documents being investigated is the tendency to link all possible drivers which may lay behind the reform of the 14-19 system, to the economic imperative.

In the same way that an increase in participation rates was desired in order to provide more skilled workers to support the economy in Document 2, Document 3 links these aims with the ultimate aim of improving the economy. An example is shown below.

...we need to create a clearer and more appropriate curriculum and qualifications framework for the 14-19 phase-one that develops and stretches all of our young people to achieve their full potential, and prepare them for life and work in the 21st Century.

DfES, 2003, p. 2

Here we see a similar situation as was noted in Document 2 where the economy is the ultimate reason for the reforms which are proposed.

The final section looking at Document 3 will consider the change in tone which is evident in this document.

Business Led Education

It was noted in the analysis of Document 2 that there was a change in tone as well as emphasis within that document, away from a skills based, business focused set of proposals in Document 1 to a more learner led vision of the 14-19 education system.

Various reasons for this finding were considered, including the nature of the document and the key players involved in its creation. Considering Document 3 in light of the previous documents, it is clear that it also embodies a change in tone. However, this change is not a change which provides a new paradigm through which to consider Document 3, but instead signals a move back, towards the tone expressed in Document 1.

Document 3 contains various sections devoted to the links between education and business, such as 'Employer involvement and meeting business needs' (DfES, 2003, p. 29) and 'Apprenticeships' (ibid, p. 28) The importance of employers within the 14-19 phase is recognised, and a desire to improve the links between business and educational institutions is expressed.

We agree with the TUC and the CBI, which have noted how important employers are to the 14-19 phase. Greater flexibility in the curriculum, new work-related learning programmes and GCSEs in vocational subjects will particularly help those seeking to enter the labour market directly from school or college...However, we recognise that we have more to do to address the preparation of young people for entry into the wide range of skilled and technical employment on which the economy will depend.

DfES, 2003, p. 29

Here the government can be seen to place business in the driving seat when it comes to the aims of the 14-19 phase, and this point is even more clearly expressed in the following quote.

Nationally, the department is committed to developing a closer relationship with the DTI, CBI, and other employer led organisations. It is essential that future policy development is better informed by the experiences and needs of employers.

DfES, 2003, p. 30

Despite this seeming subservience to employer organisations and the needs of business as shown above, Document 3 does also warn employers of their responsibilities. One of these is to increase the availability and number of employer-led modern apprenticeships through the Modern Apprenticeship Task Force as mentioned earlier, and the other is to encourage greater links with schools and colleges by employers on a local level.

And employers concerned about sector/local skills shortage and the quality of job applicants must be willing to make a positive contribution to young people's educational experience.

DfES, 2003, p. 29

What is clear, which was not evident in Document 2, is that the Labour Government, and the Department for Education and Skills as led by Charles Clarke believes that a vibrant relationship between business and the 14-19 sector is of vital importance to the economy and to the governments long-term goals,

The opportunities which would be created by a new dynamism in the employer-education relationship cannot be overstated. They lead to the heart of the Government's social and economic objectives.

DfES, 2003, p. 30

It can be said then that while business, and its effect on the 14-19 education system, is not the main focus of this document, it certainly plays a large part in the strategy being suggested. Words such as 'stakeholder' and 'customer' are used, and business itself is considered to be a key advisor for this phase. This is in direct contrast to the language and the focus of Document 2.

Structural Change

Within Document 3, the idea of structural change of the 14-19 education system is discussed. Clear reference is made to the preceding Green Paper, *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* (Document 2 in this study) as a basis for many of the reforms outlined, and one of the themes which carries into Document 3 from Document 2 is that of structural change.

The arguments for structural reform within the 14-19 system in order to create a more coherent phase are not presented in detail in Document 3 Volume 1. Instead, much of the justification and rationale for the position taken by New Labour on creating a unified phase comes from Document 2, as well as from the results of what is described as the extensive consultation results following on from the publication of that document.

The consultation on the Green Paper *14-19; extending opportunities, raising standards* revealed strong support from all quarters for more coherence in the learning opportunities available to 14-19 year-olds at school, college and in the workplace. It is clear from the debate and the substantial response to the proposals that the case for reform was accepted.

DfES, 2003, p. 9

The reasons which are offered for a unification of the phase come essentially from the belief that the vocational offer for young people is not easily followed or effectively presented, and that for those choosing an academic route, A levels offer too narrow a solution. (Ibid) As a result of these concerns, Document 3 contains policy which is intended to create coherence and unity across the phase.

For too long, we have thought in terms of two phases, 11-16 and 16-19...To think in terms of two phases is no longer helpful or meaningful...This is why we wish to develop a 14-19 phase.

DfES, 2003, p. 5

Despite this desire to unify the phase and create clear pathways through the 14-19 curriculum, on the same page as the above discussion are proposals which are designed to enhance the curriculum for 14-16 year olds (ibid).

While it is true that these reforms are explained as being short-term adjustments to the system, these proposals have the potential to maintain the divide at 16 within the 14-19 phase, working against the very coherence and unity which is being strived for within the system. Document 3 explains this difficulty through the presentation of long term and short term reforms, the long term reforms focusing on providing a stronger vocational offer, more manageable assessment and a broader choice for students with a more unified qualifications framework. (DfES, 2003, p. 7) The justification for making these changes to the system centre around the need for 'further detailed consideration' and a 'long-lead in time' (ibid)

So while this theme was prominent in Document 3, it is possible to argue that its inclusion in the document was based less on definite policy, and more on an expression of desire about the future shape of the system.

4.4.4 Conclusion

The findings for Document 3 have been detailed here. The first major theme which was recognised within the Document was that of the focus on improving the status of vocational education. This, it was envisaged, could occur through improving the take-up of Modern Apprenticeships, through developing a coherent 14-19 phase and through the possibility of radical structural change to be investigated by the Tomlinson Working Group.

The second major theme within Document 3 was the continued reliance on education to solve economic woes and create a growth situation within the economy. The final theme suggested that Document 3 signalled a return to the business language and skills focus evidenced in Document 1, and which has been less obvious in Document 2.

Themes Within the Document

Document	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	A coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
3	*	*	*	*			

Table 14

The results of the analysis of the penultimate document, *21st Century Skills* will now be considered.

4.5 Document 4

21st Century Skills. Realising our potential

Name of Document	21 st Century Skills. Realising our potential
Published by	Department for Education and Skills, Department of Trade and Industry, Her Majesty's Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions
Type of Document	White Paper
Date	July 2003
Secretary of State for Education	Charles Clarke
Word Length	48,600
Base Word Length (t)	0.7

Table 15

4.5.1 Overview of Document 4

This document is the third White Paper analysed for this project, but is unusual in that it is a joint publication between four government departments, the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Trade and Industry, The Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. As such, the foreword is signed by Tony Blair, as well as the four relevant ministers of each department, including Charles Clarke and Gordon Brown.

The aim of the document, and the ‘Skills Strategy’ which it contains, is to address the low skill levels in the UK through a co-ordinated, government wide strategy. In this way, the strategy aims to increase productivity through creating the type of workforce which employers require to be prosperous. A second strand of the strategy is to provide individuals with the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled. Finally, a major initiative proposed within this document is the setting up of the Skills for Business network. A detailed exploration of the major themes within this document is provided below, but first the results of the content analysis are presented and discussed.

4.5.2 Content Analysis Results

	Direct (raw)	Indirect (raw)	Direct (averaged)	Indirect (averaged)	Total (raw)	Total (averaged)
References to Economy	20	3	14	2	23	16
References to Participation	4	1	3	1	5	4
References to Society	7	1	5	1	8	6
References to Personal Development	9	1	6	1	10	7

Table 16

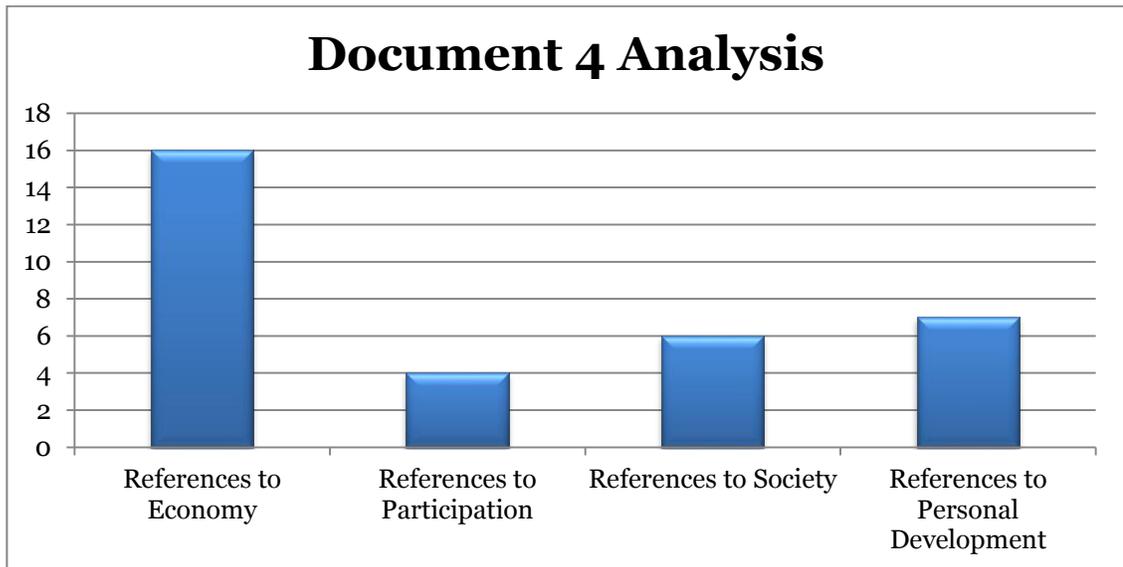


Table 17

The results of the content analysis show a similar trend to the previous three documents, with the economy being the most referenced of the four coding categories. There is a significant gap between the number of references to the economy (16) and the next most mentioned category, personal development (7) which receives less than half the number of mentions in the document than the economy. The final two categories, society and participation, show similar levels of references to the other category of personal development, with 6 and 3 respectively. The high number of references to the economy within the document must be questioned in light of the large difference which exists between this and other coding categories.

The analysis of this document was carried out in the same manner and with the same techniques and methodology as the other documents, and while researcher error can never be ruled out, there seems little reason to conclude that the dramatic differences in the number of references between the categories can be attributed to this cause. A more likely explanation for the differences in the content analysis results is the nature of the document being analysed. While the other documents were published by the education department of the Labour Government, this document was produced in collaboration with other departments, and as such can be seen to be subject to different pressures and motivations than a document produced solely by one department. With the Treasury, the Department for Trade and Industry, and the Department for Work and Pensions as joint authors along with the Department for Education and Skills, it is unsurprising that a major focus of the document is the economy.

In addition, the subject, namely the skills strategy, lends itself even more to a discussion of the role of education on the economy, and arguably less to the idea of personal fulfilment and the creation of a cohesive society.

The question then arises as to whether Document 4 provides a useful addition to this study, or whether the results gained from it were necessarily skewed by virtue of its different authorship from the other documents. While it could be argued that Document 4 should not have been included in this study, the benefits from its inclusion must be acknowledged. When considering Document 4 in light of the research question, it can be seen to illuminate the subject of the reform intentions of New Labour, which is a stated aim of this study.

By considering a document which can be seen as a snapshot of the Government's overall policy as it relates to education, a broader understanding of the intentions of the Labour Government as they relate to 14-19 education can be explored. It is arguable that by utilizing the policy statements as made in Document 4, the study as a whole benefits, as Document 4 can be said to represent an expression of education policy across the whole of government, and not simply the reform policy as imagined by the Department for Education and Skills. However, the fact that the results of the content analysis show a great propensity towards the economic benefits of education reform, with references to the economy being at the same level as the other three categories combined, the different nature of the document must be taken into account, and these results viewed in this light.

Nevertheless, for the reasons outlined above, it is believed that the inclusion of this document adds, rather than detracts from the results, and provides a deeper understanding of the motivations of the Labour Government as a whole, on the issue of reform of the 14-19 education system.

4.5.3 Themes in Document 4

As is evident from the title of Document 4, Skills and qualifications are a major theme within this document. In addition, the theme of the economic relevance of education is strongly represented, as well as the theme of business led education. How these themes are expressed in this document will now be discussed in further detail.

