

Research Briefing No. 13

Students' Perspectives of 14-19 Educational Reform

Key findings

Students were consulted by schools and colleges, but did not feel empowered in influencing institutional policy on curriculum and assessment, and the qualifications available

Students wanted to balance fairness and opportunity through provision of different assessment components, modular delivery, and variety in types of qualifications available. However, this was in tension with amounts of assessment experienced by young people, currencies of different qualifications, their usefulness in university and job markets, and the relevance of students' experiences at this phase of education to their aspirations and goals.

Student aspirations overall were high, with many responses referring to higher education and professional jobs

Schools and colleges supported students to achieve personal goals by focusing on personal and inter-personal issues, (eg development of personal skills, relationships, attitudes and identity) and on educational issues (eg qualifications and learning).

Students' levels of engagement are not fixed, and are influenced by peer and teacher relationships

Positive relationships with teachers, and a range of teaching methods in lessons worked best in engaging students, whereas poor relationships, feeling labelled, and the quality of teaching could de-motivate students. Despite disengagement, most students remained aspirational, recognising the value of education.



The research

The CReSt project investigated responses to reforms in education for 14-19 year olds, in 52 schools and colleges across England. In the period leading up to and during the research, many different policies had been introduced which impacted on the provision of 14-19 education.

- The research presents a rich, descriptive account of how policy is played out in practice in a diverse range of institutions, and how this is experienced by students.
- Rather than focusing on any single policy or reform, the research takes stock of complementary and competing reforms which affect institutions and their students.

The research took place between March 2009 and January 2011, and was funded by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency.

A special issue of the London Review of Education, which focuses on the perspectives of young people in the CReSt project, is due out in June 2013.

Research design

52 schools and colleges in England took part. The project team visited 18 institutions in 2009/10, when the reform process had begun. Visits to the other 34 were scheduled for 2010/11, and 2011/12, with further visits to all 52 in 2012/13.

Three-day visits comprised:

- interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders (head teachers, partnership coordinators, curriculum managers, governors, teachers, students, parents)
- collection of documentary evidence (prospectuses, strategic plans, curriculum, staffing structure, enrichment activities, information advice and guidance practice)

Questionnaires were administered electronically to students in Y11 and Y13, and teachers, across all 52 institutions in 2009/10. These covered students' views on their education, its relationships with their lives, aspirations and wellbeing, and the effect of reforms upon teachers and their classroom practice. Responses were returned from 773 Y11 students, 1012 Y13 students, and 882 teachers in 35 institutions.

Further information

Key messages for institutions and policy makers include:

- Involvement of educational stakeholders, including students, in the creation and formulation of policy would give the objectives a greater chance of success because it would lead to better understanding of the likely uptake.
- Students are knowledgeable about existing local, national and international arrangements that impact upon policy implementation, including policy clashes.
- Obligations to consult young people meaningfully on policy formation and development need to be met. 'Disengaged' students should be included in any forms of consultations.
- There is a high level of educational and occupational aspiration amongst students at the 14-19 level.

[Download the full report \(PDF 3.5MB\)](#)

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