

## 5. Effects at the Local Level

As described in the previous chapter, the Manpower Services Commission has been able to deliver money direct to the local level, which it achieves through its 55 Area Manpower Boards. This has given the Commission an advantage over the traditional partnership between the Department of Education and Science and the local education authorities.

Over the last decade – beginning with the Youth Opportunities Programme – this directness has had a profound effect on relationships at the local level, particularly at a time when money has been tight, and alternative sources of funding few. Three programmes in particular have implications for the relationship between local and central government: the Youth Training Scheme, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, and the plan for funding further education which was outlined in the 1984's White paper *Training for Jobs*.

### The Youth Training Scheme

When the YOP started, many local youth workers and trainers, often working with or within voluntary organisations, found that MSC money was available for schemes to help the young unemployed – but at a price. That price was the possible erosion of local freedom and educational values. Youth workers had to decide whether to join schemes funded by MSC money, knowing that there could be a conflict between their aims and those of the Commission.

Many decided to take the money, but to orient the schemes so that they included social, political and general education, as well as skills to improve 'employability,' which the MSC and the Government preferred to emphasise. Some of these schemes turned out to be the most successful so far as young people were concerned,

and in due course they formed the core of the Mode B programme.

So the MSC was able to colonise large numbers of youth workers, whose schemes then became dependent on the Commission's money, although they felt ambivalent about some of the aims – both stated and unstated – of YOP. What is more, in 1982, colleges of further education which were involved in YOP were warned by the MSC that the social and life skills courses that they offered should not include any "political and related activities," and threatened that courses which did would be closed down.

But in general, youth workers running YOP schemes were able to go their own way; the inadequacy of the MSC's local monitoring allowed some genuinely educational schemes, which offered trainees a real chance of developing themselves, to flourish. Unfortunately, it allowed inadequate and exploitative work experience placements on employers' premises to flourish too, and in the long run they proved to be a far greater source of controversy.

The coming of the Youth Training Scheme, many of whose projects were based on uprated YOP schemes, meant that local workers, often committed to the general education of young people, as well as their employability, were roped into a much tighter and work-based programme.

In 1982 the Employment Minister, then Peter Morrison, advised the MSC that YTS schemes should avoid any kind of social education apart from that which was

strictly necessary for work. But there was such an outcry from the Youth Training Board itself, and the trade unions on the MSC, that the ruling was dropped.

Economically, times had meanwhile got worse; little money was available from elsewhere. Local authorities were experiencing budget cuts and the threat of rate-capping; other sources of finance – charities, foundations, grants from central government – had more calls than ever on their funds. It looked as if the Government was taking responsibility for youth training. So local workers had little choice but to stay within the YTS, and operate within its criteria, whatever doubts they many have had.

The cutbacks in Mode B1 schemes outlined in chapter two were a further assault on local autonomy. The Area Manpower Boards were not consulted – only told how many places they had to lose. The fact that the oversupply of Mode A places was primarily in London and the South East, where youth unemployment was not so serious, was ignored in the overall plan, so Mode B schemes which were full of trainees and even had waiting lists had to be scrapped. Local needs took second place to the national plan, just as the needs of vulnerable young people took second place to the needs of employers.

## The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

This is the initiative which has had most direct impact on the relationship between local education authorities and the Department of Education and Science. The initiative, which was most unusually announced by Mrs Thatcher herself in November 1982, was launched with no local consultation at all – or consultation with the DES.

It was a plan secretly developed by Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Young (who was then at the MSC), and Norman Tebbit, with the enthusiastic support of the Prime Minister. As I suggested in chapter four,

the idea that young people should be introduced to technical and vocational education at the age of 14 (and therefore at school) before boredom and disillusion have set in, is an important element in the thinking behind the TVEI.

So here was the MSC directly influencing the school curriculum, which had always been the province of the local authorities, the schools, and the teachers. Again, the fact that it was offering money at a time of cutbacks gave the Commission power to push through its ideas against opposition. In spite of an outcry from the local authority associations, it was hard to resist the prospect of £21 million to be spent on expensive technical equipment.

As with some of the Mode B YTS schemes, it has at least been possible within the TVEI to use MSC money to run a scheme to suit local needs and aims as the teachers and the local authority see them. Different areas have chosen to spend the money in different ways, and complete uniformity has been avoided.

Some schools have created a separate TVEI stream of 14 of 18 year olds, but others have invested in equipment and teachers in order to spread technical and vocational education through the whole age group. Many teachers fear that the TVEI is Sir Keith Joseph's attempt to create a selection process which would separate the academic sheep from the technical goats, but in some authorities the TVEI has been successfully presented as a high-status course – which was, reportedly, what the MSC originally intended until dissuaded by trade union worries about neglect of less-able pupils.

But though the TVEI money seems to be being used with some success to cater for diverse needs as the local education authority sees them, the overall effect of the policy has been again to increase centralisation. In the future, TVEI money could be made conditional on schools carrying out central government policies more precisely.

## Training For Jobs

The plans outlined in the White Paper, *Training for Jobs*, in April 1984 have been the most controversial of all. Local authorities at first refused to take part in the scheme, through which in 1985/86 the MSC will take control of £155 million which up until now has been spent on work-related further education by local authorities. After a year of resistance, though, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities finally capitulated early in 1985. The Association of County Councils had agreed terms with the MSC some months earlier.

The Government – which did not consult either the local authorities or the MSC – argues that the training and vocational education provided by LEAs should be more responsive to the needs of the labour market.

Through the relationships which the Commission has already built up with local authorities and colleges, the money which it controls will be used to support further education and training “closely geared to labour market needs”. Priority will be given to new subjects such as electronics and robotics, to updating courses, and to occupations – such as business studies – where traditional programmes no longer meet the needs of commerce and industry.

Eventually, a quarter of the money for this type of further education is expected to come from the MSC, which the Government refers to as the “national training

authority”. The White Paper heralded a marked strengthening of the Commission’s role, and its degree of control at the local level.

Whatever the real merits or inadequacies of local authority further education in its traditional form – and the chances of a centralised bureaucracy identifying local labour market needs more accurately – this new move has all the hallmarks of previous MSC developments.

Attention is diverted from the real causes of unemployment to deficiencies in the education system. By emphasising training, the Government can suggest that it is genuinely tackling the problem of unemployment (which meanwhile continues to rise inexorably). It asserts, for instance, that labour market needs are not being met – whereas the real problem surely is that labour is not needed at all.

As with the YTS, *Training for Jobs* represents a slackening of control over employers – whose perceived needs, however short-term and ill-analysed, are seen as adequate criteria for directing large areas of the public education system.

But at the same time, schools, colleges and the local authorities are experiencing unprecedented degrees of control and supervision in the interests of a Government policy in which they may have little faith. For a Government which promised to roll back bureaucracy and reduce government interference, this is a strange development.