Skills and Qualifications

Document 4 is concerned primarily with skills. According to the foreword, signed by the four Secretaries of State whose departments produced this document, as well as the Prime Minister Tony Blair, the skills possessed by the people of the country are ‘a vital national asset’ (DfES et al, 2003, p. 7) Skills, as presented in this document, are the key to a vast number of economic and societal benefits. These include;

- productivity
- competition
- providing choice in public services
- increasing the employability of individuals
- individuals achieving their ambitions
- sustaining a competitive economy
- creating a fairer society by ending the gap between the skills rich and the skills poor
- labour market flexibility

DfES et al , 1993, p. 7-9

It is clear then, from the Labour government’s point of view, that skills hold the key to economic productivity and greater social equality. In fact, as the document firmly proclaims, “We all know that skills matter” (DfES, 2003, p. 8). The aim, as explicitly expressed within this document, is to increase the skill level of the working population, in order to reap the benefits as detailed above.

As a Government, we have an ambitious agenda for transforming our society and economy. Much of that agenda is dependent on developing even higher skills, in our young people, in the workforce and across the community.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 9

Document 4 uses data from O'Mahony and De Boer (2002) to highlight the skills gap within the UK economy and to compare these with skills levels in other countries. This data is shown below and is reproduced from Document 4.

Labour Force Skills, total economy, 1999				
Percentage of workforce with qualifications at levels:				
	Higher	Intermediate	Low	Relative skills UK=100
US	27.7	18.6	53.7	100.5
France	16.4	51.2	32.4	105.5
Germany	15.0	65.0	20.0	105.3
UK	15.4	27.7	56.9	100

Table 18

O'Mahony and De Boer (2002) in DfES et al, 2003, p. 19

The comment which is made in Document 4 about these figures is that compared to other countries, the UK has a significant skills gap at the intermediate level and this gap is then linked to the fact that workers in France, Germany and the US produce between a quarter and a third more in every hour that they work, when compared to UK workers. The problem is blamed on the relatively low level of skills in the UK workforce, particularly at intermediate level, as shown in the above table. However, this correlation does not necessarily follow from the figures. The US, for instance, has a much higher percentage of the population with higher level skills than the UK, but a much lower level of intermediate skills. Overall, the skill level is fairly similar to that of the UK but nevertheless, production levels are higher by up to a third in the US. These facts then, suggest that skill levels are not the sole determinate of economic output.

Indeed, instead of putting the differences in output down to skill levels, it is possible to argue that other factors, such as working practices and business efficiency may play as significant, if not greater role in the productivity levels of workers.

While it is clear that the desire of the Labour Government as expressed is to increase the skills held by the population as a whole in order to produce economic growth, what is less clear, and certainly not made explicit in this document, is what exactly skills are. However, there are clues, which give an idea about what the word skills mean for the Labour Government. For instance, the document states that basic skills for employability which, at the time of publication, were in short supply were literacy, numeracy and ICT.

However, it is simply stated that there is a skills gap at intermediate, apprenticeship, technician, higher craft, and at associate professional level, and that a gap also exists in management, leadership and mathematical skills. What is clear though, is that addressing these skills gaps are about businesses and employers having access to employees whom they believe will be able to improve productivity. This is because, according to Document 4, employers have had difficulty finding employees with the desired skills.

Employers have long been concerned that they are not getting the recruits with the skills they want.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 12

In the later section which discusses the theme of business led education within Document 4, the link between the desire for an increase in skills and the needs of business will be discussed. Here though, the focus is still on identifying the nature of the skills which the Labour Government wants to encourage the population to obtain.

While the term skills seems to be a catch-all in Document 4, which can be seen to encompass training and education, the currency which links all of these skills is qualifications. The document is very clear that a unified set of qualifications across the basic, intermediate and advanced levels of skills is required. In designing this system, the document rejects piecemeal initiatives, and instead believes the way forward is to integrate the system that already exists.

Isolated initiatives will not be enough... We need to draw together all the major partners. We need also to connect the many existing programmes and activities, so that they form a shared, sustained and determined programme for change. So this strategy is not predominately about new initiatives, but rather about making more sense of what is already there, integrating what already exists , and focusing it more effectively.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 21

The focus on qualifications comes from the stated belief that people and businesses measure their achievement in term of qualifications. (DfES et al, 2003, p. 68) and as such then it is necessary that training programmes provide what is needed.

‘Employers and learners will not get the skills they need unless training programmes and qualifications are fit for purpose’ (Ibid p. 74)

Here, it is possible to see the link, as expressed in Document 4, between training and the economy. The argument within this document, and within government and society as a whole (as has been shown previously in this study) is that training programmes need to provide qualifications which are relevant and recognisable, in order for people to be able to demonstrate their skill level to potential employers, thereby gaining employment and contributing to economic prosperity. The identification of the skills required by employers, and the acquisition of these skills through a unified qualifications framework is the major theme within this document.

The next section will look at the theme of Business Led Education, which links in many areas with that which has been discussed in this section.

Business Led Education

The idea that education policy for 14-19 year olds should be influenced by the perceived needs and desires of business and industry is a theme which has been encountered in two of the previous three documents, and so in terms of consistency of policy, it seems unsurprising that it also forms a major part of Document 4. However the strength with which this theme is expressed in Document 4 can be seen to show not merely a reiteration of previous policy, but a hardening of the position taken by the Labour government in this regard.

In describing the skills strategy as laid out in the document, the first of 5 key themes which characterise the strategy is “Putting employers’ needs centre stage” (DfES et al, 2003, p. 21) and the fourth is “ Enabling colleges and training providers to be more responsive to employers’ and learners’ needs”. (ibid, p. 22) These two key characteristics of the strategy as outlined in Document 4 show a strong belief in the role of business in the education and training of young people.

The belief in the importance of business within the education system is further enshrined in Document 4 through the creation of a network of Sector Skills Councils, known as the Skills for Business Network.

The goal of this network is to identify the skills which are needed by employers in a particular sector and go on to “ deliver the skills that employers need to raise productivity” (DfES et al, 2003, p. 47)

In this way, the vision is of the Sector Skills Councils, which are tasked in this document with leading this skills drive, recognising the areas where companies and businesses need employees with particular skills, and then coordinating the training programmes within the local area which can then provide individual with skills tailored to the need of the local economy. Overall then, the Skills for Business Network is to act as the link between business and education. This link though, is not seen as an equal partnership between education and business, but instead one where the Skills Councils drive education provision in their area, and monitor its quality and suitability on behalf of businesses. This is shown in some of what are termed the ‘core roles’ of the Skills for Business Network.

- engaging with colleges, training providers, universities and planning bodies to ensure they understand and act on sectors’ skills needs
- Reviewing the suitability of existing training programmes and qualifications to meet sector needs, and commissioning the development of new programmes where needed.
- Also, the Skills for Business Network is to be involved in reforming qualifications and training programmes, working with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the LSC.

Taken from DfES et al, 2003. p. 52

Not only is this business led vision focused on the education system as a whole, but also on the learner. In discussing the skills strategy in terms of the learner, business needs begin the dialogue. Statements such as ‘People are the key to a successful economy’ (DfES et al, 2003, p. 59), ‘Our strategy aims to help people develop the skills they need for employment and personal fulfilment.’ (ibid) and ‘There are four principles underlying our approach to improved publically-funded training provision for adults. It should: be led by the needs of employers and learners.’ (Ibid, p. 87) While mentioning personal needs and benefits of education, the skills strategy begins with business and the economy. Learners are included in the equation principally as a repository for skills and for the benefits they can impart to businesses. In addition, the skills which they do gain are intended primarily for work. As discussed in the previous chapter, qualifications in Document 4 are seen as the currency through which people gain employment and contribute to the economy.

The next section will consider how Document 4 takes this business led approach to education provision and argues for the need for the economic relevance of education.

Economic Relevance

The final major theme to emerge from Document 4 is the need for economic relevance within the education system. This theme is closely linked to the other two themes of skills and qualifications and business led education.

Skills, as previously described, are, according to Document 4, the key to increased economic prosperity, and by ensuring that the education system is geared to the needs of businesses by addressing the skills gaps which those businesses have identified, productivity will increase, contributing to greater economic prosperity for the country. As has been demonstrated throughout this results chapter, the belief that one of the aims of education should be economic relevance is a theme which is has been strong throughout all of the documents so far, and Document 4 is no exception. At the beginning of Document 4, the aims of the skills strategy are laid out, and the first one states,

We aim to improve the UK's productivity and standard of living. That will contribute to the Government's central economic objective of raising the rate of sustainable growth across all English regions, to achieve rising prosperity and a better quality of life, with economic and employment opportunities for all.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 17

Where the theme of economic relevance differs within Document 4 however, is that this theme is linked to the wider European economy in an explicit way. The final sentence from the first aim of the skills strategy as quoted above shows this new emphasis. 'It [improved prosperity and growth] will also support our wider efforts to encourage economic reform across Europe' (Ibid)

Further references to the European economy consider the mobility of people across Europe, and the need to support and work with ‘our European partners’ as part of the economic reform agenda as part of the Lisbon Treaty of 2000. (DfES et al, 2003, p. 7-8) It can be seen that in this aspect of the skills strategy, the Government believed that the skills strategy, along with its desired results, would contribute to the greater economic prosperity not only of the UK but Europe, while also putting the UK in a position to influence European wide policy.

Delivering this strategy is not just about meeting our national needs. It also supports the work we are doing with our European partners to tackle the challenges of skills and mobility across the European Union. The actions in this strategy will be our contribution to that agenda, and the successful delivery of these proposals will enable us to share best practice across Europe.

DfES et al, 2003, p.100

The economic relevance of education, as envisioned in Document 4, also links to personal fulfilment and happiness, an idea which has been described in detail in previous sections of this study. In clear terms, and with no hint of ambiguity or doubt, Chapter 4 in Document 4, entitled ‘Skills for individuals’ discusses the fact that ‘skills are not just about work or economic goals’ DfES et al, p. 59 but instead also about personal fulfilment and the dignity of self-improvement’ (ibid)

However, it also seems that the improvement in self esteem and personal fulfilment which comes with allowing every person to develop their skills, in turn comes from their ability to work, which in turn rests on the skills which they can bring to job opportunities. In a paragraph which contradicts itself, Document 4 claims

For individuals, skills are not just about work. They also serve essential social purposes. Achieving a fairer more inclusive society depends on young people leaving school or college with the skills they need to work.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 60

Here it seems, while asserting in the first sentence of this quote that skills are not just about work, nevertheless, societal fairness, and personal fulfilment both rest on individuals contributing to the economy through the world of work, and the key to obtaining a job, is based on skills. So, while skills may not be just about work, a person's self-esteem, fulfilment and place in society will suffer without the skills required by businesses. You need skills for work, you need work for self-esteem, and you need everybody to participate in work to create a fairer more equal society. In this way then 'economic and social objectives are necessarily entwined' (DfES et al, 2003, p. 60) The economic relevance of education is important in Document 4, because it is the gateway through which society can become more fair, individuals can become more fulfilled, and businesses can become more productive.

4.5.4 Conclusion

Document 4 was included in this study to provide a Government wide perspective on the reform of the education system for 14-19 year olds.

While its authorship means that it necessarily had a greater business and economic focus than the other Documents, its inclusion can be seen to give a greater understanding of the aims behind the reform of education as they exist across the whole of the Government. This provides a deeper understanding of the motivations of New Labour as they relate to the role of education within Government policy as a whole. The three broad themes which were identified within Document 4 were skills and qualifications, business led education and economic relevance.

The place of skills and qualifications within Document 4 was that they act as the key both to employment and economic prosperity. Through raising the skills of the UK workforce, the skills strategy as outlined in Document 4 envisioned greater social equality and economic prosperity. In order to ensure that this improvement in the economy and across society was realised, the second theme of business led education was described. Here, the skills which people acquired would be targeted to the needs of local business, with the Skills for Business Network overseeing the identification of skills gaps and the creation and ongoing provision of education and training to fill these gaps.

The final major theme is Document 4 was that of economic relevance of the education system. Like the other documents studies here, education is described as the route to economic prosperity. Unlike the other documents, the UK's place within the European community was considered and built into these policies. This it was argued could be seen as the Government ensuring that the UK was in a position both economically and politically to be part of the dialogue about European economic integration.

Themes within the Document

Document 4	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	A coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
	*	*					*

Table 19

The final Document which was analysed for this study, *14-19 Education and Skills*, will be considered now.

