

How to make staying on a carrot and not a stick

Youth Commission:

Raising the participation age for education to 18

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Research Report

Youth Commission 2009

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Barry Sheerman Foreword



I believe the Youth Commission has produced a very significant report, one that gives a voice to those who really matter most in education- young people. Our education system is in need of some fresh thinking, there are aspects of it which are simply not working. This report attempts to highlight some of these aspects and offer practical and flexible solutions for young learners today.

Having raised the leaving learning age to 18, it is now of critical importance that we are innovative in mapping out how young people engage and progress in these additional two years. A rich variety of choice is fundamental if we want young people to follow a stimulating and innovative learning path. This report will outline areas where improvements are clearly required, in particular, the often too restrictive emphasis on exams and systematic testing which many young people do not thrive under. Many students do better though 'learning by doing' and an emphasis on the practical approach. Whilst there may needs to be an overarching set of curriculum aims there should also be a major renewed focus on learning outside the classroom. Alongside all of this, a young person's educational experience needs to be broader and more inclusive to ensure that young people are not missing out on developing the wider personal and social skills that are essential and often overlooked in the classroom. The Youth Commission needs to be a start, not an end point, in the process of educational change that involves young people themselves.

Barry Sheerman MP

Andy Powell Foreword



Edge is a firm believer that the education system needs to incorporate more practical learning, cater for people's different talents and abilities and ensure that there are many paths to success. The Youth Commission report shows that work needs to be done in all these areas and the demand for these changes is coming directly from the young people themselves.

I recognise that the strong messages coming out of this report show that young people are not currently getting the educational experience they desire - and this needs to change.

In any other business, the consumer is given the upmost priority as their demands are the most important aspect in forming the delivery of service. This must also be the case in education. The voice of the young people - the consumers - needs to be heard and, even more importantly, we need to act on what we are hearing. The Youth Commission is a starting point for this.

Andy Powell, chief executive of Edge

1) Introduction

The Youth Commission is a unique project that has been carried out across the country for young people, by young people. Driven by the Edge Learner Forum, the Commission aims to ensure that staying in education or training until the age of 18 is the best experience it possibly can be for all young people, where no one is left behind and the hopes and aspirations of all are reached. We believe that the young people of this country hold the key to the future of its education system.

The Edge Learner Forum is a network of young people, represented in all corners of England, who are passionate advocates for change. The core mission of the Forum is to promote practical, hands on learning along the many paths to success. Alongside Barry Sheerman MP, chair of the Select Committee for Children Schools and Families, the Youth Commission has been established to investigate what it would take to make staying on a positive experience for all young people, one that rewards all skills and talents.

We recognise that staying on in education or training until 18 is an opportunity to enact positive change for everyone involved, and that the best way to ensure this is to listen to what young people have to say.

Thousands of young people from all walks of education and training nationwide have lent their voice to the Commission. Academic, apprentice, diploma and university students, pupil referral unit learners, schools and NEET's, have all given time and energy to this report, with particular emphasis on reaching the disengaged. This has

resulted in an unparalleled vision of education in England.

Our Methods:

The research in this report has at all times been steered by the involvement of young people, and has employed a range of methods to achieve a balance between depth and breadth of response. The research was carried out over three stages:

The first stage gathered the responses from over 1600 face to face questionnaires, collecting information on learning experiences and choices and hopes for the future. These qualitative interviews were carried out in a wide range of institutions nationwide.

The second phase of the research comprised of an online survey with questions built on the findings from the qualitative responses. Reaching 2400 people, the survey provided a broad range of results on the positive and negative aspects of education. Stage three of the research was all about solutions and applicable answers to the questions and issues brought to light throughout the first two stages. To find these fixes, the Youth Commission ran workshops up and down the country, including a significant sample from NEET's, special school and diploma students, and trainee teachers. These sessions were powerful and productive, providing a real insight into why students were dropping out before 18, and what can be done to motivate young people to stay on. We found proof that people from all areas and backgrounds involved in education are eager and willing to generate ideas on how to make staying on a success.

