PATHWAYS Post-School Education *Page in progress*

'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' Nelson Mandela

'Despite the raised participation age, new analysis shows 40,000 under-18s are not in education, employment or training' (NEET)
The Learning and Work's Institute's Youth Commission, July 2018

What are the options aged 18? And what can persuade students to stay until they are 18 years (and schools to keep them?)

Preamble: We need a system that delivers a range of options and looks at accessing the learning continuum from the end of formal schooling. T Levels may deliver that pathway, but not as currently constituted. There are real problems in perception as well as in creating new pathways, partly related to the hierarchical education system in the UK.

A recent article by Fiona Millar made the point that:

". . . more maintenance grants and apprenticeships would probably help. But what is really needed is a huge culture shift, away from the assumption that academic is best and towards a broader vision of what makes a real education. A vision that should include what might be seen as "that other type of education": practical, creative, technical, engaging – and, above all, of equal status to a university degree." August 2018

• Fiona Millar is a writer specialising in education

It is a view that echoes my own – that we need to stop seeing university as the only academic pathway. The crisis of conditional offers in 2018 and the fall off in interest in university places signals a turning point in our consciousness as students start looking at what whether university is the best way forward in light of the 4th industrial revolution and an exponential pace

of change that threatens to engulf us unless our educational providers can become more dynamic.

Immediate Options:

- University – UK or overseas Currently the most popular single option

- Gap Year

- Apprenticeship (i) (ii)

- Vocational education

- Employment / Unemployment

- Colleges of Further Education and other supplier (ie agricultural colleges)

- Internships (noting the impediment posed by government in not requiring employers to ensure that interns are paid a living wage).

Pathways into universities and understanding universities (Oxbridge, Russell Group etc)

- IB

- PreU

- A Levels

- IBCP

- T Levels from 2020

On-going education: The Open University / remote learning CPD / accessing learning platforms

Careers Advice: The Careers and Enterprise Company is charged with improving access to careers advice and guidance in schools. It employs regional enterprise coordinators, who oversee a network of volunteer enterprise advisers, who work directly with schools. Try to build networks etc

Appendices:

(i) There was a near 27% fall in the number taking up trainee posts in the last quarter of 2017.

The number starting apprenticeships dropped to 114,000 between August and October, down from 155,700 in the same period in 2016. That followed a 59% drop in the previous three months after the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April last year. The biggest drop came in "intermediate" apprenticeships, the basic level, which dropped 38% to 52,000. The highest level of apprenticeships – known as degree apprenticeships – rose nearly 27% to 11,600. Schemes for adult apprentices were worse affected than for those young people, falling by just over 30% compared with 20%.

(ii) May 2018 The number of apprenticeship starts dropped 40 per cent year on year in February, according to the most recent available statistics from the government.
Figures show the number of apprenticeship starts in February fell to 21,800 from 36,400 in the same month in 2017. The number of starts in February was also down on the 27,600 reported in January, which is the biggest month-by-month drop recorded in half a year.
There were 232,700 apprenticeship starts in the six months to February, compared to 309,000 during the same period a year earlier – a 25 per cent decline year on year.

Business groups said the figures show the apprenticeship system is not working the way it is supposed to.

Thousands of apprentices were getting 'shafted on pay day' Jane Gratton, head of skills at the British Chambers of Commerce, said that with businesses "crying out for skilled workers", apprenticeships should be a part of the solution "but the system just isn't working".
"For SMEs in particular, the new rules have added to the barriers, complexity and cost of recruiting and training staff. For larger firms, the inflexibility of the system has made it difficult to spend their levy funds as they see best, making it feel more like a tax, and leaving less money available to pay for the training people need," she said.
"Businesses want to invest more in upskilling their workforce, and to offer great career opportunities for young people, but this system is holding everyone back." Ms Gratton said there is *"consensus across the UK business community"* that the apprenticeship levy needs reform. At the moment, UK employers with an annual pay bill of more than £3m apportion 0.5 per cent to fund apprentices.