4.6 Document 5

14-19 Education and Skills

Name of Document	14-19 Education and Skills
Published by	Department for Education and Skills
Type of Document	White Paper
Date	February 2005
Secretary of State for Education	Ruth Kelly
Word Length	42, 717
Base Word Length (t)	0.8

Table 20

4.6.1 Overview of Document 5

The final document which was analysed for this study is the White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills*. This paper was published following the Tomlinson Review (2004) which recommended a fundamental change to the structure of 14-19 education, including the scrapping of A levels and their replacement with Diplomas, combining vocational and academic subjects. Document 5 can be seen as the Government's response to Tomlinson's recommendations. While the policy outlined in *14-19 Education and Skills* began the introduction of Diplomas for the 14-19 sector, these were not to be in place of A levels, but to sit alongside them.

The wider political context of the publication of these proposals was a general disappointment from teachers and others involved in 14-19 education, of an opportunity having been missed.

Indeed, the proposals in Document 5 were seen by the Government as a 'major package of reform' (DES 2005, p. 8) and were described as 'a once-in-a-generation chance to transform 14-19 education and skills' (ibid). However, it could be argued that the 'once-in-a-generation' chance was missed, both because of the detail of the Tomlinson Review, as well as the fact that the next election would see Labour majority greatly reduced, meaning any political chance of getting major reforms though with such a small majority was lost.

While the introduction of the Diplomas can be seen as the 'standout' policy within Document 5, other aspects of the document include the development of vocational education as well as an attempt to strengthen accountability within the education system as a whole. The major themes which were found in Document 5 will be discussed in detail later in this section, but it is also interesting to note that the critical analysis which allowed for the recognition of these themes also showed that Document 5 contained several policy inconsistencies. One of these is the idea of a system divided at the age of 16. The Document suggests that all pathways of learning must be broad until the age of 16 to allow for young people to make choices which can later be changed, or don't limit them in the future. (DES 2005, p. 24) By stating that pathways should remain broad until the age of 16, the implication is that these pathways then will become narrower at 16+, thereby creating a divide in the system based on the options offered at that age.

However, in a subsequent paragraph, the Government states, 'So our vision is that 16 should cease to be a fixed point in our system' (DES, 2003, p. 25) suggesting a desire to erase the divide at 16, thereby introducing inconsistency into the proposals. Another example of this inconsistency is in the idea that 'all young people must be stretched to achieve' (DES, 2005, p. 22).

In stating this aim, the document goes on to explain that there are many ways to achieve (Ibid) but then continues to say detail the desire that all will remain in education until 18 and achieve higher-level qualifications, (Ibid) suggesting that the only way to achieve is through the acquisition of qualifications.

The results of the content analysis on Document 5 are shown below.

4.6.2 Content Analysis Results

	Direct (raw)	Indirect (raw)	Direct (averaged)	Indirect (averaged)	Total (raw)	Total (averaged)
References to Economy	25	5	20	4	30	24
References to Participation	7	0	6	0	7	6
References to Society	8	0	6	0	8	6
References to Personal Development	20	1	16	1	21	17

Table 21

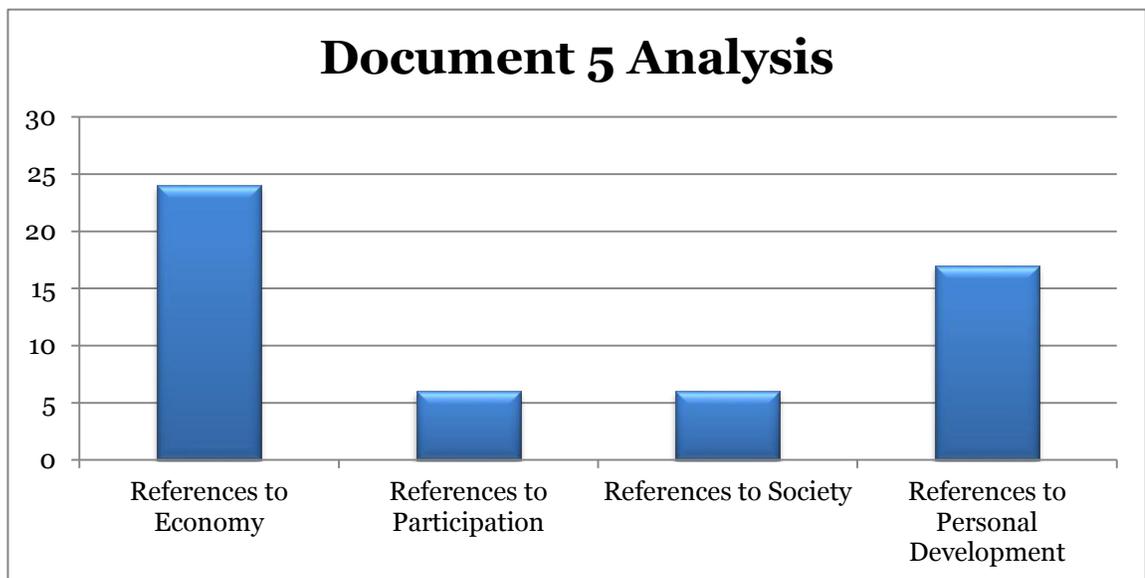


Table 22

In Document 5 then, the trend which has prevailed across the previous four documents continues, with the number of references to the economy as a driver behind education reform much higher than any other category. Indeed, it is clear to see that this is the major trajectory on which these policies are based, when in the foreword the following statement is made by Ruth Kelly.

The reforms I set out here are of vital importance. They are vital to our economy-equipping young people with the skills employers need and the ability to go on learning throughout their lives.

DES, 2005, p. 3

However, while it can be seen from these results that the economy is a key driver behind educational reform in this Document, a strong strand which emerges is that of personal development linked with life-long learning. The phrase 'in later life' is used often in relation to gaining qualifications which will be useful 'in later life' (DES, 2005, p. 44, 36, 22, 11) In suggesting that more young people should stay on in education until at least the age of 18, the Government wants to encourage greater lifelong learning, and an ongoing development of a person's individual talents and skills. (DES, 2005, p. 11)

Indeed, Document 5 can be described as the most evangelical of all of the documents in terms of the belief that education is a 'cure all' within society, most especially for the economy. The benefits of education, and the need to bring its benefits, as perceived by New Labour, to all people is not simply a *duty* of the Government, but a *moral* requirement.

...the need to offer every young person the opportunity to become educated and skilled is not only an economic imperative, but a moral one.

DES, 2005, p. 15

This moral justification for reform of the 14-19 education system permeates all parts of this document, with the belief that through the reforms detailed in Document 5, education can deliver untold benefits to all of society.

This major package of reform seizes a once-in-a-generation chance to transform 14-19 education and skills. Through doing so, we will seek to widen opportunity for all young people and take the next steps towards a more prosperous and fairer society.

DES, 2005, p. 8

The major themes which emerged through the content analysis of this document will be discussed next.

4.6.3 Themes in Document 5

Within Document 5 there are four dominant themes identified through document analysis. The first is that of vocational education. In deciding to retain A levels, and effectively rejecting the findings of the Tomlinson Review, credible alternatives to those recommendations had to be offered.

In the policies set out in Document 5 then, were proposals to strengthen the vocational offer, and improve the regard in which these routes were held.

Our next requirement for achieving this vision is that there should be much stronger vocational routes to success, which are genuinely valued by employers, and as providing access to higher education.

DES, 2005, p. 24

The second major theme in Document 5 is that of Skills and Qualifications, this being linked to offering a stronger vocational path, as well as being about creating flexibility within the education system around when pupils take certain exams. The third theme is that of business led education, with the education system being fashioned around the needs of employers and industry. The final theme is the idea of the continuing need for the 14-19 education system to be economically relevant, and geared towards creating continuing and ever increasing economic prosperity. These themes will now be discussed in greater detail.

Vocational Education

Document 5 identifies the need to improve the position of vocational education in England and Wales. In detailing the problem, the historical background of vocational education is discussed, with the long term nature of the problem being explained.

Vocational education has long been a cause of concern in this country...Vocational education for young people has often failed to command the confidence of employers, higher education and the public...Successive policy initiatives over several decades have failed to resolve the issue.

DES, 2005, p. 20

A stated aim within Document 5 is the desire to 'provide better vocational routes which equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need for further learning and employment.' (DES, 2005, p. 4)

Document 5 describes the process through which this increase in status will be achieved. The expressed desire is that through providing an education system more tailored to the needs of the individual, and 'a more intelligent range of qualifications' (DES, 2005, p. 46) pupils will be able to choose courses which are fully vocational or which contain vocational elements, assessed against GCSE and A level standards. A more detailed discussion of the vision for skills and qualifications as presented in Document 5 will follow in the next section, but it is important to recognise here how a change in the qualifications system is seen to be an important part of the reform agenda to increase the status and acceptance of vocational routes within the 14-19 sector.

A second strand running through the theme of vocational education within Document 5 is the desire to eliminate the divide between academic and vocational routes.

On page 45 the Government discusses the nature of this divide and argues that the divide between vocational courses and academic is indeed a false one, with many courses often considered the most academic and high level actually containing a great degree of vocational training.

The idea that there is, or should be, a clear dividing line between the academic and the vocational does not stand up to scrutiny...Many of the highest status and most demanding degree courses are vocational, but with significant academic content, Law, medicine and engineering are perhaps the most obvious examples among the traditional degree courses, but there are many others.

DES, 2005, p. 45

The aim then, as discussed before, is to increase the status of vocational education, and with that erase the false dichotomy between the academic and vocational strands of education. This vision, according to Document 5, will be achieved through creating high status vocational routes and a more flexible qualifications system. However, despite this desire, the inconsistencies which plague this document (as mentioned in the overview) again show themselves on this point. By maintaining A levels, the Government can be seen to be perpetuating the academic/vocational divide, through the continual recognition and re-statement of the belief that A levels are the 'cornerstone' of the education system (DES, 2005, p. 45) with no other qualification having as clear an appeal to 'young people, the public, employers and higher education' as A levels. (Ibid, p. 20)

The very fact that A levels are part of the solution as proposed in Document 5 creates a divide between the academic and the vocational within the system by virtue of the academic nature of A levels and the restatement of the belief that they represent the ‘gold standard’ of qualifications, even if this term is not used specifically.

So while the stated desire is to both increase the status of vocational qualifications and bridge the divide between the academic and the vocational, the inconsistencies within Document 5 on this point, as expressed here, make it hard to see how that aim is going to be achieved.

The next section will look at the theme of skills and qualifications.

Skills and Qualifications

Document 5 is focused on changing the nature of the qualifications system, and as shown in the previous section, one of the major reasons for this is the desire to improve the status of vocational routes within the 14 to 19 sector.

Qualifications reform is at the heart of this agenda, and the way that the reforms presented in this document are set to achieve this is through flexibility of options for students. In the above section looking at the theme of vocational education, it was discussed that the Government believed there was a false dividing line between vocational and academic routes.

However, although recognising this problem, policy choices which were made ensured that this divide remained. In the same way, the reform of the qualifications system as proposed in Document 5 can be seen to strengthen the academic/vocational divide. This situation arises through the introduction of Diplomas, with the Diplomas presented in this Document as the vocational equivalent of A levels.

We will rationalise the existing very wide array of 3,500 vocational qualifications available to young people into much more easily recognisable and understandable Diplomas, containing both specialised material and GCSEs and A levels...they will be available in a full range of 'lines of learning', covering all the main occupational sectors of the economy.

DES, 2005, p. 47

However, despite policies that would appear to encourage a dual route through 14-19, one academic and one vocational, the document is very clear that these routes be flexible and that a student who begins on a particular route at age 14, will have the flexibility throughout their school career to change the path they are on.

While it will be an essential design principle of the Diploma that achievement at one level is a full preparation to work towards the next level, it is equally important that young people do not narrow down their choices too early. We will therefore ensure that...it will be entirely possible to progress, for example, from a level 2 Diploma to A levels or from GCSE's to a level 3 Diploma.

DES, 2005, p. 48

This approach essentially means that students would be able to choose the path that is right for them at any given time throughout the 14-19 phase, being able to follow different pathways while at the same time gaining relevant qualifications, and not ending up in a qualification 'dead end' with "no natural next step in learning" (ibid, p. 47) Although the words 'unify the 14-19 phase' are not used in this document, this policy of creating a flexible and responsive qualifications framework can be seen as an attempt to do just that.

Again, the belief in this course of action is strong, and can be described at times, as mentioned before, as evangelical. The tone of Document 5 is confident and strident, and the theme of skills and qualifications reform is no exception.

Qualification reform is not a quick fix...It will take 10 years...But when it is done, aspiration and opportunity in this country will have been transformed forever.