2) Context

The Youth Commission acknowledges that good work has been done in exploring educational participation and young peoples' aspirations and choices already. The Edge Learner Forum has consulted with a range of groups and organisations which share our common goals, to help make the Youth Commission as comprehensive and effective as possible. Three reports in particular have highlighted important issues facing young people in education today. "Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training" by Barnardos; "Staying On" by the Equality of Human Rights Commission; and "Young People Survey Results From Fair Access To The Professions" by iCould have all played a role in the creation of the Youth Commission.

Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training – Barnardos

The report highlights that alienation in school and poor relationships with teachers are the principal factors behind students 'dropping out' of school. They recommend this should be rectified through engaging and motivating disillusioned young people by improving the availability of alternative, vocational and work-based learning.

Staying On – Equality and Human Rights Commission

The report is committed to concentrating upon minority groups and how learning can be made more engaging for young people in these groups. Disengagement in education happens due to the negative factors of disruption, overcrowded classes, unsuitable teaching and learning styles, and violence and bullying. The report then goes on to recommend solutions to engage students including reduction of class sizes, addressing trauma as a barrier to the education of refugees, and widening the availability of EMA and vocational pathways to young people.

Young People Survey Results from Fair Access to the Professions – iCould

The report looks into the career aspirations of young people and how they develop with age, especially making comparisons between the genders. It concludes that altogether there is approximately a 50:50 proportion between students who have vocational aspirations and those with professional aspirations; most boys concentrate on practical future whilst girls have far more professional future aspirations. The study shows how girls favour careers such as teaching, medicine and law, whilst boys favour engineering, IT and careers in the armed forces.

3) Raising the Participation Age

The majority of young people support the policy of staying in learning until 18, though there are still questions over how it will be carried out

The majority of those who believe it is a good idea to stay in education or training until 18 view the additional 2 years as a benefit that would help them later on in their careers because it would increase their knowledge and qualifications.

11% are undecided

On the other hand; those who disagree are very vocal and resolute in their views. They have great concerns over their choices and the manner in which they will learn. Even the majority who support raising the participation age do so with a note of caution which stems from a concern over whether the delivery will be right.

58% are in favour of staying until 18

“Staying in school until you’re 18 is good, as long as it is tailored and non-prescriptive, and offers a full range of practical subjects. An extra 2 years is important - a lot can happen between 16-18” (19, female)

“With two years more encouragement a bad student could have a turn around and it would get them to the next stage in life.” (Participant at the Edge Learner Forum solutions workshop)

31% are against staying in learning until 18

“It’s a bad idea. I would like to choose whether I stay in education because I may want to leave and get a job” (13, male)

Snapshot: Special School Students

The Edge Learner Forum ran a workshop with autistic students who gave their views on what needed to be done to make raising the participation age to work for them. One of the key aspects there would need to be was support in helping them to become independent after leaving education. This support would include ensuring that there was relevant experience so that they could understand what life would be like in the workplace after education. Alongside work experience they wanted to be given key life skills such as how to manage their finances and deal with the changes that will happen to them as they got older. For staying on to work there need to be the correct support networks in place for those between the ages of 16-18, in order to ensure it has a positive impact for them.

“We already have the option to stay in school after 16, but when someone tells you that you have to do something, it’s natural to react by not wanting to do it.”
(17, male)

Another important question to consider is the number of young people who believe that staying on until 18 means they will be confined to a classroom studying those same subjects that have already made them lose interest in the

education system. A significant number of young people are concerned about the lack of choice they perceive will face them if they choose to stay until 18. Although this may not be the case in reality, this is the message that has come across to them. This is causing anger and resentment amongst those young people who believe they will be forced into these same experiences that led to their initial disengagement with the education system.