ARTICLES (2005 – 2018):

1. Oxbridge and All That November 2017

The contention late last week by David Lammy, the one-time Minister of Higher Education, that Oxford and Cambridge Universities are not doing enough to widen the diversity of their entry was met with the predictable rebuttal by alumni of the two universities as well as from current students. They pointed, instead, to the failure of schools and teachers for not nurturing student aspirations in what is now becoming a familiar cycle of blame. One current student who took up her pen to write on the debate talked of demystifying the Oxford experience and showing that people attend the university are 'just like them.' She didn't quite give a lie to the idea that the two universities are the place where

the cleverest people go or debunk the idea that clever people are better equipped than anyone else in the workplace, other than to make a whole lot more money through their working lives (estimated at £200,000 over other Russell Group graduates, courtesy of the brand name). Clare Foges commented in one article on the subject that the issue is not to break more people into Oxford, 'but to break the Oxbridge stranglehold on the best opportunities.' Perhaps the decision of one leading financial services firm, Grant Thornton, in 2013, to stop giving jobs based on academic criteria is a ray of hope. Four years on, it has found that four times as many appointees selected from the 10,000 applications a year who would not have met the company's previous criteria based on grades and references have made their elite group (the Games changers) compared to those who had met the original criteria.

Rather than blaming the universities or the schools, (or lazy employers, content with the name, for that matter), we should consider the historic relationship between the universities and schools. Traditionally, places at Oxford and Cambridge were secured by word of mouth, often the result of a communication between a housemaster or headmaster of a public school and a colleague at the university. The relationship was very close and a reflection of a hierarchical society where education was the preserve of the well-off and the gentry. Independent students, of course, are no longer are given places on who they know – indeed, they would argue it is now more difficult coming from a privileged background. Yet where we see this connection flourishing today is in the number of Oxbridge graduates teaching in the independent sector, where they often make up the majority of the teaching staff. Even smaller regional schools are likely to have a number in double figures. A significant smaller number choose to teach in state schools, often at Grammar Schools while there are signs that more are beginning to go outside their comfort zone to teach at

comprehensive schools. In the vast majority of state schools, you might not find a single Oxbridge graduate. And why should that matter?

Rather than focusing on universities and schools, we need to unpick a whole history of class and expectations. The fact is that most independent schools are packed full of Oxbridge teachers sharing their DNA with their students. Many state schools have few / no such role models. One response I had to a twitter feed on the subject noted that at their comprehensive there was a part-time Cambridge Mathematics graduate who felt a student in Year 10 was a contender for Cambridge, adding hopefully, 'very lucky. Hoping they stick around for 3 years!' If it takes a part-time member of staff to make the connection simply on their own experience, as in this instance, we are in a parlous state in those schools where there is no provenance, no tradition, no historic connection between school and university.

Of course, many would say why does it matter, all this fuss about Oxbridge. Apart from making sure that education at all levels is open to all, and however much we disavow the idea, the composition of the student body at both universities is seen as a barometer of social mobility. Unless we get an influx of Oxbridge graduates opting to teach in the state sector, it is going to be difficult to change behaviours. People aspire to what they know and often only feel comfortable passing on their own experiences and information. Perhaps if employees can see that clever people are not always equipped with the aptitude, character and skills they actually want, then Oxbridge might start to be seen as just another option, not just for the cache of having been there.

2. The American Option

Published on the ISC Website, 1 December, 2016)

After sitting her A Levels at an English boarding school in the 1980s, Amanda Foreman was awarded an E for English – even after a re-sit. Not surprisingly, no British University made her an offer, leading her to look abroad for her tertiary study, not by choice, but by necessity. Yet a few short years later, after completing her under-graduate studies at Sarah Lawrence College in the USA, then Columbia University, she won a scholarship to Oxford where she completed a DPhil on 'Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire' (later to win the Whitbread Prize for best biography), launching her on a career as an academic and writer. What was it in the United States education system that allowed her to flourish? And, conversely, what was there in our system of assessment that allowed her (and many like her) to slip through the net?