Ibid

The theme of business led education, which has been evident in three of the previous four documents also features in Document 5, and will be discussed next.

Business Led Education

Business led education has been a strong theme throughout the majority of the previous documents being studied here, and Document 5 continues this idea. In setting out a reform programme where there are 'routes to success for all' (DES, 2005, p. 6) one of the main objectives to achieve this is through 'putting employers in the lead' (ibid) through the Sector Skills Councils. In explaining the case for reform of the sector, one of the reasons cited is the fact that employers are not satisfied with the skills which school leavers possess once they are in work. (Ibid, p.4)

Business led education in Document 5 is linked, as in previous documents, with the needs of the economy, but in a more fundamental way, Document 5 links vocational education with business led education. Perhaps because of the political need to respond to the Tomlinson Review, Document 5 focuses on the need to increase the status and qualification system around vocational education, and the reason provided for this is that 14-19 education should respond both to the needs of the learner, but crucially, to the needs of employers. (DES, 2005, p. 8)

As a way of ensuring this link between vocational education and employers, the Diploma system, as set out in Document 5, puts 'employers in the driving seat' (Ibid, p.47) in terms of designing the Diplomas. In the first instance, the Government say they will charge the QCA with the task of working with employers, through the SSCs to

...devise a set of national standards, tied to international benchmarks, which will apply to all Diplomas. They will set out what every Diploma must contain.

DES, 2005, p. 50

In addition, not only will employers be tasked with a large part of the responsibility for creating the frameworks within which the Diplomas will operate, the Government thought it important that employers were also involved in the delivery of the Diplomas.

In setting out the case for employers to participate in delivering parts of the Diploma qualification, Document 5 point to the dual benefits of pupils receiving training in a workplace. The first is that 'on the job' training can provide students with a level of motivation above and beyond what a school or college can offer, and also that for employers, it gives them the opportunity to have direct contact with possible employees of the future.

...for many young people, real contact with real employers is an important motivation. And for employers-especially those facing skills shortages-it provides a means to train and attract the next generation of skilled employees.

DES, 2005, p. 55

And so with these clear benefits, the Government wants to

...challenge employers to become more involved in providing opportunities to learn in a work setting

Ibid

Therefore, the vision for business led education within Document 5, particularly in terms of the Diplomas, is that businesses lead in the design and the implementation of the new qualification.

The final theme which will be discussed in this section is one which links clearly with the other three themes of vocational education, skills and qualifications and business led education, namely economic relevance.

Economic Relevance

It can be argued that the driving force behind each of the previous themes within Document 5 (vocational education, skills and qualifications, and business led education) is the final theme being considered here - economic relevance. In the case of vocational education, the need to develop a route which is relevant and valued is important because

The changing context of work and society and the need for the UK to be economically competitive place increasing demands on the knowledge and skills of the population...And vocational education has less impact on the skills levels in this country than it does in others.

DES, 2005, p. 15

Here then, the quality and relevance of the vocational education which pupils receive are seen to have a direct impact on the economic success of the country.

In the case of the theme of skills and qualifications, Document 5 argues that though creating high quality routes through 14-19 education which lead to qualifications which are valued and recognised by employers and universities as the key to ensuring young people succeed in life and are productive members of society. (DES, 2005, p. 45)

And finally, through the theme of business led education, the value to the economy is clear, with business being involved in the design of courses and training of young people in order to ensure they have the skills necessary to make a positive contribution to individual businesses, in turn leading to greater economic prosperity.

While all of these themes mean that the idea of economic relevance is important within Document 5, a different perspective is provided for this theme through the idea of the cost to society of *not* educating certain groups of people. One of the reasons given for the need to reform the 14-19 phase at the beginning of this document is that participation rates are believed to be too low. (DES, 2005, p.4) A particular group which is specifically targeted in the policies within Document 5 are those 'not in education, training or employment' (NEET) This group forms part of this document because 'the economic and social cost of young people being in the NEET group are high, and they are the young people who we most need to re-engage in education and training.' (DES, 2005, p. 67) In targeting NEETs, the policies in Document 5 show that the Government believes this group of young people cost society economically.

The solution then, is to design an education system which will engage these people, and bring them back into the system, thereby benefitting the country both socially and economically.

4.6.4 Conclusion

This final document in the group of five which were analysed for this study is consistent with the messages which have formed the majority of those studied.

A major factor in the consideration of any reform programme put forward in Document 5 is the need for economic relevance, and the requirement that young people be given the skills necessary for their future life in work. This theme can be seen both explicitly around the idea of re-engagement of those young people not in education, training or employment, and implicitly through the other major themes within this document, namely vocational education, skills and qualifications and business led education.

Linked very closely to this is the theme of vocational education. Despite claiming that divisions between academic and vocational routes to qualifications should be avoided, the effect of the policies presented here can be seen to be the perpetuation of a dual track system, thorough the maintenance of A levels as the cornerstone of the 14-19 education system. The possible political reasons behind this policy were discussed earlier, connecting this theme with the Tomlinson Report.

The introduction of the Diploma can be described as the major policy initiative within the document, and because of this, the theme of skills and qualifications was important in this document. Of particular significance in Document 5 was the idea of a flexible qualifications system, where pupils could follow meaningful paths through the 14-19 curriculum, within a framework where it was possible to change focus, thereby tailoring the qualifications system to the needs of the individual.

Finally, the need for business to lead education development and delivery, particularly in relation to the Diplomas was discussed in this section. It was noted that this concept was presented as being beneficial both to employers and pupils.

Themes within the Document

Document 5	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	A coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
	*	*		*			*

Table 23

Having looked in detail at the results from the analysis of the five individual documents, the final section in this chapter will consider the common themes between the documents, as well as discuss any areas where policy is not seen to be continuous throughout.

4.7 Comparison of the Five Documents

In tone and expression, the five documents which were analysed for this study were often varied and distinctive. Certainly, each contained policy points which were specific to that document, and initiatives which were unique. However, several common themes are evident between the five documents, and when viewed together, the similarities are striking.

The conclusion to the results section will consider three areas of similarity, linked with the coding categories used when analysing the documents, which are the economy, personal development and skills and qualifications. As part of this overview and to aid the conclusions being drawn from the document analysis, this section will also include the use of other sources, such as speeches and policy pronouncements not in the form of White or Green papers. As explained in the methodology, these sources are being used selectively and with an eye to the overall methodological rationale which is to attempt to analyse policy in its purest form. The last section will consider how by the time the final document is written, and New Labour was entering a period when their popularity was waning, the message can be seen to be more strident, and yet less confident in tone.

4.7.1 The Economy

When reading any of the five documents which have been analysed here, spanning as they do six years of New Labour, no reader can be left in doubt that the need for reform of the 14-19 education system was considered urgent. In addition, the six intervening years saw no decrease in the expressed urgency behind these reforms. If the statements from Document 1 and Document 5, shown below, are compared, it is clear that New Labour were certain that reform of 14-19 education was essential, and the danger which lay ahead if these reforms were not implemented was ever present.

“The challenge is urgent...This White Paper sets out our policies to achieve the step change in performance which is needed to meet the challenge ahead.” (DfEE, 1999, p. 3-4)

“The transformation of secondary and post-secondary education...is a critical priority for Britain” DES, 2005, p. 10

The findings of both the content analysis and the critical analysis found that the driver behind this need for reform which was most prevalent within the documents was that of the economy. This chimes in clearly with the stated aims of the Labour Party when it comes to the role of the Department for Education and Employment. In explaining the position of the department and its usefulness in the economy, David Blunkett makes clear the belief that education and the economy are clearly linked when he says,

In our schools, colleges and universities and in training the unemployed and disadvantaged, we accept our role in equipping individuals and the country with the skills and the creative, enquiring minds that will drive our economy in the new century. This is about neither purely education policy nor purely employment policy: the two are indistinguishable in this Knowledge Economy.

Blunkett, 2001, p. 2

The need to equip the young people of the country with the skills needed to make them better and more productive workers within the economy was a major, if not *the* major theme which ran across all five documents. This constant and unwavering argument about the importance to the economy of a relevant 14-19 education system can be seen in the five quotes below, taken from each of the documents and shown in chronological order.

The challenge we face to equip individuals, employers and the country to meet the demands of the 21st century are immediate and immense...To continue to compete we must equip ourselves for this new world with new and better skills. (DfEE, 1999, p. 12)

The need for reform of the 14 to 19 curriculum in our secondary schools has never been more urgent. There are four central challenges that our country must address if we are to guarantee economic prosperity and social justice for all in this new century. (DfES, 2002, p. 4)

...we need to create a clearer and more appropriate curriculum and qualifications framework for the 14-19 phase-one that develops and stretches all our young people to achieve their full potential, and prepares them for life and work in the 21st Century. (DfES, 2003, p.2)

Sustaining a competitive, productive economy which delivers prosperity for all requires an ever growing proportion of skilled, qualified people. (DfES et al, 2003, p. 7)

The reforms I set out here are of vital importance. They are vital to our economy- equipping young people with the skills employers need and the ability to go on learning throughout their lives. (DES, 2005, p. 3)

The economic imperative is present in all five documents and the language used to express this imperative, and the reasons for the long held and steadfast belief in its inherent benefits, seem hardly to change cross the five documents. It is clear that economic prosperity and a strengthening of the economy against global economic threats was of major importance to New Labour. What is also clear is the belief in the idea that this economic prosperity can be aided by , if not completely built on, reform of the 14-19 education system, in order to make it more responsive and relevant to the economic realities which were identified within the Government. Tony Blair explained this belief in 2007 when he talked of human capital being the key determinant of corporate and country success, and how education can be seen as “an economic imperative” (Blair, 2007)

Even Document 2, which was identified through both content and critical analysis as having a more learner led approach to reform of the sector as well as a different tone from the other four documents, contained a strong adherence to the idea that economic considerations were important in designing a new 14-19 system.

We need to ensure that the changes we make to provide greater choice and opportunity from the age of 14 feed through into coherent and worthwhile programmes continuing from 16 through to 19 for all young people, not just those following A level programmes. We must aim to give all young people a solid grounding in the key skills which will equip them for future study, personal development and effective competition in the labour markets of the 21st Century.

DfES, 2002, p. 35

The economic argument for the reform of 14-19 education is expressed in various forms across the five documents. In Document 4, jointly published by the Department for Education and Skills, the Treasury, the Department for Trade and Industry and the Department for Work and Pensions, the economic argument is approached from a business perspective. In this document, the economic driver behind the case for reform is the gap which businesses have identified in job applicants, and the resultant low productivity. This document then, argues that by targeting the education system towards filling these gaps in students, and eventually perspective employees' skills, productivity within individual businesses will be raised, thereby creating growth and prosperity within the economy as a whole.

There is much concern that the existing range of qualifications is not providing what employers require and individuals need...So we will reform qualifications, so that they will better meet the needs of employers, and lead to better rewards and employment prospects for learners.

DfES et al, 2003, p. 25

Within Document 5, the economic argument is expressed through the idea of reforming vocational education. The document argues that by creating routes through the 14-19 phase which contain high quality and highly valued vocational options, more young people will be able to achieve employment.

We want all young people to be pursuing programmes leading to qualifications which enable them to progress further in learning and which are in demand from employers and universities.

DES, 2005, p. 46

It is clear then, from the above examples, that the economy as a driver behind the reform of 14-19 education is a significant part of all five documents, and the reasons and justifications they offer for the need for change.

A second, and more hidden but at times more revealing aspect of the driver of economy which has emerged from the analysis across these five documents is that even when other drivers for reform are identified within these texts, these drivers being personal development, participation and society, the economy is often a supplementary reason for these other drivers being mentioned. In other words, it has also been shown that frequently these other drivers can be considered to themselves contain an economic objective. Often within the analysis, a certain driver will be identified within a particular paragraph of the document, and although the aim identified is not in itself economic, the rationale for this driver will have an economic basis. For example, the following sentence appeared in Document 2, and can be seen as an example of the driver of participation.

All, not just some, young people need to continue their education and training beyond the compulsory years. (DfES, 2003, p. 7)

The subsequent sentence gives the rationale for this stance.

At least half our young adults should at some stage enter higher education if our economy is to have enough people with higher-level skills. (ibid)

So in this example, while participation can be seen to be a driver behind economic reform, a secondary or indirect driver on the aim of participation is the economy.

In this instance then, the methodology around the analysis of this sentence meant that the coding category which was assigned to the first sentence was participation, while the second sentence was coded as an indirect reference to the economy.