4) Learning outside the Classroom

70% of bad experiences happen within the classroom environment

Young people are concerned that they will be stuck in the classroom for an extra 2 years if made to stay on. This unwillingness to prolong their classroom learning stems from aspects of learning such as bad teaching, low grades, particular subjects and a lack of support in the classroom which account for 70% of their bad experiences in education.

64% of the best learning experiences happen outside the classroom

Conversely, as the majority of bad experiences happen within the classroom environment the most positive experiences are outside. 51% said school trips, social experiences, external aspects (e.g. work placements, after school productions, sports clubs) as their most enjoyable experiences in education.

“My best experience in education was work experience, being able to go to work in a hotel and learning about the industry” (18, female)

“I really enjoyed the productions. I acted in a play, which gave me the practical experience I needed for Drama” (21, male)

The lack of engagement among a high number of young people is symptomatic of the low number of good experiences, such as those detailed above, happening. Through repeating the same routines each year, young people become disillusioned as they crave a much more varied learning experience. This means a wider range of experiences both within and outside the classroom. Young people told us they want a much wider variety of assessments as many do not enjoy or thrive under the exam-focused learning they currently get.

5) Exam Pressure

78% of young people feel the education system puts too much pressure on exam results

42% of young people believe the best way of showing what they are good at is through a mixture of exams, coursework, practical work and performances

“Effective diploma assignments instead of exams, so I can put what I learn into practice on work placements” (19, male)
Measuring achievement through exams can put a great weight on learners from a young age as they have to learn in a pressurised environment. Showing how good you are solely through exams is not the best method for many. A much

more diverse mixture of assessments is needed to enable young people to flourish and show they are intelligent. Taking away the pressure of exams will allow many young people to show their abilities and knowledge through practical assignments, coursework and performances.

“Exams prove to someone that you have achieved something” (19, male)

Unfortunately, for some young people exams are viewed as the only meaningful recognition of educational achievement irrespective of their suitability as a means of assessment for a topic. However, it was also noted that exams can be constructive as they highlight weak areas so that students know where they need to improve. This only works if exams happen throughout the year and are not heavily weighted so that there is time to make mistakes and improve on them.

6) The Important Role Teachers Play

Another important aspect of exams is that they put pressure not just on young people but also on teachers. There is a feeling that teachers become overly preoccupied with making sure that their students get through exams, and forget that students are gaining key skills and knowledge. This lack of understanding can have a negative impact on the student/teacher bond.

“My English teacher was inspirational. They brought out the best in me and convinced me to study English” vs. “One teacher shouted a lot and was negative. I lost respect for him as teacher and he created a bad atmosphere” (17, male)

“One bad lesson with a teacher could ruin my whole day; a small rudder can turn a large ship. A bad lesson with a teacher makes it harder to learn in other lessons” (20, male)

The importance of teachers:

Many of the qualitative questionnaires highlighted the importance of teaching and how it can have both a significant positive or negative impact. A number of young people listed teachers as both their good and bad experience of education showing that the relationship between a teacher and student is one of the most vital elements to get right if staying on until 18 is to be a success.

Snapshot: At risk of becoming NEET

The Edge Learner Forum ran two workshops with highly disengaged learners at risk of becoming NEET. These young people expressed frustration with mainstream secondary education. In particular, they felt the

system forced students to conform – only focusing classroom learning on exam topics and techniques – and didn’t nourish or acknowledge talents and interests which come to light outside the classroom. When asked whether their teachers know how to get the best out of them, the students gave mixed responses – more negative than positive – and explained that their best teachers were those who treated them with respect: “The teachers that know how to get the best out of me are the ones that interact with me, and talk to me like I’m an adult.” They suggested that there be more “fun”, interactive learning in the classroom and that students be examined as Ofsted now examines schools – judging them on a more holistic set of criteria.