One possible explanation is that some students take time to find their academic potential, to find out what they want to do or to learn what study is really all about. Another, more plausible, is that some approaches to tertiary study suit some students more than others and that for an increasing number, the breadth offered by American universities, particularly in the liberal arts, is much more appealing and relevant to them compared to the more rigid system we have in England. Even the process of application focuses as much on character as academic prowess, with the admissions process including essays and pieces of reflective writing an important part of the process.

While the cross-Atlantic traffic is still firmly in the UK's favour, over the past decade the numbers of UK students going to study in the United States has grown steadily, and is now increasing by around 8% per annum. Each year, over 10,000 students are leaving to study at American universities, with the majority going to the prestigious Ivy League universities such as Harvard, Stanford and Yale, more than half at under- graduate level. As well, the number of students at UK universities studying abroad as part of their

studies has soared by 50 per cent last year, a trend that seems likely to accelerate in the future. Even for students initially put off by the high costs, the very many generous bursaries and scholarships available at American universities have, on investigation, made it a realistic proposition.

Two years ago, Sir Anthony Seldon, then master of Wellington College, Berkshire, suggested that students were being attracted by the breadth of the liberal arts curriculum, in which students take a range of subjects in their first two years rather than specialising in one discipline, suggesting that British universities should take note of a growing feeling that British degrees were too narrow.

"There's an allure about studying in America and having a broader, liberal arts approach with greater focus on sport, music and artistic prowess. It is a more generous vision of what higher education can be rather than the utilitarian approach we see in the UK."

For those who go to university with only a vague idea of what they want to do, being able to select their 'Major' after their first two years of study rather than at the outset has considerable appeal. As part of their liberal arts education, mandatory for all, students study a wider range of subjects in comparison to English universities, (more akin with the position in Scotland). Students are encouraged to take other courses to provide complementary skills and interests that designed to give students a greater breadth of knowledge. Hence, even if set on studying engineering, a student will receive a broad education in the liberal arts before specialization, something we may see as wasteful of time and resources, but which is fundamental to the American tertiary system.

At the recent Education Theatre, now an integral part of the annual Independent Schools Show in Battersea, one of the key talks centred around the process of applying to American

universities. Without repeating the detail of the talk that can be accessed on the YouTube link below, or the difference in requirements (applications, for instance, have to be made to individual universities and need to start a good year earlier etc), there is a clear difference in the ethos and approach of the two countries in their approach to tertiary study. Not surprisingly, a growing number of schools are considering the option of American universities in all its diversity as they seek to offer the best advice for their students.

3. The University Divide (published in the Daily Telegraph on 12 August,

2016 as *'Scrapping student grants will do nothing to broaden access to our universities.'*)

As A Level results come out in a week's time and as universities fight for a diminishing number of students, it is timely to reflect upon the decision made late last year to abolish grants and the whole issue of widening access. In May, a report by the Sutton Trust found that students from relatively affluent homes are between two and a half and four times more likely to go university than those from more deprived backgrounds with Scotland being the worst performing country. Sadly, the removal of grants in January this year will do little to improve this situation, indeed the opposite.

The divide in education reflects the divide in society and despite all attempts at social engineering and the good intentions of politicians, it is a situation that won't easily be addressed. At one time, when local authorities and government met the costs of university and there were jobs at the end of it, the numbers of young moving onto tertiary education grew steadily from around 4% in the early 1960s to around 40% today. The growth even

continued after tuition fees were introduced because of the availability of grants, but we are now at a tipping point as a combination of mounting student debt with no guarantee of employment post-university, becomes a potent mix.