4.7.2 Personal Development

While the economy has been identified as the major driver behind reform of 14-19 education, it is also clear that there are other priorities which have been important to the various Secretaries of State for Education who have been responsible for these documents. One such driver is that of personal development.

The content analysis results show that personal development is the second most referenced driver behind reform of the 14-19 system, and that this focus is consistent throughout the five documents. The coding category for personal development was defined as containing those references within the document which mentioned the enhancing of an individual's talents and potential to improve the quality of their life through education. This was to include references to personal development, fulfilment, self-worth, self-esteem, lifelong learning and personal achievement. Two possible reasons for the prominence of this driver will be discussed now.

The first reason for personal development to figure so highly on the government's agenda for 14-19 education reform as portrayed in these documents derive from the idea, as discussed in the Literature Review of this study, that social and economic policies, under New Labour formed a core aspect of the ideology upon which the Government was based. As such, the individual and their well being was as important as society as a whole, and the belief existed that individual advancement benefited not only the individual but their family and the community.

The second possible reason for the frequent mention of personal development as a driver in the reform of 14-19 education relates to the economic imperative. As described above, the critical analysis undertaken in this study identified economic objectives behind the description of the other drivers, and this can particularly be seen when referencing the driver of personal development. The arguments, as presented in the five documents relating to personal development, often contain a discussion of the personal benefits of education to the individual, but either begins or ends with the economic advantages of individual education, as shown in the quotes below from Document 4 and Document 3

...learning and skills are not just about work or economic goals. They are also about the pleasure of learning for its own sake, the dignity of self-improvement, the achievement of personal potential and fulfilment, and the creation of a better society. **Our strategy aims to help people develop the skills they need for employment and personal fulfilment.**

DfES et al, 2003, p. 59 (emphasis added)

Many never return. [to full time education after 16] Instead they head for low-skilled, low-paid jobs or drift into unemployment. This not only affects their personal health, prosperity and well-being; it also damages the nation's competitiveness

DfES, 2003, p.59

In both of these examples, the idea of designing a 14-19 education system which will contribute positively to a person's personal development and fulfilment is intimately bound up with the economic advantages which it is argued this will bring. This point is made elsewhere by David Blunkett when he says

The policies of the DfEE are central to delivering this Government's economic and social agenda...this is good for the economy but also vital for individuals, their families and their communities. Work is the best way out of poverty...

Blunkett, 2001, p.19

The final significant finding across all five documents is the ever growing significance of the development of a skills and qualifications framework.

4.7.3 Skills and Qualifications

The theme of skills and qualifications can be seen in all five documents, although the prominence of this theme grows with each successive document.

In Document 1, the focus in terms of qualifications was on creating pathways which allowed young people and adults to attain the skills they needed for employment. (DfEE, 1999, p.7). This focus on skills continued to be evident in subsequent documents. In Document 3, qualifications reform was needed in order to combat 'historic weaknesses' in the system linked to 'a weak offer for those who want a vocational orientation to their studies, and an insufficiently broad and demanding offer on the A level track' (DfES, 2003, p. 2) By the time of the publication of Document 5 in 2005, and with the rejection of a unified system at 14-19 as proposed by the Tomlinson Review, qualifications reform appeared to be an overriding priority for reform of the system, and the introduction of Diplomas designed as a signal that the 'once in a generation chance to transform 14-19 education and skills' was being seized. (DES, 2005, p. 8)

This focus on skills and qualifications can be seen in evidence given to the Select Committee on Education and Skills by Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education. Morris was asked about the skills shortage, and how more young people could be encouraged to enrol in Modern Apprenticeship (MA) courses. Her answer was to say that the offer to the young person had to be right and the qualifications meaningful; in other words it would lead to employment "...we have to make sure it is a robust qualification that leads to employment or leads to progression and routes into higher education." (Morris, 2002, question 179) Morris' successor in the post also considered skills as pivotal in the education system, and pointed out that this was a priority not just for him, but leaders in the Labour Government.

The leadership of this Government-particularly the Prime Minister and the Chancellor-have, correctly in my opinion, identified that unless we are successful at tackling our skills problems, at the end of the day, we are not competitive as a nation, not competitive 15 years down the line and that means we cannot support our social structures.

Clarke, 2002, question 63

Therefore, through the analysis of data gained through document analysis on five key government publications, and other supporting evidence, it is clear to see that skills and qualifications form a main plank of the Labour Government's education policy between 1997 and 2005.

4.7.4 Emergent themes

The table below shows the content analysis results of each of the five documents, plotted alongside each other for ease of comparison. As already identified, the economy emerges as the most referenced category, and personal development is the second most mentioned driver behind education reform overall. The results for Document 3, when presented alongside the others, show clearly that there were significantly fewer overall references to any category in Document 3. The possible reasons for this were discussed in the section within this chapter which looked specifically at this Document.

The second chart shows the combined total of both the direct and indirect references to the coding categories for all five documents.

This chart provides a clear indication of the positioning of each of the coding categories in relation to each other, and makes clear the pole position of the economy coding category.

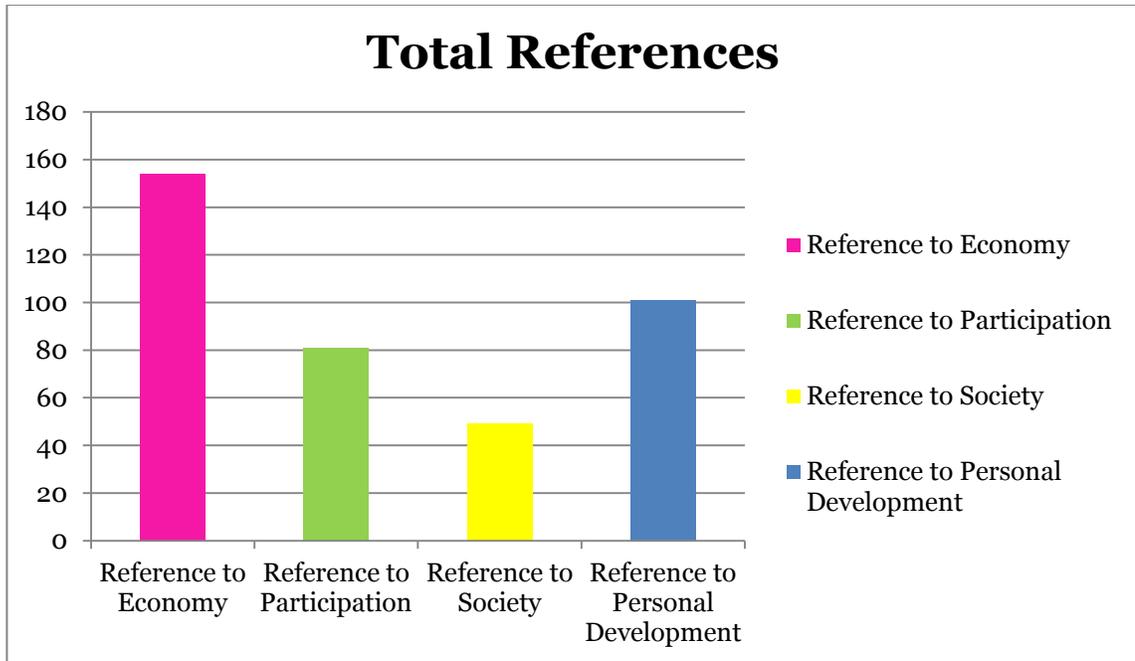
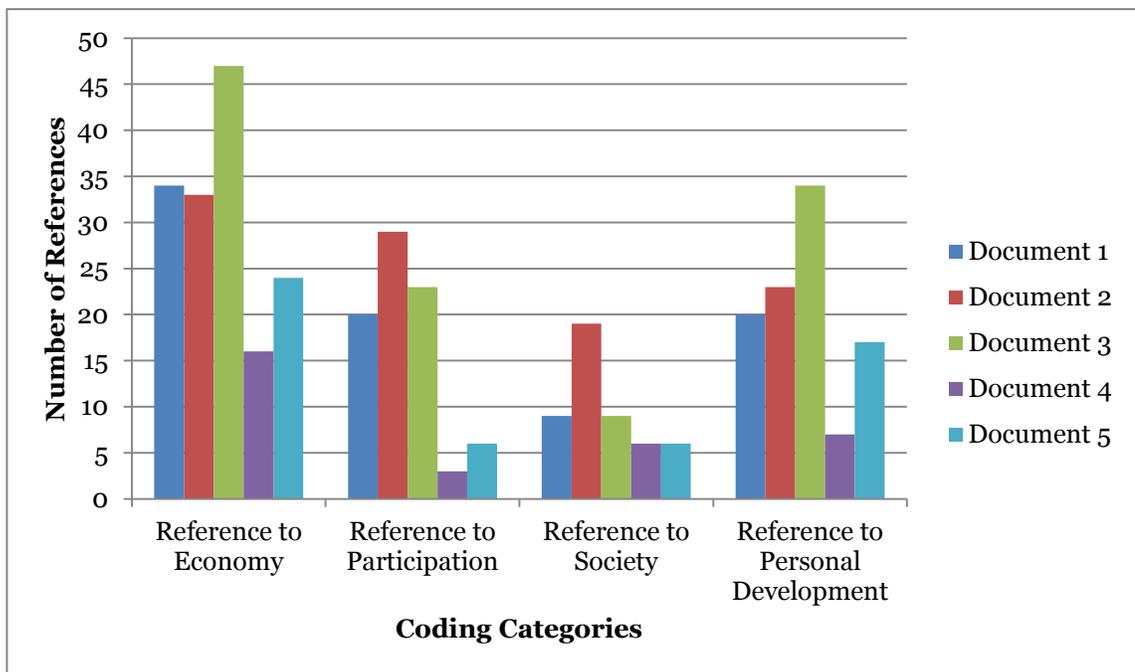


Table 24 and 25



4.8 Themes across all five documents.

The critical analysis which was carried out on all five of the documents allowed for the emergence of seven major themes. These are presented here in a format whereby the five documents can be compared against one another. The theme of the economic relevance of the 14-19 phase can be seen in all five documents, and has been discussed at length in each of the sections detailing the results for each individual document. When viewed as a whole, the results make it clear that this theme can be considered central to the policies of New Labour. Document 2 stands out as differing from the others both in direction and focus, concentrating as it does on a learner led education system, as well as its commitment to the idea of a unified 14-19 phase. The possible reasons for this change in emphasis as compared to the other four documents have been discussed, and it has been suggested that one factor in the different focus which this document represents is the fact that it is the only Green Paper which was analysed. However, in relation to economic relevance, even Document 2, with its difference in tone from the other four documents, still shows an adherence to this theme.

	Economic Relevance	Business Led Education	Structural Change	Vocational Education	Learner Led Education	A coherent 14-19 Phase	Skills and Qualifications
Document 1	*	*	*				*
Document 2	*				*	*	
Document 3	*	*	*	*			
Document 4	*	*					*
Document 5	*	*		*			*

Table 26

The results obtained from the analysis of the five documents show a level of consistency across all of the themes identified, with a strong focus on the economic benefits of education. These results are confirmed through reference to additional policy announcements which have been included in this final section. There is a desire expressed in all five documents to further improve the prosperity of the country by focusing the 14-19 education system more clearly on the economic benefits that Labour believed could be derived from education. While the results show a tendency across the documents to follow what could be termed a political plan for the education system, can it be said that an ideology exists in the educational reform programme of New Labour?

In conclusion then, the results presented here show a strong focus on the economy, within education policy, with the additional driver of personal development playing a key role in policy direction. The final section of this study will consider the findings as presented in this chapter against the original research question, consider possible aims of education, drivers behind New Labour's 14-19 education policy the ideology upon which New Labour was based, and provide a final conclusion to this research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study began with the intention of investigating the drivers behind the reform of 14-19 education. The motivations behind policy decisions made by New Labour, with its emphasis on education, was the focus. The period being studied was 1997-2005.

The research question which was posed at the outset of this study was

What were the drivers of Labour's 14-19 education reform between 1997 and 2005, and how do these drivers complement or work against educational goals?

By analysing the five policy documents produced by New Labour on the topic of 14-19 education, four possible drivers were identified. These were the economy, personal development, society and participation. The drivers were used as the basis for the coding categories for the content analysis, and their definition can be found on pages 191 and 192. These coding categories provided a framework with which to analyse each of the five documents. A close reading of the documents following the methodology laid out earlier produced a numerical result whereby the instances of references to these drivers within a document could be identified.