Snapshot: Trainee Teacher’s perspective:

The Edge Learner Forum ran a workshop with trainee teachers to gather their views on raising the participation age. A concern common amongst the contributors was how much energy teachers felt they would spend on disruptive students intent on not continuing in any form of education. This meant other students in class who wanted to learn would be losing out on valuable time due to the excess time teachers would have to spend with disruptive students. There is a fear that this could lead to a lack of motivation for teachers. To make sure that this is not the case the teachers produced three recommendations. The first was that much more feedback was needed by students on how they felt they were taught, ensuring that

student voice is fundamental in shaping the lessons. Following on from this they believed 'communities of practice' should be used, where students learn from each other and help with support and resources to build a community spirit. The third recommendation was to

embed the social experience that university provides in to schools, as it helps to provide the additional life skills for young people, with extra-curricular activities playing a key role in the educational experience

7) How Young People Learn and how they are Taught

The changes young people want to see in education are about how and what they learn

It is clear that young people want more choice from an early stage, and results suggest that students will be more engaged if they get a say in what is taught. More choice, more learning they like, better teaching, more learning support and smaller classes made up 62% of the changes that need to be made to the education system.

“At GCSE you get a bit of choice. People only really complain about the subjects that we have to do. We resent not having a choice” (Participant at the Edge Learner forum solutions workshop)

“I wanted the opportunity to have alternative provision from an earlier age as I learnt much better in a college environment with more choice rather than in school where I didn’t learn well” (15, female)

“I definitely need more variety to my learning, the paperwork and repetitive nature of school was not for me” (20, female)

Practical learning is the best way for young people to learn

48% learn best practically with 37% listing a practical subject as what they were best at. This has come from a mix of academic and vocational students alike including diploma students, GCSE students, university students and apprentice students. Over 50% want

more practical and creative strands to their education that in the past they have not had and at present are not getting.

“I really look forward to science as it is one of the lessons where I get to do practical stuff. But then we just get shown the experiment and are asked to write about it. It would be much better if we actually got to do the experiment” (15, male)

Snapshot: Pupil Referral Unit

The Edge Learner Forum ran a workshop with students from a pupil referral unit that emphasised why there is an urgent need to introduce more learning they like to stop them from falling out of education completely. The most interesting and motivating part of education for them is being engaged through practical learning and the reason for the severe disengagement is the lack of this. Bearing in mind the levels of intelligence we observed during the workshop and the passion they communicated for their own favoured occupation; be it pigeon-racing, being a jockey or driving, it was clear to see how these young people may disengage if faced with education streaming based on their academic attainment rather than their intelligence. When taking care to present subjects in a way that seemed relevant to the young people and when learning outcomes were put into a wider context of their individual benefit these learners could be challenged and motivated through learning.

The main motivations for staying until 18 are money and careers

52% expressed money or the benefit education gave to their later career as their main motivation for staying on in education. Many young people had problems with the Educational Maintenance Allowance and whether the distribution of it was fair, with some of those surveyed feeling they were unfairly excluded from receiving it. Many also listed their career as the motivation to continue in education post 16, with a belief that the only way to ensure a good job was to get as many qualifications as possible by staying in education longer.

Aspirations are high but young people have a very narrow perception of how to develop them

80% believe they are talented and 85% of young people know what they are good at

Whether it is a specific subject or a key skill young people know they have huge potential and aspire to great heights. The ambition is there but there is a clear lack of understanding on all courses of action that could help achieve their goals. They are motivated not only by money, but, more importantly, a desire to have a good job that interests them and a happy life. 62% wanted a job they enjoyed and happiness out of life with only 12% saying that money was their focus in life.

80% of young people believe they will need to go to university to achieve their goals

“From when you’re very little, everyone tells you that uni is the route to success. But so many of the most successful people didn’t go to university.”

(Participant at the Edge Learner Forum solutions workshop)

The narrow perception of how to achieve goals is demonstrated by the 80% of young people who believe they need to go to university to succeed. Traditional educational routes (GCSE’s, A-Levels, university) make up the majority of educational paths, with many young people seeing education as a means to an end.