The abolition of student maintenance grants in favour of loans, promoted as fair and equitable based in part, on future projected earnings, is anything but, and shows an ignorance of the mindset of those looking at university from poorer backgrounds who look at future debt in a completely different way from those whose families have never experienced hardship. Telling students that hardship grants, bursaries, scholarships and sponsorships are available for those who bother to look shows is patronizing and misses the point: the decision will deter those who are already half-hearted about going to university for any number of social and practical reasons. The idea of incurring a debt of £41,000 for the time at university with no guarantee of future employment (even though loans don't have to be repaid below the earning threshold, few like to live with such a level of debt hanging over them) is daunting as is the knowledge that those from affluent homes or who get support for their time at university are also more likely to get the internships or the better jobs.

Like it or not, our universities are reflection of our society, post-Brexit. There are students who having enjoyed gap years, will move into university accommodation or flats where in many instances, they will enjoy all the comforts and trappings of home; students who don't spend their holidays working to minimise their loans, who have the latest technology, who expect to travel and have the same trappings and social life as if they were earning. There is a world of difference in knowing that you have parents who won't see you go under or who you can expect some financial help from both directly or indirectly compared to those, the majority, who get no help from home, not because their parents won't help them, but because they can't. It is hypocritical to talk

about future earnings when they have nothing to fall back on, not the faint sniff of being a future beneficiary from a non-existent estate; nor the security of family money or even access to the best jobs (after all, it's more often than not the quality of degree that determines achieving the best jobs). I can see how they would weigh the decision up and decide it is not worth it
University should be about more than jobs and future earnings, but the rising costs have made them increasingly so. They should be about equality of opportunity and transparency from the university that they are being responsible in the courses they offer, and not just about their roll and financial viability. The choice of those from poorer backgrounds is more likely to be pragmatic, based on how it will help them, leaving others the privilege of pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake. Clearly, more must be done in schools to encourage students in need to overcome their reluctance and access the avenues of assistance available, but I fear that without such support, many will not bother. In the meantime, the removal of grants can only be seen as a retrograde step hat will damage social mobility and reduce access – not what we thought we were aiming for.

4. Exiting School – Choosing what comes next (published in the

Daily Telegraph on-line on 13 June as '*When the Country is flooded with graduates, why are we pushing so many students to University*?'

Last month, it was announced by UCAS that the number of students enrolling for A levels was set to increase by 4,000 with a commensurate decline in those enrolled for vocational courses. In the view of Mary Curnock Cook, the UCAS chief executive: '*It's now a good decision to take A levels even if you are not an A* student,*' justifying her view by arguing that: '. . . *choosing A-levels means*

teenagers can keep their options open without having to fix a career path so early in life' whereas those choosing vocational qualifications such as sports science or health and social care' (she was careful in the examples she chose!) are more likely to go into those fields, closing their options rather early in life.' She concluded her argument by stating that 'sticking to academic qualifications doesn't close any doors, regardless of whether you want to apply for a top apprenticeship or a top university.' Even accepting that she was batting for the universities who are having to chase rather harder for business these days, her argument does raise several questions about what education is about and whether many of those going on to university have the time or resources to pursue education for anything other than for a vocational end. A study conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development some ten months ago revealed that 58.8 per cent of UK graduates have ended up in non-graduate jobs, and around one in 12 of those working in low skilled jobs, such as in coffee shops, bars, call centres and at hospitality events. Surely, therefore, it is right to question whether we are getting the fit right and whether university is the best option for all of these students, particularly considering the levels of debt they rack up. This year's White Paper on Higher Education refers to the consumerist ethos of students, measuring the costs they are incurring in their study and short and long-term returns on their investment – and who can blame them?