The supplementary methodology of critical analysis was used alongside the content analysis to provide a deeper analysis of the texts, and themes emerged from this analysis which complemented each of the coding categories and provided a richer set of data from which to draw conclusions. The methodology used for each of these processes is described in detail in the methodology chapter.

Considering the results from both the content and the critical analysis allowed for the identification of themes not only within documents but also between documents, and it is this comparison of the documents which provides much of the data for the conclusions being discussed here.

The results from the content analysis showed that the most prominent and obvious driver behind the policy presented in the five documents was that of the economy. It was clearly shown that the educational reform programme concerned with the 14-19 phase was driven by economic considerations, both to improve the prosperity of the country domestically, but also to allow Britain to maintain a strong economic position globally. Overall, the content analysis results show that the references to the economy, both direct and indirect, made up 41% of the total. Personal development made up 25.7% of the references to aims of education, while participation represented 20% and society 13.3% of the overall number of references to educational aims within the five documents. These results show that the economy was mentioned nearly one and a half as many times as an aim for education within New Labour's reform programme than the next most mentioned category, personal development.

In relation to the research question then, it seems that the economy was the biggest driver behind the reform programme of the Labour Government between 1997 and 2005, and that the second most important driver was that of personal development.

Within the results section there has been discussion of the reasons for the different drivers being included in the documents, and the justifications for these reasons for reform as presented by the Labour Government. Overall, the education system was seen to play a significant role in the development of the economy. By developing the economy and creating a population of flexible workers who possessed high levels of skills, it was argued that prosperity would increase, creating a fairer and more cohesive society. Personal development (the second most cited reason for reform) can be seen to be the other side of this coin, with the argument being made in the documents that education develops a person's self-esteem and self-confidence, allowing them to live the life of their choosing, as well as contribute to the well being of the family and ultimately to the economy as a whole.

While these results, obtained using content analysis, provide a clear indication of the drivers behind the reform of 14-19 education within the period being studied, critical analysis added to the findings considerably. The inclusion of critical analysis as a technique within the study produced data which meant a more nuanced interpretation of the results was possible, with the assumptions and accepted paradigms upon which reforms by the Labour Government were made coming under scrutiny through the combination of both techniques. These points will be taken up later in this chapter. Now though, the second part of the research question will be addressed.

The second part of the research question asked whether the drivers which were to be identified within the study complemented or worked against educational aims. A key question in this study was to identify possible aims of education, and through the literature review it was shown that it was difficult to determine aims of education in any universal way. Pring (1995) suggested some universal aims for education, but discussed the difficulty in producing a definitive list. These universal aims, it was suggested, needed to be accommodated within any particular education system, while at the same time the historical, cultural and personal needs of citizens must also be taken into account. Despite the lack of clarity around the aims of education, a general consensus could be seen, namely that education should aim to develop rounded individuals, with knowledge of a range of subjects, and exposure to various disciplines.

However, the argument was made that education has become politicized in such a way that the role of determining the aims of education within modern societies has fallen to the state, and as such is prone to political, cultural and economic forces. In this aspect of the study then, to determine whether the drivers of economic and personal development work against or complement educational goals, the task of drawing conclusions becomes more difficult. In addition, the political dimension of policy making in the period being studied, adds to this difficulty. As part of the literature review, the ideological position upon which New Labour based its policy was considered in order to answer one of the key questions of this study. The argument was advanced that one characteristic of the New Labour project was to shed ideologically intransigent positions. As such then, only those policies which were believed to work and which it was believed would lead to electoral success were adopted.

If this position is extended into education policy, then it can be argued that there was little ideological underpinning which can be linked to a philosophy for education as espoused by New Labour. However, given the findings, as well as some of the arguments presented in the literature review, the contention of this study is that the Labour Government did have an ideological basis upon which the reform of 14-19 education was based, and that that basis was the economy. This is borne out here by the results, that economic and educational goals could in fact be seen as one in New Labour thinking and as such, the economy was the main driver of educational reform in the period being studied here, as well as the ideological basis upon which reform of the phase was developed.

While the main drivers for reform were identified through the content analysis carried out on each of the documents and have been discussed at length in the results section, the combination of content analysis and critical analysis allowed for more in depth findings, taking into account the context within which the reforms were developed, as well as creating the possibility for the identification of themes both within and between the documents.

These themes were also discussed at length in the results section and provide a different perspective from which to view each of the documents. When viewed together, the results from the two forms of analysis provide an additional layer of understanding of the reform policies being studied. This analysis has allowed for two main overriding conclusions to be drawn from the results.

The first of these is the idea that a consistent policy message coming from the Labour Government throughout the time period being considered. The second is the argument that the three education drivers of participation, society and personal development, despite being drivers in their own right, can be seen as subsets of the overriding driver of the economy. These two conclusions will be discussed here.

5.1 Consistent Policy Message

One clear finding that emerged from the documentary analysis was the fact that for the most part, the policy message within the five documents, spanning New Labour's time in government from 1999 to 2005, was consistent. The data presented in the results section clearly show this trend, with the positions of the four drivers across the five documents remaining stable overall, and with several major themes which emerged from the critical analysis, such as business led education, evident in all of the documents. Therefore, it is possible to say that that the rationale behind the policies, the justifications put forward, were largely similar across the documents. This consistent policy message can be seen to have three distinguishing characteristics. These are: urgency, a focus on the economy and a deferment to the requirements of business. These characteristics will now be explored in more detail.

Throughout the five documents, the sense of urgency surrounding the proposals is evident. The argument is made in every single document that the global economic threat is growing, and that in order to prosper, Britain needs to create a workforce which is flexible and well skilled.

(The final section of the results chapter shows quotes from each of the documents to this effect.) This is the same message given by Brown (2007), Blunkett (2002) and Blair (2007) and is consistent with Keep's idea of a canonical narrative believed and perpetuated by both politicians and civil servants. (Keep, 2009, p. 28) The task of skilling the population to the degree required falls to the 14-19 phase of education, and the reforms presented in these documents present New Labour's solution to this problem. This urgency then, means the documents are written with a tone of certainty and confidence. The sentiment expressed is one of 'a great problem exists, we need to tackle it now, and the way to do it is presented here' An example of this tone is shown below.

The challenge is urgent...The task ahead is to modernise the framework for post-16 education and to raise quality. This White Paper sets out our policies to achieve the step change in performance which is needed to meet the challenge ahead.

DfEE, 1999, p. 4

What is interesting about this point of urgency is that it doesn't decrease over the years when these documents were published, but instead either remains at the same level, or in the case of Document 5, shows a significant increase, with discussion, as mentioned before, of a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to remedy the situation. (DES, 2005, p.8)

What this says about the effectiveness of the previous policies which were implemented within this period will be discussed further in this section, but this consistency puts into question the influence of previous policies if the argument is to be believed that the global economic threat has not been mitigated, at least in some way, by measures to reform the 14-19 system between 1997 and 2005.

The second characteristic of the consistent policy message as identified in this study is the focus on the economy. The theme of the economy as a driver of education policy throughout the 5 documents has been demonstrated here within the results section, but as an overarching concept within the policy proclamations which these documents represent, its influence is large. Not only is the economy a major concern to the policy makers and so drives much of the reform programme, it also contributes to the aims for the 14-19 system. In other words, the economy provides both a reason for the reform, and contributes to the nature of the reform, through an emphasis on skills acquisition for the world of work. This is evident in the following section from Document 2.

In the 21st century, to be prosperous, the economy will depend heavily on the creativity and skills of its people...So what young people need from our education system is changing rapidly. We must build a flexible system around the needs and aspirations of individual pupils.

DfES, 2002, p. 3

The economy is in the driving seat then, with underlying assumptions and belief rarely questioned; the reform of educational practices are linked to the global economy. (Ball, 2008, p. 15) With the economy in such a position of importance then, the question which was asked at the start of this research is important, questioning as it does whether the needs of the economy should dictate to the extent evident through this study, the aims for the education system of 14-19 year olds. This point will be expanded on later in this chapter.

The third aspect of the consistency of policy shown throughout the six years being studied here is the seriousness with which the needs of business are addressed and accommodated.

In the majority of the documents, the theme of business led education was prominent, and indeed only Document 2 was identified as having a specifically learner led education focus. In all the other documents, it was stated that the needs of business were to be identified and included in proposals relating to curriculum matters. This stance was reiterated by Gordon Brown when he discussed the need for businesses to “usher in a national debate on how we, Britain, can move to becoming world class in education.” (Brown, 2007) The Education and Skills Committee report on the National Skills Strategy noted that the Government intended to improve the links between education and businesses but that at that time were not working together effectively enough, but also explained that what business really wanted was ‘literate, numerate and work-prepared [people] when leaving the education system, rather than people who have had training in specific skills.’ (Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p.14)

Within the documents studied, the development of the Sector Skills Councils, together named the Skills for Business Network is a prime example of a business led approach to the development of the education curriculum for 14-19 year olds.

The central theme of this strategy is the importance of identifying the skills that employers must have to support future business success, and doing whatever we can to ensure that the supply of training, skills and qualifications is responsive to meeting those needs. DfES et al, 2005, p.48

The three characteristics of the consistent policy message described here, namely urgency, economy and business led education, form the basis of the policy message developed by New Labour between 1997 and 2005 and constitute the justification for the reform of the 14-19 phase. It has been argued that the results show that over the time period being considered, this policy message has remained broadly consistent. In addition, a further level of consistency is evident, namely that the nature of the policies, the specific measures being considered remained similar. An example of these consistent policy details which span the five documents is the Diploma, first mentioned for the purposes of this study in Document 2, and then brought to (partial) fruition in Document 5. However, there are many more instances where policy proposals were suggested in one document and rejected or allowed to fade in subsequent documents. This can be seen in the suggestion that a Baccalaureate style qualification be developed in Document 3, rejecting the previous suggestion in Document 2 of a matriculation Diploma, and then was not mentioned in any further document being analysed in this study.

All three characteristics of the consistent nature of the policies which have been identified above can be seen to have a link to the economic imperative which drives much of the reform programme under scrutiny, and as such leads to the second conclusion of this study, namely the prominence of the economic driver within education policy. It is the link of both the consistency of the policy message with the idea of developing the economy which will be discussed next.

5.2 All Roads Lead to the Economy

Throughout the consideration of the content and critical analysis results, the connectedness of the coding categories has become apparent and was highlighted within the results section. This is not to say from a methodological point of view that there was crossover between the categories and their definitions, but instead that within the documents, the categories were interconnected, and often presented as dependent upon one another. The point of connection between the coding categories was the economy. In other words, often, the other drivers (society, personal development and participation) had an economic justification for their inclusion in the document.

As was shown earlier in the case of personal development, particularly in relation to Document 5, often this category was expressed in the policies of New Labour (as presented in the publications being studied here) as a driver behind educational reform. However, with the method of close reading employed in this study, it was possible to see that the *ultimate* purpose of promoting the personal development of young people through reform of the 14-19 system was for the benefit of the economy.

Another example of this interconnectedness is in the area of participation. In Document 5, participation is discussed in connection with creating a more relevant and better recognised vocational offer, the point being made that many young people become uninterested in school because they feel the education being offered is not personally useful, and too academic.

The quote below shows how the economic aspect of this driver of participation is significant within New Labour's reform agenda.

As a result of low participation, skill levels in our workforce are behind those of other similar countries. This is because many fewer people have vocational qualifications. It is important that we match other countries in maintaining education and training into young adulthood if we are to close the gap.

DES, 2005, p. 18

The driver of society was also subject to being part of the reform agenda for economic purposes, as the quote below makes clear. Here, the development of a strong, cohesive society is described in terms of the economic benefits this driver will provide.

Not only do individuals, families and communities benefit, learning throughout life also delivers tangible results for business-improved productivity and competitiveness.

DfEE, 1999, p. 55

In these and the other coding categories and themes which were identified through content analysis, an economic benefit for their inclusion is discernible.

Given these points, it is possible to argue that the only reason for a focus on, say, the personal development driver is to allow for more of the population to contribute to the economy by obtaining secure employment as a result of better training and education. Therefore, the focus which is placed on these and other categories is motivated in no small part by the economic benefits that it is believed they are able to deliver. In this way then, the three coding categories of personal development, participation and society can be described as sub-sets of the economic category. Ball makes this point clearly when he says,

...the rhetoric of reform often also manages to couple improvements in social justice and equity...and the maximisation of social, educational and economic participation to economic success...