Only 9% recognise vocational and applied routes as the next step available to them in education

There appears to be a lack of awareness of the choices open to young people post 16 with very few stating a vocational and applied course as a possible route they might opt for. The fact that young people are engaged and learn best when having practical elements in their course raises the question over why so many see university as the only route forward. In workshops run with diploma course students, participants felt practical and vocational learning routes were given second-class status below A-levels and undergraduate degrees.

“If you’re not strong academically then you’re thrown into the NVQ class and made to feel like a failure” (19, female)

Snapshot: Diploma Students

The Edge Learner Forum ran a workshop with students taking new diploma qualifications to find out their motivations for taking the diploma and the quality of their learning experience so far. We heard about a number of positive aspects of the course, including: a good mixture of types of learning, including practical; flexibility to mix diplomas with other qualifications such as A Levels and GCSEs, which provides a varied diet of learning experiences and qualification outcomes; a good focus on group and teamwork; and a 'respectful' relationship between teacher and student.

Despite positive feedback on the diploma, students saw problems with the course. Some students felt strongly that the value of the diploma qualification was diminished by the fact it had been their only option due to not achieving their expected exam grades, and that it was therefore a 'second class route'. This left the student feeling that their own worth was somewhat less than

others taking academic courses. Participants recommended that more effort should be made to raise the status of the diploma and ensure it is offered to all students, beyond simply suggesting it to those who failed at GCSE level. Another negative aspect of the course was a severe lack of information about it, both for students and, worryingly, for teachers, who seemed ill-prepared to teach the course. Certain students expressed feeling like 'guinea pigs' on which the course was being 'tested out'. Participants recommended that it would be useful to learn from teachers with first-hand experience of the industry about which they are teaching.

In terms of the course content, certain students felt that there was too much written work for a practical course and too many modules. There were also concerns that the Functional Skills element of the diploma is not pitched at the right level, with some students finding they were repeating learning they had undergone already and others finding it too challenging. Participants expressed a preference that Functional Skills be taught in a practical way.

Young people see education as a means to an end

63% of young people stated that their primary reason for staying in education was for getting qualifications or a job. Only 21% gave the skills and knowledge they gained as what they wanted to get out of education.

8) After School - University, Entering Work and Careers Advice

Only 21% listed a form of formal careers advice as the information or support they would need to make the right choices

Family, friends and teachers make up the sources most young people turn to for information and support, raising the question over whether they know where else to go for careers advice. This predominance of informal advice means that not enough young people are going to formal careers advisory services that can provide them with the level of information and guidance that is needed.

44% of young people do not feel they receive good advice on work options

A lot of young people who felt they were not receiving good careers advice believed that this was because it was

not intensive enough. Due to a lack of time the careers advisors could not get to know the young people well enough to be able to give helpful advice on what direction they might take in the future.

"I only found out there was a Careers Advisor at my university at the end of my 4th and final year." (24, male)

When asked what they will do after graduating, many university students said that they have no clear direction with graduates saying they studied Master Degrees simply because they don't know what else to do.

"Dunno", "unsure", "undecided", "taking a year out", "Masters because I'm not sure what job" (University students responses to what they want to do in life)

9) The Way Forward

Throughout the Youth Commission we worked with a wide spectrum of young people to devise solutions for the future of education. The main question we wanted to answer was: “How can we make Staying On a carrot, rather than a stick?” This section outlines the six solutions we came up with, and what the Edge Learner Forum intends to do to take them forward.

1) Overhauling careers advice

Careers advice should be an essential part of young people’s education right up until they leave. But we don’t mean sticking to the same old advice – there needs to be a fundamental change in the way it gets offered.

Young people should be involved in designing the advice that is given to young people so that it is from the horse’s mouth. We need more one-on-one time with advisors to help us to develop our thinking about the future in a way that works for us personally.

