

**The National Record
of Achievement:
Just Another Initiative or
a Useful Tool for the
Future?**

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore why records of achievement (RoA) became part of national education policy in the English education system, whether it is just one more education initiative, like so many others, which only had a relevance and significance at a particular time and within a certain context, or whether it might have a longer-term structural significance within the national education system. The thesis focuses particularly on the significance and role of the first nationally recognised and designed record of achievement - the National Record of Achievement (NRA) - which was introduced in 1991 and has been redesigned as a result of the Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications (Dearing 1996).¹

The thesis argues that there are three major inter-related factors which determine the role that RoA has played or might play within the English education and training system - firstly, and most importantly, the context within which it is developed; secondly, the content or features of the record itself (particularly the change from locally developed and determined records to the National Record of Achievement); and thirdly, the balance in emphasis between the use of the process of recording of achievement and the use of the RoA document itself. These three factors form the basis of a theoretical framework which is developed in Chapter 1 and is then used throughout the thesis to analyse the role of RoA (and specifically the NRA) in the past and in the future.

The thesis uses this theoretical framework, as well as a detailed case study, to identify and describe the role that RoA has played in its three major phases of development:

Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative, largely brought in to meet the needs of lower achievers;

Phase 2 (1991-1996) - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement;

Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning.

The thesis concludes by arguing that it is in the type of role described in Phase 3 that the NRA will become more than just another education policy initiative and will take on a longer-term structural significance within the English education and training system.

¹ Dearing, Sir Ron (1996) *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds*, London: DfEE

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Preface and Reflections on the Methodology of the Thesis

This thesis, in its final bound form, begins with a theoretical framework and ends with a practical policy proposal based on this theoretical framework. In reality, the thesis began with a practical problem and then developed a theoretical framework to explain and possibly to address it. The thesis begins at Chapter 1, but the methodological story behind the thesis begins with the case study in Chapter 5. Here, in the Preface, I give an account of the methodological history behind the thesis.

It was clear from working in Tower Hamlets during the early 1990s that something was happening in the borough's schools and colleges as they were introducing the National Record of Achievement. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for this work, a wish to discuss and to share practice and, most of all, a desire to collaborate and to make the implementation process successful. Alongside this crusading zeal, there ran both a thread of scepticism about what effect all the hard work was actually having on students and also a deep sense of frustration about the apparent lack of interest in the NRA displayed by end users, particularly employers and HE providers. The two major questions for the thesis were firstly, how to capture what was happening and secondly, how to explain it. It is these two questions which shaped the methodological approach of the thesis.

Capturing what was happening

Working as the advisor with overall responsibility for the development of the NRA in Tower Hamlets meant that I was in a unique and potentially very privileged position for collecting data about what was happening across the borough. In terms of written data, I had access to information ranging from minutes of meetings

to borough reports of all types. In terms of oral evidence, I had everything from anecdotal off-the-cuff remarks to tape-recorded in-depth interviews. It was possible, as part of my work, to observe and discuss practice in any of the borough schools or the college and to talk with a range of people from senior managers to students and external partners, such as employers and careers advisers, who were working with institutions. Moreover, it was possible (and indeed I made use of this facility on several occasions while working on the thesis) to devise and to administer questionnaires or to undertake interviews which probed into certain aspects of the NRA development process which had not been captured as part of the routine borough data collection service. There was therefore a wealth of data to use for reflecting on what was happening, as well as the possibility of filling any gaps through the use of specifically designed data collection processes.

All the teachers, lecturers, students, employers, careers officers and others with whom I worked knew that I was planning to write my doctorate about the NRA and that I was using the Tower Hamlets case study as part of this. They were all prepared to share information with me on the understanding that they remained anonymous in any writing up and that I shared general findings with them. In the event, it was easy to satisfy both of these stipulations. In the latter case, it was also very useful, because I was able to gain further information through feeding back my interpretations of data to those who had initially provided them and getting their reflections on these interpretations.

The problem for me in capturing what was happening in Tower Hamlets during the period of the case study was therefore not one of access, nor, in my estimation were there any real ethical issues raised by my work. There were, however, three major methodological problems posed by the case study: first, because there was such a

wealth of data, which of it I should use and how; second, how to interpret the data; third, and more problematic, how to view the status of the data, because of my strong personal involvement in the NRA development work in Tower Hamlets².

In the event, the majority of the evidence that I ended up using in the thesis was actually collected specifically for this purpose. If I analyse the data which I drew on for the chapters in the thesis which describe or use the Tower Hamlets case study, there are only four sources which could strictly be seen as part of the day-to-day record of the development of the NRA - minutes of meetings, quality assurance material, borough conference reports and guidelines on good practice (e.g. in relation to the NRA, individual action planning, the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement and the "14-19 Unified Guidance Framework"). The other sources³ I drew on in the thesis were all questionnaires and interviews which

² Robson (1993) has a helpful chapter in his book entitled *Real World Research* which examines this problem in some depth. I have drawn particularly on his observations about the "practitioner-researcher". I have also to a lesser degree, found the work of Elliott (1991) and Winter (1989) useful in terms of their discussion of 'action research'. In addition I would like to acknowledge the influence of Schön (1996) and Boud *et al* (1996) who provided me with models for reflecting both on the case study described in this thesis and on the methodological approach that I took to the thesis overall.

- ³ A postal questionnaire survey of 500 (125 responses) employers in the LDDC area carried out in March/April 1992 and designed to find out their opinions of the NRA;
- A series of tape-recorded interviews with 31 Tower Hamlets post-16 students over a period of two years (1992-1994) - this was the first cohort to have experienced the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement;
- A survey of pre-16 student and secondary school staff views of individual action planning in six schools in Tower Hamlets (just under 500 student questionnaires);
- Questionnaires, completed by 31 staff in a sample of Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions, about teacher/lecturer views on the strengths and weaknesses of the NRA;
- Tape-recorded interviews with 11 NRA co-ordinators in a representative sample of Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions in December 1994/January 1995 about their views on Unified Guidance and the role of the NRA within this;
- Students' views on the NRA questionnaire.

I also used personal notes and, from 1991-1992, a reflective diary on the introduction of the NRA into Tower Hamlets institutions.

were primarily designed to help me to answer questions raised by the thesis, while, at the same time, being of practical use to practitioners and policy makers in Tower Hamlets.

What is important here in terms of methodology is that the greater part of the data which I have drawn on in the case study sections of the thesis is that which I have collected myself and which is therefore strongly affected by my role in Tower Hamlets. The issues connected with this dual role of developer and researcher will be discussed below.

The issue of interpretation of the data is, I would argue, less problematic since it is common practice for the researcher also to act as interpreter of the data s/he has collected. However, even the role of interpreter in this thesis raises some methodological issues because of my involvement in the case study. All the data that I draw on within the thesis is potentially accessible by another researcher or interpreter. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that a researcher who had not had the involvement that I did in the NRA development process described in the case study, would not immediately be able to interpret the data in the way that I have done in the thesis. For me, the process of interpretation was, to a certain extent, like reliving and reflecting on personal history - that process is therefore not replicable. Through my interpretation of the Tower Hamlets case study data in the thesis, I have been able to make the implicit explicit and to emphasise certain trends in preference to others. This is a function which is, of course, always a facet of the interpreter's role, but here the reader should be aware of just how strong that aspect of the role was in the case of this thesis.

If my role as interpreter of the data gathered for the case study was problematic, so too was my role as data gatherer. How robust can data be when those from whom they are collected themselves have a

personal investment in those data and when they are also well aware of the personal investment that the researcher has?

I have already mentioned above the enthusiasm that surrounded the introduction of the NRA in Tower Hamlets. At the time of the case study, Tower Hamlets was a new local education authority⁴ with a large influx of new staff who wanted to make a perceptible difference to achievement, progression and participation levels in their schools and college and who saw the NRA as one of the tools they could use towards realising this end. They therefore, in common with myself, had a reason to make the NRA implementation as successful as possible and also to provide evidence of that success. This fact obviously raises a question about the objectivity of the data collected for the thesis.

Objectivity only becomes an issue, however, if that is what the interpreter of the data is claiming for her/his data. I make no such claim for the case study data in this thesis. What the thesis does is to use the case study data to illustrate the story of the NRA's role in the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets. It is thus often used to illuminate a point in the story rather than to prove a particular point of view.

My standpoint in relation to the case study data used in the thesis is that my role as developer, researcher and interpreter should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness, since it gave me a unique position as story-teller. At the same time, there are also a number of methodological 'tactics' I used in gathering and interpreting the data for the case study which could be seen in some senses as

⁴ The London Borough of Tower Hamlets LEA had been formed in 1990 after the breaking up of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). There was, at this time, a great deal of rivalry between the newly formed London borough LEAs, despite the fact that they had all previously been part of ILEA.

compensating for the lack of fully objective data (if such a thing exists!).

Firstly, I attempted always to make it clear to students, teachers, lecturers and others from whom I collected data through questionnaires or interviews that these data were intended to be used to improve practice in relation to the NRA. I stressed that it was therefore important for responses to raise problems, as well as to reveal good practice where it was taking place. In addition, questionnaires were, in most cases, followed up by visits, direct observation of practice and interviews to test out some of the original responses and interpretations of those responses.

Secondly, when I was collecting data, I tried where possible to obtain information on a particular area from a variety of sources (e.g. students, teachers, careers officers, employers, further education providers) in order to get a range of perspectives on an issue and to attempt some kind of triangulation.

Thirdly, and this has already been mentioned above, I tested out my interpretations of findings both with those from whom the data had originally been collected, with colleagues involved in the development work in the borough and with those involved in similar work outside the borough. I also tested these findings against any available literature in the area. The reflections that I gained through this process not only helped with the interpretation of the original data collected, but also provided new data to be used in this interpretation.

This section has examined the methodological issues related to one of the major questions raised by the case study in the thesis - What was happening in Tower Hamlets? The second, and arguably the more important question that the thesis attempts to address is - How

can I explain what is happening? In the section below I explore the methodological approach that I took in the thesis to examine this question.

Explaining what was happening

In the introductory paragraph of this Preface, I make the point that the methodological story behind the thesis began with the case study rather than with the theoretical framework - context, content and process/product relationship - that is laid out in Chapter 1. In this section, I hope to be able to throw some light on the approach that the thesis takes by examining the methodological story behind it. This section thus briefly traces how observation of and reflection on practice led to the development of a theoretical framework which, in turn, helped me further to reflect on and to explain that practice. In addition, through a review of recent education policy literature, as well as literature on assessment and more specifically on RoA, I was able to refine this theoretical framework and then to use it as a way of explaining the role that RoA played in the past and in the Tower Hamlets case study, as well as proposing the type of role that it might play in the future.

Work on the thesis began with a description of the way that the NRA was used in the Tower Hamlets case study. Two key words - enthusiasm and frustration - emerged from an initial reflection on the role of the NRA in this case study. It was an attempt to explain the significance of these two key words that led to the initial concept of the theoretical framework.

The enthusiasm that teachers, lecturers and students felt for NRA development work appeared to be generated for two different reasons. Firstly, it was related to the newness and features of the NRA document itself, particularly its national status. This is what became known as “content” in the theoretical framework. Secondly,

the enthusiasm seemed to be engendered through the type of collaborative work that took place across borough institutions around the formative process of recording of achievement/action planning and the use of the summative record as part of the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement. This is what became “process/product relationship” in the theoretical framework. The third element in the theoretical framework - “context” - represented a way of conceptualising and explaining the frustration that teachers, lecturers, students and others felt when faced with the limitations that all the external factors beyond Tower Hamlets and beyond their direct influence placed on the use of the NRA.

An initial review of key assessment and RoA texts from the 1970s and 1980s was particularly useful early on in the thesis, because it helped me to identify two fundamental issues for both the theoretical framework and for the Tower Hamlets case study. Firstly, this literature highlighted the differences between the roles of formative and summative assessment and the potentially problematic relationship between the two for RoA. Secondly, it was clear from a review of this literature that the role that RoA played in the 1970s and 1980s was different from the role that I observed the NRA playing in the Tower Hamlets case study.

The identification of these two issues - the relationship between formative and summative assessment (process/product relationship) and the role that RoA played in the 1970s and 1980s - helped three key elements of the thesis to fall into place. The first was the conceptualisation of a model to explain the different but inter-related roles that both process and product were playing in the Tower Hamlets case study (see Figure 5 on page 155). The second was the identification of the differences between the role that the NRA was playing in Tower Hamlets and the role that RoA had played in the 1970s and 1980s. It was thus possible to conceptualise two phases

of RoA development: Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; and Phase 2 (1991-) NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. The third essential element of the thesis that this initial review of the literature helped to clarify was the theoretical framework. This review confirmed that it was possible to use the theoretical framework to explain the role that RoA was playing in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of RoA development.

What this review of the assessment and RoA literature of the 1970s and 1980s did not shed much light on, however, was the “context” element of the theoretical framework. For an explanation of this element, it was necessary to undertake a review of the education policy literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Reflection on this literature and an analysis of how the national education policy context had affected RoA in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of RoA development explained very clearly why those involved with the development of the NRA in the Tower Hamlets had felt so much frustration. The power of certain key factors of the national education policy context - such as the national qualifications framework - could be identified as having a strong impact on the role of RoA/NRA.

What also emerged from a reading of the education policy literature of the 1990s was a desire by policy makers for the NRA to play a role in supporting lifelong learning. This, since it goes beyond Phase 2 - the role described in the Tower Hamlets case study - led to the conceptualisation of Phase 3 of RoA development - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. As Chapter 7 of the thesis points out, this potential future phase is something which is discussed in some depth in three recent sources - Crombie-White *et al.* (1995), Halsall and Cockett (1996) and Dearing (1996). In my conclusion to

the thesis, I used the theoretical framework, developed within and tested on the case study, to raise issues about the likely success of the proposals for the NRA put forward in these three sources. I also used it to suggest a new policy approach to the NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning.

Concluding comments

In this Preface I have argued that, despite its position in the final text, the Tower Hamlets case study played a central role in the thesis, both as an initial stimulus to write about the NRA and in the development of a theoretical framework for explaining its role within the education and training system. Through writing the thesis, I realised the importance for me of working from practice to theory and then using theory better to understand practice and to inform policy. The role of “developer/researcher”⁵ allowed me to use this type of methodology, although it also, as discussed above, raised methodological issues for the thesis. The fact that the data that I used as a central part of the thesis are not open to scrutiny by another researcher, in the way that data collected by an outsider might be, could be seen as a weakness. On the other hand, the uniqueness of the data that I was able to use because of my position as developer/researcher could also be viewed as one of the major strengths of the thesis. It was certainly central to my better understanding of the area I was studying.

⁵ I prefer this term to Robson’s (1993) “practitioner-researcher” because I feel that it more closely describes my role in relation to the Tower Hamlets case study.

Introduction

The English education system, in common with most education systems, has always had records of achievement and methods of recording achievement - qualifications and school or college reports being the best known and most widely used. In this thesis, however, I use the terms recording of achievement and records of achievement in a more limited sense. Here the term is used to describe the practices and documents which were associated initially with teacher-led local developments which began in the late 1960s and were used as a means of recognising and accrediting a broader set of achievements for a wider range of learners than was possible through the national qualifications system. This initiative then culminated in the introduction of the National Record of Achievement (NRA) in 1991.

The fact that records of achievement (RoA)⁶ of this specific type, which are distinct from qualifications and examinations, exist in the English education and training system is, in itself, an interesting and unusual feature of that system and one which currently occurs in no other European country (Dearing 1996)⁷.

What I therefore set out to explore in this thesis is why RoA has become part of national education policy in the English system, whether it is just one more education initiative, like so many others, which only had a relevance and significance at a particular time and

⁶ For the purposes of brevity, I shall use the term RoA to refer to the records of achievement initiative as a whole, within which I include both the summative document and the process of recording of achievement, except on those occasions when there is a need to make a distinction between the two for reasons of clarity.

⁷ In fact, Broadfoot (1996) claims that the '*orientation*' system in France and the '*livret scolaire*' are similar to RoA.

within a certain context, or whether it might have a longer-term structural significance.

In order to pursue these questions, I begin by examining why and how records of achievement and the process of recording of achievement have become features of the English education and training system. I also examine the changing role of RoA within that system since the late 1960s.

I argue in Chapter 1 that there are three major factors which determine the role that RoA has played or might play within the English education and training system - firstly, and most importantly, the context within which it is developed; secondly, the content or features of the record itself, particularly the change from locally developed and determined records to the National Record of Achievement; and thirdly, the balance in emphasis between the use of the process of recording of achievement and the use of the RoA document itself.

I draw on three major sources in the thesis: recent literature on education policy, with a particular focus on the late 1980s and early 1990s, policy and research literature on assessment which relates to RoA and specific research and evaluation literature on RoA. These three sources have been chosen because they provide information about the context within which RoA has been developed, and which has therefore shaped its role within the education and training system, as well as the way that it has been used by educational practitioners, policy makers and employers. The literature on assessment is particularly relevant for a study of RoA because this is where the potential role for RoA (both process and product) was most widely discussed and debated in the 1980s, since it was seen as a response to the narrowness of existing modes of assessment.

From an analysis of these sources, I suggest that RoA has moved through two major phases in the period from the late 1960s to the early 1990s: Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers - and Phase 2 (1991-1997) -NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement.

In Phase 1, those writing about RoA viewed it in diverse and, in some cases, contradictory ways. It will be argued that these different interpretations of RoA, each of which is examined in some detail in the early part of the thesis, all had a degree of validity in the period up to the 1990s. None of them, however, I would suggest, provides an adequate basis of analysis for the second Phase of RoA development in the early 1990s. I therefore argue the case for using the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - as an analytical tool for discussing the role of RoA.

Phase 2 of RoA development, which, I argue, begins with the introduction of the NRA in 1991, is discussed in the latter part of the thesis. The analysis of the role of RoA in this second phase is based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1, as well as on the specific but limited literature on the NRA and on a case study of one particular local education authority's use of the NRA in the early 1990s.

Finally, using this analysis of Phase 2 as my basis, I point to the possibility of a potential future Phase 3 - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. The features of this Phase are touched on, but not fully explored, in the Dearing Report of 1996 (Dearing 1996). As in Phase 2, the focus is on the use of the NRA with all learners to record achievement, but here the emphasis is on the link between the NRA and the concept of lifelong learning. It is as a

mechanism for supporting lifelong learning, I argue, that the NRA could become more than just another education policy initiative and could take on a longer-term structural significance within the English education and training system.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework for discussing and analysing the role of RoA in the English education and training system - a framework, which, as I have indicated above, is then used throughout the thesis. The chapter is divided into three main sections which reflect the three elements of this framework: context, content and process/product relationship. For this thesis, the context is discussed in terms of three models of education and training systems - the first two of which have a historical basis in England and the third of which relates to a hypothetical but possible future model. The first section of the chapter therefore opens by introducing these three models, which are defined by levels of student full-time participation rates and levels of achievement - "low participation/low achievement", "medium participation/low achievement" and "high participation/high achievement" (Spours 1995). These particular models are used for discussing context because I wish to argue, particularly in later chapters of the thesis, that RoA can be used as part of a strategy for tackling the low levels of both participation and achievement that international comparisons have highlighted as specific weaknesses of the English education and training system (e.g. Steedman & Green 1997).

The second section of Chapter 1 focuses on the second element of the framework - the content of the RoA initiative itself - and makes a distinction between the locally developed records of achievement of the 1970s and 1980s and the NRA.