Ball, 2008, p. 17

The previous section has shown that there are overarching themes beyond those identified through content and critical analysis. These are the consistency of the policy message and the economic basis upon which much of the reform exists. These two ideas permeate the results and form the framework from which to consider the reform agenda as a whole.

These overriding conclusions are informed by an understanding of the drivers which have shaped these policies which were seen by the Labour Government as the reason behind the specific aspects of the policies and which were identified in this study.

There are two conclusions expressed above. The first is that there has been a consistent policy message relating to 14-19 education from New Labour throughout the time period being studied, based on a perceived urgency, the need for business led education and a focus on the economy. The second is that overall, the economy is the main driver of these policies with the other three drivers operating as subsets to this overriding consideration, and with the economic imperative forming a large part of the justification for the reform programme as a whole.

If these two conclusions are accepted then it is possible to argue that by implementing the policies being studied here that New Labour believed two things. The first is that throughout this period, the Labour Government was of the strong belief that the 14-19 education system was in need of reform. The second is that between 1997 and 2005 there was a need to tailor the 14-19 system to the needs of the economy, based on the perceived global economic threat. Indeed, it will be shown here how the second belief is an extension of the first, with the belief in the global economic threat forming the justification for the reform programme. These two ideas will be considered in more detail now.

5.3 The Case for Reform and the Global Economic Threat

It is clear from the results presented here, that New Labour, between 1999 and 2005 believed whole heartedly in the need for reform of the 14-19 education system. This belief was expressed in each of the documents, with an emphasis on the urgency with which these reforms needed to be implemented. In each of these documents the weaknesses within the system were listed and the reforms contained in the documents presented as the solution to those problems. (DfEE, 1999, p. 16, DfES, 2003, p. 4-5, DfES, 2003, p. 9, DfES et al, 2003, p. 12, DES, 2005, p. 14)

With the publication of each new policy by any government, but in particular here New Labour (including those presented here but also remembering that there were many more) the implication exists that something needs to be changed or improved in relation to the area being reformed

The reason for this constant and pervasive need for reform of the education system can be traced to the belief that the economy of the country is under a form of economic attack. The needs of the new century, developing technologies and the rise of what are termed emerging economies are all cited within the five documents as reasons for the workforce of Britain to become more competitive, flexible and productive.

This belief, it has been argued in this study, was based on the acceptance of the view espoused in Callaghan's speech at Ruskin (1976), that education was failing to provide workers with the requisite skills which businesses and industries needed to remain competitive. As part of the acceptance of this idea, there also came the acceptance of the idea that the education system could not only deliver a curriculum to ensure business success, but also that education could positively influence the economic prosperity of the country. Given this standpoint, and the widespread acceptance of this argument, the reforms studied here clearly fit that pattern.

The thrust of much of the argument within these five documents is the need to improve the education system in order to allow the country to deal with the global economic threat and create a more prosperous society.

Not only do these documents fit into that pattern, and contribute to that argument, they do it consistently across the time period in which they were written. There is little to distinguish between the documents in terms of their justifications for reforms. As previous quotes show, there is clear evidence of a belief in the economic benefits of developing a unified 14-19 phase, creating a country better able to counter this global economic threat. Therefore, in terms of the reforms which are presented in the five documents studied here, the focus is to build a 14-19 education system which exhibits the characteristics which are, according to the government, similarly desirable in the workforce; being attuned to the economic needs of the country, flexible in its ability to tailor provision to those particular needs, and able to keep the individuals involved motivated and productive.

So, if New Labour believed that the 14-19 education system required reform, and that this reform necessitated a tailoring of the phase to the needs of the economy in order to combat the global economic threat, then the question which arises is: Why were reforms, containing similar initiatives and proposals continually offered as solutions to the perceived problem? If the need for reform remained, and the fragility of the British economy in the face of the global economic threat continued, then perhaps new and different policies were required? Nevertheless, it would appear that in terms of reform of the 14-19 phase, the urgency did not change, the reasons for that urgency, mainly economic, did not change, and in many ways, the solutions did not change.

The next section will explore the possible reasons for the continuity of the reform programme in spite of New Labour's stated belief, contained in each of the five documents studied here, that the case for reform was clear and a global economic threat persisted.

5.4 The detail of the policy and politics.

It is clear from the data gathered that the four drivers which were identified as shaping the aims of the policies for 14-19 education, played a significant role in the justification for those reforms as expressed by the Labour Government in the documents studied. The economy and personal development were clearly the most referenced drivers, but society and participation played a role also.

As a result of the methodology employed in this study, it is possible to see that these four drivers contributed to the development of the reform agenda, and to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the nature of the policies which were developed. In addition, it can also be seen that these drivers did not change throughout the six years over which the documents were published, and neither to any degree, did their relative significance to one another change over that time period. For example, the driver of the economy was referenced the most in all five documents, and society was referenced least in three out of the five documents. Therefore in terms of policy making, these drivers are significant to the policy making process to a similar degree across all five documents.

This consistency is in contrast to the scale of the reform agenda, which suggests that the 'problem' which reform is trying to address still needs to be solved and so therefore there appears to be a case for changing that policy. If that was the case, the findings of this study would have highlighted a lack of consistency, rather than consistency between policy documents.

Successive policies would then suggest new ways to tackle the perceived problem rather than continue to focus on the same policy driver, and similar solutions. That was clearly not the case. Thus, if the urgency has remained the same, and if the solutions have remained much the same, then a logical conclusion to draw from this is that the solution is not working. The section below will discuss this point.

In varying degrees the five documents suggested a need for an improvement in the vocational offer for students, a greater focus on business needs within the 14 to 19 curriculum, greater integration of the qualifications system to create clear pathways through the phase, and the desire to make education more relevant to the world of work. These were constant themes throughout the documents, as was the economic imperative of changing the system, and the business led focus of the reforms. However, it is argued here that while New Labour may have believed their policies were not working (hence the constant stream of policy initiatives and announcements) the fact that the drivers behind these policies remained relatively constant throughout the time period being studied suggests that the foundations upon which the policies were based (the drivers) were considered by the Government to be sound. Perhaps then, rather than believing that the policies were not working because of the principles upon which they were based, the Labour Government felt the faults which existed in education policy lay elsewhere, possibly either in the implementation or design.

This study has set out to focus solely on the motivations around the policy choices made by New Labour in regards to 14-19 education, and as such specifically avoided considering how these policies were implemented. As a result, it is not possible to discuss here whether there were faults in the policies relating to their implementation.

What can be discussed however is the design, and more specifically the drivers which created these policies.

It has been made clear that the drivers behind the policies remained consistent, and indeed some can be seen to be stronger in the final document than in the first. A possible conclusion to draw from this is that the Labour Government believed that the policies were not focused enough on the specifics of the problem. This can be seen as an answer to the question posed in the last section regarding the constant need for reform and the inconsistency this appeared to highlight in the Government's approach to policy. It can be argued that the solution which was adopted saw the Government focus more and more deeply on the detail of the policy, rather than consider that the basis upon which the policy stood was itself flawed.

Indeed, this perspective is evident in the following quote from Document 5. In it the point that much progress has been made is expressed, but the need to focus on specific initiatives is made clear.

Since 1997, we have carried through far-reaching reforms to raise standards...Primary school standards are at their highest ever level...Results at secondary school are also at their best ever level...but the challenges remain considerable...We propose therefore a radical reform of the system of 14-19 education-curriculum, assessment and the range of opportunities on offer.

DES, 2005, p. 4

This focus on detail is cautioned against by Perry et al when they suggest that government needs to stand back from the detail and focus on ideology.

But whilst politicians can shape ends, means are another matter. It is unlikely to be helpful for them to support one technique [of instruction] against another.

Perry et al, 2010, p.41

A final factor which may explain this apparent dichotomy in policy approach could relate to the political environment within which the policy was formulated. This can be explained in the following terms. As mentioned previously, the political environment can be characterised as one where the economy is paramount, and seen as a solution to many of the ills facing the country. Therefore, the importance of the political environment in which these policies were formed must not be discounted and could be seen as a reason behind the stated need for reform aligned to the lack of revision of policy. Indeed, in answer to the key question in this study around the ideology upon which New Labour based their reforms, the literature review shows political consideration to be paramount to those involved in the New Labour project.

In addition, as argued earlier in section 2.3.2 *Politics and Policy Making*, policy is prone to many pressures, and these pressures can have an effect on the shape and nature of the policy being produced. An example of political pressure which has the potential to hamper policy can be seen in the attempt to unify the 14-19 qualification system. In Document 2 the idea of a matriculation diploma was floated, as a way of providing an overarching qualification for the 14-19 phase.

In Document 3, Tomlinson was appointed to head a study into possible ways to unify the qualifications framework of the 14-19 system, particularly considering the problem of the academic/vocational divide. Document 5 in 2005 rejected the proposals of the Tomlinson report to abandon A levels and create an overarching Diploma qualification, and instead chose a compromise solution whereby A levels were retained and Diplomas introduced for particular lines of learning. It can be argued that the rejection of Tomlinson was based on an unwillingness to take a political risk, and that the environment in which the policies were shaped affected the nature of the policy which was produced.

In conclusion then, a paradoxical situation existed between 1997 and 2005 which saw the Labour Government produce policy after policy because of the need (which they espoused) to reform the 14-19 system, while all the time keeping these many policies very similar in tone and message. This can be seen to be based on the belief on the part of the Labour Government that the premises upon which these policies were based (mainly the need to create a stronger economy as shown in this study) were sound. A second explanation of this policy course follows from the nature of the policy making process, and the political world in which policy is developed.

This environment may have the effect of 'watering down' or limiting the scope of policies based on political risk, and so as a result radical or non-mainstream ideas may well have suffered.

So, the business of politics and the pressures that a political environment places on the policy making process were in fact in play here, and that rather than take what may be seen as politically risky decisions to change radically the structure of 14-19 education (for instance getting rid of A levels to pave the way for a more unified and single track system) the options which were chosen were those which were less difficult, less radical, and more concerned with reforming the 14-19 system incrementally and in small, clearly marked steps. Ball described this process when he discusses the 'ratchet effect' of incremental changes to policy. (Ball, 2008, p.97)

Given the arguments put forward in this chapter, the final conclusion drawn from the analysis which will be discussed here, is that rather than developing educational policy based on a set of educational aims, the policy making process as followed by the Labour Government was developed under the influence of the educational drivers identified in this study, mainly the driver of the economy. In other words, the drivers became the aims upon which policy was created, and as such a situation occurred whereby the beliefs and understandings upon which policies were based were never questioned.

5.5 Drivers Become Aims

At the beginning of this study, potential aims of education were explored. The philosophical basis for determining the aims of education was investigated, and possibilities for general aims for education were discussed. These aims included the development of the character, preparation for life within society, the ability to deal with obstacles and set-backs, and personal fulfilment.(Power, 1982, p. 228-250) Having identified possible aims for education, and advanced the argument that the aims for 14-19 education should not be solely economic, the rationale for this study was to identify the drivers behind the reform policy as they affected 14-19 education. It was made clear that drivers were defined as the pressures and motivations behind the creation of policies affecting education and as such are distinct from aims. In this study it has been shown that the main *driver* behind the reform programme of New Labour was the economy.

New Labour consistently promoted the viewpoint that education could positively affect the economic prosperity of the country and it has been argued here that despite a lack of clear evidence to show that there is a positive link between the two, this concept became the accepted wisdom, and in political terms formed a great deal of the justification for policy direction. This study has found no evidence of a move away from this belief, but instead revealed a hardening of this position throughout the five documents. It can be argued then, that because of this belief in the value of education to the economic prosperity of the country, the education system was seen as a tool, or more precisely a lever, on the economy.

The Labour Government persisted in this course, and as a result of this viewpoint, strove harder and in more detailed ways to mould the 14-19 education system towards the need of the economy.

This is a possible explanation for the continuity of the policy message across the five documents, and indeed this point has been touched on earlier. By maintaining a broadly similar policy throughout the time period being studied, New Labour can be said to have considered the basis upon which the reform of the system was being developed was sound.

In other words the economy was seen as a valid driver for 14-19 education policies. An inference which can be drawn from these results is that the basis upon which this reform was taking place, for the most part a need to increase the strength of the economy, was never questioned. The argument that education could positively influence the economy was an assumption which was never investigated. Consequently, this argument goes some way to explaining the consistency of the policy message as well.

Therefore, it is possible to explain the findings in the following terms. There was a consistent policy message throughout the time period being studied and the drivers behind the reforms remained the same and indeed became more entrenched. At the same time the documents reveal the urgency behind the reform process never diminished. The drivers were believed to be sound, and the assumptions upon which the policies were based were not questioned.