There is not enough information about vocational and applied options like apprenticeships and 14-19 diplomas reaching young people (and parents) whilst they are still in school. Young people in schools have a right to have all this information so they can make positive choices about what is right for them.

At Yale University in the USA, it is compulsory for all students to visit a Careers Counsellor within the first semester, and the advice given at these meetings is constructive and substantial. The student is then required to meet with them in every year of study. Universities in the UK need to place the right importance on helping out their students with the important decisions at vital times.

What are we going to do about it? We are going to create our own advice for

young people to tell them about the different avenues they can take, by showing them real examples from the horse’s mouth. We will take this advice directly to young people in schools and encourage them to explore all the possibilities.

2) Making the most of the power of teachers

Teachers play a *make or break* role in young people’s education. We want to see more support for teachers to use their influence over young people’s lives more positively.

Teachers need to know more about the different routes young people can take in education and in work. We want to see a programme for teachers so they can gain this knowledge. Especially with applied courses like 14-19 Diplomas, our teachers need to know about the industry they are preparing us for.

Teachers need a better connection with young people’s needs and styles of learning. Teachers should sit down and reflect with their students about how much they are learning and how they could learn more.

What are we going to do about it? We are going to design a training experience to show teachers about the different routes that young people might want to take and show them real examples of young people doing these routes. We aim to spread our practice of youth-led reviews in schools and colleges around the country, so that more young people are involved in giving feedback to teachers as part of

the review process.

3) Promoting pride in vocational learning

Most young people think the academic route of A-levels then university is the only way to prove your intelligence and become successful, even when they prefer to learn in a practical and creative way. Those of us that do take vocational courses do not feel as proud as we should because it feels like a lesser route.

Young people must know that all the choices are equally valued. Options like 14-19 diplomas and apprenticeships need to be valued more by society. This message needs to be reinforced by universities and schools as a priority.

What are we going to do about it? We will spread success stories of young people who feel they have made a positive choice to do vocational learning. We will talk to universities around the country about the problems and encourage them to take a stand so that young people know that their doors will be open.

4) More practical options, more flexibility

Across the country young people told us they want more practical and creative learning if they are going to stay in education. The best experiences are out of the classroom, but these don't happen enough. Young people need to get out of the classroom and have more hands-on experience. This is a priority.

We want more work experience in schools, not just two weeks. This helps you know what you are good at and

what you want to do. There should be more work-based learning courses available, even if we are not sure what we want to do in the future, to try out what it might be like to work in different industries. There should be more youth workers and mentors involved in giving practical experiences to young people – getting us out to youth clubs and community organisations to experience a different way of learning and help us to mature.

Young people want more choice and flexibility built into the system. We need more control over what we learn and how we learn it. For example, if we want to learn about enterprise alongside doing an apprenticeship in retail, this should be possible. Or if we want to do more coursework instead of examinations, this should be possible. One way of achieving this is through alternative provision where at an earlier age young people get more choice across the board, such as being able to go to college and taking a variety of courses they like.

What are we going to do about it? We are going to work with businesses to get them to raise their game on work experience. We are going to look into what practical and creative options need to be offered. We will look at examples from other countries, and talk to young people who are outside education about the options they think are missing. This will generate a picture of what the future options should include, for instance a 'sampling apprenticeship' to give people wider skills and experiences by moving around industries they are interested in.

5) Using financial support to raise success

We have heard a lot about the importance of financial support to stay on in learning up until 18 and beyond. One of the main reasons for dropping out is seen to be financial, and this is also one of the main things that would motivate people to keep learning.

The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is felt to be not enough and not reaching everyone, and this needs to be looked at. Similarly, the payment that people get on apprenticeship courses is not always seen to be enough to make it worthwhile choosing these routes over other jobs. Across all areas of learning we want to see financial support that is also more based on how much effort you put in, not only whether you have turned up or not.

What are we going to do about it? We are going to design some schemes to test out the use of financial incentives with young people who are disengaging from learning. We will work out if these schemes could save the government money in other areas.

6) Raising the Participation Age has to be done with young people, not to them

Through the Youth Commission we have seen that young people around the country want to have a say in the future of education. Some of us are inspired, and some of us are frustrated or angry, but we are ready to talk about how to make things better. Over half the 4000 young people we spoke to have already volunteered to keep involved with this debate.

The government decision to raise the participation age has a lot of support but there are still a lot of people who feel strongly against it. We think that this conversation with young people needs to carry on and grow – we need to be equal partners in making the big decisions, and decision-makers need to be prepared to work with us.

What are we going to do about it? We are going to keep involving larger numbers of young people around the country in the debate about the future. We are going to take young people's views to the very top, and work with government to get change happening. We are going to make sure that everyone we have spoken to knows that their views do matter and they can see we are doing something about it.

10) Get Involved

To get involved and generate the debate, visit www.edgelearnerforum.co.uk and www.edgeforum.co.uk

11) Acknowledgements

The Youth Commission would like to thank the following people and organisations for the support they have offered the project

Croydon Business Academy
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Immanuel School
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Huntington School, York
Canon Lee School, York
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Ryedale Out of School Education, Pickering
St Augustine's School, Scarborough
Aireville School, Skipton
Barlby College, Selby
William Howard School – Brampton, Cumbria
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School – Penrith, Cumbria
Ulverston Victoria High School – Ulverston, Cumbria
All Saints Secondary School - Doncaster
Hallcross Secondary School - Doncaster
Danum Secondary School - Doncaster
Doncaster College
Burnside Business & Enterprise College - Newcastle

“Raising the Participation Age means the education system will need to provide for every young person. No one should be deemed too hard to engage. I welcome Edge’s contribution through this report and I am focussed on supporting young people to be at the centre of what we do. “

Iain Wright, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for 14-19 Reform and Apprenticeships

“As the Forum has found, traditional class-room based work does not work for every learner – greater flexibility in delivery is needed if we are to keep young people interested in learning. Apprenticeships are an ideal way for them to do so allowing them to learn while they earn.”

National Apprenticeship Service

"To prepare young people for the challenges of the 21st century we need to provide education that is effective, engaging and relevant. The Youth Commission project offers invaluable insight into the attitudes of young people and marks a crucial step towards achieving this goal."

Kai Vacher, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

"I think this is an extremely useful report. It shows that young people are aware of the value of education and training but don't just want more of the same. Many of them are looking for a more practical, work-based route to qualifications. The fact that so few of them, their parents or their teachers know that such a route already exists or how to access it, is a shocking indictment of our present system."

Baroness Margaret Sharp - Liberal Democrat spokeswoman on education in the House of Lords

“The Youth Commission Report marks a hugely important step on the journey to recognise the importance of vocational learning pathways to young people and that increasingly this must be seen as the learning pathway of choice for many individuals. This will only come about if we, as policy makers, strive for parity of esteem between vocational and academic courses and careers and guidance advisers’ step up the plate by offering both pathways to young people.”

Phil Willis MP - Chair of the House of Commons Science & Technology Select Committee

" We should try to make every home, school, college, academy, workplace, playground, youth centre a practical centre of learning. I admire and respect young people, whom through the forum show concern with the affairs of their education and future and who are capable, when aroused, of making fundamental changes to our education system for the future betterment of themselves and the economy of our country.

My batteries are fully charged and I am ready to go into battle, alongside these inspiring young people, to together, make a difference.

It was Einstein who said "imagination is more important than knowledge" so lets not get bogged down in the problems ,lets drive together for solutions, lets experiment. Remember "there is no such thing as a failed experiment, only experiments with unexpected outcomes"

Lets get on with it! NOW!!! "

Mr Paul Preston