Celebrating an increase in numbers sitting 'A' Levels is rather contrary at a time when the country is flooded with graduates with degrees in subjects that have little market value at the same time that employers are crying out for young people in subjects such as computing, design and engineering (courses which are offered through BTEC). While there is an argument is that you can access these subjects after A Levels, (appropriate for the majority of students), there are many young people who struggle with the

examination system as it is or whose abilities, enthusiasm and practical skills are not best assessed by exams; or perhaps, even, those who, at sixteen, know what they want to do. Getting into a vocational course, with its greater emphasis on formative assessment is a good option for many especially in the knowledge that further education is there to access in the future in the sure knowledge that no job is for life. In making their decision, they might also reflect on the fact that, as well as the number of graduates whose degrees have not led to employment in their study areas, that between 1996 and 2011 89.8 per cent of graduates with BTEC qualifications were in employment, compared with 88.1 per cent of graduates with A Levels. What is crucial is that those with the ability and desire to go on to university should not be deterred from doing so, particularly because of cost. This is where the greater effort is required, by teachers, schools and universities, to ensure that we encourage and support the most able and those who have the ability, focus and maturity to do well, rather than trying to steer all students towards university as a matter of course, often going without them having any clear reason as to why they are going (and by the same token, we should be wary of the many schools that proudly advertise how many of their students go onto university). Of course, it is imperative that those who are able and set on a certain course of study, especially those from poorer socio-economic groups, are not put off because they fear the threat of falling into debt with no guarantee of employment at the end of their course. University should not be seen as simply what you do between school and work, just as vocational courses should never be chosen as an easier or less expensive option. Arguably, far too many students go to university because it is what their peers do and too many others who should go, eschew the opportunity for the same reasons – and addressing that contradiction is the challenge.

Instead of focusing on university entry, schools should be looking closer at the changing job market and the ability, skill set and aptitude of their students. Education, as we know it, is undergoing a dramatic transformation (as with the job market) and our schools and systems need to show more flexibility in recognizing that A Levels, (even if they are the best measure we can come up with – and adherents of the IB would argue not), are an inadequate vehicle to measure a student's ability to find and solve problems, think critically and creatively, skills as important as content knowledge. Quite possibly, rather than pushing more students towards A Levels and then university, it is possible many more students would benefit from taking a vocational course, possibly in conjunction with A levels (and perhaps, also, we need to look at establishing more some rigorous vocational courses in the future). Schools should be promoting alternatives and look at the breadth of what they offer by way of syllabi and career advice and not steer all students towards university simply as a matter of course or because their schools can offer no other options. Few students can afford the idealistic view of education opined by some academics, of education for education's sake and whose views, laudable in theory, should not be foisted on students who simply need to get a job without being buried in debt and no way of paying it off. There are numerous examples of entrepreneurs, including Alan Sugar and Richard Branson who left school early in preference of starting work (and their views, business success and methodology have gone on to educate others). With education changing through technology and the fact that traditional methods of teaching are in danger of holding back learning rather than facilitating it, we need a more flexible approach and remember that the concept of readiness applies just as much at eighteen as in pre- school when children begin learning to read. Comparatively few so-called academic schools offer BTEC courses although some offer their own alternative (such as the Bedales assessed courses). Academic

schools argue that they cannot be all things to all students although their rigidity and adherence to league tables is arguably holding them back and costing them some of the more able students, even if their lack of orthodoxy may take more careful handling.

If we are serious about the purpose of education being to prepare students for the next stage in life, we need to stop pushing university as the first choice for all at eighteen and not see A Levels as the bespoke option for all at 6th Form. There are other alternatives that allow for different skills sets, different stages of development and different aptitudes. To go down a vocational route should not be seen as closing a door on university with education (and the job market) changing so rapidly that adaptability, initiative and a good work ethic are, arguably, more important to employers than a degree. BTEC, like A Levels and the IB, have their limitations, but well-taught, they and other vocational courses should not be seen as the lesser option in an age when on-going access to education and frequent changes of jobs will become a feature of their lives.

5. Learning to Learn: A Response from the Russell Group of Universities

'The University students I teach are, almost without exception, charming young people, quiet and well-behaved, with nice middle-class names like Hannah and Rebecca. Their faces are clean and glowing with health. They attend my lectures, obediently taking notes. They hand in their essays on time. There is only one problem – they lack even the slightest spark of initiative or intellectual curiosity' Andrew Conway Teaching Children Not to Think

In wrote a letter to a number of the leading universities who come under the umbrella of the Russell Group. My letter was directed at the press coverage given to students arriving at universities with poor literacy and study skills (and a lack of initiative and independence). The response has from the universities been very positive indeed.

What they identified:
• A lack of self-discipline and good organisation skills.
• Problems with students who have been used to reading for plot rather than paying attention to what is written down.
• The need for clear, logical and analytical thinking, interest and enthusiasm.
• The absence of intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm and an ability to digest and assimilate significant quantities of data and argue from evidence. (Oxford University.)

Bristol University noted the success of the new national curriculum to address areas such as creativity, independence and making connections between subjects in relation to wider educational themes such as education for sustainable development, enterprise, cultural diversity and technology. They added the following proviso: '*However, the issue of narrow testing at the end of KS2 and KS3 has not yet been addressed and unless changes are put in place for assessment then teaching will continue to focus on drilling pupils to pass the test.*'

They added that their experience was that pupils knew the literacy terminology but didn't know how to apply it. Students were given highly detailed essay frameworks which required little independent thinking. Literary skills were often taught from extracts and not enough emphasis was given to reading for pleasure and sustained reading, concluding *'Perhaps it is not*

surprising that undergraduates are having trouble thinking for themselves, need help designing their own study plans and have a utilitarian approach to education'

As part of their ELLI (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) they identified seven dimensions which described a person's motivation or power to learn:
i Changing and learning
ii Meaning Making

iii Curiosity
iv Creativity
v Learning Relationships vi Resilience
vii Strategic Awareness

At Newcastle there are various initiatives to develop writing skills to address deficiencies in the area of writing texts other than essays for assessment purposes (eg critiques, book reviews, literature reviews, business or technical reports, project proposals). They listed a number of skills / aspects of writing that pupils needed help with including:

i Understanding assignment and exam questions

ii Planning, structuring, drafting and revising assignments
iii Using reading sources without plagiarism
iv Citation and referencing conventions
v Writing analytically and critically
vi Writing theses and dissertations
vii Accuracy in grammar, spelling and punctuation
viii Appropriate vocabulary and style

At Edinburgh, the problem that was identified was the diversity of English produced by students and the inability of some to write in coherent sentences.

Birmingham argued that active and independent learning skills are at the heart of their vision to enable all their students to '*profit from a culture of learning, aligned with a research ethos, which is based on critical enquiry, debate and self-motivation*.' In support, they provided an excellent paper entitled 'A Vision for Birmingham Learning' that focused on enquiry-based learning and equipping students for life-long learning.

A further paper was provided from King's College London entitled 'A Framework for Transition: Supporting 'Learning to Learn' in Higher Education' that looked at the moves from school where learning is planned, closely monitored and evaluated for them by their teachers to an environment where they have to plan, monitor and evaluate large portions of learning by themselves.

The Imperial College in London was strongly supportive of '*efforts within schools to improve standards of English and to encourage the development of study and thinking skills*' They listed a number of concerns held by their staff about the standard of written English including:

i Poor sentence construction
ii Lack of clarity of expression
iii Inaccurate spelling
iv Lack of or inappropriate use of punctuation, capital letters and paragraphs
v Poor essay writing skills; in particular, an apparent lack of understanding of the importance of presenting information in a

logical order so as to develop a rationale argument or 'tell a story'

Other responses received were from Cardiff, Leeds, Glasgow, Nottingham, UCL and Cambridge Universities, all on a similar theme and I am very grateful for the time taken by the universities for their helpful responses. Collectively they provide a very clear message for us and a challenge to the way we teach and organise our curriculum, and to what we prioritise in our schools. As always, it is somewhat reassuring that what was important, before education became a plaything of politicians and bureaucrats, remains so and the schools that insist on a good standard of English and teach the children how to think and be active, independent learners are most certainly on the right track.

'Students are '…able to gain A levels without howing any creativity or original thought making it more difficult . . . to pick our exceptional candidates . . . There's essentially an expected answer and you are jusdged on how close you get to that.' Director of Admissions, Cambridge University