But this argument only goes some way to explaining the findings because it does not answer fully why the Labour Government continued producing similar policies which were, according to each subsequent policy document, in need of reform.

The explanation which will be explored here is the idea that in developing policy, the Labour Government confused the driver of the economy with an aim for education, and in this way identified the 'wrong' problem upon which to base the reform of the 14-19 phase, producing solutions which required frequent revision. The question being asked here in this final point, is have these drivers, and in particular the driver of the economy, become so forceful that they have actually come to be viewed as aims? In other words, have economic considerations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries become so prominent that this driver, the economic imperative, is not simply a *reason* for reform, but instead the *aim* of the reform?

It has been shown in this study that the 14-19 education system is directed in many aspects towards economic goals, with even the other drivers of participation, society and personal development employed in this quest. Indeed, it is possible to argue that during the time period being studied here, in respect to the reform of 14-19 education, New Labour did indeed confuse the driver of the economy for an aim of education. While at first glance this confusion of drivers and aims in the policy making process may not seem problematic, the policy implications mean this situation of drivers becoming aims might be a cause for alarm. If the driver of economy is indeed viewed as an aim for education, then in policy terms, all educational questions become filtered through an economic lens.

If this is the case, the educational policies have the potential to become skewed and manipulated in a way to favour economic over other possible aims of education. Two further difficulties arise as a result of this confusion of aims and drivers.

The first is that by failing to differentiate between drivers and aims, policies are at the mercy of political forces. It has been shown in this study that political forces can have an adverse affect on policy creation. As such then, long term initiatives become more difficult to justify, having to be balanced against the need for tangible results which can be translated by politicians and political parties into electoral success. Additionally, through the acceptance of the idea that education is vitally important to the success of the economy in the global environment (part of 'the narrative' (Keep, 2009)) policy makers are bound by

...a tightly defined and artificial set of theoretical boundaries that have defined what ideas are acceptable inside the policy world and hence can be discussed, and what are unacceptable and therefore cannot be discussed

Keep, 2009, p. 29

This situation therefore limits the possible policy solution available and also serves to perpetuate the situation, such that the similar policies are constantly produced, and the arguments and basis upon which these arguments are based remain the same.

The second difficulty with adopting the driver of economy as an educational aim (which is being argued here as having occurred during the period being studied) is that the curriculum is in danger of becoming utilitarian, directed only towards the task of economic development. This means that the potential exists for other *aims* of education, such as those discussed earlier, are not addressed within the politicised and driver oriented policy making process. Therefore, it can be argued that because the economic driver is not a true educational aim, possible curriculum and qualification developments which do not have an obviously economic goal are not included in policies.

It may be that this blinkered vision of the purpose of education means that policy makers do not see alternative solutions. This study confirms this point by highlighting the consistency of New Labour 14-19 education policy. By focusing on the economic benefits of education, and attempting to mould the 14-19 phase to accommodate this driver to the exclusion of alternative *aims* the education system may become skewed. This is an idea expressed by Ball when he says,

While Labour may see themselves responding to employers' concerns and students' basic skills deficiencies and the needs of international competition they may well be paying attention to the wrong messages.

Ball, 1999, p. 203

By focusing on the wrong message and confusing the aims of education with drivers, coherence, qualification reform and the creation of clear pathways within the 14-19 education system has been difficult to achieve. This then creates a situation where ‘new’ initiatives are always necessary in order to combat the same perceived problem of globalisation and economic underachievement.

This study has shown that reform of the 14-19 education system has remained on a similar trajectory for the period under investigation, and that despite the claims contained within the five documents that there was a great need for reform, in fact policies and initiatives consisted of the same elements and were based upon the same drivers. The effect of this situation is that each policy document creates the environment whereby each *subsequent* policy document is not only inevitable, but will also contain within it the claim that the same weaknesses and problems within the system exist, and the need to tackle these issues is urgent. By contrast, if policy formation were founded on more broadly based aims of education, with the economy an important driver but not an aim of education, the right messages could be addressed, mitigating the need for constant reform and allowing the 14-19 education system to be more protected from short-term political and economic demands.

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www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk.

Appendix i

Significant Reforms Relating to 14-19 Education

1997 *Education (Schools) Act (Labour government)*

1997 Introduction of FMA at L2 replacing most youth training provision at this level. (Modern Apprenticeship renamed AMA).

1997 New Key Skills qualification piloted in range of schools, colleges and training providers (1997-99).

1997 DfEE *Guidance to FEFC*

1997 Initiatives announced:

- ‘Investing in Young People’
- ‘New Start’

1997 Consultation Document (DfEE): *A Passport to Learning*

1997 Green Paper (DfEE): *Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs*

1997 White Paper (DfEE): *Excellence in Schools*

1997 Green Paper (DfEE): *The Learning Age*

1997 Kennedy Report: *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Higher Education*

1997 Fryer Report: *Learning for the 21st Century: continuing education and lifelong learning*

1997 Dearing Report: *Higher Education and the Learning Society*

1997 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) established.

1998 School Standards and Framework Act

1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act

1998 Education (National Curriculum) (Exceptions at Key Stage 4) Regulations

1998 Regional Development Agencies Act

1998 From September 1998 schools have **statutory duty** to provide programme of careers education for 16-18 year olds. All pupils under 19 have statutory right to free careers guidance. Schools required to run careers education programmes for years 9-11.

1998 Select Committee on Education and Employment (Fifth Report):
Disaffected Children

1998 Green Paper (DfEE): *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change*

1998 DfEE: *Further Education into the New Millennium*

1999 White Paper (DfEE): *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*

1999 SEU PAT 12 Report: *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training*

1999 Moser Report: *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy*

1999 Report of the Working Group on Adult Basic Skills: *Skills for Life*

1999 *Qualifying for Success* consultation

1999 *Draft Regulations* to enable 14-16 year olds at risk of disaffection to spend part of the week in FE college or gaining work experience.

1999 *Special Educational Needs Bill*

1999 *Education Bill*

1999 16-17 'Learning Gateway' introduced:

1999 *Excellence in Cities* initiative announced (implemented 2000)

1999 *Educational Maintenance Allowance* piloted in order to test its ability to increase participation,

2000 Prime Minister Tony Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown to chair a new high-level **Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services** with the task of co-ordinating policies to prevent poverty and underachievement among children and young people up to 19. Tony Blair also and created the post of **Minister for Young People**.

2000 DfEE launched campaign for 16-year olds: “**Don’t quit [school] now!**”

2000 QCA proposed **National Diploma for 18-year olds** on the same lines as high school graduation in the US.

2000 Curriculum 2000

2000 House of Commons Education and Employment Select Committee:
The Role of Private Sector Organizations in Public Education

2000 Citizenship for 16-19 Year Olds in Education and Training. Report of the Advisory Group

2000 Learning and Skills Act

2001 Modern Apprenticeship divided into **Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA)** at L3 and **Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA)** at L2. Many other GST schemes wound down and ‘rebadged’ as FMA.

2001 Learning and Skills Council operational with 47 Local LSCs. Responsible for funding and planning all post-16 provision (except schools sixth forms and Universities). **Employment Service** (now incorporated within DWP) set up.

2001 Two inspectorates: **Ofsted** for all full-time 16-19 provision and **ALI** for all non-university post-19 provision.

2001 *DfEE* becomes ***Department for Education and Skills (DfES)***.

Employment functions transferred to newly created Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

2001 *DfES: Skills for Life*

2001 *Green Paper (DfES): Schools: Building on Success*

2001 *White Paper (DfES): Schools: Achieving Success*

2001 *Cassells Report: Modern Apprenticeships: The Way to Work*

2001 *DfES: Meeting the Sector Skills and Productivity Challenge*

2002 *DfES: Success for All: Reforming Further Education and Training*

2002 *Green Paper (DfES): 14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*

**2003 House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills:
*Secondary Education: Pupil Achievement, seventh report of the session
2002-03***

2003 DfES: *A New Specialist System. Transforming Secondary Education*

2003 White Paper (DfES): *The Future of Higher Education*

Jan 2003 White Paper (DfES): *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence*

**April 2003 *A Level Standards, Third Report of the House of Commons
Select Committee on Education and Skills***

**2003 Working Group on 14-19 Reform: *Principles for Reform of 14-19
Learning Programmes and Qualifications***

**July 2003 White Paper (DfES et al.): *21st Century Skills: Realising our
Potential***

Aug 2003 Launch of **Entry to Employment programme**

2004 *Interim Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*

Mar 2004 HMT/DWP/DfES: *Supporting Young People to Achieve: Towards a New Deal for Skills*

May 2004 LSC/DfES: *21st Century Apprenticeships – End to End Review of the Delivery of Modern Apprenticeships*

2004 DfES: *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*

Sept 2004 Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group: *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice*

Oct 2004 *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform. Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*

2004 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2004) *Public Expenditure. First Report of Session 2004-05*

Feb 2005 White Paper (DfES) *14-19 Education and Skills*

Mar 2005 White Paper (DfES, DTI, DWP, HMT) *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work*

May 2005 Education Secretary Ruth Kelly announces that in 2008 the DfES will review how the system was operating.

June 2005 DfES: *Departmental Report 2005*

July 2005 Green Paper (DfES): *Youth Matters*

2005 Apprenticeships Task Force *Final Report*

Oct 2005 White Paper (DfES) *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*

2005 Sir Andrew Foster: *Realising the potential. A review of the future role of further education colleges.*

Compiled from: Wright, S. and Oancea, A., (2005) Policies for 14-19 Education and Training in England, 1976 to the Present Day: A Chronology. Nuffield Review Briefing Paper (online) www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk

Appendix ii

White and Green Papers 1997-2005

1997 Green Paper (DfEE) *Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs*

1997 White Paper (DfEE): *Excellence in Schools*

1997 Green Paper (DfEE) *The Learning Age*

1998 Green Paper (DfEE) *Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change*

1999 White Paper (DfEE): *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*

2001 Green Paper (DfES) *Schools: Building on Success*

2001 White Paper (DfES): *Schools: Achieving Success*

2002 Green Paper (DfES): *14- 19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*

2003 White Paper (DfES) *The Future of Higher Education*

2003 White Paper (DfES): *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence*

2003 White Paper (DfES et al.): *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*

2005 White Paper (DfES) *14- 19 Education and Skills*

2005 White Paper (DfES, DTI, DWP, HMT) *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work*

2005 White Paper (DfES) *Higher Standards, Better Schools for all*

2005 Green Paper (DfES) *Youth Matters*

Appendix iii

Key Documents/Reforms 1997-2005

1997 White Paper (DfEE): *Excellence in Schools*

1999 White Paper (DfEE): *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*

2001 White Paper (DfES): *Schools: Achieving Success*

2002 Green Paper (DfES): *14- 19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*

Jan 2003 White Paper (DfES): *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence*

July 2003 White Paper (DfES et al.): *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*

Feb 2005 White Paper (DfES) *14- 19 Education and Skills*

Appendix iv

Key Documents for Analysis

1999 White Paper (DfEE): *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*

2002 Green Paper (DfES): *14- 19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*

Jan 2003 White Paper (DfES): *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence*

July 2003 White Paper (DfES et al.): *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*

Feb 2005 White Paper (DfES) *14- 19 Education and Skills*

Appendix v

Categories for Analysis

Economy

Participation

Personal Development

Society

Appendix vi

Pre-Coding Analysis

Learning to Succeed (1999)

National competitiveness

Personal prosperity and growth

Encourage creativity and innovation

Cohesive society

14-19 (2002)

Personal confidence

Skills

Knowledge

Meets needs of economy

Increase participation

Increase aspirations of young people to be responsible citizens and workers

Broaden skills to improve employability

Whole person

14-19 Opp and Excellence (2003)

Participation

Achievement

Increase participation

Preparation for modern workplace

Encourage life-long learning

21st Century Skills (2003)

Skills and for employment and adaptability

Improve productivity

Improve standard of living

Build a better society

Contribute to community

14-19 Ed and Skills (2005)

All young people active

Continue in education until 18

Deal with economic change

Tackle anti-social behaviour through poor attendance

Full inclusion

Success in life through work

Engage young people

Key Economy Participation Personal Development Society

Appendix vii

Document Analysis

Title:

Date Published:

Type of Document:

Authorship:

Purpose of Document/Main Points:

References to Economy		References to Participation		References to Society		References to Personal Development	
Total		Total		Total		Total	
Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect