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## ABSTRACT

This study is part of a regional study in industrial South Wales on the determinants of participation and non-participation in post-compulsory education and training, with special reference to processes of change in the patterns of these determinants over time and to variations between geographical areas. The study combines analysis of secondary data about education and training with a regional study of several generations of families in South Wales (a door-to-door survey of 1,104 representative householders), interviews, and taped oral histories. This study considers the types of opportunities available over the period 1945-1998 to determine whether they can help explain the pattern of changes in participation in education over time. The study found limited training opportunities available during the post-war years, with an emphasis on heavy industries. The 1950s and 1960s saw a more structured approach to training, with the setting up of Industrial Training Boards and a limited expansion of opportunities for further education. In the 1970s, further education became more important, and companies began in-house training departments, although these developments were interrupted by the oil crisis and resultant recession. In 1981, many of the training boards were dismantled and the Manpower Services Commission took over organizing training. Training schemes came and went, and large job losses in basic industries created a training industry but few jobs. By 1989, economic recovery began, and the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications and Modern Apprenticeships opened up the potential of accreditation to more people. Expansion of further education has taken place in the 1990s, but the education system faces economic constraints and the future is uncertain. (KC)

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PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A Cardiff and Bristol University ESRC- funded Learning Society Project

WORKING PAPER 12

**Changes in training opportunities in South Wales 1945-1998:**

*the views of key informants*

**Paul Chambers, Stephen Gorard, Ralph Fevre,  
Gareth Rees and John Furlong.**

**1998**

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## *Changes in training opportunities in South Wales 1945-1998: the views of key informants*

**Paul Chambers, Stephen Gorard, Ralph Fevre,  
Gareth Rees, John Furlong  
1998**

This paper reports on research funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (Grant No. L123251041).

### **THE STUDY**

Since space is limited there will be little attempt to reproduce in this paper the full background to this substantial project, or the complete methods of data collection and analysis used. Readers are referred to Rees *et al.* (1997) and Fevre *et al.* (1997) for a discussion of the theoretical basis of the study, to Gorard (1997) and Gorard *et al.* (1997<sub>a</sub>) for a presentation of the methods used.

In summary, industrial South Wales is used as the focus of the study, since it has experienced an economic 'boom, bust and retrenchment' over a relatively short

period - the lifetime of one of the participants. This makes it easier to uncover the links between economic activity and participation in learning. The study was regionally focused to allow the researchers to gain clear descriptions of the changing structures of objective opportunities for participation over 100 years, and this has been achieved primarily by analysis of taped oral histories of families dating back to 1890 in the South Wales Coalfield Archive, by interviews with key participants with long experience in local training, by secondary data analysis, and through the experiences of the researchers in previous locally-based studies. Within the focus area, a systematic stratified sample of 1,104 education and training histories have been collected from respondents aged 15 to 65, identified from the electoral register. The second wave interviewed many of the children of those in the first wave, while the third wave collected unstructured narratives via in-depth re-interview of those in the first two waves.

## **BACKGROUND**

The study uses the notion of a learning trajectory to encapsulate each individuals participation at a 'broad brush' level of analysis, and the frequency of each is shown in Table I. The structured interviews attempted to capture all and any episodes of formal learning including one-off health and safety training, leisure reading, and evening classes as well as the more usually reported induction training, and Further and Higher Education. Non-participants reported no episodes at all despite, in many cases, numerous and varied vocational changes. 'Immature' trajectories describe those still in continuous full-time education, and these individuals are not used in the models below (but remain as a future test of the validity of our predictions). Transitional learners reported only full-time continuous education or immediate post-compulsory work-based training so far. 'Delayed' learners have a learning gap after compulsory school until at least age 21, but then reported at least one substantive episode of education or training. The lifetime learners reported both transitional and later episodes.

**Table I**  
**Frequency of five learning trajectory categories**

Trajectory	Frequency	Percentage
Non-participant	339	31
Delayed	144	13
Transitional	222	20
Lifetime	353	32
Immature	42	4

It is interesting that the percentage of respondents following each trajectory varies significantly by age (Table II). There has been a clear trend away from non-participation and towards participation in some form of adult education since 1945/46 when the oldest respondents left school. The proportion of each cohort reporting no formal learning has decreased, but this decrease is not chiefly to do with a greater return to education as an adult since the proportion of delayed learners has held relatively constant. The proportion of lifetime learners has only increased since the oldest cohort, but the big change has been in the proportion of those only using education as a transitional state. In general, over the last 50 years there has been an increase in extended initial education, similar in impact to successive raises of the school-leaving age, but this has not yet translated into equivalent patterns of participation in lifelong learning or training. That this is not due simply to lack of elapsed time to undertake a second learning episode is clear since the average age of each group, including the transitional learners, is mid-40s. One of the key objectives of this paper is to widen the investigation: to consider the nature of opportunities available over this period and see if they can help explain the pattern of changes in participation over time.

**Table II**  
**Frequency of trajectory by age cohort**

Traject./age	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
Non-partic.	26	28	37	43
Delayed	8	20	17	22
Transitional	33	17	16	12
Lifetime	31	35	31	22

This is a report of the interviews with key informants which concerns their recollections of the opportunities for post-compulsory education and training in South Wales from 1945 to the present day. It is hoped that these stories and the official secondary data on the type of opportunities available over the period can provide a helpful backdrop to the opportunity structures perceived by the participants in this study (e.g. Gorard et al. 1997b), and to their actual patterns of participation (e.g. Gorard et al. 1998a). Thus it should be borne in mind that the account that follows does not seek to be definitive, ignoring as it does the secondary data and the stories of the participants themselves. The account is one given by a sample of the actual providers of education and training during this period, as far as it has been possible to trace them. It is ironic that primary data sources and records for the early part of the period 1945-97 have been harder to locate, and perhaps less eloquent historically, than those available to the study for the first half of the century through the South Wales Coalfield Archive (see forthcoming Working Paper).

Primary historical documentation was particularly difficult to obtain, and there were a number of reasons for this. The definition of 'historical' data held in County Archives tends to be of older material. There were documents relating to education in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. However, the type of ephemeral documentation relating to education and training from 1940 onwards was largely absent. What there was tended to relate to schools only. No one appears to have thought it important enough to gather and store the type of material that might have been useful to this research (e.g. college yearbooks, prospectuses, I.T.B. reports, County provision of services documents, local business directories). The local government reorganisation of 1996 has also led to a dispersal of reference material, much of which appears to have dropped out of sight. Only one of the former County Library Headquarters remains. This is Mid Glamorgan Library H.Q., which provided the best source of documents, but even there the available material was very thin. There were some business directories and educational prospectuses dating from the 1960s and 1970s and some reports from Bridgend College, the collection of which appears to have been haphazard.

It proved equally difficult to find trainers and educators who could comment authoritatively on changes since 1945. In some cases, potential informants had recently died, some have retired or been made redundant and contact has been

lost with them. Consequently many of the people interviewed had only recently been in post and could only offer hearsay evidence about the past, and much of this interview data therefore relates only to the very recent past. Roughly a third of the respondents were in the upper age bracket and felt that they could talk about the past, but the data relating to 1940-70 tends to be drawn from the respondents own educational biographies. After 1970, more respondents were actively involved in delivering education and training and could talk authoritatively about policy, provision and implementation as it occurred locally. The reader should bear these methodological limitations in mind when the views here are inconsistent with more standard accounts of the development of local education and training. It is possible that the sense of progression, of increasing the formality, coherence and substance of training described here is in part a consequence of the respondents' increasing involvement and awareness during the period. In some cases these 'elephants' with long memories are speaking as individuals rather than in the professional capacity through which they were contacted, and their views, while interesting, carry no more inherent weight than those from the much larger number of in-depth interviews with participants (for example Gorard et al. 1998b).

## **SUMMARY**

The report commences with a description of training and education in the immediate post-war years, when technical schools in South Wales were developing into adult technical colleges offering a limited range of vocational courses. These were primarily geared towards the coal and steel industries and commerce, and apart from apprenticeship training, the world of work was perhaps largely characterised by informal learning strategies.

The 1950s and 1960s may have seen a more structured approach to training in Wales with the setting up of the Industrial Training Boards and a limited expansion of opportunities in further education. The 1970s saw a raised profile for further education and training and the introduction of internal training departments in many organisations. These developments were interrupted to some extent by the oil crisis and resultant 'recession', with training departments in some organisations suffering cutbacks. Conversely, more emphasis was seemingly

placed on re-training of the unemployed, with a five year plan for training being drawn up by the government in 1978.

In 1981 many of the Industrial Training Boards were dismantled and the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) took over the remit for organising training. According to some of these accounts, training schemes came and went with bewildering rapidity, contributing little to the social and economic recovery of South Wales. Large scale job losses in the steel industry and the collapse of the mining industry indirectly created a large local training industry but this could not deliver new jobs. Training within industry declined, laying the foundations for what is perceived by some as a major local skills shortage in the 1990s (one employer in Port Talbot has been looking for an electrician for two years but cannot compete with the prospects at the nearby Sony plant for example).

By the end of the decade a patchy economic recovery was seen as taking place along the M4 corridor, notably in Newport and Bridgend, with other focus sites for this research such as Neath Port Talbot and Blaenau Gwent remaining largely untouched by this development. Under Welsh Office control both training and education became more financially accountable. The MSC gave way to the new Training and Enterprise Councils with apparently mixed results, and the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications and Modern Apprenticeships opened up the potential of accredited training to more people. However, in reality initial reactions to these developments were muted and it is only now that the schemes may be starting to deliver their promise.

An expansion of further education in the 1990s has been accompanied by financial restrictions, and the whole FE system is under considerable strain according to some informants, although others celebrate the flexibility that the financial reforms have brought. The private training industry which began to develop in the late 1970s is now contracting, largely as a result of the new financial regime imposed by the Welsh Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). At the same time there may be a renewed commitment to training within industry. This reflects the impact of the influx of foreign owned firms and is largely driven by lessons learned in the 1980s, although there is some evidence that this phenomenon is restricted to larger companies. It is directed at both retraining the existing workforce and addressing a local skills shortage. The

future of training and education in South Wales remains very open and there are marked variations within the research area. It should be noted that there are already indications within this study that some of the growth in participation in formal training at work described here may have been in unnecessary forms of learning, perhaps 'credentialist' in intention (Fevre et al. 1998), and that the increases in initial education decried here may not be particularly effective in creating a Learning Society 'ethos' in isolation (Gorard et al. 1998c). Doubt has also been cast on the precise nature of the skills shortages said to be facing local employers today.

## **PEOPLE AND PLACES**

Industrial South Wales has undergone significant economic and cultural change since 1940. The staple industries revolved around coal and iron and the cultural characteristics of the area reflected the pervasive influence of these industries. The post-war decline of these industries has been reflected in significant and uneven social change. The impact of recession on South Wales was marked and recovery has been slow and uneven. The three geographical areas chosen as research sites were selected precisely because they reflect this uneven recovery.

Blaenau Gwent, characterised by parallel coal valleys running north from Newport with the small town of Ebbw Vale at its centre, was perhaps the most dependent on coal and steel and the demise of these industries has left the area in a very depressed condition. Recovery has been slow. Bridgend, a near-coastal town on the 'M4 corridor', by contrast can be characterised as economically buoyant. The relative prosperity of the area reflects, in part, the pre-war location of an arsenal on the edge of the town and the post-war development of this facility as an industrial estate. Neath Port Talbot, a succession of coastal urban areas between Bridgend and Swansea, falls somewhere between the other two sites in economic terms. Port Talbot, certainly, was 'made' by steel but that prosperity has slipped away with the contraction of the British Steel workforce. Neath too has also suffered the effects of recession but it was never a town that depended entirely on one employer or a single industry. Economically, the area is beginning to show signs of recovery. The industrial estate at Baglan and the nearby Pyle Industrial Estate both offer employment opportunities with the many

new firms that have moved into the area. The M4 corridor has made a significant difference to the economic life of both Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.

### Blaenau Gwent

Respondents who had entered the labour market in the 1950-60s emphasised that for the overwhelming majority of males the options were either coal or steel (and most of the 'elephants' were in fact male). The primary criterion for occupational selection was geographical and work was expected to be 'on your doorstep'. There was some evidence that the steelworks became more attractive as working conditions in the local mines were seen as becoming more difficult. Those respondents who had undergone National Coal Board apprenticeships all later sought work in the steel industry, either at Ebbw Vale or at the new works at Llanwern. Attendance at a local technical or grammar school was a criteria for a British Steel apprenticeship. 'Getting in' to the steelworks for unskilled males was primarily straight from school and through family contacts, and once in, workers generally progressed through a strong internal labour market.

All of the respondents, from both industry and education, stressed the 'parochialism' of local people. As working conditions in the mines deteriorated, miners, if they wished to continue in mining were forced to travel to other valleys to work and this was not a popular option. While there were some other industries operating in the area, these tended to be small firms paying low wages. The introduction of redundancies at British Steel in the 1970s coupled with the decline in the pits was exacerbated by the reluctance of paid-off workers to look for work out of the area. This reluctance persists and, in this account, has contributed to second and third generation unemployment.

Vocational trainers and educators emphasised the difficulties that this parochialism creates. The reluctance of people from Tredegar or Blaina to travel to Ebbw Vale and *vice versa* has forced educators to adopt strategies of taking education to the people. In this respect, the more fluid structures of Community Education may have proved rather more successful than the activities of Ebbw Vale College. This has caused some animosity in the college which is currently struggling to remain viable (a new management structure having recently been put in place), since trainers operating from fixed sites have not had this luxury

and the past two decades have been very much geared to encouraging people to travel to the opportunities available. Nevertheless there is some evidence that the old Institutes have survived better in the eastern valleys of South Wales, for while the story in the west is almost exclusively one of dereliction and closure, the Scientific and Technical Institute built in Ebbw Vale has been in continuous operation since 1849. Although the library has gone, the Institute is currently a site for certified courses, especially in IT-related areas and there are two computer laboratories - supporting the Open Learning Project and the Adult Literacy Project respectively. A manager of local community education commented:

Somebody in the South East of the borough would find it very difficult to get to the North West with the sort of public transport we've got. If you've got a car that's alright but this part of Gwent is one of the lowest areas of car ownership in Wales... Of course community education centres [like the Institute] are much more evenly distributed throughout the borough. They're very accessible to people.

A Blaenau Gwent Careers adviser agrees that:

We've had to retrain the people in this area, before anything else, to move from one area to another... when I started I couldn't get the kids to come from Brynmawr or Ebbw Vale for training. I'd bring kids over here and they'd say "is this Tredegar"? They'd never been to Tredegar!

This reluctance to move may be based on past patterns of employment:

If your father was in the works, there was a job for you when you left school. That was the pattern. It was the same in the other valleys, they had mines they did, not the steelworks, but they had the pits and the mines. There was always that type of work [*for men, by implication*].

A manager in an engineering firm concludes:

There's not many people who will from Tredegar to Ebbw Vale which is the next valley over. They won't travel. It's just that they won't. If they can't get the employment they want in their locality that's it.

There is some recent evidence that young people (particularly those with qualifications) are showing more willingness to travel. However, LG (a Korean company new to an adjacent area) has had extreme difficulty recruiting workers from Blaenau Gwent, despite laying on free buses. All respondents commented on the deep-rooted third generation culture of unemployment in the area. Many of the families known to them appear disinterested in both education or working. One respondent commented that the only level of education many aspired to was knowing how to sign their name at the dole office. However, there was evidence of a very sophisticated understanding of the benefits system among these families.

New industry has slowly moved into the area. In the 1970s there was an influx of what a Tredegar careers advisor described as 'fly-by-night' companies, which were only there for the Welsh Development Agency subsidies. This has changed and there are now a number of relatively long established SMEs committed to the long term development of their workers through training. Manufacturing is still largely male dominated with the female workforce tending to be concentrated in the retail and care sectors. There is reportedly an acute skills shortage and this has been exacerbated by the presence of large foreign owned companies such as LG, Sony and Bosch. Respondents felt that Ebbw Vale was turning the corner, with the success of the rugby club and the Garden Festival boosting confidence in the town, but that this would be a slow process. A local careers adviser reports that:

Japanese [and other] companies moving into the area are surprised at the skills shortage. They look at the high unemployment figures but when it comes to recruiting staff they have great difficulties... They think there's hundreds looking for those jobs, but there are not. If the kids have anything about them in terms of ability they are going back to school aren't they?

The suggestion here is that employers would see extended initial education as a cause of a low skill workforce, rather than a solution to it.

## Bridgend

Bridgend presents a very different picture to the above. Coal was an important presence in the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys and this is reflected in the history of Bridgend College which began life as a mines school. However, unlike Blaenau Gwent, coal has never been the dominant local industry. Large employers such as Revlon and British Tissues have been long established fixtures in the valleys town of Maesteg. There is 'parochialism' still in the valleys but also a recognition that the town of Bridgend itself constitutes the focus for work and post-16 education.

The character of Bridgend and its people owes much to the establishment of the arsenal just prior to the Second World War. This drew a largely female workforce from all over South Wales, many of whom married locally and settled in the area. Consequently, many people in Bridgend can be classified (in Welsh terms) as 'newcomers', even if their families have been in the town for three or four generations. This may partially account for the lack of parochialism, while the presence of a mainline railway and latterly the M4 has further widened peoples' horizons.

The arsenal itself was transformed into one of the first Welsh industrial estates with a mixed manufacturing base offering employment opportunities for both men and women. Links between industry and Bridgend College have always been good and the present college Principal commented that over the past forty years most of the past and present supervisory and management staff on the estate had been through the college.

The recessions of the 1970s and 1980s saw a high turnover of companies on the estate. Old established companies disappeared, new small to medium employers appeared and disappeared. However the relocation of large companies such as Ford and Sony and the gradual appearance of many SME supplier companies has created a healthier economic base. Many of these new companies claim to be highly committed to workforce training. Unemployment is lower than in the other research sites of Blaenau Gwent and Neath Port Talbot, and the pattern of unwillingness to travel is different. A local college principal says:

It's not a factor in Bridgend itself. There's plenty of work locally, but people are not afraid to travel to Cardiff or Swansea for work. Cardiff would be considered local. But it's very strange because you get students here from... say this is Bridgend town centre, if you were to draw a circle and go up to Aberkenfig which is two and a half miles away, Pencoed two and a half miles away, within that circle people will travel. You go five miles... up the valley, six miles to the top of Maesteg or Blaengarw, they won't travel. You know, we have students here, sometimes from say Nantymoel, they've never been to Cardiff or Swansea... A big town to them is coming to Bridgend!

Bridgend College itself has undergone massive expansion over the past twenty years both in terms of buildings and the horizontal and vertical development of the curriculum. It continues to offer a solid base of vocational training but has also ventured into limited provision of higher education. The continued development of the college is suggestive of demand, and in the opinion of the Principal suggests that there is a fairly high premium placed locally on education and training. This is mirrored by the relatively high number of private trainers also operating in the area. He has noticed a change in the range of students enrolling on courses over the last twenty years. The students used to be predominantly young (average age 20) and male. There is now a gender balance among the students whose average age is 24.

The town itself continues to grow rapidly with new housing developments springing up constantly. Communications are being further improved by a comprehensive system of new roadworks and the reopening of rail line to Maesteg.

#### Neath Port Talbot

Neath Port Talbot presents something of a conundrum. The joint product of local government re-organisation, there is little love lost between the two constituent communities. While they may be joined administratively, this has yet to be translated into any feeling of common purpose, and in part this may reflect the

prevalent parochialism that local respondents commented on, as they did in Blaenau Gwent.

This parochialism is rather more apparent in Port Talbot. The Principal of a local College commented both on this and the fact that the town had not yet shaken off its single industry culture. The steel works dominates both the skyline of the town and the 'hearts and minds' of its people. For many young males, their primary ambition is still to 'get into' the works. Formerly known locally as 'Treasure Island' it could now be better termed 'Shangri La' as annual recruitment into the works is now so low (whereas the plant employed 12000 workers in 1980 it now employs 4000). He comments:

When you look at some of the recruitment surveys that local employers have carried out, sometimes they will only receive applications from a very small radius of the plant... you know sometimes as little as two or three miles because people geographically perceive that to be too distant.

The town has a mixed character with some wards characterised by extreme economic and social deprivation. The advent of 'Slimline' in the late 1970s saw many British Steel workers leave the area to find work elsewhere. The resultant empty properties on the huge Sandfields Estate saw an influx of 'problem families' rehoused from areas such as Penrhys, according to a local careers advisor. Sandfields is characterised by relatively high levels of second and third generation unemployment, a higher than average level of 'broken homes' and low levels of educational attainment. According to the source:

Whereas the area was always working-class it was 'tidy' working class. Now there are war zones [pockets of marked deprivation] dotted in among older residents.

Both educators and employers emphasised what they saw as the very low levels of ambition among people in Port Talbot, and their consequent reluctance to travel any distance to work. The Principal of a local college characterised his students as both parochial in their attitudes and as having very low personal expectations. He saw this as being translated into minimal performance in school which created problems when they moved on to the college. A local careers advisor commented

that families see very little value in the type of education on offer, since 'they don't see education as leading anywhere'. Both respondents noted that high rates of unemployment lead to a lack of motivation and a culture of short termism. Local employers commented both on the marked lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills among their workers and their reluctance to train in order to improve their promotion prospects.

The Principal of the local college disputes the claim made in his presence that the standard of local education is poor since Port Talbot has one of the lowest percentages of higher qualifications according to the Census 1991. A local employer claimed that he could not recruit the right type of people to 'drive Port Talbot forward'. Whereas:

The really interesting question is how many of those people [graduates from the college] have come back into this community with a job that is commensurate with their educational attainment. The sad answer is its much closer to nought... You can't blame the local people. You can't blame the schools. You can't blame the colleges. Yes, you can look at elements of blame but unless you've actually got something there for them, it's [Port Talbot] always going to be a net exporter. You look at the Afan Valley wards. Look at the population there and it's the classic skewed age profile, an increasingly ageing population. No industry and those communities are starting to die on that.

This view, from a regional perspective, attacks the simplistic basis of recent human capital approaches to economic development. Even in the best-planned economies of the Pacific such as in Singapore, graduates are now working long-term as maids and waiters. In Port Talbot they simply leave, since having a trained workforce cannot, of itself, produce work.

The Baglan Industrial Estate on the other hand, located as it is on the M4 corridor, has seen an influx of new companies and economically there does seem to be something of a recent upturn, but perhaps because of its recent history, the area is apparently suffering from a skills shortage. New firms have been unable to recruit skilled personnel locally. The town of Neath offers a slightly different prospect again. While its residents may in the past have been dependent on British

Steel and BP for employment there has always been a more diverse manufacturing base in the town, and nearby Swansea has always offered further employment opportunities.

The largest employer in the town, Metal Box has been through a radical restructuring. In 1975 it employed 3,500 workers, and it now employs 450. Its Training School closed in the 1980s and since then there has been virtually no local recruitment. Most other local manufacturers are small-scale engineering firms and the general pattern outside of the larger companies is of 'low pay low status' work. Neath College maintains a relatively high profile not least because it is a tertiary college. There has also been an upsurge in training requirements from SMEs, primarily with Modern Apprenticeships. However it has not matched the expansion of Bridgend College for example. In fact, in both Neath and Port Talbot there is considerable resentment directed against Bridgend and its economic prosperity, since inward investment is seen to stop at Bridgend.

## **SOUTH WALES BEFORE 1960**

### **Entering the Labour Market.**

The respondents who comprised the age cohort educated during this period all came from working-class backgrounds, being educated in local Grammar, Technical and Central Schools and leaving school aged 15 or 16. A common observation of those who were educated during the war years was the way in which the preoccupations of war impinged on their educational careers. Fathers were often away serving in the forces and there was little home encouragement to apply themselves at school. Parental attitudes (and those of the ex-pupils themselves) to schooling were almost exclusively orientated to entry into the labour market.

For those respondents fortunate enough to have secured a grammar school education, there was parental pressure to enter secure 'white collar' employment. Respondents generally felt that they had to accede to their parents wishes, at least in the short term. One respondent entered banking, although he had set his sights on a career in the police force. Another left school to attend teacher training

college, even though her ambition was to become an actress. These respondents both emphasised the difficulties they would have experienced at the time in going against their parents wishes.

During the war years there seemed to be a marked ambivalence among working-class boys towards a grammar school education. One respondent who did go to grammar school saw himself as totally unprepared for the experience. Another, who described himself as 'fairly bright' opted not to go to grammar school and left central school without a school leaving certificate. Both entered the employment structure as 'juniors'.

A fairly general pattern of on the job training appeared to emerge here. Training for 'juniors' was very low level and *ad hoc*. One respondent described himself as a 'dogsboddy' and 'training' consisted almost entirely of watching others do the job (colloquially known as 'sitting by Nellie'). The nature of on the job learning was emphasised by the importance of being 'taken under the wing' of an older worker, which was important both for training and subsequent promotion prospects.

This pattern was largely reproduced in the 1950s. School leavers immediately entered the world of work, usually into the dominant local industries of coal and steel (although it should be emphasised that nearly all respondents of this age are male). For those ex-pupils of technical schools, the nationalisation of the coal industry particularly opened up the possibility of employment with accredited training. A number of respondents had taken advantage of Coal Board apprenticeships which were introduced in the early 1950s. These apprenticeships were limited in number and highly sought after.

For nearly all male respondents (excluding those in the mining industry), their initial entry into the labour market was seen as marking time before National Service. The prevailing attitude seemed to be that training and subsequent career prospects were on hold until National Service had been completed. Responses to National Service itself were all favourable and respondents emphasised that this was their first real experience of formal post-compulsory education and training. Many cited this exposure to 'adult' learning as being highly influential on their attitudes to training and education in later life. Completion of National Service

was also seen by employers as an important watershed in the transition from 'junior' to adult employee.

## Education and Training

During the 1950s there was a sharp qualitative difference between apprentice training and informal training within employment. The introduction of widespread apprentice training was paralleled by an expansion of further education. Afan College in Port Talbot was initially set up as a training college for British Steel apprentices. Bridgend College, which had originally been set up as a mining school in 1929 but which then became a technical school, expanded to meet the new demands for training in industry triggered by the establishment of Bridgend Industrial estate. In 1946 fully equipped engineering and electrical workshops were built and the premises enlarged. Ebbw Vale College was largely geared to meet the demands of the steel and coal industries. All three establishments offered limited training in secretarial skills for women through their commerce departments.

For those who went through it, apprentice training was seen as of very high quality. It combined both on and off the job training and those who completed training were seen as highly sought after in their local labour markets. Many of the individuals interviewed who later took up careers in training in the 1970s began their working lives as apprentices. The majority of workers however, did not go through apprenticeships. Within the steel industry, what training there was for production workers, was very much 'sitting by Nellie'. The production processes were very labour intensive, the plants were overmanned and strict demarcation meant that there was no call for workers to know anything other than their immediate work tasks. Promotion was largely on the basis of 'who you know not what you know'. Indeed promotion led to several individuals feeling out of their depth because there was little or no induction training for the new position. Some of the more ambitious workers sought to make up for what they saw as a lack of personal educational attainment by enrolling on trade union sponsored distance learning courses. These courses were geared towards improving their English and mathematical skills. The low priority given to formal training by industrial employers in the 1950s was probably echoed in other occupational spheres.

Within the police force, there was little substantive training and what there was differed widely between different forces. The nature of policing was very fragmented with many different types of force, including county, city and borough. There seems to have been a correlation between the size of force and the level and quality of training. The smallest forces placed a very low priority on training, the detrimental effects of which appeared when the Home Office started to link promotion to national examinations. Within South Wales, only the Glamorgan force had a training centre, established in 1945. A retired superintendent responsible for training said:

There was *some* classroom teaching but most of it was based on the theory of the police service as shop window activity. When you're out on the beat there as a dear old policeman friend of mine used to say... I'm going to give the town a bit of confidence... and I'm sure he did. He rarely did anything but by God he looked the part... At Dyffryn their main ambition was to get them to look like a policeman [no women PCs in this part of the world]... it wasn't as if they were trying to get people to stretch themselves to become better... *holding hands* that was the only training in those days, you'd be put out with a senior man.

In 1950, the Home Office introduced eight District Training Centres for England and Wales. The whole of Wales was covered by just one training centre, located in Cwmbran. The introduction of a thirteen week induction course followed by two week 'refresher' courses was seen as a progressive step, as was the introduction of standard national promotion exams. This training largely consisted of learning case law and there was little or no emphasis on teaching the actual mechanics of police work. Training manuals were devised but at this time there was no formal training for instructors. Police training was little more than:

going through the motions...it was crude..[and] administered on an *ad hoc* basis by anyone who was available to do it. They knew nothing, and we learnt nothing... The idea of training was good but it typifies the way a good idea was destroyed by the way it was administered.

As forces were amalgamated during the 1950s, the profile of training was gradually raised. In part this was a response to the failure of many officers to actually pass promotion exams. In the late 1950s, a two year probationer training scheme was finally nationally. There was no formal training but there was a recognised route to joining the force. In 1958 the Police Training Centre was established at Bridgend, and for the first time a five week course was put on to train trainers. Initially two places were allocated to each Welsh force.

In many ways the railways were similar to the police force at this time. Training for some jobs was fairly casual and the railways themselves were fragmented. Formal training may have lasted for only a few weeks and largely consisted of learning railway rules and regulations. Other than this, training was again mostly by observation and emulation. For younger workers, learning the job properly or being 'shown the ropes' was therefore dependent on the goodwill of those already in post. Promotion was accompanied by a few weeks training but the emphasis was again, primarily on memorising rules and regulations rather than actually learning the practicalities of the job. The new job was again largely picked up through observation and hands on experience. This emphasis on familiarity with rules and regulations applied to all working branches and the onus was on individuals to familiarise themselves thoroughly from the relevant books rather than any formal classroom training. It was not until the 1960s, that a more structured training regime was to come into operation.

However, the lack of structure, and short duration of training experiences should not be over-emphasised. One man who joined the railways in 1946 said:

It was all a question of learning from a practical point of view. I mean I spent about a *fortnight* learning the telephones... I became a porter/signalman... So I had several weeks of training there because you had to know the rules and regulations... I mean the number of books they had really was... I mean, they had what was called the Ordinary Rule Book which applied to all staff, and then they had the General Appendix which applied to British Rail, and then they had a Regional Appendix... which was a red book and which applied to Western region, and then they had what they called the Block Regulation, which applied specifically to signalling with all the Bell Codes. There was a terrific amount of books then really.

and on the assessment at this time:

It was rather a complicated business with the exam... but you had... the Signalling District Inspector, I think he was called a DI... but there was a chap from Cardiff Queen Street who did all the valleys, and after a few weeks he'd come along and tackle you on the rules and regulations, and after a while, after he had come back and seen you again, when eventually you had satisfied him so he'd make out a certificate, and then you had to go and see the Chief Inspector at Cardiff and pass him. But then you had to go and see the Superintendent and pass him.

This early period can be characterised as a time when formal post-compulsory training and education had a relatively low profile. Whatever their educational background, most working class people went straight from school into the workforce. Formal training, outside of the apprenticeship scheme, was almost non-existent. In the manufacturing and extractive industries, learning was by looking and the onus was on individuals to improve their educational profiles through schemes such as trade union distance learning packages. Even in those occupations, such as the police and railways, where a high premium was placed on assessment and examination for promotion purposes, learning was by rote and was largely dependent on individual self effort. Technical Colleges still had a very restricted profile and were largely concerned with apprentice training in the case of males and office practice for females.

## **A PERIOD OF TRANSITION: THE 1960s**

Most respondents were agreed that the 1960s saw the beginnings of a more structured approach to training in and for employment. There appeared to be a steady increase in the influence of national over local structures during the 1950s. In part this was due to the nationalisation and consolidation of many industries and the reorganisation of the various arms of the state. However the introduction of national standards of competence and assessment in many occupational spheres probably revealed huge disparities in training provision and procedures at the local level. Respondents emphasised the variability of localised training at this

time (or often, the lack of it). The perceived priorities were not only to increase the profile of training but also to train the trainers, so that training might be delivered more effectively. The Industrial Training Act of 1964 established 23 statutory Industry Training Boards which were designed to cover half the working population. Their remit was to assist firms in raising their training profile.

The 1960s was a period of modest expansion for technical colleges in South Wales. The growth of industrial estates and the continued investment in steel production led to a growth in demand for part-time courses for industry, although at this time the mainstay was still apprenticeship related training for males and commercial training for females.

Ebbw Vale College was attracting students from a wide geographical area and had a good reputation in the areas of heavy industry and pharmaceuticals. However, the breadth and variety of its courses was still limited. Afan College found itself in competition with British Steel's newly established apprentice training school. At this time, the ambition of most young males in the town was to get into British Steel, and their emphasis was not to get the qualifications necessary to get into British Steel, but simply to get into British Steel. Bridgend and Neath Colleges were in a slightly different position in that their localities were not dominated by single industries. The setting up of various training boards (all statutory organisations, of which only the Construction Industry Training Board still appears to exist) gave a financial boost to apprentice training and both colleges took advantage of this. The overwhelming majority of students were part-time and in the case of Bridgend, links with local industry were seen as very good. Lecturers regularly visited places of work and delivery of some courses was on site.

The training boards themselves largely operated as facilitators of the training which was delivered by local colleges. The setting up of these boards and the introduction of Industrial Training Levies in 1966, represented the beginnings of the recognition that there was a need for people in industry to undergo formal training. This new emphasis was echoed by respondents from the police and railways.

Developments in Police training were driven both from the top and bottom. The introduction of standardised promotion exams with a large law content was initially resented by 'grassroots' personnel but they also recognised the need for formal training to get them through the exams. The Police Cadet scheme was introduced in 1964 as a direct response to a shortage of recruits, and based in Bridgend at the South Wales Police H.Q., with some teaching done at the technical college but the bulk of the training delivered at headquarters. In 1966 a purpose built training centre was opened in Cwmbran.

Following a Home Office policy decision, all instructor training for England and Wales was centralised, initially in Coventry, and a Home Office manual for police promotion exams was introduced. This impetus towards a national training regime was also driven by the changing nature of police work. As more specialisms developed more sophisticated training was required.

A very similar story was developing on the railways. While a large part of the rail network was adjudged redundant, the remaining rail networks were being modernised. New signalling systems required better training, although initially this was still largely through 'looking and learning'. British Rail Western Region had a training centre in Wiltshire and this was progressively utilised far more as the 1960s progressed. The number of formal courses was increased and classroom facilities extended.

A Signalling School was established in Cardiff. This provided courses for signalmen, guards and shunters. Drivers largely remained outside of this scheme. The setting up of the school created some tensions. Time-served signalmen particularly, placed a high premium on experience and resented the new emphasis on classroom based theoretical knowledge. In 1969, supervisory training was formalised with the National Examination Board in Supervisory Studies scheme. At the same time graduate entrants at management level began to appear. The NEBs scheme was quite rigorous with four stages of training, the last being delivered at the Railway School in Darlington.

Thus, the 1960s were seen by informants as essentially a transitional period, bridging the early post-war years, when (apart from apprentice training) there was minimal formal training and the 1970s, when an expansion in participation

took place. Whereas formal training in the 1950s (where it existed) had been largely localised in both conception and delivery, the next decade saw the beginnings of a national training consciousness emerging with more direct state input. Grants for training were now increasingly available to industry. Technical Colleges were expanding and working closely with both the Training Boards and local employers. The changing nature of work itself was perhaps also revealing a need for more formalised and specialised training.

## **'TRAINING WITH EVERYTHING': THE 1970S**

The momentum towards more formal training structures which was becoming apparent in the 1960s seems to have increased in the 1970s. If one single development can be said to characterise the decade it was the rise of the training organisation. The profile of training rose with the professionalisation of trainers themselves, although this could of course be an artefact of the age range of the informants. Increasingly within industry and organisations, separate training departments were set up. Entry into the Common Market highlighted the lack of competitiveness of much of British industry, a point emphasised by those who had worked in the Steel Industry. At the same time, the changing nature of work emphasised the need for more and better training. The training schools established at British Steel Ebbw Vale and Port Talbot, were seen locally as centres of excellence.

If work was changing, the structure of employment was also changing. The Oil Crisis and the uncompetitive nature of much of British industry was perhaps reflected in the rise in unemployment. As the 1970s progressed both youth and adult unemployment became a significant factor, and it became apparent that there was a need to retrain workers laid off in the progressive economic downturn of the 1970s. The late 1970s saw the then government spearheading training strategies and the beginnings of the rise of what might be termed the 'training industry'.

Government financial assistance towards training was made available between 1975 and 1978 under a 'Special Training Measures' scheme. This was administered by the Industrial Training Boards and other training organisations

on behalf of the Manpower Services Commission. In 1979, the MSC introduced the 'Training for Skills' programme. At the same time, significant changes in the educational structure, notably the introduction of comprehensive schooling, were affecting the Technical Colleges, who were now making the transition into Colleges of Further Education.

### Further Education

It was around this time that many secondary schools in the area became comprehensive. A teacher at one of them, now Headteacher, was glad that the divisions of selection were phased out in the 1970s and her comments here on a sense of almost predetermined failure for some are echoed in the stories of the primary participants in this study:

My view was always that it was a dreadful system to declare children at 11 failures. Some went to the secondary schools and some went to the grammar school and I found that most aggravating and upsetting really. So I was very happy at the thought of comprehensive education. It suited my philosophy if you like and my politics I suppose.

At the start of this period, Ebbw Vale for example was a prosperous town with a booming steelworks.

It was not a case of what job will I be able to get when... I leave school, but what job do want to take? Because there was a choice. The pits were flourishing, the steelworks were flourishing. They could have gone anywhere.

Although perhaps exaggerated the truthfulness of this account from a local Headteacher is again backed up by the stories of participants, and the evidence they give of the prevailing opportunity structure. But by the end of the 1970s, the steelworks was on its way to becoming little more than a large 'factory':

Within a couple of years [of 1976] then it altered... the situation had altered and children no longer had this choice and where, you know, struggling to

get work. Even kids with decent qualifications leaving school. At 16 and at 18.

However this Head does not see much change in pupil attitudes over time:

I have always been amazed that they have behaved as well as they have knowing the economic climate... and the difficulty to get jobs. I'm *amazed* by it. We've got rotteners of course. We've always had rotteners... and they're no different now... I've always lived here so I know the people. I've taught children whose parents I taught. Some whose grandparents I taught... And our children do respond.

In the FE sector, Bridgend College was still largely committed to vocational training, but part-time academic courses began to gain a higher profile. Both GCE O and A Levels were now offered in the evenings, as well as a range of vocationally orientated adult education courses. Student numbers were nowhere near their present levels and the range of courses was far more limited than what is currently on offer, but there were also few financial constraints on the college. By the mid 1970s, there was a rapid turnover of businesses on the industrial estate, with smaller firms moving in to take advantage of Welsh Development Agency grants. Many of these firms were seen as having had no long term commitment to the area and being uninterested in training above their immediate needs. In 1975, the college was renamed and more workshops and buildings erected. In 1978 a residential block to house handicapped students was completed.

In West Glamorgan, Neath and Afan Colleges were still primarily engaged in delivering the first year of engineering apprenticeships for smaller firms. Neath College in particular was highly successful in attracting engineering apprentices. The first training workshops began to appear and an Employment Rehabilitation Centre was opened in Port Talbot. Afan College was becoming particularly vulnerable because at this time all local British Steel apprentice training was located within the plant.

Ebbw Vale College was instrumental in starting a number of innovative courses in science and saw a marked increase in students as British Steel began to shed jobs in the mid 1970s. The college was heavily involved in offering vocational

courses for retraining but demand fell and in the late 1970s, the college re-orientated itself more towards full-time academic courses. This brought it into direct competition with local schools who had recently gone over to the comprehensive system and the majority of which now had sixth forms.

### 'In house' Training Departments

All the respondents who had been working in the larger industries in the 1970s emphasised the rapid shift to high profile training. There was a massive expansion in police training, partly as a response to the changing nature of policing. However, training budgets became stretched and a decision was made to dissolve the Police Cadet scheme in order to spread the training budget more widely. Within British Rail in-house training departments had been set up and by 1972, 'it was training with everything'. In part this was a reflection of the heightened profile of training but was also driven by the massive restructuring going on. British Rail was one of the first organisations to computerise operations extensively and this was reflected in the need to retrain existing staff to meet these new demands. By the mid 1970s, British Rail was making extensive use of courses provided by their own training departments and this constituted a radical shift in consciousness. 'Sitting by Nellie' was rapidly being superseded by more formal training procedures.

Within the Steel Industry, sophisticated training departments were now operating with relatively large budgets for training. British Steel Port Talbot had fifty employees in their own training department and British Steel Ebbw Vale fifteen. However, the onset of the recession and radical restructuring within the plants, saw substantial job losses within these departments and the move of many ex-staff into private training organisations. This retrenchment in in-house training was reflected elsewhere in companies like Metal Box in Neath, and was accompanied by substantial restructuring and job losses in all departments. All respondents emphasised that training was the first thing to go when organisations were faced with financial difficulties.

Of course, at this stage not all companies were yet committed to training anyway. Several training officers still in post now, emphasised that apart from apprentice

training and the introduction of some management courses, formal training was conspicuous by its absence.

### Private Training Organisations

For many trainers either made redundant or facing redundancy, the introduction of government training schemes offered an employment lifeline. Individuals with training experience in industry were in demand as there was little or no training structure in place to meet the demands of the new Work Experience on Employers Premises and Youth Opportunities Schemes.

Manpower Services and the Careers Service were heavily involved in the new training schemes and drew many of their personnel from local industry. Local authorities were also instrumental in setting up training workshops. However, the involvement of some employers in the work experience schemes was less than successful and there was widespread abuse of W.E.E.P.s, with little or no real training going on in placements. This led to very negative public perceptions of training schemes which have since become entrenched over time. Trainers who were involved at the time have very mixed feelings about these schemes but emphasised that much good training was going on.

Many ex-trainers from the nationalised industries were encouraged by contacts in Manpower Services to set up private training organisations and bid for contracts. This was the genesis of the explosion of private training companies that was to follow in the 1980s and 1990s.

Opinions about the Manpower Service Commission were very divided. Voices that were critical of the MSC accused them of being out of touch with the real training needs of Welsh industry and unwilling to listen to criticism. The skills shortage that erupted in the mid eighties and which contributed so much to inflationary pressures was seen as a direct result of the MSC opting for the wrong sort of training regimes. Conversely, trainers and careers advisors, emphasised the wealth of experience and localised knowledge of industry that MSC personnel had and successfully deployed. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, in that this was very much a time of training trying to find its feet, with schemes which had never been tried before.

The 1970s were a period of mixed fortunes for education and training. There was a growing recognition of both the needs and benefits of more formalised training. This was informed by the increasing centralising of organisations and changing work practices. Within industry, growing exposure to foreign competition revealed deficiencies in both operating procedures and production processes and sensitised management to the possibilities of training. Foreign competitors were perceived to have superior training regimes.

However, this new emphasis on training was not yet established enough to be able to resist the effects of restructuring brought on by recession. Trainers, stressed that it was their training departments that were the first point of short term cost-cutting exercises.

At the same time, growing unemployment alerted government to the need to set in place mechanisms for youth training and adult retraining. These were beginning to emerge in the late seventies but were very much driven by trial and error. In 1978 a five year plan for both youth and adult training had been drawn up and this was to develop in various directions in the eighties.

#### THE 1980s: 'SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS'

Again, the profile of training through the 1980s was extremely variable. Most notable was the steady expansion of government training schemes and the growing involvement of voluntary training organisations in South Wales, in what was becoming a lucrative cottage industry. However, in the opposite direction, 1981 saw the abolition of 16 of the 23 statutory Industry Training Boards.

The nascent training regimes within Industry, that had been built up in the 1960s and 70s were constantly under threat from restructuring and cost cutting exercises. This was particularly noticeable within the sphere of apprentice training. Respondents suggested that the abolition of many of the Industrial Training Boards, whose remit was to assist individual firms to develop and improve their training provision did not help matters. The Manpower Services Commission took over the administration of training but the close of the decade

saw the demise of this organisation. Over ten years there was a bewildering proliferation of training schemes, none of which stayed the course.

### Training in Industry

The 1980s saw significant changes within Blaenau Gwent. Mining disappeared and with it NCB training. British Steel fared little better as the plant changed from steel production to merely coating products manufactured elsewhere. The workforce haemorrhaged and the training department shrunk accordingly. The drastically thinned workforce nevertheless required retraining to accommodate new working practices. Ebbw Vale College benefited from the clearout at this time and was heavily involved in retraining ex-steelworkers. Some new industries moved into the area but the 1980s was characterised by many small to medium firms drawn into the area by WDA grants and leaving quickly when the money 'dried up'. Their commitment to workforce training was often minimal.

Where there was a continued commitment to training, this tended to be with foreign owned companies, particularly those associated with the automotive industry. These firms were attracted to the area because of a large pool of labour but instead found a local skills shortage. Training was twofold. Initially, production operatives (many drawn from coal and steel) had to be re-orientated towards a multi-skilled environment which did not recognise demarcation lines. Secondly, the skills shortage of craftspeople had to be addressed internally through apprentice training.

The story in Neath Port Talbot was rather different and this reflects the fact that the local labour market (Port Talbot excluded) was rather less dependent on single industries. In Neath and Baglan, established medium sized firms were both shedding jobs and drastically curtailing apprentice training. This latter move was seen by some as storing up problems for the future. More prescient individuals were pointing out in the mid eighties that ten years down the line this would create a huge skills shortage. Interestingly, the smaller long established engineering firms in the Neath area, were rather more committed to retaining traditional patterns of apprentice training.

British Steel Port Talbot found that the large scale shedding of jobs associated with 'Slimline', particularly among middle management, created a need for a thorough overhaul of training. Apprentice training for the first year was moved back to Afan College so that British Steel trainers could concentrate on retraining the existing workforce to adapt to the new working environment.

The situation in Bridgend was different again. The early 1980s saw a rapid turnover of firms on the industrial estate. Many of these were small firms with little long term commitment to the area. However, Bridgends' excellent communication links (as well as substantial financial 'sweeteners') began to attract large firms such as Ford and Sony. During this period, those smaller firms, where committed to training, tended to use the local college facilities. Sony also made use of the college but gained a reputation locally for 'poaching' skilled workers from other firms. Training at Ford was entirely in house.

Police work has become increasingly fragmented and specialised and this was reflected in a proliferation of courses delivered both locally and nationally. Entrance requirements into the police force were raised accordingly as it was felt that more sophisticated training required a higher level of pre-entry educational qualifications. 'Fast track' graduate entry schemes were also introduced. The introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act has led to significantly more classroom training for all police personnel.

### Training Organisations

The abolition of most of the Industry Training Boards in 1981, opened the way for many voluntary training organisations to take over the task of promoting and delivering training. These worked in tandem with the MSC who, as part of the Training Opportunities Scheme, administered six Skillcentres in Wales. Blaenau Gwent was served by the centre at Newport, while Mid and West Glamorgan were served by Port Talbot. In principle, special priority was given to expanding and developing technician training but in reality training was generally of a lower level. Industry did not welcome this move with open arms and generally the training was seen by informants as vastly inferior to traditional craft training routes.

In 1983 the Youth Training Scheme was fully implemented, mixing work placements and college and training workshop based training. A number of different schemes were operating under this initiative and the general consensus was that the whole system was, like the curate's egg, good in parts. It was seen as something of an improvement on the YOPs scheme. One trainer, commented that there was 'no way' he would have taken his son into any of the YOPs schemes operating prior to 1983. The main drawback with YTS, was not the quality of the training but the lack of accreditation at the end of it. Locally, some trainers tied these schemes into City and Guilds and related qualifications in order to rectify this. The mid 1980s posed a particular problem with both adult and youth training in that there was little likelihood of a local job at the end of training.

Schemes also changed quickly did not excite confidence either with clients or employers. It also made life difficult for trainers. Some schemes which the informants considered of great benefit were dropped while other schemes, which they felt had little value were persisted with. It was very much up to the vagaries of government policy at any given time. A common criticism from trainers was that courses were too short to offer quality training and there was no continuity between courses. Clients would complete a course and then have to return to the dole, when their interests would have been better served by a progressive stage by stage training career.

The MSC was generally agreed to be doing a very good job in difficult circumstances. Some critics saw both the MSC and local industry as adopting a short sighted approach to training. Plugging the gaps rather than looking to the future.

Towards the end of the 1980s there was a major shift again with the decision to dissolve the MSC. Many of the voluntary agencies had been set up by local authorities. Individuals with a training background in the nationalised industries and known to MSC personnel were also approached and encouraged to set up private training agencies. The whole system hung together through a complex of networking of personal friendships. With the demise of the MSC, some personnel moved over into Jobcentre management and others took their redundancy money and in partnership with colleagues, set up private training agencies.

Local authority training workshops largely disappeared, with only one in Neath remaining. Only Blaenau Gwent resisted this move and the majority of training provision in the area remains in their hands. The successor organisations to the MSC were the local Training Enterprise Councils whose remit was to administer training through a mix of private training organisations and F.E. colleges. In 1989, the NVQ scheme was launched.

### Colleges of Further Education

Further Education in the 1980s saw many changes. These were largely influenced by particular local conditions. During the early part of the decade West Glamorgan County Council opted for a tertiary model of post 16 education. (The West of Swansea opting out.) This secured the future of Afan College as a provider of high quality full-time A Level courses. It also expanded the range of vocational courses. It took over year one training of British Steel apprentices and through its foundation engineering course acted as a feeder into British Steel.

Neath College was also able to diversify and horizontally expand its range of courses. At the same time it saw a marked drop in referrals from local firms and numbers on its engineering courses dropped drastically. Student numbers in this sphere were beginning to be squeezed by the introduction of the Youth Opportunities and Work Experience schemes. The college began to concentrate, not too successfully according to the current Principal, on providing high tech courses. In 1983 it established an in-house careers and training co-ordination centre.

Information about Ebbw Vale College was very mixed. Personnel from the college saw this as a successful period of innovative diversification, whereas critics saw the college as rather inflexible. It was reportedly slow to change from a vocational curriculum that was geared towards the needs of the steelworks. During much of this period, the local careers service had to direct clients to out of area colleges for vocational courses.

Bridgend College, in contrast, went from strength to strength in the 1980s. It was probably the first F.E. college in South Wales to market itself aggressively. This decade was characterised by a lack of teaching space and many temporary

buildings were erected to accommodate students. The emphasis in the 1980s was still very much vocationally orientated and the overwhelming majority of students were part-time. A pattern was also emerging where there was a high correlation between periods of heightened unemployment and increased student numbers. Whether students were merely using the college as an employment shelter or whether they were consciously training for a future economic upturn is unclear.

## **THE 1990s - 'AUDITED OUT OF SIGHT'**

If education and training in the 1980s was both advancing and retreating, the 1990s saw the renewed onward march of the 'learning society', at least as a theme, but with a new emphasis on financial accountability. 'Audited out of sight' is the description of an FE college principal:

At any given day of the week there is somebody at this college doing some sort of audit or inspection. There's two here today... So we're audited tremendously closely for finance. We're audited very very closely for actual registrations. We're audited for our Estates. We're audited for everything you can think of... and it does occupy the mind... College government is dominated by compulsory committees of governors for everything... but there's no mention in the [1993] Act of a curriculum committee. It doesn't exist which is perhaps symptomatic of the way things were set up. I mean. I would have thought the product... deserves some specialist governors to look at it.

The decade has been characterised by a number of developments. The demise of the Manpower Services Commission and the establishment of the Training and Enterprise Councils. The rise and what now appears to be the fall of private training organisations. The continued expansion of further and higher education. A renewed and what appears to be longer term commitment to training in industry. Overshadowing all these developments has been the debate about falling educational standards and the introduction of large scale auditing of education and training.

Schools such as Sandfields, which had been providing a mostly vocational education to very difficult-to-motivate children is now bound by the National Curriculum. According to a careers adviser:

It is now completely academically orientated... a totally inappropriate form of education. The relevance of education as it is provided to most of these kids... is deeply questionable... It is very difficult to motivate pupils [with academic routes] and this is compounded by parental influence... They don't see education as leading anywhere.

However, a local employer has tried to encourage the same school to arrange visits to look at their engineering plant, but with no success. Many pupils take Certificate of Education examinations at a time when local employers still do not recognise that a GCSE grade G is an achievement. In his opinion, this is not a new phenomenon, which used to be explicable by the full employment linked to 'Treasure Island' in Port Talbot. Qualifications were once seen as being of no value since it was so easy to walk into a fairly decent job, which was labour intensive and not requiring high levels of literacy or numeracy. It is interesting that a new generation may see qualifications as irrelevant to them since there are no longer many jobs locally. A job is better than a qualification, and a piece of paper cannot create a job for you. Perhaps neither explanation is correct. Many residents simply do not value what school provides, and perhaps the experience of school colours their attitude to later participation in learning.

The Head of a comprehensive school in Blaenau Gwent explains further:

It's a bleak prospect for youngsters you see. They're faced with the dole. We've got families I suppose in Ebbw Vale where no adult in the household has ever worked. You know that's no sort of a model for a youngster is it? To think - oh well I can manage on whatever I get... It is a working-class area but it is becoming an area without work.

One view is that this 'what is the point' attitude is prevailing over a traditional respect for education in Wales. A community educator believes that learning used to be seen as a liberating force:

A way to avoid going down the pit or ending up behind the counter at the Co-op and parents would push their children to do well at school so they would at least have choices in what they worked at. Now, that philosophy has gone. The philosophy of education being a liberator seems to have gone.

She speculates that the lack of physical horizons in the valleys affect peoples' mental horizons, with people seeing no further than their own valleys. A careers adviser from Tredegar believes that there has actually been a drift of people into the area because they know there are no jobs and it is therefore easier to claim the Jobseeker's Allowance, saying 'it's a thing I've never seen before'. They tend to 'drift up' from Newport and Cardiff (where there is much higher employment) having no real interest in getting job or going on a training scheme.

### Training in Industry

Training officers emphasised what they believed to be a genuine re-orientation by management towards training and a recognition that a stop-go approach to training in the 1980s may be partly responsible for any skills shortage currently. Whereas previous emphases on training had tended to fluctuate with economic conditions, training officers now feel that training is increasingly seen as having parity with production. The status of training managers is now generally on a par with production managers and many firms now have a dedicated training budget. However, the figures cited must not be accepted uncritically since although British Steel has a training budget of over £45 million, less than £4 million of that is actually spent on training courses, with the rest going towards making up the time of trainees. In-house training facilities have been improved and a more diverse spectrum of workers are in receipt of training. There does seem to be more of an investment in people via training.

The drive towards new technology may be one factor in this. Production workers previously considered as unskilled are having to be trained in order to cope with the demands of more technologically based production processes. What were manually based operations are now increasingly done by expensive and sophisticated machines. Employers are also realising that the only way they can overcome any localised skills shortage is by training themselves or sponsoring

training, but in some cases they are finding it hard to relate salary incentives to training success because of what they see as a tradition that everyone gets any available pay rise.

Training in the 1990s also reflects a move towards multi-skilling. According to British Steel, this is largely with the co-operation of the trade unions, who adopt a more pragmatic attitude towards industrial relations and working practices, which was necessary 'for survival in the 1980s'. Multi-skilling has proved something of a two-edged sword locally, in that it makes workers more marketable as well as more flexible. In many of the interviews a tension between training up and then losing trained workers to local competitors was discernible. A company whose 'parent' is in a part of Spain where the employer and the employed tend to be loyal to each other over generations, is 'finding it difficult to come to terms with the fact that employees leave to go elsewhere after training'. It is also possible to exaggerate to the scale of multiskilling, since even large employers like British Steel have done nothing other than combine the routes for training electrical and process skills. One supervisor now manages all aspects of each shift.

Competition in an increasingly globalised market and the introduction of TQM have brought with them the recognition, or at least a rhetoric, that companies are only as good as their workers. Employers often stressed that in an increasingly competitive market, customers now expect their suppliers to participate in schemes like Investors in People. A good training programme in place is therefore becoming as much of a marketing strategy as advertising or the product itself.

At the same time the restructuring of both government training grants to industry, the introduction of a comprehensive system of nationally recognised vocational qualifications (NVQs) and the development of Modern Apprenticeships have all made training more attractive to employers. Opinions about NVQs were very divided though, as most respondents emphasised that the introduction of NVQs was seen at the time as a mixed blessing. Initially, many employers were suspicious of their worth and during interviews training officers complained that the system was still too bureaucratic. One employer said of the whole credentialist scenario 'the customers like to hear about it but it hasn't made any

tangible difference to our workforce'. Her specific comment on NVQs was 'it looks good on paper but hasn't delivered the sort of workforce we are looking for'. Several respondents referred to local or national 'scandals' in accreditation of NVQs, and one trainer described how the first that one batch of 50 workers heard of NVQs was when they were photographed receiving their award for the local press. He felt that with only one NCVQ visit per year many companies would take the risk of 'sharp-pencilling', in order to be able to say that they were competent because often part of their business was reliant on funding. Some employers felt that the particular training routes offered are not always fully in tune with their own training requirements. However, in a constantly changing working environment NVQs also constituted a convenient method of retraining workers that also attracted government funding.

NVQs were also seen as good for employee morale. Generally, the type of worker who follows the NVQ route would have been previously classed as unskilled. For example, production workers in the steel industry can now work towards a qualification which gives them parity with indentured engineers. Workers, previously classed as unskilled, now receive qualifications and many have gone to become trainers themselves. In a number of firms, some of the training on the shopfloor is carried out by those recently trained themselves. This development of cascading is interesting. In many ways this is a return to the pattern of workers passing on skills to other workers, with ownership of training in the hands of workers. This development goes hand in hand with the development of team working practices. Again, worker responses to training appear more positive when training is not classroom based. Most trainers commented on the resistance to classroom training at the lower levels of the workforce. Responses were generally more enthusiastic when people could 'see the point' of training. That is, that training and education were related to the practicalities of the job in hand. People trained because they were pushed by their employer, said the training manager of a light engineering firm. They were neither ambitious nor intrinsically interested in learning.

Training has been made more difficult by the low levels of literacy and numeracy of many employees. One training manager was 'amazed that most of the kids don't understand how real is the fact they can't read or write'. Some employers

were quick to blame the schools for this, citing falling standards. An engineering manager pointed out the potential reproductive effects of this local phenomenon:

It's worse now than I've ever known it where people can't read and write. Worse. And I never thought I'd come from that... I can remember when I was young... But I know that person now and his children and none of them read and write. None. And I mean they're a big family.

Employers also stressed that it was becoming progressively harder to recruit young people into manufacturing and industry. Again, they stressed that it was difficult to get schools to promote careers in industry, which is perceived as 'dirty' and 'old fashioned'. Whereas, in the 1950s and 1960s, the brightest working class males went into apprenticeships, this is no longer the case in the 1990s. This cohort is more likely to go on to higher education. However, industry has found it increasingly difficult to attract the 'middle ability' band.

Employer relations with the TECs have been mixed. The demise of the MSC was not always welcomed. Initially personnel from the TECs were perceived as too Civil Service orientated with little understanding of the training needs of industry. This perception has changed over the past few years although some employers are still extremely critical of the TECs. The financing of training is on occasions seen as inflexible, particularly in relation to age criteria. Funding for training is seen to favour the young. In many cases TECs do not even provide information. A Training Manager in a Neath company has repeatedly asked for contact on the New Deal. The problem is they take his name, promise to get in touch and he hears no more.

That worries me... I would have thought the TEC would be clamouring for organisations such as this size to help out, but when they don't even bother to return the phone call. It makes me wonder really. A lot of hype but you hear nothing.

In the early 1990s most employers were utilising outside training organisations for the administration and delivery of NVQs. This position has changed as employers have invested in their own training departments. Cost was one factor but there was also widespread disquiet about the performance of some private

training organisations. Most employers interviewed now prefer to do as much as they can in-house. The size of the company and its economic position appears to be a major factor in this. For example, British Steel is relatively impervious to these constraints. All the other companies interviewed, necessarily have to be somewhat more circumspect. However, while these companies obviously take whatever government monies are available, they also appear to be much more committed to putting their own money into training.

Training managers emphasised that this was still very much conditional on visible economic returns however. Training has to be seen to be delivering increased productivity. Only British Steel, with the cushion of its huge training budget, appeared to be committed to a wider perception of education and training, offering the option of non-vocational GCSEs in some subjects to its workers. Many jobs, perhaps most jobs, do not require multi-skilling or even mono-skilling. They remain low skill jobs on the shopfloor, open to anyone without qualifications. A training manager for a manufacturing company near Neath points out how easy it is to get workers:

The people who apply are predominantly female, and when I say apply there's a lot of word of mouth from the people who work here. They tell their mothers or their sisters or their cousins. 'OK there's jobs going at XXXX and that's the way we tend to recruit.... I mean we have entire families working here... The people we employ on the shopfloor they don't particularly need any skills to get the job. What we're looking for here is ... a positive attitude to work. It is very repetitive work. At most an operative will do three minutes of work and then do it again.... The fact that they're working here probably means that they didn't achieve that much at school. In general, they are people who would have left school with the minimum level of bad GCSEs.

Needless to say, this company does not experience a skills shortage, although a few engineers have left for larger rivals and higher pay. Until recently training has not been a 'priority' with most plants like this simply fighting for survival in an era of 'rationalisation'. Low cost was more important to them than high skill. People with skills to pass on say 'I haven't got time to train anybody Peter, I'm too busy making things'. The takeup of shopfloor NVQs has been relatively high

but there are considerable problems with literacy and numeracy. The NVQ has been designed so that there is no writing at all, and no break in the production process. Assessors come round with a check list and tick boxes [while the worker works]. This system has worked well'. The most complete training available in this company is for managers, centrally run by the owners of the factory, aiming at building teamwork.

Another respondent who does not recognise the apparent skills shortages he reads about in monthly bulletins from head office is on the Training Board for the Construction Industry. He speculates that perhaps it has simply not hit South Wales yet. Several firms encounter no shortage of suitable applicants for 'operatives', but 'terrific difficulties getting skilled crafts people'. Companies like British Steel still have 'in excess of 700 applicants every year across the two sites for 40 odd positions. So that means you can really pick and choose... It gives us the opportunity to take the best'. An engineering firm from Neath still runs a traditional apprenticeship scheme. According to the manager, this is relatively unchanged in style since 1946. They have tried the Modern Scheme with one trainee but do not intend to continue:

Because we're not convinced about sending someone to college for a year. We can usually set apprentices something useful to do from the first week... Once we take on an apprentice as an improver and ultimately as a craftsman [no women], they stay with us. The reason for that is because the apprentices we get here in the first place have nearly always been rejected by Sony or some bigger outfit.

The view of work-based training from outside industry is somewhat different. A local college principal believes that firms are actually doing less training now than in the quite distant past, and the reason is that they are unwilling to pay for it:

They don't pay, they're not as willing to pay as they used to be going back a long time ago, since the Training Boards were closed down things have been far more difficult... A lot of them [small and medium-sized firms] are really working at the margin... You know the exporting firms locally on the trading estate are finding it very very hard going because of the

strength of the pound at the moment. Most of them are losing money but they hope that the tide will eventually turn. Well at that stage, as I'm sure you're aware, training is often the one that goes, gets the lowest priority... One of the [problems] is the high turnover of companies on the industrial estate... there was that period when firms used to come into South Wales for the grants. Pick up the grant and at the end of four years just go back to wherever they came from.

### Private Training Organisations

The years 1990-93 saw a massive growth in the private training industry. New training organisations appeared to be springing up overnight throughout South Wales. Many of these were set up by ex-MSc personnel and redundant trainers from industry. In the early part of the decade this sector seemed to dominate the administration and delivery of the new NVQ schemes. The quality of training delivered appears to have been highly variable with many 'bad' training organisations, many of which have since ceased trading.

Whereas the MSc preferred specialist training organisations, the TECs have increasingly forced organisations to diversify. Some employers have questioned the competency of these organisations to actually deliver the goods in terms of quality training in areas they are unfamiliar with. The industry has now become highly competitive and is constantly undergoing change. There has also been a move from workshop based provision (now largely defunct) to assessment and evaluation on employers premises. Some trainers saw this as a retrograde step because workshop training was where their strengths had lain. Nevertheless, the TECs were no longer prepared to fund in this area and as commercial organisations they had no alternative but to fall in line with TEC requirements.

Training itself is now mainly carried out by employers themselves and the role of training organisations is restricted to assessment. Some employers have grown steadily dissatisfied with the quality of assessment and increasingly many have registered themselves as trainers with the TECs.

Funding is a constant worry and all trainers complained that the TECs were demanding increased performance every year while at the same time annually

cutting the levels of funding. Training contracts are reviewed annually and the business is becoming increasingly uncertain. Training is now seen as finance driven with an emphasis on 'starts' and 'outcomes' but little or no real consideration of the quality of training in between. Little or no forward planning can be done because contracts are up for renewal annually and as a number of trainers commented, 'the goalposts are always moving'.

Trainers emphasised their strengths in actually obtaining full-time jobs for clients after training, and they were supported in general by careers advisers. There is a marked emphasis on networking and trainers constantly 'keep their ears to the ground' looking for suitable jobs for their trainees. The best motivation for clients to persist with a training programme was a job at the end of the process. School experiences had not always been happy, but clients were willing to persist with training if they could see a job outcome. On the negative side, if a job came up during training, it was difficult to convince clients to follow their training through to its accredited outcome.

All trainers commented on the 'quality' of trainees. One said 'the problem now is that people want is to train kids but the calibre of trainee just isn't coming forward'. Numeracy and literacy levels were low and were perceived as getting worse. The consensus was that this was largely because training was seen as a second class option compared to going on to the sixth form or going to college, and the situation may have been worsened by the need for FE Colleges to fill their rolls. Sixth forms, Colleges and the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme for example are all seen as competing for the same batch of students in each cohort, with the students deciding on grounds of prestige rather than long-term outcomes or suitability. Parents and children may be reluctant to go for the training option, largely because of the bad press it received in the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, training organisations tend to attract the lowest achievers. By and large, they are also excluded from promoting training in schools, and their material is frequently discarded or returned. This was put down to the financial pressures on schools and colleges.

Some trainers are 'bitter' about these developments. They see colleges as unable to deliver 'real' work based training but better able to attract TEC funding. TECs are seen as 'out of touch' with the needs of training and unwilling to listen to

trainers. Some trainers saw the fault lying more with the Welsh Office, and the TECs merely responding to orders. Even those youngsters who start off in training are often attracted away from the scheme by the salaries available from a short-term contract at an employer such as Bosch or Sony. Some employers may be using the training schemes as a subsidised selection process, and the trainees come from a culture in which parents see training as purely a 'stepping stone to a job'. So if a job is available, why train? Short term economic benefits to the family may be paramount.

An overall impression from talking to private trainers is that competition between the trainers themselves has become increasingly intense, with many organisations falling by the wayside. One college Principal was surprised that private trainers were willing to take part in the study at all. He saw them as 'very nervy' and commented that 'they are under tremendous pressure. Glamorgan TEC will do things, or any TEC, and they will lose their contract in a flash. They are very loath to say anything anti [TEC] you know?'

This view was reinforced by the accounts of careers advisers, who no longer have responsibility for training, and no longer feel in control. One says:

It was Careers *and* Manpower Services... you could talk where there was a need for things... every month we'd have meeting with Manpower Services and all the careers people would be there too... we used to work with them. sit down, do surveys with them so we knew what the need was... I don't know when I last saw someone from the TEC last. I couldn't tell you when I last... had a meeting with anyone from the TEC. You've got a woman at the end of the phone - they're running all the Modern Apprenticeships - you are trying to get some sense out of them. You're talking to that person at the end of the phone and they haven't got an idea what Modern Apprenticeships are all about. They don't know what they're talking about.

Another adviser feels that some trainers are inadvertently doing a disservice, especially when dealing with a certain kind of factory, perhaps using low-skill low-wage workers.

Some local firms have a pattern of advertising jobs just at the time the CoE kids leave at Easter. The kids take the job but I know for a fact the week before Christmas those kids will be back with us right? It's a pattern. Another problem we're getting is like with the training centre up there... young persons will go and work with factories like that, and then they [trainers] will go into the factories and say 'Have you got a young person starting?... Well can we sign them up for NVQs.'... Well at the end they'll drop them off and say 'Well you've got your qualification' and that's it. An NVQ and they don't want them any more, so what do we do then? Because they've already been on a scheme, got an NVQ2, there's nothing more we can do for them... They [policy-makers] say we want everyone on the workforce NVQd, so the trainers are going out and looking for them... If the Training Centre didn't do that... or if there was a problem and they dropped out... and were made redundant... at least you've got the training to put them on... The trouble is it gets training a bad name with people. They only remember the bad things.

Another view from the inside [i.e. from a trainer] was that the training system was riddled with widespread corruption. Students were being 'signed off' for NVQ modules when they had not completed the units, and encouraged to copy other students' workbooks, and this means that although some 'would have made it eventually', some are 'not up to it'. 'At the very least there should be witness testimony'. This trainer has very strong opinions on the value of current vocational qualifications, arguing that NVQs are meaningless as a guide for recruitment because 'they can't be trusted'. Presumably he would make the same comments about progress towards National Training Targets, and he would be supported in this by the views of two of the principals of local FE colleges.

### Further Education

The FE colleges themselves are under the same sort of pressures. College Principals all agreed that their biggest problem was finances. Every year they were expected to recruit more students and widen their range of courses while having their funding constantly cut back by the TECs. The 1990s have therefore been characterised by constant expansion in the face of increasing financial uncertainty. This has led to criticisms, especially from local careers advisers, that

colleges are totally dominated by 'bums on seats', taking anyone willing to come even if this is not the most appropriate move for the individual. Few actively engage with the learning process or find employment afterwards, and this has an effect on those who might gain from the courses available:

They get on the bus on their first day of college and they find the same 'louts' on the bus, performing and shouting, that they had to put up with every day of their school careers. And when they come back to me and me why this is I can't give them an answer. They've had enough of them in school holding them back... most kids who go to college end up on the dole. It's a generational cycle that they are caught up in.

This financial dominance has made the future prospects of smaller institutions such as Afan and Ebbw Vale Colleges problematical. Ebbw Vale has gone down the consortium route and is now part of Gwent Tertiary College. In 1994 Afan College lost its apprentice training contract with British Steel to Bridgend College. Subsequently, after an abortive attempt to merge with Bridgend College, it is now being forced into a merger with Neath College. Bridgend College has survived and prospered through aggressive marketing and an emphasis on full cost recovery work. They now have some very big training contracts with some of Britain's largest employers. This has made them slightly less reliant on franchising and the Further Education Council.

Financial accountability and auditing are now seen as the buzzwords of the 1990s. The ethos of education is seen to have suffered accordingly. One Vice-Principal commented that when he began work as a lecturer at his college in the 1970s, finances were hardly mentioned. The college could get on with what it was supposed to do, which was to concentrate on offering the best educational provision possible. Another Vice-Principal described financial auditing as 'labyrinthal' and occasionally 'surreal'. Both commented that on any given working day there were auditors from somewhere present in their colleges.

## AFTERWORD

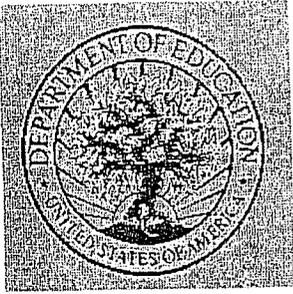
Although further analysis and cross-referencing of data sources is necessary, it is immediately apparent that several of the themes contained in this account can substantiate and partly explain the findings from other components of this study. For example, geographical mobility and a family background involving moving between regions has already been found to be a determinant of patterns of participation in education and training. Similarly, an expression of unwillingness to move or travel in order to learn has been encountered in many of the in-depth interviews.

The survey data shows an increase in formal participation and qualification among adults in South Wales from 1945 to 1996. The substantive changes in opportunities described here are primarily aimed at younger people in the form of MAS, funding for NVQs, and the expansion of FE and HE. It is therefore no surprise to discover that the largest growth has been in lifetime learning trajectories showing participation only when young. Despite the growth of qualifications for older workers, and the many schemes for training and re-training described here there is no clear implication that there have been substantive improvements in the learning opportunities for older people. In some respects what may have happened is that training has become more formal and more 'credentialist'. There is nothing in these accounts to disturb our earlier notion that for many people the conditions for lifetime participation may have been more favourable in the past than it is now (Gorard et al. 1998c). It is therefore appropriate to continue questioning the nature of current progress towards a learning society in the UK.

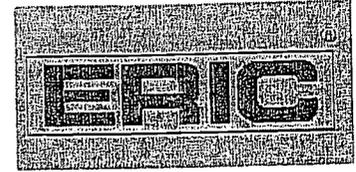
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