Finally, the third section concentrates on the third element of the theoretical framework - process/product relationship - and

distinguishes between the process of recording of achievement, which involves students taking an active part in their own learning and assessment, and the record of achievement as a summative document which students can use at transition points in their education and training (Broadfoot 1986a). What the chapter argues is that all three elements of the theoretical framework - context, content and process/product relationship - have had and continue to have an effect on the role that RoA can play in the English education and training system, but that it is the interrelationship between the three that determines that role in the different Phases of RoA development.

Chapter 2 reviews the policy and research literature on assessment which relates to RoA and the specific research and evaluation literature on RoA. It identifies five major diverse and potentially contradictory ways in which RoA has been viewed in these sources. This chapter highlights the limitations of the analysis in these sources and concludes by arguing that the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1 might provide a more useful basis for discussion of the historical and potential future role of RoA.

Chapter 3 examines in more depth the historical context within which Phases 1 and 2 of RoA development have taken place. It focuses particularly on the way that RoA was used as a policy instrument by different agencies for different purposes from the late 1960s to 1991, when the NRA was launched, in order to explain how RoA changed from a grassroots initiative to an instrument of national policy. In its final section, the chapter describes the new role which education policy makers have intended the NRA to play in the early 1990s - i.e. as a tool for addressing the "skills shortage" and the problems of the "academic/vocational divide". The chapter concludes by raising the issue of how effective an educational initiative like RoA can be, when it is constantly shaped by, but does

nothing to challenge key elements of the national education context, such as the national qualifications system, alongside which it has to co-exist.

Chapter 4 explores in more depth the second element of the theoretical framework for analysis of RoA developed in Chapter 1 - the content of the NRA. This chapter thus mainly focuses on a discussion of the particular and different features of the NRA, as compared with earlier RoA variants, and examines why it developed in the form that it did in the early 1990s. The chapter argues that the features of the NRA are the result of an amalgam of RoA developments in both the academic and vocational tracks of the English education system. It also suggests that this fact constitutes one of the major potential strengths of the NRA as a policy instrument for use with all learners in different phases of education, as well as in the workplace. This is a role which earlier local records of achievement were never intended to, nor were equipped to fulfil. Hence the stress on the importance of content in Phase 2 of RoA development (1991-1997 - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement.)

Chapter 5 describes a case study of how a local education authority has used the NRA in the early 1990s as part of a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” designed to tackle low levels of post-16 participation and achievement and problems of student progression. It illustrates the arguments made in previous chapters by suggesting that it is the balance between context, content and process/product relationship which determined the role that the NRA played. The chapter particularly highlights the fact that it is the new features (or content) of the NRA, as opposed to earlier records of achievement, which were significant both in the initial development of this Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework and in its eventual effectiveness as a local strategy.

Chapter 6 uses both the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 and the case study material to draw some wider national lessons about the role of the NRA in the early 1990s. It suggests that the way that the NRA was used in the case study differed quite strongly from earlier uses of RoA, particularly in the way that it was seen as part of a “systems” approach. Firstly, the NRA was not used as a tool on its own to address a particular issue, but rather in conjunction with other educational tools which together made up what was known as a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”. Secondly, its use was not confined to a single phase or institution, as earlier RoA developments had often been, but formed part of an LEA-wide strategic system for raising levels of achievement, participation and progression. It is these differences, the chapter argues, that distinguish Phase 2 of RoA development from Phase 1.

However, the chapter also indicates ways in which the effectiveness of this local strategy was limited by the national education policy context of the early 1990s. Apart from the fact that the role of LEAs themselves changed during this period, one of the major features of this context which affected the use of the NRA was the continuing dominant role of qualifications (and, in particular, the dominance of selective academic qualifications) in national education policy.

The chapter then looks at the role that education policy makers have expected the NRA to play at a national level in the English education and training system - that is as a tool for addressing the “skills shortage” and overcoming the “academic/vocational divide”. It suggests that an over emphasis by policy makers on content, at the expense of a consideration of contextual factors, led them to over expect in terms of the role that the NRA could play in the early 1990s (Raffe 1984).

The chapter concludes by arguing that the theoretical framework for discussing the role of RoA, developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/ product relationship - has proved useful as a tool for analysing the role that the NRA played in the early 1990s, both in the local and the national context. It thus suggests that this analytical tool could be used as a way of conceptualising a role for the NRA in supporting lifelong learning within a potential future high participation/high achievement education and training system.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by using the theoretical framework developed earlier in the thesis to suggest a new role for the NRA in a potential future high participation/high achievement education and training system - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. This it describes as Phase 3 of RoA development. In terms of context, the chapter begins by exploring the possible features of a future "high participation/high achievement" education and training system in more depth, specifically the role of a unified qualifications system. It then goes on to examine the content of the NRA, and the balance of emphasis required between the process of recording of achievement and the actual record itself. The thesis concludes by suggesting a new approach to the role that the NRA might play in a future high participation/high achievement system, arguing that any policy proposals in this area need to consider contextual factors, as well as the content of the record and the balance between process and product.

Chapter I

Context, Content and Process/Product Relationship: A Theoretical Framework for Discussion of Records of Achievement

Introduction

The Records of Achievement (RoA) initiative began in the late 1960s as a locally-based and teacher-led response to the national education context of that time, in particular the narrowness of existing modes of assessment and their effect on student learning and on the secondary curriculum. The launch of the National Record of Achievement (NRA) by the Department for Education and the Employment Department in 1991 constituted national government recognition of the type of local development work that had taken place over a number of years as part of this initiative.

This thesis sets out to argue that the NRA is not just one more education initiative, like so many others⁸, which only had significance at a particular point in time and within a certain context, but something which has the potential for a longer-term structural significance within the English education and training system. The thesis is therefore concerned with the role that the NRA, as a feature of national education policy, currently plays in the different policy context of the 1990s and what type of role it might play in a hypothetical future “high participation/high achievement” (Spours 1995) education and training system.

What this chapter argues is that any discussion of the historical development of RoA or of the present and future role of the NRA needs

⁸ Such initiatives might include, for example the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education, the National Record of Vocational Achievement, the Certificate in Extended Education.

to take into consideration three major factors: firstly, context - that is the national education policy context within which this initiative has been or will be developed; secondly, content - that is the features of the record itself and thirdly, process/product relationship - that is the relationship between and balance of emphasis on the process of recording of achievement and on the record of achievement as a summative document. It will be argued that all three of these factors and their interrelationship one with another affect the role that RoA has played in the past and can play in the future. The chapter therefore uses these three factors as the theoretical framework for discussion of the three stages of RoA development outlined in the introduction: Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; Phase 2 (1991-1996) - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement, Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning (see Figure 1 overleaf).

This chapter is divided into four major sections. The first section draws on recent education policy literature, with a particular focus on the late 1980s and early 1990s, to look at the changing national education context. It introduces three models (two historical and one future) of the English education and training system as a way of periodising the context for RoA development - "low participation/low achievement", "medium participation/low achievement" and "high participation/high achievement" (Spours 1995). These three models broadly correspond to the three phases of RoA development described above.

Figure 1.

A theoretical framework for the discussion of the role of RoA in the English education and training system

Changing role of RoA	Phase 1 (1969-1991) RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers	Phase 2 (1991-1996) NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement	Phase 3 (a potential future phase) NRA as a tool for supporting life-long learning
Context	low participation/low achievement education and training system	medium participation/low achievement education and training system	high participation/high achievement education and training system
Content	varied and locally determined format	national format	national format
Process/ Product Relationship	greater emphasis on process than product	greater emphasis on product than process	equal emphasis on process and product

Section two briefly discusses the changing content of RoA, making an important distinction between the features of the NRA and those of earlier locally determined records of achievement - a distinction to which the thesis returns in later chapters. Section three highlights the difference between the record of achievement as a summative document and the process of recording of achievement (Broadfoot 1986a). It suggests that the use of RoA as an educational tool has been and will be determined by the balance of emphasis on either one or the other. These sections of the chapter draw mainly on two other sources - the policy and research literature on assessment which relates to RoA and the specific research and evaluation literature on RoA.

The chapter concludes by re-examining the way that the three factors within its theoretical framework (context, content and process/product relationship) and the interplay between the three have determined the role that RoA and the NRA have played and might play in the future. It argues that although the first of these appears to have had, and continues to have, the strongest impact on this role in all three phases of RoA development, the influence of the other two factors has also been, and will continue to be, significant (see Figure 1, p.26).

Context

There are many ways in which one might choose to periodise the English education and training system to highlight the changing context within which RoA has been used and might be used in the future and which has also had a determining effect on the role that this educational initiative has played in the past and could play in the future. Here I distinguish between three models of full-time education and training systems - "low participation/low achievement", "medium participation/low achievement" and "high participation/high achievement" (Spours 1995) (see Figure 2 overleaf). I draw for this analysis on the classification developed by Spours, supported by a wide

Figure 2.
Three models of the English education and training system

Key aspects of the education and training system	Low participation/ low achievement (1970s-1980s)	Medium participation/ low achievement (Late 1980s -early 1990s)	High participation/ high achievement (hypothetical future system)
Qualifications system for 14-19 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear break at 16 • selective function academic/ vocational divide with stronger academic track • stress on linear approach and terminal assessment • stress on subject specialism rather than generic skills • complexity of vocational offer largely confined to FE and part-time route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wider range of qualifications with emphasis on staying on at 16+ • selective function continues academic/ vocational divide with stronger academic track • greater emphasis on modularity and formative assessment • greater stress on generic skills, but mainly in vocational route • simplified general vocational offer for 16-19s with introduction of GNVQs in 1992 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coherent unified qualifications system with emphasis on participation and progression rather than selection • emphasis on modularity and formative assessment but with synoptic element • combination of general education as well as specialist study, theoretical as well as applied learning • flexibility of study modes and contexts with credit accumulation and transfer
Labour market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incentives to exit at 16 because of lack of strong pay differentials or reward for qualification • little liaison between employers, unions and education service over qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recession and lack of employment opportunities at 16 • little liaison between employers, unions and education service, except for employer input into NVQs and GNVQs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment from 18+ at the earliest (stress on full-time education and training to this point) • increased differentials to incentivise qualification • increased employer involvement in education and training • working practices which stress use of all core skills and support life-long learning

Post-16 provision and institutional organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institutional insularity • increasing number and diversity of HE places • local progression strategies largely to benefit lower achievers • limited and short-term provision for non A Level students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased institutional competition • expansion of FE and HE (but slowing down in expansion of HE by mid 1990s) • nationally funded initiatives focusing on progression 14-19 (e.g. TVEI) • emphasis on individual careers education and guidance • local progression strategies largely to benefit lower achievers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in HE places and expansion of the work-based route • non age-related financial support for education and training • culture of high expectations and focus on achievement • focus on attainment (e.g. through value-added) • underpinning student support structures (e.g. RoA) • impartial careers education and guidance • flexibility of access and modes of study • focus on pedagogy and assessment to maximise learning and achievement • collaborative ways of working for horizontal and vertical progression and delivery of broader curriculum (e.g. consortium arrangements)
National regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • separate government departments for education (DES) and training (ED) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more co-operation between DES and ED culminating in QNCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single national body for unified qualifications system

range of recent education policy literature - for example, CBI 1989; NAHT 1987 and 1995; Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team Report 1991; DES/ED/Welsh Office 1991; Royal Society 1991; NIACE 1991; Spours 1991a, 1992; Institute of Directors 1992; Ball 1992; Young and Watson 1992; Raffe and Rumberger 1992; Green & Steedman 1993; Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993; National Commission on Education 1993, 1995 a&b; Raffe 1994; Richardson *et al.* 1995; The Headmasters' Conference 1995; Crombie White *et al.* for RSA 1995; Dearing (1996).

I have chosen these models for analysing the context within which RoA and the NRA have been or might be used for three major reasons:

1. they largely overlap with the three phases of RoA development outlined in the introduction: Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; Phase 2 (1991-1996) -NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement, Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning;
2. they refer to problems (low participation and underachievement in the English education and training system) to which the NRA has been seen, in the research and policy literature and in the case study section of this thesis, as one solution;
3. although focusing on post-16 education and training systems, these models also relate to Key Stage 4 of the education system because of their achievement and progression focus - this is a helpful overlap for RoA which can also be seen as a mechanism for spanning Key Stage 4 and the post-16 education system.

The thesis moves directly from the two historical models (low participation/low achievement and medium participation/low achievement) to a hypothetical future model (high participation/high

achievement) without moving through any intermediate phases, because it wants to demonstrate how RoA, which has traditionally been associated with compensatory educational strategies, might also have a useful and integral part to play in a highly performing education and training system. Possible intermediate models, such as a medium participation/medium achievement system, are not discussed here because they are not related to the central task of the thesis.

It is also important in each of the three models to examine the complex relationship between participation and achievement and the effects of national education policy on each factor separately, as well as their interrelationship. In the English context, for example, higher levels of participation do not necessarily indicate or lead to higher levels of achievement, although the recent steady rise in achievement indicated by the higher numbers of students gaining 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C has been one of the factors leading to increased rates of full-time participation at 16+ (Richardson *et al.* 1994).

Moreover, these models do not adequately describe the whole context within which RoA has been used and continues to be used. In order to provide a picture of all the limitations that are placed on this educational tool, one would need to look beyond the education and training system to economic and cultural factors which also affect how powerful the role of any educational initiative might be (Walsh, Green & Steedman 1993). This is not, however, the main task of this thesis. One cannot, of course, ignore cultural and economic factors when evaluating the effectiveness of an educational initiative such as RoA. Nevertheless, in this thesis I will confine my discussion primarily to the national educational policy issues which relate to the English full-time 14+ education and training system.

The education policy literature mentioned above describes both full-time and part-time education and training systems and uses

comparative statistical data to define low, medium and high levels of participation and achievement. Here I will draw pre-dominantly on those aspects of the literature which discuss full-time education in England and Wales.

There are four major elements described in this literature that have most relevance as a context for the use of RoA:

1. the qualifications system for 14-19 year olds;
2. the labour market;
3. post-16 provision;
4. national regulation.

These have thus been used in Figure 2 (pp.28 & 29) and are discussed in turn in each of the three sections below.

The low participation/low achievement model

The English full-time education and training system of the 1970s and 1980s has been characterised as a low participation/low achievement⁹ system (e.g. Richardson *et al.* 1995). Recent analysis suggests that towards the end of this period, both participation and, to a lesser degree, achievement rates began to improve to such an extent that the English full-time education and training system of the late 1980s (from 1987 onwards) and early 1990s could be characterised as medium participation/low achievement¹⁰ in international comparative terms (Spours 1995). Nevertheless, the model of a low participation/low

⁹ A low participation/low achievement full-time education and training system could be described as one where less than 50% of the total cohort remains in full-time education after the age of 16 and where less than 50% of the cohort gains the equivalent of 5 A-Cs at GCSE at age 16.

¹⁰ A "medium participation/low achievement" full-time education and training system could be described as one where more than 50% but less than 80% of the total cohort remains in full-time education after the age of 16 and where less than 50% of the cohort gains the equivalent of 5 A-Cs at GCSE at age 16.

achievement full-time education and training system could largely be applied to the period prior to the introduction of the NRA in 1991 - that is Phase 1 of RoA development.

The qualifications system for 14-19 year olds

Recent education policy literature suggests that the low participation/low achievement full-time education and training system of the 1970s and 1980s is characterised by a qualifications system that has a number of distinctive features including:

- a clear break at 16 when there is the possibility of early entry to the labour market (Finegold & Soskice 1988);
- selective qualifications at 16+ and 18+ that cause early failure and encourage early exiting from the system (Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team Report 1991; Raffe & Rumberger 1992);
- an in-built division between academic and vocational qualifications, where only the ~~few~~ lead with any certainty to higher education and highly paid employment (Benson & Silver 1991; Raffe & Rumberger 1992);
- a stress on subject specialist rather than generic skills with no alternatives to exclusively academic or narrowly occupational study (NAHT 1987; Spours 1991a, European Enquiry Team 1991, Royal Society 1991);
- large differences between academic and vocational tracks and therefore problems over progression between the two (Spours 1991a; European Enquiry Team 1991);
- a "long haul" (two years in many cases) to qualification with a stress on terminal examination in many courses, thus encouraging more didactic forms of pedagogy and resulting in poor retention and high failure rates (Hargreaves 1984; European Enquiry Team 1991);

- a qualifications and progression structure which is complicated and often misunderstood by students, teachers and employers (Finegold *et al.* 1990; Dearing 1996).

Labour market

At the same time, this low participation/low achievement model also features a youth labour market which provides incentives to exit from full-time education at 16, a lack of effective pay differentials in the workplace to encourage qualification (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990) and little effective liaison between employers, unions and the education service (Holland 1986).

Post-16 provision and institutional organisation

The third major aspect of the low participation/low achievement model of the education and training system - post-16 provision - affected participation and achievement in different ways in this period. Although institutional isolation characterised the majority of the 1970s and 1980s, it could be argued that the institutional competition, which began to emerge towards the end of this period, was one of the factors responsible for stimulating higher rates of post-16 participation. Towards the end of the 1980s, schools and colleges were beginning to expand the number and choice of post-16 courses they offered and there was an increasing focus on marketing these course to students (DES/DoE/Welsh Office 1991). This was supported by the expansion in the number and diversity of HE places on offer (Robertson 1992). There were also increasing attempts, during the latter part of this period, to build local progression strategies to encourage individuals or small groups of students to participate in further or higher education, some of which involved RoA (Strugnell 1985; Spours 1988; Morris 1992; RoAHE Project 1993). As Spours (1991a) points out, however, such strategies, while helping to increase participation rates did little to raise levels of achievement in national qualifications. In addition, institutional insularity and, towards the end of the 1980s greater

institutional competition, were also having a negative effect on achievement. Because of the desire to encourage students to stay on at school, rather than providing them with the impartial advice and guidance required to help them make the most appropriate choices of post-16 education or training (Finegold & Soskice 1988), there were significant numbers of students either failing to complete their post-16 courses or failing to achieve an advanced level qualification (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993).

National regulation

Finally, in terms of national regulation, Finegold & Soskice (1988) emphasise the lack of co-operation between the two government departments responsible for education and training - the Department of Education and Science and the Employment Department. They claim that this division led to a lack of strategic planning for the post-16 phase and thus had a detrimental effect on both participation and achievement.

The role of RoA in the low participation/low achievement model

The context within which Phase 1 of RoA development took place was therefore one where the 14+ qualifications system and the curriculum offer were difficult to understand, fragmented, selective and divisive, there were weak incentives for young people to participate in full-time education and training, and progression through the different parts of the education and training system, particularly for lower attaining students, was often only achieved at the local level through individually negotiated progression agreements. It is in this "nationally reactive/locally proactive" (Hodgson & Spours 1997) context that RoA is described by Hargreaves as playing a role in providing an alternative local or institutional curriculum framework and a means of accreditation designed to motivate those effectively excluded from the qualifications system (Hargreaves 1989). The NAHT (1987), the only other education policy document which makes specific

mention of the role for RoA in this period, suggests in addition that the record of achievement might be used as a mechanism for students to use when they transfer from school to further/higher education or the workplace.

The medium participation/low achievement model

The qualifications system for 14-19 year olds

As can be seen from Figure 2, many of the features of the 14-19 qualifications system remained the same in the early 1990s as they had done in the previous couple of decades and the system could thus broadly be characterised as selective with a strong academic track (Royal Society 1991; Richardson *et al.* 1995). However there were three important differences that helped to support a rise in full-time participation at 16+: a greater number of, and more diverse qualifications, in terms of, for example, assessment regimes and modularity (Richardson *et al.* 1995; NCE 1995); a more coherent and more explicit qualifications structure (IOD 1992; Richardson *et al.* 1995) and more clearly defined progression routes within qualifications (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995).

Labour market

At the same time, the pull of the youth labour market had declined further, as a result of the deepening recession, and there were definite changes in recruitment patterns which tended to encourage longer-term participation in full-time education and training (Richardson *et al.* 1995). The higher rates of achievement at GCSE, while still low in international comparative terms, were also supporting this trend by making the possibility of staying on at school or college a reality for the majority of the 16+ cohort. "Staying-on", rather than entering the labour market at 16 was thus rapidly becoming the norm (Raffe & Rumberger 1992; Richardson *et al.* 1995).

Post-16 provision and institutional organisation

There were a number of factors related to the nature of post-16 provision in the early 1990s which also served to support this increase in the full-time participation rate at 16+. Firstly, there was an expansion of the further and, at least initially, the higher education sector, reinforced by the abolition of the binary divide in the higher education sector. At the same time, central government funded schemes, such as TVEI extension, encouraged greater post-compulsory participation by focusing on progression and supporting student-centred pedagogy and processes (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995), there was a push for better careers education and guidance to ensure effective progression and greater student choice (OFSTED/Audit Commission 1993) and some evidence of further local developments designed to promote progression (Young and Watson 1992; FEU 1993).

At the same time, a series of national education reforms aimed at bringing about change in post-16 provision (e.g. the introduction of GNVQs, local management of schools and incorporation of colleges) meant that this was also a context of constant change and upheaval (Post-16 Education Centre, Unified Curriculum at 16+ Series), where there was an increase in institutional competition (OFSTED/Audit Commission 1993; Richardson *et al.* 1995). This is a context which encourages participation, but does not necessarily support greater student achievement.

National regulation

During this period, there was the beginning of a more centralised national approach to education and training, exemplified by the greater co-operation between the government departments responsible for education and training over initiatives, such as the NRA, and joint policy documents, such as the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (DES/ED/WO 1991) or on "competitiveness" (DTI 1995).

The role of RoA in the medium participation/low achievement model

This was the new context for Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. It is a picture of greater student choice and expansion in terms of post-16 provision, a weak pull from the labour market at 16, a greater focus on both participation and progression with nationally-funded initiatives at a local level, but only the beginnings of a rise in overall achievement rates. However, despite this new "nationally proactive" (Hodgson & Spours 1997) context, there is very little in the education policy literature of the 1990s that refers to a change in the role of RoA at this time. Neither does this literature look specifically at the role of the NRA, as opposed to that of earlier records of achievement. This is an area that the thesis therefore sets out to address in later chapters, arguing that the changes in the context influenced the role that RoA played in this period.

The high participation/high achievement model

Although the recent education policy literature cannot describe the features of a high participation/high achievement model in the same way as it has described the other two models - since this is a theoretical future system rather than an historical one - it does attempt to suggest what some of the features of such a system might be.

Qualifications system for 14-19 year olds

Again the literature is at its most detailed where it describes the nature of the qualifications system that such a model should have. There is widespread support for a clear, coherent and unified qualifications structure which would cater for the majority of young people until the age of 18 or 19 (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; Royal Society 1991; National Commission on Education (NCE) Briefing 1992; NCE 1993 & 1995a & b; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995). Several of the policy documents stress the importance of

high standards and public criteria (Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996). There is a great deal of emphasis on the need for the inclusion of some kind of general education component (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Esland 1990; Finegold *et al.* 1990, Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; NCE 1995) , or at least core skills (CBI 1989; Royal Society 1991; Dearing 1996) for all students. Most of the education policy literature in this area mentions the importance of including both applied and theoretical learning experiences for all students (Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; NCE 1995; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995) emphasises the value of modularisation of the curriculum (Hargreaves 1984; Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; NCE 1995), with a variety of modes of assessment (Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995) and the possibility of credit accumulation and transfer (Hargreaves 1984; Finegold *et al.* 1990; Spours 1991a; Royal Society 1991; FEU 1993; NCE 1995a &b). The importance of having clear progression routes within and between the various elements of the unified qualifications structure is highlighted in Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; Spours 1991a and the European Enquiry Team Report 1991. There is less consensus, however, over the inclusion of grades within such a system - only the reports by Finegold *et al.* (1990) and the National Commission on Education (1995a) appear to consider the need for a grading structure. More importantly for this thesis, there is little detailed discussion of RoA in this education policy literature. It is mentioned as an important feature of any future high participation/high achievement model of full-time education and training in the Finegold *et al.* 1990 and Royal Society (1991) reports, but its role as an education policy instrument is not discussed in any depth.¹¹

¹¹ There is a section of the Dearing Report (Dearing 1996) which specifically examines the role and purpose of the National Record of Achievement. This is fully discussed in Chapter 7.

Labour market

In terms of the labour market, the literature suggests that there are four major ways in which English employers and companies might contribute to the vision of a high participation/high achievement full-time education and training system. Firstly, they could recruit at the earliest at 18+ rather than 16+ and, where possible, after graduation (Mardle 1989; CBI 1989; Finegold 1990; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; NCE Briefing 1992). Secondly, they could increase differentials between the pay of qualified and unqualified employees to provide an incentive for increased qualification (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Streeck 1989; European Enquiry Team 1991; Green & Steedman 1993). Thirdly, they could increase their involvement in the organisation, delivery and funding of education and training (Streeck 1989; CBI 1989; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; Prospect Centre 1992; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995). Finally, they could introduce more flexible production methods and management styles, thus underpinning the need for better initial general education and the concept of "life-long learning" (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Mardle 1989; Streeck 1989; CBI 1989; Prospect Centre 1992; Green & Steedman 1993).

Post-16 provision and institutional organisation

Turning to post-16 provision, the recent education policy literature largely proposes national rather than local or institutional policy solutions to the continued problem of low (in international comparative terms) post-16 participation rates and institutional-level solutions to the problem of low levels of achievement. It is suggested in Finegold & Soskice (1988), Mardle (1989), the European Enquiry Team Report (1991) and Dearing (1996), for example, that there should be a further increase in the number of higher education places and specialist high-level apprenticeships for those not entering higher education. There are also proposals for more non age-related financial support for study (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Mardle 1989; CBI 1989).

To encourage high levels of achievement, on the other hand, there is a stress on creating a culture of high expectations (European Enquiry Team 1991; Green & Steedman 1993; Dearing 1996) with a focus on attainment through the use of value-added measurement to promote student achievement and stimulate institutional effectiveness (OFSTED/Audit Commission 1993; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995), underpinned by strong student support structures, such as recording of achievement (CBI 1989; European Enquiry Team 1991; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996). There is also an emphasis on the importance of good impartial careers education, counselling and guidance (Finegold & Soskice 1988; CBI 1989; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team 1991; Royal Society 1991; OFSTED/Audit Commission 1993; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996) and flexibility of access to education, in terms of age, number of entry points throughout the academic year, place and mode of study (Ainley 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; European Enquiry Team Report 1991). Some sources point to the need for changes in pedagogy (Hargreaves 1984; Finegold *et al.* 1990; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995) and many stress the importance of setting up links and networks with external agencies such as higher education institutions, LEAs, businesses and the local community to deliver a broader curriculum with more opportunities for horizontal and vertical progression (Ranson, Taylor & Brighouse 1986; Kirk 1989; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; NCE 1995a & b; Dearing 1996).

There is little in the literature about the type of institution(s) that might best deliver the kind of education which would lead to a high participation/high achievement full-time education and training system, although the IPPR Report (Finegold *et al.* 1990) argues strongly for some form of tertiary college system.

National regulation

Finally, in terms of national regulation, Finegold & Soskice (1988), Finegold *et al.* (1990) and Dearing (1996) suggest that the provision of a

unified qualifications structure to promote higher levels of participation and achievement would best be served by the setting up of a single central government department with overall responsibility for both education and training and the national qualifications structure.

The role of RoA in a high participation/high achievement model

This hypothetical high participation/high achievement context would thus appear to be one in which RoA would have to play a role at a number of different levels. At a national level, it would need to play a part in the new unified qualifications system; at a local level, it would need to become a mechanism for progression between collaborating institutions in a local area; and at an institutional level, it would have to play a part in internal assessment, recording, reporting and guidance systems as well as managing learning.

The majority of the education policy literature outlined at the beginning of the previous section (NAHT 1987 etc.) does, in fact, suggest a new or enhanced role for RoA, and sometimes specifically for the NRA, in a theoretical high participation/high achievement system of the future. In no case, except the Dearing Report (1996)¹² however, is this role described in any detail.

Turning first to the process of recording of achievement, the RSA document (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995), and the Dearing Report (1996), for example, suggest that it should be an integral part of careers education and guidance and individual action planning, that it can encourage students to become more involved in and to take control of their learning, that it can provide a focus for discussing learning needs

¹² There is a section of the Dearing Report (Dearing 1996) which specifically examines the role and purpose of the National Record of Achievement. This is fully discussed in Chapter 7.

and preferred learning styles and that it can help to ensure a form of coherence between pre and post-16 education and training.

With regard to the NRA itself, the literature briefly mentions three enhanced or new major functions for it in a future high participation/high achievement education and training system. Firstly, it is seen as a nationally accepted way of recognising all types of achievement in education, training and the workplace (CBI 1989; DES/DfE/Welsh Office 1991; Royal Society 1991; IOD 1992; NCE 1993; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996). Secondly, it is perceived as a useful tool for further/higher education institutions, training providers or employers to use in selection and recruitment (CBI 1989; IOD 1992; NCE 1993; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996; Spours & Young 1997). Thirdly, the National Commission on Education (1993) and the Dearing Report (1996) suggest that it might be used to assess on-going education or training needs when a student moves out of school into further/higher education, training or the workplace.

These are new functions for RoA because they stress progression and a relationship with the whole education system, including the qualifications structure, rather than confinement to one institution or one phase of education. There is also a focus on addressing the problems of the academic/vocational divide.

In this section, I have laid out the three models of education and training systems which not only provide the context for the three phases of RoA development, but have also played a major part in shaping the role of RoA in each of these three phases. In addition, I have suggested that the education policy literature to some extent describes the role RoA played in the low participation/low achievement English education system of the 1970s and 1980s; that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the medium participation/low achievement period of the early 1990s (particularly

as regards the role of the NRA); and finally, that the literature outlines, but does not elaborate on, the role of RoA in a future high participation/high achievement education and training system.

Content

This section focuses on the second aspect of the theoretical framework for discussion of RoA development illustrated in Figure 1 (p.26) - the content of the record of achievement. Here, I briefly describe the differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement, particularly highlighting the significance of the common national format from 1991 (a fuller discussion takes place in Chapter 4). While recognising that the context within which RoA is used strongly determines the role that this initiative plays, I argue here that the features of the record of achievement itself, and its national format in particular, have also contributed significantly to the role that RoA has played since the early 1990s with the introduction of the NRA in 1991.

The NRA is a hybrid, deriving features both from earlier Department of Employment sponsored post-16 RoA and profiling initiatives, in particular the National Record of Vocational Achievements (NROVA), and from the variety of school-based local records developed as part of the RoA movement and supported, in principle, by the Department of Education and Science from 1984 (DES/Welsh Office 1984). As later chapters of this thesis discuss in more detail, records of achievement were initially developed entirely in the secondary education sector. However, because of demands from the post-16 sector and TVEI (with its 14-19 focus) for profiles which were designed to recognise and accredit the new types of vocational education and training that were being introduced in the 1980s, the final version of the NRA which emerged in 1991 owed as much to developments post-16 as to those pre-16.

The concept of the NRA as a new type of record of achievement, which could bring together all previous types of recording of achievement in one common format, could be used with all types of learners and could be used to recognise achievements in both education and workplace settings, is highlighted in the Employment Department's *"Guidance on Summarising the Record and Completing the National Record of Achievement"* (1991). This document states that the NRA provides:

"...a single common format to summarise an individual's overall Record and to provide a standard presentational style. The ultimate aim is to produce one single system of recording achievement throughout life of which both the process encompassed by the NROVA and the summary NRA will form a part. (Employment Department, February 1991, ED 1991)

This role for the NRA is echoed in the 1991 White Paper *"Education and Training for the 21st Century"*:

"It (the NRA) is designed to present a simple record, in summary form, of an individual's achievements in education and training throughout working life." (DES/ED/Welsh Office, May 1991, p.49)

From 1993, the NRA contained eight sections - Personal Details, Personal Statement, Individual Action Plan, School/College Achievements, Attendance Sheet, Other Achievements and Experiences, Qualifications and Credits, Employment History - and was intended to be accompanied by a portfolio which contained evidence of statements made in the record (ED 1991). The NRA, therefore, had all the features of earlier records of achievement - it was designed to contain statements about all aspects of learning at different levels and to be written by a variety of people, including the student. As with earlier records of achievement, guidance notes on the NRA suggested that these statements should comment on a student's skills,

experience and attitudes as well as her/his knowledge of the curriculum studied (NCVQ 1993a &b). In addition, as the first quotation above indicates, the document, like earlier records of achievement, was intended to be part of an on-going formative recording of achievement process. There are, however, as Figure 3 below illustrates, several major distinctions between the NRA and earlier records of achievement, all of which were significant in determining the new role that RoA played in what I have called Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement (see Figure 1, p.26).

I would argue that these distinctions, when taken together, provided the potential for the NRA to play a new and different role in the education and training system from that played by earlier records of achievement, particularly in the “nationally proactive/locally reactive” (Hodgson & Spours 1997) context of the early 1990s. The new features of the NRA suggested firstly, that it, unlike earlier records of achievement, had the potential to be used as part of national education policy, particularly since it was explicitly linked with the national qualifications system through the inclusion of a mandatory (from 1992) qualifications and credits sheet (features 1 and 2); secondly, that the record was intended to be used for forward planning for progression beyond school (features 3-5); and thirdly, that it was designed to be used by all types of learners to record all types of learning in both education and workplace settings (features 6-8).

Later chapters of the thesis explore the significance of these new features of the NRA in more depth and assess to what extent their potential was limited by the context of the time. Nevertheless, if one returns to the theoretical framework for the discussion of RoA development illustrated at Figure 1, it is evident that the content of the NRA was significantly different from the content of earlier records of

Figure 3.
Differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement

NRA	Earlier RoAs
1. Single national format	Varied locally-determined format
2. Specific sheet for recording national qualifications and credits as mandatory requirement for all 16 year olds	No mandatory sheet for recording national qualifications and credits
3. Inclusion of Individual Action Plan (official sheet from 1993)	No Individual Action Plan
4. Employment history sheet	No explicit reference to employment
5. Reference to the record's use in training and the workplace	No reference to the record's use in training and the workplace
6. More emphasis on individual student/employee input	More emphasis on educational institution input
7. Stress on collection of materials for a portfolio of evidence	Little stress on inclusion of portfolio of evidence
8. Inclusion of comments on core/transferrable skills	No explicit reference to core/transferrable skills

achievement and that this was likely to have had a strong impact in Phase 2 of RoA development.

Jessup highlights some of the new features of the NRA in his chapter in Burke (Jessup 1995):

“Within the NRA system the concepts of individual action planning and the continuous recording of achievement will be promoted as well as the curriculum models that these processes assume. The NRA will encourage recording of evidence and achievements within formal qualification systems, such as the National Curriculum and NVQs, as well as the less formal achievements which have tended to be associated with records of achievements in schools. There is no intention that the various approaches to recording which have been enthusiastically and successfully developed in schools throughout the 1980s should be discontinued. There is no need for standardisation when the primary function of such recording is formative. But when students wish to summarise their achievements for employers or others outside their institution, the adoption of widely accepted conventions is desirable in order to communicate in an intelligible format.” (p.40)

In the latter part of this quotation, however, Jessup seems to be suggesting that the fact that the NRA is different from earlier records of achievement need not necessarily affect the way that the recording of achievement process is carried out. I would argue, and it is a view which the Tower Hamlets case study material described later in the thesis will support, that when the summative record of achievement changes, the nature of the recording of achievement process associated with it also changes. It would be surprising if the recording of achievement process leading up to the completion of the summative record of achievement were not affected in some way by the nature of that record, particularly when that record conforms to a national format. Because the NRA was a national initiative and included or

emphasised features which earlier records of achievement did not, it would not be surprising if it were these features which schools and colleges would also choose to emphasise with students and which would, to a certain extent, determine the way they viewed the process of recording of achievement as well as the record itself. With the NRA, the emphasis was on achievement in formal qualifications, forward planning and progression, transferable skills and experience in the workplace. It was likely, therefore, that these would also be aspects which teachers and lecturers would ensure were included in the recording of achievement process. This process must thus, of necessity, take on a different focus from that used with earlier records of achievement.

The following section of this chapter will look in more depth at the relationship between the process of recording of achievement and its product - the record of achievement - as part of the discussion on the third aspect of the theoretical framework for discussion of RoA development. What this section has attempted to highlight is firstly, that Phase 2 of RoA development represented a significant change from Phase 1 and secondly, that the content of the NRA played a strong part in determining the new role for RoA in this latter Phase.

Process/product relationship

In the previous two sections, I have discussed two of the three factors in the theoretical framework which this thesis uses to analyse the role of RoA as an educational initiative - the context within which RoA is being used and the content of the record itself. This section of the chapter looks at the third element of this framework - the relationship between the process of recording of achievement and the summative record of achievement. What I suggest in Figure 1 (p.26) is that there was a change in the balance of this relationship between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of RoA development and that this, together with the other two

elements of the framework, had an effect on the role that RoA played in these phases. I also suggest in Figure 1 that there would need to be an equal emphasis on both process and product in Phase 3 in order for the NRA to be used as a tool for supporting life-long learning.

What this section argues is that there is a need firstly to distinguish between process and product, concepts which the RoA literature tends to confuse in its definitions of RoA, and secondly to examine how the balance between the two has affected or might affect the role of RoA in the three phases of its development. These issues are then explored in greater detail in later chapters of the thesis.

I therefore begin this section with some definitions of the process of recording of achievement and records of achievement. Alongside this, I also discuss profiling and profiles because these terms were commonly used in the 1970s and 1980s as another way of describing RoA. I then highlight the confusion that arises from these definitions and suggest some of the reasons why this confusion might have arisen. Finally, I argue that there is a need to make a distinction between the process of recording of achievement and its product, the record of achievement, in order to discuss the distinctive role that each of these, as well as the balance between the two, has played or might play in the three phases of RoA development.

For the researcher who is concerned with definitions and distinctions, the literature on RoA is, in fact, somewhat unhelpful. This is partly because of the vocabulary used - the words "records of achievement" and "profiles", for example, are often used to mean the same thing - and partly because records of achievement are commonly described in terms of what they can do, rather than in terms of what they are. Even the detailed evaluation report on records of achievement, "Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Extension Work in

Pilot Schemes", (Broadfoot *et al.* 1991) admits to finding definitions problematic:

"Are Records of Achievement a set of processes, a set of documents or a set of principles?"

The report then ends up by suggesting that RoA:

"probably includes all of the following:

- a) teacher-pupil reviews;*
- b) preparation of summative documents;*
- c) preparation of 'interim-summative' documents;*
- d) pupil self-assessment;*
- e) pupil statement-writing;*
- f) target-setting;*
- g) 'unitisation' of syllabuses, use of coursework profiles etc." (p.67)*

It is, however, perhaps worth looking here at some of the definitions of profiles, records of achievement, profiling and recording of achievement that appear in the literature, in order to try to find a common starting point for discussion of the subject. It is also worth pointing out that the words profiles and profiling tend to be used more in connection with vocational or pre-vocational education, because of their link with competence-based qualifications, rather than with academic or general education.

"A profile implies an outline or representation of separable (although not necessarily separated) elements and levels, usually skills, behaviour, tasks or attitudes." (Macintosh 1982, p.58)

Records of achievement and profiles

There are two main points that emerge from the definitions of records of achievement and profiles in the RoA literature. The first is that there

appear to be no very clear distinctions being made between records of achievement and profiles - they do, in fact, as Macintosh (1988) claims, often seem to be considered as interchangeable terms.

"A profile, or record of achievement as it is often called, is an overall statement of performance provided for students upon completion of studies, whenever that may be. A profile is thus a summary at a given time of the information that has emerged from profiling." (p.4)

Having said this, it is true that the term "profile" tends to be used more in the literature on post-compulsory education and the term "record of achievement" in the literature related to the compulsory education system, as the following two quotations illustrate:

"Student profiles are documents constructed by professional teachers or trainers, describing as accurately and succinctly as possible the knowledge, skills and experiences of an individual relative to a particular curriculum." (Mansell 1982, p.5)

The summary Record of Achievement is a précis of the main collection of evidence of achievement and must be of value to all concerned: pupils and students, parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, trainers, college admissions staff and employers. It should fully reflect the purposes and principles of the assessment, recording, reporting and reviewing phases embodied within the overall processes of recording achievement." (Summary of guidance given by Training Agency and published as an annex to DES, Records of Achievement Circular 8/90, July 1990, DES 1990)

The second point is that all the definitions have several factors in common. They stress the importance of including all aspects of learning at a variety of levels in the summative record of achievement. Hitchcock's (1986) description of a profile, for example, is:

"...a document which can record assessments of students across a wide range of abilities, including skills, attitudes, personal achievements; it frequently involves the student in its formation and has a formative as well as a summative function." (p.1)

There are considerable similarities here with the following definition from SEAC's document on Primary Records of Achievement (SEAC 1990):

"It is a file or a folder including various assessments of the child's work, skills, abilities, personal qualities. Within the school curriculum as a whole, it gives details of achievements both inside and outside the classroom. It can also include a portfolio of samples of the child's work. A Record of Achievement, which is sometimes called a profile, forms the basis for the summary report which is needed each year. (p.5)

There is often a suggestion, as in Fairbairn's (Fairbairn 1988) definition below, that the commentary, which should be written by a variety of people including the student, should contain statements about a student's skills, experience and attitudes as well as her/his knowledge of the curriculum studied.

"...a method of presenting information on a student's achievements, abilities, skills, experiences and qualities from a range of assessments, and often from a range of assessors, including the students themselves." (p.60)

Finally, there is often an emphasis on the fact that the record/profile should have both a formative and a summative function (i.e. it should be used by the student and/or teacher for recording on-going progress, as well as by employers or further/higher education providers for recruitment and selection).

"It has always been intended by FEU that profiles were to be both a formative and a summative recording format; formative in that they are built up progressively over a period, with the active participation of the learner, and as a way of monitoring progress through an agreed curriculum; summative in that they provide a record of attainment which is available to employers and future scheme providers..."
(Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit 1982, p.48)

There are evidently difficulties with regard to this last feature in that any document serving two such different purposes, and any definition which makes no distinction between them, is likely to lead to a lack of conceptual clarity.

I will return to this problem after looking at some of the definitions of the process of recording of achievement or profiling that appear in the literature.

Recording of achievement and profiling

There are fewer definitions of these processes, possibly because, as has been mentioned above, they are often described within, and form part of, definitions of profiles or records of achievement. Where separate definitions exist, the emphasis, as with definitions on profiles or records of achievement, is on recording student achievement in its broadest sense:

"Profiling is the name given to the ongoing process of recording information about achievement, interpreted as widely as possible, as both courses and students develop." (Macintosh 1988 p.6)

and on valuing and recognising alternatives to the type of curriculum that is defined by qualifications and awards:

"The whole issue of recording achievement is the manifestation of an alternative value system which has education and people at the heart of it." (Webb 1990, p.80).

There is also occasionally the hint of institutional accountability in some definitions of recording of achievement:

"The process of recording of achievement can provide the vehicle through which students' receipt of and progress within an entitlement curriculum are recorded and monitored." (Brown et al. 1990, p.155)

as indeed there is in Stronach's definition of profiles:

"...profiles are a form of sales presentation for pupils, especially for those pupils who lack the currency of formal qualifications, but also for schools in the wake of the accountability debate" (Stronach 1989, p.162)

Problems of definition

Clarity about the nature of what is being described is again not immediately apparent in these definitions. Difficulties over definitions can perhaps be understood, however, if one looks at what is being described. The words "profiles" and "records of achievement" have probably become confused in the literature for two major reasons.

Firstly, with a disparate and localised initiative such as RoA, precise definitions and differences of vocabulary, if not actively encouraged by those writing about the subject, were probably considered of secondary importance to the spread of the RoA initiative. Prior to the 1984 DES Statement of Policy, a "movement" (Broadfoot 1986a) such as the RoA initiative relied on the participation of enthusiasts to keep developments alive. In some local developments, profiles formed part of records of achievement, in others profiles were themselves seen as

records of achievement. Stressing the differences between the two would have served no purpose for those who wished to promote the RoA movement - the terms appeared, therefore, to be used rather interchangeably in order to encourage consensus rather than division.

Secondly, during the late 1970s and the 1980s, the terms "profiles" and "profiling", as I have pointed out above, tended to be used more often than "records of achievement" and "recording of achievement" in post-16, particularly vocational, education and training contexts. For an initiative such as the RoA "movement", which wished to embrace both sectors, the terms were likely to overlap and to be used generally to mean the same thing.

In addition, and more importantly, there are bound to be confusions with definitions if, as the National Evaluation Report on Records of Achievement, (Broadfoot *et al.* 1991) quoted above does, one tries to sum up an activity (recording of achievement) and an object (a record of achievement) in the same definition. It is often stressed in the RoA literature that one should not separate the process of recording of achievement from its product - the record of achievement - because the quality and integrity of the second is dependent on the existence of the first. This advice, however useful when developing the practice of recording of achievement, has, unfortunately, rather confused the issue of definitions.

Although the connection between recording of achievement and a record of achievement (and similarly between profiling and a profile) is an important one, since they are both strongly interrelated in practice - the first being the process which leads to the second - there is, nevertheless, an obvious distinction between a process and a product. Moreover, there is a strong argument for each to be defined and described separately in order to assess the different roles that each, and

the balance between the two, has played or might play as part of the English education and training system.

In fact, the more general policy and research literature on assessment (notably Rowntree 1977; Nuttall 1986; Murphy & Torrance 1988; Gipps 1990) does discuss in some depth the difference between formative assessment (of which recording of achievement could be considered one type), whose main purpose is diagnostic, and summative assessment (such as that required for a record of achievement), which often has a selective function. As the literature points out, the former is something internal to the education system, or even one educational institution, whereas the latter immediately becomes connected with qualifications and agencies outside the educational institution or even the education system itself.

Although there are references in the RoA literature to the distinction between recording of achievement as a purely internal educational process for supporting learners and records of achievement which relate to the outside world, definitions of the two still remain unhelpfully interrelated and the problems and tensions that this interrelationship creates are never fully explored. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there is also little discussion of how the particular features of any specific record of achievement affect the type of recording of achievement that takes place. Yet, as the previous section argued, and other parts of the thesis echo, the different features of the NRA, in comparison with earlier records of achievement, have undoubtedly had an effect on the type of recording of achievement process that has taken place since its introduction.

The distinction between recording of achievement and records of achievement is a significant one for this thesis. The former, as an internal formative educational process, can, in theory, be defined or designed by teachers and learners in a single education institution and

can be used simply as a mechanism for supporting and managing learning. The latter, on the other hand, since its main purpose is communication with others beyond the immediate place of learning, is forced to relate to any other existing summative assessment system, such as national qualifications, as well as to individuals outside their place of learning. This distinction is given particular importance in the latter half of the thesis, where there is a discussion of the differential effects that the national education context has on the use of the process of recording of achievement and on the use of the summative NRA. External national contextual factors outside the individual school or college have a more limiting effect on the role of the record itself than on the role of the process of recording of achievement. At the same time, as the previous section argued, and the case study in Chapter 5 goes on to explore, the features of the record itself are significant in terms of the type of process that takes place to support it.

These, I would argue, are the reason why, at various points, this thesis will make a clear distinction between the concepts of recording of achievement as a process and the record of achievement as the product of such a process, as well as discussing the important interrelationship between the two.

Conclusions

This chapter has set out a theoretical framework for the discussion of the role that RoA has played and might play in the education and training system in this country. I have argued that there are three major elements of this framework- context, content and process/product relationship - each of which, in conjunction with the other two, has had an effect on the three phases of RoA development - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; NRA as a national

policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement, and NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning (see Figure 1, p.26).

What later parts of the thesis will argue is that in each of these three phases context has had the greatest impact, both in shaping the form that the initiative has taken and in determining the outcomes that it has had as an educational tool. However, as this chapter has argued, and Chapters 5 and 6 will demonstrate, the content of the record of achievement initiative became of greater significance in the second phase of development, with the introduction of the NRA. Finally, in all three phases, but more particularly in the last two, the balance between the emphasis on the process of recording of achievement and the summative document itself has had an impact on the role of RoA as an initiative.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Assessment and Research Literature on RoA: Confusions and Limitations

Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced a theoretical framework for analysing the historical and the potential future role of RoA in the English education and training system. Drawing largely on recent education policy literature, it argued that any discussion of this role is best approached by an examination of three factors - context, content and process/product relationship. The chapter also introduced the concept of three phases of RoA development - Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; Phase 2 (1991-1997) NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement; Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. This chapter builds on that discussion by reviewing the policy and research literature which relates to RoA and the specific research and evaluation literature on RoA. This review supports the case for using a new theoretical framework for analysing the role of RoA in the English education and training system.

The chapter argues that current sources on RoA have four major limitations in the way that they analyse and discuss the role of RoA. Firstly, RoA is often discussed either in a relatively context-free way which has led to rhetoric or critique, or there is a focus on implementation issues which form the basis of practical guidelines for practitioners. What is not strongly in evidence is critical analysis of the rationale for or value of this type of development which is grounded in the wider context. Secondly, discussion and analysis of

RoA are largely confined to Phase 1 of RoA development and, where there is discussion of Phase 2, there is little or no consideration of the different 14-19 national education policy context of the 1990s, nor the significance of the change in the format of the record itself (content). Thirdly, there is little discussion in the literature of the role of RoA in post-16 education. Fourthly, confusion arises from the fact that there is little distinction made between the role of the process of recording of achievement and the role of the record of achievement itself. The final section of the chapter therefore argues the case for using the theoretical model introduced in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - as a new way of conceptualising the role of RoA and thus of examining Phases 1 and 2 of RoA development in more detail (Chapters 3 to 6 of the thesis) and for developing a model of a potential Phase 3 (Chapter 7).

The nature of the literature on RoA

The policy and research literature on assessment which relates to RoA and the specific research and evaluation literature on RoA consists of five inter-related but distinct categories - the literature on different methods of assessment and their effects on the curriculum, teaching and learning; large- and small-scale local and national evaluation studies; MA dissertations; local and national support and development documentation and government reports and policy documents.

These different types of literature were, of course, written for different purposes and their content to some extent reflects this. One would expect the local and national support and development documentation on RoA, for example, to concentrate mainly on practical implementation issues and to argue the case for practitioners becoming involved in the introduction of RoA. However, what is unusual about the RoA literature is that the more

general assessment literature and the national evaluation studies - where one might expect a more critical analysis of RoA - often also largely concern themselves with implementation issues rather than questioning the whole concept and role of RoA in a more detached and analytical way.

It is perhaps worth considering here some of the reasons for this overlap in the literature, because it helps to explain some of its limitations for the education researcher of the 1990s.

Initially, as Chapter 3 will discuss in some depth, RoA began as a "grassroots" development - that is, it was largely practitioner-initiated and practitioner-led. It was developed by teachers mainly as a response to dissatisfaction with the existing qualifications system (Hargreaves 1984; Macintosh 1986; Broadfoot 1989) and as a progressive attempt to encourage more student-centred and locally-relevant education (Hitchcock 1986; Murphy and Torrance 1988; Munby *et al.* 1989). With these origins, it is not surprising that the literature is often also dominated by practitioner concerns and debates rather than by theoretical arguments about the value of and rationale for RoA. Moreover, because in the 1980s the RoA "movement" was equated, often in an uncritical way, with progressive educational thinking of the time, it would have taken a brave educational commentator to build a strong critique of RoA. As James (1989) comments:

"Student profile assessment and RoA schemes have developed with such rapidity that they seem to bear the stamp of an evangelical movement. As with many such movements, the emphasis on development and action often outweighs critical reflection." (p.150)

Even the authors of the two major national evaluation studies of RoA - *Recording of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Pilot Schemes* (Broadfoot *et al.* 1988), and the DES *Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Extension Work in Pilot Schemes* (Broadfoot *et al.* 1991) - sometimes appear to be caught up in the "religious fervour" (Hargreaves 1989) of the "movement".

The assessment and the research and evaluation literature on RoA is therefore confusing and less clear-cut in its perspective than one might expect. "Scepticism" and "watchfulness", as Hargreaves (1989) points out, are not always in evidence.

There are two other features of this literature which make it problematic for the researcher who is attempting to appraise RoA as a policy instrument for the 14-19 education system in the 1990s and beyond. Firstly, most of the literature on RoA was written in the 1980s and secondly, the majority of it refers to the pre- rather than the post-16 phase of education.

On the first issue, although the actual development work on RoA still continued into the 1990s, at this time there appears to have been less interest in it as a topic for debate at practitioner or academic researcher level. This might partly have been as a result of there being less curriculum development time for the type of "grassroots movement", on which RoA was founded in the 1980s, when significant national initiatives, such as GCSEs and the National Curriculum, were being introduced pre-16 and new vocational qualifications post-16. Implementing these national changes was what preoccupied the practitioners of the early 1990s and these were the topics on which the major educational debates took place. The "grassroots agenda", where it existed in the early 1990s, was focused on developments like modularisation and credit accumulation and

transfer, which work within, rather than provide an alternative to the national curriculum and qualifications framework. It was on national developments such as GCSE, vocational qualifications, school-based teacher education and the National Curriculum that key authors (e.g. Broadfoot, Hargreaves, Macintosh), who had written about RoA in the 1980s, also began to concentrate their attention in the early 1990s.

The second issue - the fact that the RoA literature concentrates more on education pre-16 than post-16 - is something which this thesis identifies as a gap in the literature and attempts, in some way, to address in its final chapters.

Five major interpretations of RoA

There are five major ways in which RoA is viewed in the assessment and specific RoA literature. The first three focus on RoA's positive attributes and the way that this initiative has been used as a mechanism for supporting social equity and the comprehensive ideal. The last two views belong more to the realm of critique, although they are sometimes also touched on by authors who broadly support RoA and emphasise its potentially positive aspects.

Firstly, RoA is seen as a tool for promoting a secondary school curriculum which embraces and recognises a broader range of learning experiences than those demanded by national examinations (e.g. Hitchcock 1986; Murphy & Torrance 1988; Hargreaves, A. 1989). Secondly, there are those who argue that RoA provides a mechanism for encouraging the development of student-centred assessment and changes in teaching and learning styles (e.g. Broadfoot 1986a; Munby *et al.* 1989; Hargreaves, A. 1989). Thirdly, it is viewed as a way of recognising and accrediting achievements that

are not recognised or accredited by existing qualifications (e.g. Burgess & Adams 1985; Hitchcock 1986; Munby *et al.* 1989). Fourthly, RoA is seen as a component of post-16 vocational education and qualifications and a feature of the "new vocationalism" (which is often viewed as a negative rather than a positive concept), but of little relevance to post-16 academic education or qualifications (e.g. Ranson & Travers 1986; Ainley 1988; Harland 1991). Finally, there are those who argue that RoA can be used as a mechanism of social control which divides learners into "academic sheep" or "vocational goats" and which intrudes into every aspect of a young person's life (e.g. Hitchcock 1986; Hargreaves 1986 & 1989; Stronach 1989).

While recognising that there is some overlap between the first three categories and also, in some senses, between the last two, I propose to examine each of these viewpoints in turn.

RoA as a tool for promoting a broader curriculum

Much of the assessment literature of the 1980s is preoccupied with criticism of the role of public examinations in the English education system. Authors such as Burgess & Adams (1980 & 1985); Nuttall (1984); Hitchcock (1986); Pearson (1986); Macintosh (1986); Broadfoot (1986b); Edworthy (1988), Murphy & Torrance (1988); Hall (1989); and Munby *et al.* (1989) argue that the public examinations system encourages schools to focus on a narrowly-based subject-specific and out-moded curriculum and to limit their view of achievement. These writers contend that achievements other than those accredited by public examinations are not recognised and that students are therefore effectively divided into achievers with good progression possibilities and social prospects and non-achievers with poor progression possibilities and social prospects. The secondary school curriculum, they argue, is largely geared to the former type of student.

Broadfoot (1989) goes further and claims that this dissatisfaction with public examination systems is a general European, rather than simply a UK, view:

"The current attempts to reform assessment procedures in the UK and Europe more generally certainly emanate from the widespread and multiple criticisms which have been made of traditional examinations." (p.8)

These writers are all also in agreement in proposing RoA as a progressive alternative to existing national qualifications, claiming that it is more suited to the idea of a broad and relevant curriculum for the comprehensive secondary school. As Hargreaves (1989) says:

"Given such developments in National Curriculum policy towards increased specialisation and differentiation, it is in assessment that the last vestiges of comprehensive ambition and the continuing attempts to secure some kind of common social cohesion are being invested." (p.110)

He emphasises the fact that RoA actively encourages the recognition of a curriculum broader than that covered by national qualifications. This, he argues, allows for local curriculum innovation, while at the same time providing a framework which can embrace the achievement of all learners, including those who are not able to obtain recognition for their learning through the national qualifications system.

As well as providing an alternative to public examinations, it is argued in much of the literature that RoA encourages a move towards a more student-centred education and greater teacher control over the curriculum (Murphy & Torrance 1988; Munby *et al.* 1989).

This, in turn, is seen by writers such as Hargreaves (1989) and Gipps (1990) as providing a form of motivation for the whole of the student cohort rather than simply for those who are likely to gain some form of national certification.

"The importance of motivational factors in stimulating educational policy change can be seen very clearly in the development of pupil profiles and RoAs." (Gipps 1990, p.111)

Finally, Garforth & Macintosh (1986) suggest that RoA promotes *"curriculum unity rather than curriculum division"* (p.135) because it encourages those who use it to see learning as an holistic experience, rather than as a discrete set of subjects or topics.

RoA was thus seized on by academic writers (e.g. Hitchcock 1986; Burgess & Adams 1985; Murphy & Torrance 1988) and practitioners as a key educational tool in the 1980s, when the effects of comprehensivisation, the demands for a more relevant curriculum to prepare young people more effectively for life after school and the raising of the school leaving age were making themselves felt in secondary schools. They saw it as a way of supporting both breadth and equity by promoting a more student-centred, relevant, comprehensive and broader curriculum and by recognising all types of achievement and thus motivating all types of students.

RoA as a means of encouraging the development of student-centred assessment and changes in teaching and learning styles

Because, as has already been pointed out above, RoA was seen by most of the writers in this field as an alternative to the formal examination system of the 1980s, it is assessment and pedagogic reform, rather than curriculum reform, that provides the major focus of the RoA literature. It is in this area too that the greatest claims for it are made. It is also in this area that the evaluation

studies provide some evidence for some of the claims that are made about the effects of RoA (DES 1988; Broadfoot *et al.* 1988; Employment Department 1988; Broadfoot *et al.* 1991).

The last, for example says:

"It should be emphasised at the outset that the positive impact of RoA systems on the working practices of teachers and sixth-form students was profound." (p.13)

This report claims that, in those schools where RoA systems were working, teachers were clearer about the aims and objectives of courses, student were involved in more precisely defined target-setting in relation to their learning programmes and teachers were able to identify student learning difficulties or study problems earlier in their courses.

Some of the literature makes very broad, generalised claims for what RoA can do in terms of reforming assessment and pedagogy. Murphy & Torrance (1988), for example, say that it is:

"...the most appropriate focus for an alternative approach to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in our schools." (p.110)

and Webb (1990) even goes so far as to claim that it is:

"...an alternative value system which has education and people at the heart of it..." (p.80)

However, there are three major common and, in terms of assessment and pedagogy, more specific views described in the literature of what RoA can hope to achieve. First, it is suggested that

RoA stimulates greater student involvement in the assessment and learning process; second, that it encourages the integration of assessment into the learning process, rather than seeing it as an externally imposed, summative bolt-on; and third, that it brings about changes in teaching styles to facilitate this new form of assessment.

The view that RoA is more democratic and less hierarchical than other forms of assessment and that it involves students more actively in their own assessment and learning is something that all the writers on RoA express. It is often tightly bound up with the idea of improving pupil motivation - a key concern of the 1980s. Hargreaves (1984), for example, suggests that RoA provides a framework for breaking the curriculum down into more manageable units of learning and that this is likely to be motivational for working-class pupils who would otherwise find the two-year haul to O Level or CSE unmanageable. Fairbairn (1988), Hargreaves (1989) and Stevens & Dowd (1989) suggest that RoA allows pupils to work towards developing their own personal skills and to track their own personal growth. Ranson, Taylor & Brighouse (1986) Munby *et al.* (1989) and Pole (1993) express a similar idea when they suggest that RoA can be a way of introducing an element of student-negotiation into the curriculum and its assessment. According to a large number of writers, notably Broadfoot (1986), Hitchcock (1986), Murphy & Torrance (1988) and Munby *et al.* (1989), RoA ensures that assessment becomes part of the formative learning process rather than a separate summative exercise. Finally, Hitchcock (1986), Hargreaves (1989) and Pole (1993) claim that RoA is likely to bring about improvements in teacher/pupil relationships as well as in pedagogy. All of these claims are substantiated to some degree in the HMI and national evaluation reports on RoA (DES 1988; Broadfoot *et al.* 1988 & 1991).

RoA is therefore heralded as a means of bringing about a more relevant and individualised approach to assessment for students, while, at the same time, encouraging teachers to be more explicit about what they teach and what their students are expected to learn.

RoA as a method of recognising and accrediting achievement

Previous sections of this chapter have discussed how RoA was seen in the 1980s largely as an alternative to national qualifications, especially for those students who were likely otherwise to receive no formal recognition of their achievements in secondary education. The fact that so many students were leaving secondary education with no form of accreditation was a much debated problem in the 1980s. RoA was seen as a possible solution to this problem. For this reason, it was seen by many as something which related to the “second quartile” (Ainley 1988), an “adjunct to national qualifications” (Baumgart 1986), for use on “Newsam courses” (Burgess 1988) and as a response to the raising of the school leaving age (Broadfoot *et al.* 1988). This view can be summed up in the following words from the Hargreaves Report of 1984:

“The impulse for this innovation (the London Record of Achievement) has been the teachers’ concern to offer to older pupils, especially those who achieve little or nothing in public examinations, a proper Record of their achievements in secondary education.” (para. 3.11.8)

Other writers saw RoA as a tool for recording and recognising students’ broader educational and non-academic achievements (Hargreaves 1989; Dale 1990; Crang 1990;). Some went further and suggested that RoA had the potential, in the long run, to replace the examinations system (Burgess & Adams 1985) and that records of achievement should be seen as *“valid alternatives to public examinations and not simply as extensions to them”* (Garforth &

Macintosh 1986, p.109). In this way it was felt that RoA-type assessment and certification was not only *“expected to develop in order to accommodate expanding conceptions of achievement”* but *“even, some would argue, to lead them”*. (Fairbairn 1988, p.38)

However, amidst this optimism in the power of RoA as an alternative assessment and certification system, particularly for those unlikely to gain national certification, a few writers do express concern about RoA’s currency outside the secondary school (Swales 1979; Hargreaves 1989; Dale 1990; Crang 1990).

RoA as an accepted element in vocational qualifications post-16

As has been mentioned earlier, there is less in the literature about RoA in post-16 education than in pre-16 education. Where it is referred to in relation to post-compulsory education, it is usually in connection with pre-vocational or vocational education and training, such as Youth Opportunities Programmes, “Newsam courses”, CPVE or NVQs. During the 1980s, vocational, and particularly pre-vocational education, was often seen as providing an alternative for the “non-academic” lower-achieving student. RoA, together with profiling, was seen as a useful tool for such courses. It was advocated as a mechanism for providing an on-going record of student achievements in courses which were almost exclusively continuously assessed and criterion-referenced: a record which could also then serve as a form of accreditation to be used with employers or further education providers. Since the early pre-vocational and vocational courses were entirely new, and therefore meant very little in terms of currency with employers or further education providers, there was a desire to spell achievements out in order to make them more explicit and better understood.

For this reason, post-16, RoA is largely associated with pre-vocational and vocational qualifications and courses rather than

with academic or general education (Harland 1991; Mansell 1982) and is sometimes viewed with suspicion as being part of the “new vocationalism”, which was seen as introducing a damaging and limited instrumentalism into education (Ranson & Travers 1986; Ainley 1988). Perhaps this goes some way to explain the reasoning behind the final major way in which RoA is viewed in the literature - that is as a mechanism of social control which divides learners into “academic sheep” or “vocational goats” and limits their educational and life chances.

RoA as a mechanism of social control.

The literature describes three ways in which RoA, far from being used as a benign tool for promoting a more democratic and student-centred form of education, can instead be used as a mechanism to exert some form of social control through the education system.

Firstly, RoA was seen by some writers in the field as a divisive tool for reinforcing “*the role of the schools in confirming the brainlessness of the many, while selecting the few for positions of management and control.*” (Ainley 1988, p.140) or for guiding students to specific and limited future roles in life (Hitchcock 1986). Hargreaves (1989) expresses concern that unless assessment-led reforms such as RoA are developed in conjunction with a sense of curriculum purpose, then the desire for equity underpinning the concept of comprehensivisation could be undermined and RoA or profiles could be used to “*adjust*” students “*to any purpose within the social system*” (p.114). In similar vein Broadfoot (1986a & 1996) likens RoA to the French system of *orientation* which, she says:

“*...conceals under a pretence of ‘equal but different’ a process of sorting and selecting pupils according to their academic level for different scholastic and ultimately occupational routes...*” (Broadfoot 1986a, p.63)

This idea of dividing students into two types - the academic and the vocational - is related closely to the second way in which the literature views RoA as exerting some sort of dangerous social control. Several writers suggest that RoA can become a method of teacher/classroom control which is all the more invidious because of its subtlety. RoA with its methods of student-based assessment and negotiated learning is seen by some of the writers in this field as an all-pervasive method of asserting teacher control - a form of "*pupil-focused but not pupil-centred assessment*" (Stronach 1989). Stronach argues strongly that profiling is not a genuine ipsative assessment process, rather it encourages students to measure themselves against "ideal-typical constructions" of the compliant worker. The "warm and participative" process of profiling deceives pupils into thinking that they have some form of power over their lives, when, in fact, this is invested elsewhere.

"It is the insertion of the warm within the cold that marks the new transition ritual of which profiling is a central part. It indicates, therefore, a ritual whose pedagogy involves a manipulative rather than an assertive allocative assessment. That ritual promises warmth and a fantasy of superiority or at least equality; but it delivers a permanent liminality for an age group, a deferment of adult status until they are trained, developed, made employable." (Stronach 1989, p.176)

Stronach's views on the manipulative nature of RoA and profiling are much more extreme than others writing on the same topic. Nevertheless, Nuttall & Goldstein 1984; Broadfoot 1986a; Finn 1987; Phillips 1989 and Hargreaves 1989 all express concern that RoA offers the promise of negotiated learning and student control but can actually be very teacher-directed, can be used to restrict student individuality, can lead to stereotyping and denies the opportunity for objective testing of pupils' abilities and capacities.

Finally, Hitchcock (1986) and Phillips (1989) see RoA as potentially limiting pupils' privacy by intruding into every aspect of their lives.

This is self-evidently a very different view of RoA than those expressed in the previous four sections.

Conclusion: a 1990s' perspective on the RoA literature

From what has been discussed above, it is apparent that there are limitations in the literature on RoA for the researcher of the 1990s who wishes to obtain a clear picture either of the historical role of RoA as a policy instrument for the English 14+ education system or of its potential future role within that system. These limitations are of three major types:

1. RoA is often discussed in a relatively context-free way with a focus on implementation issues rather than on critical analysis of the rationale for or value of this initiative, hence the five different and sometimes contradictory viewpoints discussed above and the strong division into rhetoric or critique;
2. there is a lack of discussion in the literature of the changed role of RoA in the 1990s - what this thesis refers to as Phase 2 of RoA development (1991-1997) - despite the different national education policy context at this time and the introduction of the NRA for all learners from 16+;
3. there is little distinction made in the literature between the role of the process of recording of achievement and the role of the record itself or of their interrelationship.

What the literature as a whole presents, I would argue, is a somewhat confusing and incomplete basis for analysis of either the past or the future role of RoA in the English education system. The first three interpretations of RoA described earlier in the chapter

(RoA as a tool for promoting a broader curriculum, RoA as a means of encouraging the development of student-centred methods of assessment and changes in teaching and learning styles and RoA as a method of recognising and accrediting achievement) all present a positive view of RoA and, while recognising some of its limitations, regard it as a useful and progressive tool for educational change. The final two interpretations of RoA, however, (RoA as an accepted element in vocational qualifications but of little relevance to academic and general education post-16 and RoA as a mechanism of social control) present a rather different picture of RoA.

Moreover, as has been stated earlier in the chapter, much of the literature on RoA is of an evangelising nature, stemming from the fact that RoA was seen as a progressive “movement” in the 1980s and had a great deal of teacher and lecturer support. The literature brims over with enthusiasm for RoA as some sort of panacea for the problems of a qualifications-led and divisive secondary education system, without a full appreciation of the context within which it is expected to operate. RoA is associated with power for both teachers and students and is heralded as one of the mechanisms by which the vision of a broad and balanced comprehensive education system might be realised.

This enthusiasm is such that, despite *caveats* from the HMI Report on RoA (1988):

“There has as yet been no discernible improvement in levels of achievement that can actually be clearly attributed to RoAs.” (p.4)

“The introduction of RoA schemes have made relatively little impact on schools’ policies and practices for the whole curriculum and its assessment” (p.35)

the two national evaluation studies on RoA (Broadfoot *et al.* 1988 & 1991) still feel able to make considerable claims for the initiative, encourage its continuation and focus on implementation issues rather than on a critical appraisal of the role and value of RoA in the changing education context of the time. The 1988 report, for example, concludes:

"...RoAs pose a challenge to schools and teachers that is perhaps unprecedented in formal education. They make novel and substantial demands on time, energy, resources and skill across a wide range of fronts...Despite all this, there has been no serious challenge to the policy itself, no turning back. Our evidence, like the responses to the national Steering Committee, confirms a continuing consensus that RoAs can raise the standard of a pupil's learning by raising their involvement in, their commitment to, and their enjoyment of the educational process." (p.178)

For this thesis, which concerns itself with an examination of the historical and the potential future role of RoA in the English education system, this type of analysis is problematical. There are two additional problems in using the literature on RoA as a basis of analysis. Firstly, most of the discussion of RoA is to be found in sources written in the 1980s: there is therefore little or no reference to the NRA, which is a central feature of this thesis. Secondly, these sources on RoA tend to concentrate on compulsory rather than on post-compulsory education, and thus neglect significant national contextual factors that relate to the post-compulsory phase, such as increasing rates of full-time participation in post-16 education and the changing nature of the post-compulsory student cohort in the 1990s.

During the 1980s - the late 1980s in particular - RoA received a considerable amount of attention in the general literature on assessment, as well as in that literature specifically devoted to RoA. In the early 1990s, however, although RoA appears briefly as a discussion point in the more general literature on assessment (e.g. Gipps 1990; Torrance 1994), it is clear that this is a subject which has "gone off the boil" somewhat. Until the RSA and Dearing reports (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Dearing 1996), it is only in the specific RoA development and evaluation literature (e.g. Further Education Staff College 1990; Crang 1990; National Council for Vocational Qualifications 1990; Department of Education and Science 1991; Pole 1993), which concentrates on implementation issues rather than on critical analysis, that RoA appears to remain a live issue in the early 1990s.

There is thus a gap in the literature which this thesis attempts to some extent to fill in two ways. Firstly, it proposes a broader and different way of analysing the role of RoA by using the theoretical framework for analysis set out in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship. This is intended to provide a new way of conceptualising the role of RoA which goes beyond a focus on implementation issues or decontextualised rhetoric and critique. Secondly, it considers the role of RoA in the post-compulsory as well as the compulsory phase of education. It thus opens up the possibility of examining the role of RoA across, between and even beyond one phase of education, thereby providing the opportunity to assess its role in the national education system as a whole.

In this way, the thesis uses the theoretical framework it has developed to attempt to overcome some of the limitations in the current literature on RoA. It thus provides a firmer basis of analysis for discussion of the three phases of RoA development - Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education

initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; Phase 2 (1991-1997) NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement, Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning - which form the subject of later chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 3

Records of Achievement: From "Grassroots"¹³ Initiative to National Policy Instrument

Introduction

Chapter 1 argued for the importance of context in determining the role that RoA has played over the past two decades or might play in the future. This chapter traces changes in the context for Phase 1 of RoA development (RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers) in some depth and then touches on the context for Phase 2 (NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement). In particular, it considers the various roles that different key players and agencies within the education system have intended RoA¹⁴ to play and attempts to explain why this grassroots initiative became an instrument of national policy in the early 1990s. The chapter concludes with a short section which begins to examine the role of the National Record of Achievement (NRA) as a national policy instrument in the early 1990s and discusses why it gained the support of such a wide range of agencies and key players in the English education system at that time. This final section also briefly raises the issue of how effective an educational initiative of this type is likely to be which works alongside and is shaped by, but never fundamentally challenges one of the major

¹³ The word grassroots is in quotation marks because it is taken from the following statement by Broadfoot in "Profiles and Records of Achievement: A Review of Issues and Practice" (1986a):

" If national guidelines are successfully imposed, the effect may be to dampen the grassroots enthusiasm so characteristic of the early stages of the (recording of achievement) movement..." (p.230)

¹⁴ Although, as I have argued in Chapter 1, recording of achievement and records of achievement are obviously not one and the same thing - one is a process, the other is the product that results from that process - in this chapter, for the sake of brevity, I shall use the abbreviation RoA to include both the process and the product, except where it is necessary to distinguish between the two.

elements of the national education policy context - the national qualifications system.

Since RoA is most often described as an assessment initiative, it could be argued that a study of assessment policy and practice within the English education system would be sufficient to arrive at an understanding of the place of RoA within that system. However, as all of the literature on RoA points out, assessment is so fundamental to the English education system, because of its potential for regulating the curriculum, that a discussion of the origins of and context for any assessment reform would be superficial without an examination of that system itself.

As Broadfoot says, for example, in "Selection, Certification and Control: Social Issues in Educational Assessments" (1984):

"A proper understanding of the combination of pressures which has led to such a policy formulation can only be achieved by tracking the way in which changes in public assessment procedures reflect changing educational priorities which are in turn a product of broader developments in the social and economic context." (p.199)

In attempting to trace the historical origins of RoA, this chapter draws on literature which provides an overview of general trends in twentieth century national education policy, particularly from 1944 onwards, as well as on the more specific literature on assessment and RoA.

Following Broadfoot's point quoted above, I propose to limit the scope of this chapter to sources in the following two areas, since these provide relevant information about the context for assessment reform in England in the latter part of this century:

1. literature which examines the major assessment-related educational, social or economic problems that the English education system, as part of the state apparatus, has been expected to address since 1944;
2. sources which describe the nature and role of the different agencies and key players in the English education system, who have, in their different ways, used RoA to respond to these educational, social or economic problems.

It seems in some ways rather artificial to divorce the education system from its key players and agencies - since these essentially constitute the education system. However, because these agencies and key players have such a vital role to play in manipulating and changing education policy, through their contradictory actions and attitudes, I have considered it necessary in the latter part of this chapter to provide a detailed separate consideration of how they have responded to issues and subsequent policy developments related to RoA. The attitudes and actions of the various key players and agencies are particularly relevant for RoA, as I will demonstrate, because they help to explain why and how a piecemeal "grassroots" initiative became an instrument of national education policy.

Major assessment-related problems since 1944

As soon as one starts to delve into the literature about the English education system, one is immediately plunged into sophisticated arguments about the political nature of the "state" and the powerful role of education within it. Because of education's universal application and central place in society - we are all obliged to expose ourselves to some form of it at some point in our lives - its power and significance as a potential social control mechanism or instrument of state policy immediately poses political and philosophical questions for educationalists.

Although these questions are important and absorbing, they are not the main concern of this chapter. It is, of course, impossible to ignore the political dimensions of education policy and practice. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the education system itself will be characterised largely as a neutral instrument of state policy and a part of the state apparatus: something then to be used and shaped to some degree by whichever political party or pressure group wields power at the time. Something, moreover, which is seen by all the key players involved - parents, learners, politicians, administrators, educators, employers, community groups - as potentially capable of addressing a wide range of social and economic issues. Although, as this thesis points out in several places, this is not as easy to achieve as some of these key players might hope or wish.

In "Curriculum and Assessment Reform" (1989), Andy Hargreaves provides a useful analysis of the major educational, social and economic issues that the education system has been expected to address since 1944. I have chosen to draw on his analysis extensively here because it gives a distinctive role to RoA. Hargreaves brings together what he calls "social and educational crises" and divides them into three major stages, each of which leads to and overlaps with the one that follows:

Late 1950s-mid 1970s - "The Crisis of Administration and Reorganisation" - where there is a general consensus about the role of the education system;

Mid 1970s-early 1980s - "The Crisis of Curriculum and Belief" - where competing internal views make themselves felt;

Early 1980s - "The Crisis of Motivation and Assessment" - where there is a clear lack of consensus about the function of the English education system.

He then goes on to explore what, in his view, the "policy focus" for each stage has been - comprehensive education, common curricular entitlement and RoA respectively.

Although Hargreaves's analysis is helpful as a tool for examining education policy and the emergence of RoA as a policy instrument, it has two major limitations in terms of its use here. The first is that Hargreaves's three stages do not explicitly highlight the economic issues of the time. The second is that Hargreaves's analysis suggests that RoA really only emerges as a policy instrument in the 1980s, whereas Broadfoot (1986a & 1986b), Fairbairn (1988), Burgess and Adams (1980) and others who write specifically about RoA, would claim that it makes an important appearance in the 1970s.

A consideration of economic, as well as educational and social issues is important because, as the majority of the other writers in this field claim, they not only underlie the "social and educational crises" but also heavily influence the policy decisions which attempt to address them. It is not coincidental, for example, that the "crisis of administration and reorganisation", takes place during a time of economic growth in Britain when the major preoccupation of education policy makers was expansion of the education system and the creation of a conducive environment in which productive education could take place. Similarly, it is the economic context of recession that underlies and provokes "the crisis of curriculum and belief", where education is gradually seen by some as a drain on resources rather than as a public good. Finally, it is the continued climate of economic recession and increasing unemployment which lies behind "the crisis of motivation and assessment" and leads to calls for assessment reform.

On the second point, Broadfoot, Fairbairn, Burgess and Adams all argue that because of its fundamental role in the English education system and its inherent links with curriculum reform and student

motivation, assessment and qualifications reform (of which RoA is one type) enters the education policy arena well before the early 1980s.

Chapter 1 has already suggested that the 14-19 qualifications system is one of the major contextual factors determining the role of RoA in the English education and training system. As Chapter 4 will outline in more detail, from the introduction of qualifications in the nineteenth century, and particularly with the advent of the School Certificate in 1917, the nature of the school curriculum throughout the twentieth century has been fundamentally influenced by the demands of national examination systems (Broadfoot 1984). Since their inception, qualifications have provided the means by which pupils gain access to higher education and high status positions in the professions. Schools have always, therefore, had to respond to the pressure of ensuring pupil success in qualifications, since this is the main means by which their effectiveness has been and still is judged. Examination success can only be ensured when the underlying aim of an educational institution becomes the preparation of pupils for external examination. The curriculum, of necessity, therefore becomes primarily a study of that which is likely to be tested by the examination boards - something which the Crowther Report recognised as early as the 1950s (Ministry of Education 1959).

" External examinations not only tend to direct attention, and attach value, to the subjects which are examined at the expense of those which are not (and within the examined subjects only to their examinable aspects): they also focus attention on pupils who are examined at the expense of those who are not." (p.86)

"Examinations have come to have such a high value for Englishmen that most unexamined subjects are regarded with indifference." (p.280)

Until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, the nature of qualifications and pupil assessment were the only factors effectively regulating the curriculum of schools and colleges. Hence the fundamental role of assessment reform, of which RoA is a part, at all stages in the English education system of the twentieth century. The majority of the literature on RoA, as Chapter 2 pointed out, links this initiative with assessment reform. It is for this reason that I focus to such an extent on this area in this historical discussions of the role of RoA.

While drawing extensively on Andy Hargreaves's stages, I will, here, also briefly consider those economic issues which have relevance to an understanding of RoA. The dates for the beginning and end of each stage are rather arbitrary because ideas and policy issues which begin in one stage clearly overlap into the next.

1944- early 1970s economic growth and the "crisis of administration and reorganisation"

Most of the writers on English education reform agree that throughout the 1950s and 1960s - a period of economic expansion - education was seen as a public good, both because it was building a more educated and civilised society and because it was assumed that a well-educated workforce would bring continuing economic prosperity and national wealth. The consensus was that as technology advanced and transformed the nature of employment, education would continue to provide a sophisticated educated workforce to work within and advance still further new working environments and practices. Everyone, therefore, had a right to education, but at the same time the duty to perform as well as possible within the education system, in order to play a productive and fulfilling role in society. During this period, education was seen as the key to social and economic advancement. It was assumed that universal entitlement to education would ensure social mobility, that the gradual establishment of a

meritocracy would undermine the out-moded class system and create a flourishing modern society equipped to meet the challenges of technological change and development. Existing educational provision did not, on the whole, have to justify its existence or even its cost.

This view is reflected very strongly in the Newsom Report (Central Advisory Council 1963) which, safe in the belief that education is considered a public good, boldly proposes a number of recommendations, including the raising of the school leaving age to 16, that would clearly necessitate an increase in the amount of public money being spent on education.

"We make no apologies for recommendations which will involve an increase in public expenditure on the education of the average pupils. Their future role politically, socially and economically is vital to our national life but, even more important, each is an individual whose spirit needs education as much as his body needs nourishment. Without adequate education human life is impoverished." (p.xiv)

However, there were concerns throughout this period, and particularly from 1960 onwards, that the way that education was organised - selection at the age of 11 followed by a divided, ineffective and out-moded secondary system of education - resulted in underachievement, untapped human talent and therefore the loss to the nation and to society of potentially valuable human resources. This concern was expressed in a number of ways at the time. The Newsom Report, for example, particularly highlights the inadequacies of an education system which is tailored to cater for the needs of the "above average" but spends inadequate time and resources on meeting the needs of the "average" or "less than average".

"Despite some splendid achievements in the schools, there is much unrealised talent especially among boys and girls whose potential is

masked by inadequate powers of speech and limitations of home background. Unsuitable programmes and teaching methods may aggravate their differences, and frustration express itself in apathy or rebelliousness. The country cannot afford this wastage, humanly or economically speaking." (p.3)

As Hargreaves points out, it appeared, therefore, in the 1960s that the way that education was organised could actually be hampering the social and economic advancement of the nation - hence his "crisis of administration and reorganisation". The major policy solution to this crisis at this time, in Hargreaves's view, was comprehensivisation - an institutional response to an educational, social and economic problem - although the reorganisation of secondary education along comprehensive lines was not one of the recommendations proposed by the Newsom Report.

Creating a comprehensive education system out of a tri-partite system inevitably led to major organisational and administrative problems. These are not, however, the issues that are of most relevance to this chapter. What is more pertinent here is the effect that the arguments for comprehensivisation and an end to selection at the age of 11 had on assessment.

A tri-partite education system, such as that which developed after the 1944 Education Act, pre-supposes firstly that there is a limited percentage of the cohort able to benefit from each of the three types of education - grammar, modern and technical - and secondly that there is a form of assessment which can effectively be employed to select those children who are able to benefit from each particular type of education. Because of the widespread acceptance of IQ testing at this time, with its stress on normative curves of distribution and its "impartial", "scientific" and "fair" methods of selection, this was often the basis,

together with tests in English and mathematics, on which children were selected for a particular type of education at age 11 (Broadfoot 1996).

If you begin to question the idea that there is a limited number of people who are able to benefit from any one type of education and if, more importantly, you begin to suggest that the method by which children are being selected for each particular type of education is not working effectively, then you are not only questioning the rationale for selective assessment, but also the nature of the selective assessment itself. This is, in fact, what began to happen in the 1960s (Gipps 1990). Doubts about the nature of assessment being used for secondary school selection were reinforced by evidence from an increasing body of research that began to undermine the claims of IQ testing to be "fair" "impartial" and "scientific", because of the potential for cultural, gender and, more particularly, class bias. The whole status and credibility of normative, summative assessment was therefore increasingly called into question at this time (Gipps 1990; Broadfoot 1996). So, by extension, was the whole status, credibility and function of the English examination system, which was founded on normative and summative assessment and was thus also open to cultural, gender and class bias.

The arguments for comprehensive schooling in the sixties, therefore, began to pose fundamental questions about assessment, in particular normative assessment. Once you start to question the rationale and means of selection at age 11, it is a short step to questioning the rationale and means of selection at age 16 - public examinations. As soon as you begin to criticise the public examinations system and the forms of assessment it uses, you need to look for alternatives - criterion referencing, self referencing, formative assessment - all of which potentially lead in the direction of RoA (Broadfoot 1996).

The literature on RoA documents several tentative localised developments in all of these modes of assessment during this period

and in the early 1970s - for example, the Record of Personal Achievement introduced in Swindon in 1969 and the introduction of Mode 3 Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations¹⁵.

Before moving on to the next section, which considers the relationship between the content and form of the secondary school curriculum and the development of RoA, it is important to look at some of the issues which Hargreaves does not consider in his analysis of education policy in the 1960s since these issues have significance in relation to a discussion of the development of RoA. His analysis largely ignores the findings and recommendations of the Newsom Report of 1963. This report not only identifies a rather different "crisis" to the one put forward by Hargreaves, but also suggests an alternative "policy focus" for the 1960s and one which has relevance to this thesis, since it involves RoA.

The Newsom Report sees the 1960s as facing a crisis of ineffective pedagogy and irrelevant curriculum rather than a crisis of administration and reorganisation. Its policy focus is therefore not comprehensivisation, which does not of itself necessarily address the issue of effectiveness and equality of opportunity, but improved pedagogy and the development of a relevant, modernised secondary curriculum.

While concentrating mainly on the nature of the secondary school curriculum, on how this curriculum is taught, its relevance for the older learner and its function in a modern technological society, the Newsom Report also examines the effect of external examinations on the curriculum. The authors of that Report were clearly concerned by the

¹⁵ The Beloe Committee which reported in 1960 (Ministry of Education 1960) suggested three modes of examination for the new Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE): Mode 1 - an external examinations based on a syllabus devised by a regional examination board; Mode 2 - an external examination based on a school's own syllabus, and Mode 3 - an internally assessed school-based syllabus.

arguments being put forward at that time by the Beloe Committee in support of CSE. The Beloe Committee Report (Ministry of Education 1960) argued that it was necessary to make changes in the national 16+ qualifications system, so that qualifications could become accessible to a larger proportion of the secondary school cohort. The authors of the Newsom Report are not convinced that introducing a qualification which is accessible to more secondary-age pupils will necessarily create greater equality of opportunity.

"We are convinced that for a substantial number of pupils public examinations would be entirely inappropriate, and for a considerable number of others they would be appropriate over only a small part of their school work. In other words, we do not think that external examinations will provide a valid major incentive for many of the pupils with whom we are concerned." (p.81)

More importantly, the authors of the report are concerned that the more emphasis that is placed on external examinations, the more restricted the curriculum is likely to become.

"We likewise strongly endorse the warning that the tendency of examinations to limit freedom in the curriculum and to restrict experiment could be especially harmful to pupils in the lower ability ranges..." (p.81)

The Newsom Report supports the idea of providing a broader, more vocationally oriented, more experimental, more relevant and locally adaptable curriculum to motivate and interest the whole cohort, regardless of institutional setting . Furthermore, the Report proposes that this breadth of educational experience is recognised through an internal "record of achievement" rather than through external examinations.

"Boys and girls who stay at school until they are 16 may reasonably look for some record of achievement when they leave. Some form of leaver's certificate which combined assessment with a record of the pupil's school career would be valued by parents, future employers and colleges of further education and should, we believe, be available to all pupils who complete a full secondary course." (p.80)

Although the thrust for comprehensivisation which took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s was likely of itself to lead to calls for a change in curriculum - a new curriculum for a new type of institution - as the Newsom Report shows, there were also other underlying general pressures which supported changes in the secondary curriculum even within a tri-partite education system. Moreover, and of more importance for the subject of this thesis, these changes to the curriculum suggested both new forms of assessment and new forms of accreditation (Ministry of Education 1960).

Early 1970s-1980 - recession and "the crisis of curriculum and belief"

It is during the period which Hargreaves designates "the crisis of curriculum and belief" that many of the early RoA-related experiments began to take place, albeit sporadically and in a very localised way (Broadfoot 1996).

From 1965 onwards, education authorities were encouraged by central government to reorganise their secondary institutions along comprehensive lines (DES 1965). New institutions with a new mix of students, who had a wide range of needs and interests, were stimulated to look again at what they taught and how. The creation of a single secondary ^{education} institution, which all children would attend, did not, of itself, ensure the provision of a single learning experience for all of those children. If all children were to develop to their full potential in order to take their place as citizens in the modern world, then the curriculum needed to cater to their individual and collective needs. A new

curriculum demanded new pedagogy and new assessment methods (Burgess & Adams 1980) - arguments for child-centred education and formative assessment began to gain ground (Rowntree 1977) and there were a variety of experiments in new forms of assessment (e.g. the RSA Vocational Preparation Award, 1976 and the Scottish Council for Research in Education Profiles Initiative, 1976).

It would be naive to suggest, however, that the concept of education promoting self-development was the only driving force behind the arguments for a new secondary school curriculum. Two other issues fuelled the curriculum and assessment debate. The first was basically a socio-educational issue - how to motivate and retain the interest of those students for whom the public examination system and the academic curriculum were inaccessible. The second was fundamentally an economic issue - how to make the public education system more efficient and more attuned to the needs of the economy in times of recession and public expenditure restraint. Interestingly, as later parts of the chapter point out, these arguments came together in support of RoA, because this initiative was seen both as a mechanism for motivating students (Swales 1979) and for accrediting the new types of vocational education that began to be proposed during this period (MSC 1981).

The first problem, (that is how to promote extrinsic and intrinsic motivation among the whole student cohort within the comprehensive school, when the curriculum and the assessment modes used in that institution were largely unsuited to a significant proportion of the cohort) although primarily a socio-educational issue, was exacerbated by prevailing economic conditions by the end of the 1970s. During the late 1970s, because of a slowing down of economic growth, particularly after the oil crisis, unemployment began to rise. Those students, therefore, who had been able to gain employment without qualifications during times of economic growth, now began to find that

they were having more difficulty getting jobs. Although there are studies (Jones 1983; Ashton *et al.* 1982; Ashton & Maguire 1986) which argue that there is no direct correlation between the possession of qualifications and the acquisition of a job, it was as undoubtedly true in the late 1970s, as it is today, that those with more and higher levels of qualifications have more choice of progression routes than those with fewer or lower qualifications.

For a large proportion of the cohort in the 1960s and early 1970s, secondary education ended at 15 and was the prelude to employment, not further study. The lure of a good job was what the education system therefore ultimately held out to students in order to motivate them and to ensure their good behaviour while in school. During the times of economic prosperity and high employment in the 1960s, educational qualifications were not essential to the acquisition of a job. When jobs, and particularly unskilled jobs, become scarcer, however, the value of qualifications in the employment market rises (Dore 1976). If these qualifications, because of their design and purpose, are unattainable for a large proportion of the cohort, they cannot be used to promote extrinsic motivation. If, moreover, the curriculum is geared towards these qualifications, even though they exclude a large proportion of the cohort, it is likely that those who are unable to take them, will feel little intrinsic motivation to learn. As the power of extrinsic motivation decreases so the power of intrinsic motivation needs to increase or the result is likely to be classroom disruption, alienation from the education system and truancy, with all its attendant problems. The issue of the promotion of intrinsic motivation began to be particularly acute after the raising of the school leaving age in 1972 and could be seen as one of the major issues that RoA was designed to address.

"...early recording of achievement schemes gave pupil motivation as a key factor in their development, particularly for the less able, the group

most likely affected by the failure of the work-hard-to-get-some-exams-and-therefore-a-job argument. (Gipps 1990, p.9)

"...concern over de-motivated, lower ability adolescents accounted for the speed with which the developments were adopted." (Gipps p.12) 1990

The search for an appropriate secondary curriculum for all students and the development of new forms of assessment, which supported rather than restricted this curriculum while also providing worthwhile outcomes for all students in terms of credentials in the labour market, is what Andy Hargreaves (1989) refers to as "the crisis of curriculum".

A full analysis of the solutions that were suggested in the name of curriculum reform from the 1970s to the 1980s is not relevant to this chapter, except where these solutions are inextricably linked with specific assessment reform.

In terms of assessment reform, the trends towards developing and experimenting with formative, criterion-referenced and self-referenced modes of assessment, which had begun in a very tentative way in the late 1960s, continued and became more widespread. This, as I have indicated earlier, was the period of development and experimentation with profiling, RoA, graded assessments, CSE and GCE Mode 3 and the beginning of the debate about a common 16+ examination (Bowe & Whitty 1984).

What was also significant at this time, in terms of RoA, was that all the arguments for a broader, more universally relevant curriculum pointed towards the importance of valuing those aspects of learning which were not explicitly valued within the education system, because they were not assessed by public examinations. The development of human qualities, competencies, personal attributes, self-awareness, cross-curricular skills, personal and social skills, although arguably a

valuable part of what education is about, was not formally or overtly recognised by the public examinations system (Burgess and Adams 1980).

The public examinations system of the 1970s, as now, for the most part valued, assessed and rewarded the acquisition of subject specialist knowledge and understanding. The development of skills that related to this subject specialist knowledge and understanding was therefore accorded maximum status and thus institutional time and resources. Since institutional time and resources are limited, it follows that other aspects of learning must suffer. A broader curriculum demanded a broader range of assessment strategies to accord value and credibility to what it was attempting to provide (Rowntree 1977).

RoA and many of the types of profiles that were being developed at this time, attempted (albeit sometimes in somewhat crude ways) to assess a wider and different range of skills, knowledge and understanding than those which were encompassed by traditional forms of qualification or assessment. They were therefore intended to play a role in according status and value to the broader curriculum which was being proposed (Mortimore *et al.* 1984).

Although what has been written above perhaps explains Hargreaves's "crisis of curriculum", it does not explain his use of the term "crisis of belief", which is his interpretation of the so-called "Great Debate" in education, and which also has relevance for the development of RoA.

What is interesting about RoA in this period, as this section attempts to suggest, is that it survived because it had supporters on both sides of the "Great Debate" (Broadfoot 1996). Hargreaves's term "crisis of belief" refers to an increasing loss of confidence in the power of the national education system to improve the social and, more importantly, the economic position of Britain within the world. As recession bit

more deeply, during the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s and it became clear that the human resource development theories prevalent in the 1960s had not been realised in practice, the education system was increasingly seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to economic decline. Rather than being seen as a public good and an essential ingredient in the move towards an economically expanding and modern Britain, the education system, from the early seventies onwards, was increasingly regarded as inefficient and ineffectual, producing unemployable young people who were unable to work to make Britain competitive in world markets. It was claimed in the press and in influential political documents such as the "Black Papers" on education (Cox & Dyson 1972) that educational standards were falling. The education system in the 1970s was characterised as expensive, self-interested, increasingly out of touch with the modern world - in short, an impediment to change and modernisation. It was necessary for it to change not only what it taught and how it taught, but the quality of what it taught, how it assessed what it taught, how it could account for what it taught and who decided on what it taught. The "crisis of belief", then, does not refer to any diminution in the belief of the inherent power of education, if anything the fact that education had become the proper subject for open national debate suggests the reverse. What the "crisis of belief" refers to is a diminishing belief in the contemporary form of the education system in England. As Hargreaves writes in "Curriculum and Assessment Reform" (1989):

"From being a much-needed investment, education spending quickly came to be regarded as a non-productive luxury the nation could no longer afford." (p.106)

This "crisis of belief", which began in the 1970s, found a public voice in Prime Minister James Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College Speech, the ensuing "Great Debate", the DES Green Paper: Education in Schools (1977), the Black Papers (Cox & Dyson 1972) and has arguably led,

among other things, to the National Curriculum in 1988. The education system of the 1970s, according to Callaghan in his Ruskin Speech, failed to equip young people:

".. with the knowledge, skills and qualities necessary for their role in society as working adults."

The profound effect which this "crisis of belief" has had on the power of the various key players in the English education system will form the subject of the subsequent section of this chapter. What is important for this part of the chapter is to examine briefly how the "crisis of belief" affected assessment reform. This will then be dealt with in more detail in the subsequent section of this chapter because it is, in fact, the nature and relative power of the players in the debate over forms of assessment that, according to Nuttall (1984), determined the outcomes of that debate for assessment reform.

Nuttall argues that because there were so many conflicting interests and players in the Great Debate, the education system could not hope to satisfy them all. In terms of assessment, the advocates of a greater vocationalisation of the secondary curriculum - e.g. the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), some employers and the Further Education Unit (FEU) among others - broadly supported initiatives which encouraged criterion-referencing, formative assessment, self-assessment and profiling (all essential elements of RoA). The supporters of the traditional academic education system, on the other hand - e.g. the Department of Education and Science (DES), the universities, the political Right and some employers - although appreciating the limitations of the contemporary public examinations system, which was not compatible with the demands of a more industrialised nation, were interested in promoting a national assessment and examinations system which people trusted, so that they could win back credibility for the education system. They also argued

for a "return to basics" and an end to progressive teaching (criterion referencing and teacher assessment were seen to epitomise this) to prevent the further decline of standards.

As a result, according to Bowe and Whitty (1984), the much-discussed proposal for a common 16+ examination (later to be called the GCSE) was effectively put on ice in 1976 by Shirley Williams, the then Secretary of State for the DES, because it did not seem politically possible to introduce an innovative examination when public faith in the education system was at such a low ebb. The defenders of the "standards of education" argument depended on the retention of the familiar tried and tested public examinations system.

Interestingly, RoA, although closer to the tenets of the advocates of the vocationalised curriculum, also had supporters on both sides of the debate, as evidenced by the introduction of the 1984 Statement of Policy by the DES (Broadfoot 1996). It could be argued, however, that at this stage it was possible for the DES to support RoA because it did not seriously threaten the supremacy of the public examinations system. Rather, RoA was seen as a useful motivating alternative for those lower achievers who could not anyway participate in the national qualifications system of that time. RoA therefore posed no significant challenge to the supporters of "national standards" in education.

Early 1980s- 1991 - entrenched recession and "the crisis of motivation and assessment"

During the 1980s, those social, economic and educational issues which had their roots in the late 1970s persisted, that is:

- i. the need for a comprehensive curriculum which would cater for the whole secondary cohort as well as meeting the demands of a modern technological society;

- ii. continuing levels of high youth unemployment (Roberts *et al.* 1990) and the need for the development of appropriate qualifications and methods of assessment to support the curriculum, to embrace the whole cohort and, most importantly, to motivate learners;
- iii. an increased demand for educational accountability as recession bit deeper and national and local resources for education became scarcer.

There were, however, two new problems affecting assessment reform which emerged during the late eighties and which continued into the early 1990s:

- iv. an increased pressure on institutions to compete for students in a free market environment after 1988 with the introduction of local management of schools, grant maintained status, qualifications league tables and further education incorporation (Finegold 1993);
- v. a substantial rise in the numbers of students staying on beyond the period of compulsory education from the late 1980s (Finegold 1993) and the subsequent challenges this posed for post-16 education and training provision and assessment (Richardson 1993).

Hargreaves's "crisis of motivation and assessment", does not adequately address the second of these two new issues because it ignores the curricular and institutional problems that the rise in post-16 participation has caused and is continuing to cause in the 1990s.

If the problems of the 1980s were not all entirely new, some of the ways in which the education system was being used to address them were,

in fact, new, mainly because of the change in the power balance between the agencies and players in the education system. This changing balance of power will be examined in more detail in the subsequent section of this chapter, but some consideration of its effects will be needed here in order to understand why certain solutions - one of which was RoA - were increasingly being put forward to address old problems.

The main change in the balance of power in the English education system during the 1980s was the significant growth in the strength of central government (the DES, Treasury, the Department of Employment (ED) and even the Cabinet Office) and the power of institutions (but institutions accountable to their governing bodies rather than to local education authorities) and the corresponding declining power of local education authorities and education professionals.

In addition, during this period, the ED's influence in education matters increased dramatically and in some cases challenged the role of the DES. The ED, unlike the DES, did not have to use local education authorities (LEAs) as intermediaries to encourage schools and colleges to introduce central government policies, although in many cases it did still use LEAs in this traditional way. By allocating institutions funding directly linked to specific centrally-devised educational objectives, the ED, through the MSC, became a much more efficient and speedy conduit for effecting central government education policy than the DES (Dale 1985). The ED's role is significant for RoA, and indeed assessment reform as a whole, because of its responsibility for the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and for the development of vocational qualifications and programmes which often used profiling or RoA as their main form of assessment.

Because of national government's increasing power and ability to intervene directly in education institutions, particularly after the 1988 Education Act and the creation of grant maintained schools, it was able to introduce national education policies much more swiftly and effectively than ever before. It no longer needed to work exclusively through the intermediary of the LEA. It was therefore possible for central government, in response to the crisis of motivation and assessment, to bring about three sets of very substantial and influential changes in the education system of the 1980s:

1. To introduce TVEI from 1982 and the National Curriculum from 1988, in order to respond to the demands for a comprehensive and vocationalised secondary curriculum (Finegold & Soskice 1990);
2. To promote the concept of educational accountability by the introduction of SATs , the requirement for education institutions to publish the results of public examinations and SATs (league tables) and by the strengthening of parental power in education (Finegold & Soskice 1990);
3. To introduce into schools a range of new qualifications and assessment initiatives (GCSEs, the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), the National Record of Achievement (NRA) and SATs), which were to a greater degree centrally controlled, because they conformed to national criteria, and which, it was claimed, were designed to support the curriculum, embrace the whole cohort and motivate learners (DES/ED/WO 1991).

How other agencies and key players responded to this greater central government intervention will be examined in more detail in the

following section of this chapter. What I would like to turn to here, are the implications for assessment and RoA raised by the two new problems emerging in the 1980s.

The increased pressure on institutions to compete for students in a free market environment affected both pre- and post-16 institutions (Finegold & Soskice 1990). I have already mentioned above how secondary institutions have been, and still are, judged largely by their success in public examinations. When institutions are competing for students in order to retain sufficient funding to remain viable, they are less likely to be prepared to experiment either with their curriculum delivery or with the methods of assessment they use (Spours 1996). The public's knowledge and understanding of the national qualifications system, and education initiatives in general, naturally lags several years behind new developments. This, combined with the innate caution of parents and employers (and sometimes even teachers too), means that the credibility of new initiatives in assessment is likely to be low (Nuttall 1984). In times of high unemployment, therefore, when qualifications inflation takes place, it could be argued that institutions and those who use them are unlikely to wish to experiment in the sphere of assessment. It is safer for institutions to respond to employers', students' and higher education's demands for tried and tested qualifications and assessment methods.

Given this unconducive political and educational environment for assessment innovation in the 1980s, one might have expected the credibility of RoA, as a representative of "the new assessment" (Stronach 1989), to be called into question. According to Andy Hargreaves, however, this was in fact not the case. His analysis claims RoA was the "policy focus" of the 1980s' in response to the "crisis of motivation and assessment". RoA, he argues, had the potential to motivate students and, at the same time, to provide a form of assessment which could be extended to all learners, could dovetail with

the National Curriculum and could provide all learners with a summative document at the end of their compulsory education period. This was therefore the period which saw the publication of the DES/Welsh Office Statement of Policy on RoA (DES/WO 1984) which funded and encouraged a major expansion of the RoA initiative. It was also the period when TVEI funded and promoted RoA and major developments, such as the Inner London Education Authority's London Record of Achievement and the Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement were set up (Finegold & Soskice 1990; Broadfoot 1996).

By 1991, the position of RoA was further strengthened by the introduction of the NRA. It can be argued that the introduction of a **national** record of achievement, which was intended to be used by all students from 16+, gave impetus to the development of RoA by raising its profile and by according it higher status with institutions and with employers and further and higher education providers. As the Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Extension Work in Pilot Schemes (Broadfoot *et al.* 1991) says:

"The implication of this is that overall coherence among the various recording initiatives pre- and post-16 will only be achieved by deliberate co-ordination of policy at institutional, local and national level, based on a common set of guiding principles which are known and understood by students, tutors, trainers and employers alike."
(p.32)

This echoes and strengthens the observations made in the earlier national evaluation report of 1988 (Broadfoot *et al.* 1988):

"In particular the perceived level of central government commitment, whilst it might not affect the enthusiasm of teachers themselves, would be likely to have an effect on the relative priority given to records of achievement in the decision-making process." (p.175)

All of which tend to support the Employment Department's assertion that:

"...the introduction of the NRA builds upon substantial work which has been undertaken by Education Authorities, schools and others to date in developing summative records of achievement. It is intended to use that experience further in order to produce a single summary format which will have national credibility." (ED 1991)

The fact that the NRA, as one of the core components of the TVEI Extension Programme (ED 1991), was supported by much needed resources in a time of expenditure cuts should not be ignored, and has undoubtedly been instrumental in its widespread introduction, but the issue of credibility gained through the NRA's national status is also significant and will be explored in more detail in later chapters of this thesis.

The second new issue for the late 1980s and early 1990s was the rapid rise in the numbers of students staying on beyond the period of compulsory education, partly resulting from increased attainment at 16+ and the availability of a wider variety of provision, but predominantly as a result of a significant fall in employment opportunities for 16 year olds (Finegold 1993; Spours 1993b). This increase in post-16 participation created significant challenges for post-16 institutions of all kinds, because of the size and changing nature of the student cohort (Hodgson & Spours 1997). One of the responses of national government was the introduction of new types of qualifications and courses (such as CPVE, Youth Training (YT) and GNVQ) which often involved profiling and RoA as part of their assessment system. In both secondary and post-16 education, therefore, there was an increasing emphasis on RoA (by 1991 the NRA) with the support of substantial funding from TVEI to underpin its development.

Different agencies and key players

In the first part of this chapter, I have attempted to describe some of the major social, educational and economic problems that the education system, as part of the state apparatus, has been expected to address since 1944. In describing these problems, I have tried to depict the context within which RoA, as an assessment initiative, developed. I have attempted, therefore, to answer the questions of why and when RoA was proposed as a solution to some of the major social, educational and economic problems that the education system has been expected to address since 1944. However, this does not adequately explain how and why RoA developed from a "grassroots" initiative into an instrument of national education policy, nor who was involved in its development from one state to the other. This section of the chapter sets out to put forward some possible answers to these questions.

Dale in "The State and Education Policy" (1989) discusses the importance of examining the roles of all the agencies and key players within the education system. As he points out, education cannot be seen simply as something transmitted by the state to the people through the education system, because of the complex make-up of that education system itself. Any form of education which the state wishes to transmit will be transformed and moulded by the key players and agencies within the education system. Dale goes on to describe how the various key players and agencies in the English education system have moulded and transformed the education system from 1944 onwards. He then looks at the way that the balance of power between the various players and agencies has changed over time. It is only through an examination of this balance of power, he argues, that one can understand the nature and significance of changes in the education system and education itself in the second half of the twentieth century.

Although the first strand of Dale's argument does not apply directly to RoA - since it was only from 1991 onwards that RoA became an

instrument of national policy - the second part of his argument, and the examples he uses to illustrate it, throw considerable light on the changing balance of power between the various agencies and players in the education system. This provides a very useful framework for understanding the development of RoA from a "grassroots" initiative into an instrument of national education policy.

RoA began in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an initiative devised by teachers for use with their pupils (particularly the lower achievers), in response to a need for alternative forms of assessment and accreditation, which teachers themselves had identified. Others before them - e.g. the members of the committees which produced the Norwood Report (Board of Education 1943) and the first report of the Secondary Schools' Examinations Council (Ministry of Education 1947) - had proposed similar ideas but there was no official national or, except in a very few areas, local policy which prompted or forced teachers to begin to use RoA. The following section will examine why teachers in the late 1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s¹⁶, decided to use RoA with their pupils and in response to which problems or issues.

1960 - 1970

The first section of this chapter has described this period (1960-1970) as being one, at least initially, of economic growth, a time when the education system was facing the "crisis of administration and reorganisation" (Hargreaves 1989). This is the era of increasing comprehensivisation, the bringing together in one institution of pupils with different talents and needs. This is also the period when education

¹⁶ Some of these early localised attempts at RoA are documented in the literature on RoA. It was during this period, for example, that the Record of Personal Achievement was launched by Swindon Borough Education Authority in 1969 and used mainly with non-examination pupils before being extended to the whole cohort. In 1973, the Sutton Centre set up a record of achievement. In 1976, the Scottish Council for Research in Education Profile was introduced for the 60 per cent of school leavers who were unlikely to obtain national qualifications and in 1979 a Personal Achievement Record was started in Evesham High School, again for use with lower ability learners (Fairbairn 1988).

was seen as capable of changing pupils' life chances, of bringing about equality of opportunity, increased civilisation and continued economic prosperity, when education was seen as responsible for nurturing and developing the whole person (Ministry of Education 1959). During this same period, however, the public examinations system at 16+, and therefore the secondary education curriculum, was geared at most to 60 per cent of the student cohort (Ministry of Education 1960). Only 60 per cent of the school population was seen as potentially able to leave compulsory education with some form of publicly recognised accreditation which it could use in the employment or further education market place.

RoAs provided teachers with the opportunity to offer a form of accreditation to the remaining 40 per cent the cohort and thus had some potential for promoting extrinsic motivation.

RoA was also seen by practitioners as a mechanism for promoting intrinsic motivation by encouraging students to value what they had achieved in all areas of the curriculum, since these achievements could all be recorded and accorded credit, whether or not they formed part of a public examination syllabus (Swales 1979). As the Newsom Report (Ministry of Education 1963) says:

"Most boys and girls are able to accept realistically differences of ability among themselves, it is not the fact that they cannot attempt the same work, but the reality by some pupils that what they are doing is not valued by the community, which is most likely to produce a sense of rejection, apathy or hostility." (p.83)

There was also support for RoA because it was viewed as a way of promoting equality of opportunity and pupil self development, as well as providing a possible solution to classroom management and experimentation with the curriculum (Burgess & Adams 1985).

As chapter 2 pointed out, teachers who were searching for something to make the curriculum more relevant for young people, in order to encourage greater student involvement, were able to use RoA as a way of assessing and accrediting a more diverse, localised and individually tailored curriculum. In this way, RoA offered an alternative accreditation framework which could accord status to a broader, more relevant curriculum, while serving to counter some of the arguments of those who supported accreditation by external examination only.

"For the pupils who have taken no exit examinations, it (a record of achievement) could contain some assessment of progress based, perhaps, on the whole final year's work at school rather than on an examination. For other pupils it could supplement the Certificate of Secondary Education by recording what studies had been followed other than in subjects externally examined." (Ministry of Education Newsom Report 1963, p85)

RoA thus had the potential to satisfy both "occupational ideology" and "occupational interest" (Dale 1989). Hence its attraction to teachers and the reason for its initial emergence as a "grassroots" initiative (Broadfoot 1986; Hitchcock 1986).

1970-1980

The solutions which RoA had offered to teachers in the 1960s were equally, if not more, relevant to the 1970s - with the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1972, the growth in unemployment throughout the period and the expansion of comprehensive schools - and thus ensured its growth as a grassroots development, as the examples cited earlier in this section have shown.

It was also during this period that the beginnings of a move towards more national support for RoA were emerging. In 1977 the Schools'

Council policy document "The Whole Curriculum 13-16" says of pupil records of achievement:

"This record should be a balanced account of the pupils' attainments, interests and aspirations. The document should be externally validated and underwritten by appropriately authorised bodies. We would see these bodies as offering a comprehensive assessment service which would in time supersede the present system of examining at 16+."
(p.115)

However, the decade from 1970 to 1980, as mentioned in the first section of this chapter, had additional problems to contend with. This was the period where recession began to set in and the education system had to respond to "the crisis of curriculum and belief" (Hargreaves 1989).

RoA, however, was also able to offer something extra which, I would argue, assured its increasing popularity with professionals, and, towards the end of the decade, led other key players and agencies in the education system to become interested in its potential.

As previous parts of this chapter have already indicated, during the period from 1970 to 1980, the problems of extrinsic and intrinsic student motivation were exacerbated by the rise in youth unemployment. The necessity of stimulating intrinsic motivation increased as the power of extrinsic motivation decreased. The search for a broad and relevant curriculum and a new pedagogy appropriate for the whole student cohort became more pressing.

RoA, with its stress on formative assessment and the development of the whole person, was seen as a possible medium through which to encourage curricular and pedagogic reform. Where student needs and interests are highlighted through a process of regular review, the

curriculum and pedagogy can in theory be tailored more closely to these needs and interests. There is the potential for the curriculum to become more than that which is assessable by public examination, because new areas, broader competencies and skills can be opened up to and deemed worthy of assessment (Pearson 1986).

It was in relation to the "crisis of belief", that other key players and agencies in the education system began to become interested in RoA towards the end of the 1970s. It was also during this latter half of the 1970s that RoA began moving beyond a grassroots development towards an instrument of national education policy.

The reasons for "the crisis of belief" have been outlined above. Increasing economic decline from the mid 1970s onwards had led to an increasing loss of confidence in the ability of the education system to improve Britain's economic position. At this time, employers, particularly industrialists, were claiming that school leavers were ill-equipped for employment, that their skills and attitudes were inadequate and inappropriate and that the education system was at fault. This argument was taken up by politicians and government departments and was conveyed to the general public through the media. The so-called Great Debate had opened.

Some of the key players in the education system, particularly the industrialists and advocates of vocational education and training, saw all aspects of education, including assessment and public examinations, as failing and therefore ripe for reform (CCCS 1981). They supported a more vocationalised curriculum and a reform of the whole examinations and assessment system to underpin and reflect this. There was an increasing demand for schools to equip their pupils more effectively for adult life and to provide learning experiences which would achieve this (Callaghan 1976). The traditional style of liberal general education, which was being supported and kept alive by the

public examinations system, was seen as ineffective. There was a recognition that if the curriculum was going to change, then forms of assessment and the nature and scope of public examinations would also have to alter (Broadfoot 1996).

Other key players - e.g. certain politicians from both major political parties, some employers, the universities, the examination boards, parents and, finally, the DES - although also agreeing that the education system needed to change, did not wish to tamper with the tried and tested examinations and assessment system (Dale 1989). This would have been too risky during the "crisis of belief" in education .

RoA, however, presented an attractive proposition to those on both sides of the debate (Broadfoot 1996). It was useful as a recording and reporting mechanism for those who advocated a more vocationalised curriculum, because it was able to record and report on those aspects of the curriculum which were not assessable under the present public examinations system. For those who supported the continuation of the traditional curriculum and public examinations system, on the other hand, RoA was useful as a motivational tool for lower achievers. For these latter key players, who saw themselves as the upholders of "standards", RoA posed no significant threat. As an alternative form of accreditation, mainly for use with lower achievers, RoA could easily coexist alongside traditional qualifications, did not threaten their supremacy and could be used to placate those who wanted to change the public examinations system and to introduce a common 16+ qualification. No risk then of contamination of the "gold standards" of GCE O and A Level examinations.

By the beginning of the 1980s, therefore, RoA still remained largely a grassroots development, but it now had supporters outside the teaching profession and had even begun to make an appearance on the

agenda of national education policy with Sir Keith Joseph's publication of *Records of Achievement: A Statement of Policy* (DES/WO 1984).

1980-1991

The 1980s brought entrenched recession and "the crisis of motivation and assessment" (Hargreaves 1989). It also brought changes in the balance of power between the various agencies and key players in the education system. This change has been described above, but a brief recap is necessary here in order to provide the context within which RoA moved from a tentative item on the agenda of national education policy in the early 1980s to an instrument of national education policy in 1991.

It is sufficient for this section of the chapter to bear in mind that the settlement between national government, the local education authorities (LEAs) and the teaching profession, which had been enshrined in the 1944 Education Act, had been gradually eroded. In 1944, the power base in education was largely shared between national government, which concentrated on policy and legislation, the local education authorities, which interpreted that policy and legislation in order to implement it in their local education institutions, and the teaching profession, which reinterpreted and then carried out national policy and legislation as interpreted by its local education authority. There was a form of equilibrium in this settlement, since each of the three key players was kept in check by the other two, while, at the same time, retaining a certain amount of autonomy within its own limited sphere. By 1980, the influence of extraneous key players had largely destroyed this delicate balance (Dale 1990).

As Dale (1989) points out, the equilibrium had been undermined in the 1970s by the intervention of newly empowered key players, such as parents, industrialists and the ED, so that by the 1980s it became gradually more possible for central government agencies, such as the

DES and ED, to intervene directly in institutions without using the local education authorities as intermediaries. It became increasingly possible, therefore, to introduce an initiative such as RoA as an instrument of national policy and even, in 1991, to introduce a common format for records of achievement - the National Record of Achievement (NRA). By 1991, with the advent of a national record of achievement, the long-term continued existence of locally determined records of achievement in a variety of different formats was clearly called into question. RoA had finally achieved national status.

The fact that something becomes possible, however, does not mean that it is inevitable. The fact that central government was in a position to introduce RoA as an instrument of national education policy does not explain why it would wish to do such a thing. The previous section (headed 1970-1980) describes why national government might consider supporting such a reform at that time, but it does not provide an adequate picture of the context in the 1980s that determined why national government finally did decide to introduce the NRA. This will be considered below.

Until the Great Debate during the 1970s, although education was considered important as a key to social mobility and a more civilised and prosperous society, it was largely considered to be a matter for central and local government and the education professionals (Dale 1989). The LEA and the teachers were the "active partners"¹⁷ in the education system and central government oversaw the process.

Lip service was paid to the role of parents and children in the provision of education, but basically parents' views were not sought and pupils

¹⁷ This term and all the other terms in quotation marks in this section are taken from two useful tables to be found in "The State and Education Policy" (Dale 1989, pp. 105 and 115).

were seen as passive "recipients". Employers remained, on the whole, "indifferent" to what happened in the education world.

During the latter 1970s and increasingly throughout the 1980s, the roles and interests of the key players and agencies changed. Once the Great Debate had introduced the idea that education was something that was too important to leave to the professionals - since they were obviously getting it wrong - then the field was wide open for politicians, parents and industrialists to air their opinions and voice their demands. Prime Minister, James Callaghan, made this position very clear in his Ruskin College Speech (1976):

"Parents, teachers, learned and professional bodies, representatives of higher education and both sides of industry, together with the government, all have an important part to play in formulating and expressing the purposes of education and the standards we need."

Parents were characterised as "natural experts" and "moral guardians" by those who wished to use parent power as a force in political debate. Pupils were seen as "entitleds" or even, for those who saw education as the key to rebuilding the economy, as "raw material". Employers became increasingly "concerned" to voice their opinions about education as they saw the recession advancing and blamed its advance on what they perceived as declining standards in education. Teachers became the scapegoats and were seen as "problems". Meanwhile, successive education legislation, culminating in the 1988 Education Reform Act, ensured that the local education authorities were increasingly emasculated.

As the balance of power in the education system changed, so the voices of the various key players and agencies began to have different weight in the argument about what education should be and how it should be

delivered. Political parties could begin to play off one set of players against another for their own ends.

As unemployment rose and recession tightened its grip throughout the 1980s, the call for education reform intensified (Gleeson 1990).

Those who put forward the arguments for increased vocationalisation of the curriculum - employers, industrial trainers, some parents, the ED - became more vociferous and, since their power as a political force had increased (for reasons already outlined) their views were used as the rationale for bringing in reforms. The TVEI, which was essentially a curriculum development initiative designed to promote vocationalisation of the curriculum for 14-18 year olds, was introduced in 1982. With TVEI came financial and political support for RoA. One of the requirements of TVEI as it progressed was, that all students should take part in RoA.

"In ensuring the delivery of TVEI, Education Authorities are required to address the provision of records of achievement for all students within the Initiative. This is not least because the aims and focus of TVEI will not be achieved without records of achievement."
(Employment Department 1990)

RoA was seen as an essential element of the vocational curriculum because it had the potential to assess and accredit areas which were not covered by other forms of accreditation (including those areas which employers considered important), had universal application, stimulated changes in teaching and learning styles and had a motivational function for all students.

As Dale (1990) points out, TVEI was the first large-scale national curriculum development programme to be introduced into the English education system and, what is significant, is that it was not introduced

by the DES. TVEI, which had a substantial influence on those schools and colleges into which it was introduced, since there was so much funding involved, was originally the responsibility of the MSC. This agency was an offshoot of the ED and was accountable to a board consisting of both employers and education representatives rather than to Parliament. It was thus able to intervene directly in schools and colleges in a way in which the DES had never been able. Although, like the DES, the MSC worked through a partnership with local education authorities, this partnership was of a new contractual type. The MSC undertook to provide LEAs with a certain amount of TVEI development funding for their schools and colleges on the condition that the authority ensured that those institutions receiving funding adhered to certain national criteria.

As has been mentioned above, the ED was not the only government department which had become interested in RoA during the 1980s, the DES also played a significant role in placing RoA on the agenda of national policy. When the National Record of Achievement was finally launched in 1991, it was as a joint initiative supported by both the DES and the ED. Chapter 4 will look in more detail at the rather different roles and views of these two government departments in the development of RoA.

As early as 1981, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), at the request of the DES, was monitoring the way that schools and colleges were using records of achievement. Then, in 1984, the DES issued "Records of Achievement: A Statement of Policy" which recommended that:

"...records of achievement, when introduced nationally, should be respected and used throughout the country by all who are concerned with selecting young people for courses, training or employment."
(DES/WO 1984 , p.8)

suggested that by 1990 all young people would have a record of achievement and instigated the setting up of nine RoA pilot schemes involving 22 local education authorities and 250 institutions. By 1990, the DES further emphasised its support for RoA by issuing Circular 8/90 which makes explicit the link between the national curriculum and records of achievement:

"The Government sees records of achievement as integrally linked with the National Curriculum. The underlying principles of recognising positive achievement in all pupils are common to both...For the future, he (the Secretary of State) sees records of the achievement as the means by which achievements across the National Curriculum and beyond can be most effectively reported to a range of audiences." (DES 1990, p.9)

If education professionals, particularly the teachers, who originally supported RoA as a "grassroots initiative", could not argue the case for RoA becoming a national development, because of their diminished lobbying power in the 1980s, then there were, as I have indicated, several other more powerful key players and agencies who were prepared to argue the case on their behalf, although sometimes for rather different reasons.

As TVEI was extended in 1989, more and more learners were experiencing RoA, although still in varying localised forms. By 1991, with the introduction of the NRA, something which had started as a "grassroots" initiative had now become an instrument of national education policy with the direct support of both the ED and the DES.

The NRA as a national policy instrument in the early 1990s

Why should the National Record of Achievement (NRA) be attractive as an instrument of national policy in the early 1990s? What educational "crisis" - to extend Andy Hargreaves terminology into a

period beyond that which he analysed in *Curriculum and Assessment Reform* (Hargreaves 1989) - typified the context of the early 1990s?

I will argue in this section that the early 1990s suffered from the crises of "skills shortage" and "the academic/vocational divide" and will then attempt to explain why the NRA was seen by different key agencies and players as one of the means of addressing the latter crisis. In order to support this argument, it is necessary to focus more on post-16 than on pre-16 education.

Before considering this post-16 focus, however, it is worth mentioning here that, since its launch in 1991, the NRA has acquired a particular and significant additional function within the pre-16 education system. From December 1992, the NRA became the medium for reporting to parents on their children's attainment in the National Curriculum. This function for the NRA, which linked it inextricably with the mainstream secondary education system in England and Wales, will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter. However, it is important to note here that this official function for the NRA both raised its profile within schools, as the local case study material in later chapters will demonstrate, and also ensured it a place alongside the National Curriculum.

Turning now to the post-16 education and training system, throughout the late 1980s and the early 1990s, as Chapter 1 has already pointed out, there were increasing references in education policy documents to the need for Britain to increase the skill levels of its workforce in order to compete in world markets (e.g. CBI 1989; DES/ED/WO 1991). This led to calls for the creation of "a learning society" (e.g. Ball 1992) - a concept which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7. It was argued that one very important step in this direction would be an end to the highly divisive and wasteful "academic/vocational divide" in the English post-

16 education system. As the Royal Society's report *Beyond GCSE* (1991) pointed out:

"...current education provision for students post-16 is out of step; it does not reflect the balance, style or coherence now being sought for pre-16 education. Current post-16 education is broadly split into two types: an academic track demanding specialisation and a high degree of competence, and catering for a minority of the post-16 population; and a vocational track, regarded as 'second class' and less worthy than the academic track. There is little opportunity for transfer between the two tracks and no parity of esteem." (p.7)

It is not that there was no division between the academic and vocational tracks in post-16 education before this period - it has always existed - but rather that the disadvantages of such a division were made more apparent in the 1990s by the increase in post-16 participation which was reflected in the analyses contained in a number of influential national reports representing all shades of political opinion. I refer here, for example, to the Confederation of British Industry's *Towards a Skills Revolution* (1989), to the RSA's *More Means Different* (1990), to the IPPR Report *A British Baccalaureate* (Finegold *et al.* 1990), to The Royal Society's *Beyond GCSE* (1991), to the Government White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991) and to the Institute of Directors' *Performance and Potential: Education and Training for a Market Economy* (1992). The "crises" of the late 1980s and early 1990s could therefore be seen both as skills shortage and the academic/vocational divide.

The rest of this section will be devoted to an exploration of why the NRA was seen as one of several possible policy responses to the latter of these crises and how its role as an instrument of national education policy was perceived in the early 1990s.

It could be argued that one of the strengths of the NRA as an instrument of national education policy in the early 1990s was its flexibility - that is that it could be used both within a divided and within a unified post-16 education system. In both systems, its functions could essentially be the same - to provide coherence and accreditation for all learners.

"It is proposed that a system of lifelong recording is built up, starting from the NRA, incorporating the local practices of recording in schools and various regions of the country and the processes and experiences which have been gained through NROVA. It will of course span both education and training and help to forge links between different forms of learning at different stages of an individual's career." (Jessup 1992)

In a divided post-16 education system, the NRA, as a "record for life" (Secretary of State for Employment 1992), could be used by all learners whatever course of study they were pursuing, whether they were studying part-time or full-time and in whatever context learning took place - in an educational institution, in the workplace or at home. The NRA could be used to record and value all aspects of learning and all elements of the curriculum, whether these related to vocational, academic or informal learning. Thus, in a sense, the NRA could be claimed to be giving equal weight and validity to all types and modes of learning. No process, other than recording of achievement, would be able to fulfil this function and no existing qualification could carry out this role.

"Beyond school, in higher and further education and in the world of work and training, records of achievement are being used more and more to maximise the effective development of individuals. It is recognised that individuals need to take control and responsibility for their own learning needs in order for the country to compete in both

European and world terms and records of achievement are essential tools for this task.” (Employment Department 1990)

Those who promoted the NRA (initially the Employment Department and later NCVQ) therefore argued that it widened access to learning by valuing all types of learning and that it also supported learning by validating achievements in all types of context for any age group. Thus, as a policy instrument, the NRA potentially stimulated a desire and demand for learning which could be seen to contribute to the development of "a learning culture" in Britain. As Sir Christopher Ball says in *Profitable Learning* (1992):

“The creation of a learning society depends on the recognition that everyone is capable of benefiting from continuing their learning throughout life.” (p.9)

In the sense that it has the potential to value all types of learning and can be equally validly used for recording and recognising academic or vocational achievements, it could be argued that the NRA could also be seen as a policy instrument or framework which overarches the academic/vocational divide. The flaws in the argument for this role for the NRA within a divided post-16 education system, where there is no parity of esteem between the two tracks within that system, will be explored in more depth in future chapters. An analysis of the ability or power of the NRA to address the crises of "skills shortage" and "the academic/vocational divide " is not relevant to this chapter. What is important here is to understand why the NRA was, and still is, seen by policy makers and others as a useful tool for addressing these crises.

What is also important for this chapter is to explain why so many different agencies and key players in the education system were, and continue to be, supportive of the concept of a National Record of Achievement.

As has been indicated earlier in this section, the NRA has the potential to be used as a policy instrument both within a divided and within a unified post-16 education system. Its fundamental role of recording and accrediting learning of all types is potentially as valid within the one type of system as within the other. Within a unified post-16 system, as I will argue later in this thesis, there is as much need to have underpinning guidance, assessment, recording and reporting processes as there is within a divided education system. Both systems require a process which provides coherence and unity for the learner, which records achievements made and targets yet to fulfil and which supports continuity and effective progression from one educational setting to another.

Educationalists and politicians supporting the retention of unreformed A Levels¹⁸ and thus, by extension, the perpetuation of the academic/vocational divide in post-16 education and training, as well as those arguing for qualifications reform and unification of the post-16 curriculum, therefore both had reasons to support recording of achievement using the NRA. The NRA was potentially attractive to employers, because it could be seen as a way of valuing and accrediting work-based learning and as one of the ways of improving the skills of the workforce. It was potentially attractive to examination boards and validating bodies because it had the possibility of overarching their awards without threatening the way in which they operated and it was potentially attractive to practitioners because, like earlier records of achievement, it provided a way of recognising and valuing all types of learning for all types of learners.

¹⁸ Richardson (1993) provides a very useful detailed account of the policy debates surrounding the arguments for retaining or reforming A Levels that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the key players who supported the former or the latter view. He does not, however, link these arguments with the arguments for or against the use of the NRA.

The NRA, therefore, did not threaten those with vested interests in the retention of a divided post-16 education and training system, who viewed it as a largely benign and potentially useful instrument of national policy (DES/ED WO 1991). At the same time, those who wished to bring about reforms in the post-16 education and training system viewed the NRA as one of the essential elements in the move towards a unified curriculum (Spours & Young 1997). Thus the NRA, like earlier records of achievement, received support from a variety of key players and agencies in the English education system for a variety of different reasons. The question of whether it was able to fulfil the various and potentially conflicting roles that these different key players and agencies intended for it, particularly in the national education policy context of the early 1990s, forms the subject of later chapters of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how RoA moved from a grassroots initiative in the late 1960s to an instrument of national policy in the 1990s with the introduction of the NRA in 1991. It has argued that both as a local development and as a national initiative, RoA was seen as providing a solution to a number of key educational issues that related to the national education policy context of the time. Throughout its history, RoA has been supported by a variety of different key players and agencies in the education system, each of whom has had a different purpose for supporting this initiative. What the chapter argues, however, is that enough of these purposes came together in the early 1990s for the initiative to gain national status. It is also suggested, in the final section of this chapter, that part of the reason for the continued existence of RoA in the 1990s is that it has never, as some of the earlier writers suggested it might, fundamentally challenged the supremacy of the national qualifications system alongside which it has had to coexist. The way that this co-existence shaped and limited the role that the NRA played in the early 1990s will be explored in the chapters which follow.

Chapter 4

The Importance of Content¹⁹ in Determining a New Role for the National Record of Achievement

Introduction

Chapter 3 examined the importance of context in shaping the role that RoA played from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. It highlighted particularly the way that RoA changed from a grassroots initiative, in the 1970s and 1980s, to an instrument of national education policy with the introduction of the NRA in 1991. This chapter focuses on the second element of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - content - and argues that this element has been significant in determining the role that the NRA played in Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. This argument is then illustrated in the case study analysed in Chapter 5.

This chapter begins by discussing the ways in which the features of the NRA differ from those of earlier records of achievement and analyses the significance of these differences for the new role that the NRA played in the early 1990s. It then goes on to explain how the features of the NRA have resulted from RoA developments in both academic/general education and vocational education and training, as well as in the compulsory and post-compulsory phases of education. Finally, the chapter argues that the fact that the NRA was developed in this way and that it was supported by the Department of Education and Science (DES) (which was then responsible for academic/general education) and the Employment Department (ED)

¹⁹ In this chapter I am using 'content' in a rather narrower sense than I have in Chapter 1. Here I focus particularly on the format and design of the NRA - although I do also examine the significance of the NRA initiative as a whole.

(which was then responsible for vocational education and training) was significant in determining its new role as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. This was a role, the chapter suggests, that earlier RoAs were not equipped to play, both because of their particular features and also because they originated in and were associated exclusively with either vocational education and training or academic/general education or with secondary or post-16 education. Hence the shift in the balance between context, content and process/product relationship in Phase 2 of RoA development towards a greater emphasis on content (see Figure 1 p.26)

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section uses Figure 3 in Chapter 1 (p.47) as its starting point for examining the differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement. This section argues that these differences were significant in determining the different role that RoA played in the early 1990s. The second section examines the origins and development of the NRA design firstly within academic/general education and then within vocational education and training from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. It then draws some conclusions as to how and why RoA developed differently in each type of education, what the NRA's association is with each type and to what extent the role of the NRA in the early 1990s is determined by this association. The third section of the chapter argues that the fact that the NRA is associated with both academic/general education and vocational education and training - both pre-16 and post-16 - is a distinction which sets it apart from earlier records of achievement. This distinction, I shall suggest, has had an effect on the way that the role of the NRA has been viewed by different key players and agencies in the English education system. The discussion in this section also attempts to explain why both the DES and the ED supported the NRA and jointly participated in its launch in 1991. As later chapters of the thesis will discuss in

more detail, the fact that the NRA was associated more clearly with academic/general education than earlier records of achievement had been, was a significant factor in how it was viewed and used within the English education system of the 1990s and could also be significant for its potential future role.

Differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement

There are eight major differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement which are illustrated in Figure 3 (p.47). Firstly, and most obviously, there is a single national format for the NRA, whereas earlier records of achievement varied from LEA area to LEA area or even from school to school. Secondly, the NRA contains a specific sheet for recording achievements in national academic and vocational qualifications, which became a mandatory requirement for all schools to complete from 1992 (DES 1992a & 1992b). Thirdly, national guidance on the completion of the NRA suggested that it should include an Individual Development Plan, which was translated into a practical form by the inclusion of a specific Individual Action Plan sheet from 1993. Fourthly, the NRA contains an Employment History sheet which was never part of earlier records of achievement in compulsory education. This emphasis on the use of the NRA in the workplace, as well as in educational settings, is supported by the fifth difference between the NRA and earlier records of achievement. In all the national guidance on the NRA, there is a stress on the importance of the record being made available to both trainees and employees in the workplace, as well as in all types of educational institutions. The final three differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement also relate to the national guidance that is given on the completion and use of the NRA. There is an emphasis on the student input, rather than on the school/college input, there is the

suggestion that statements made in the NRA should be supported by a portfolio of evidence and, finally, that the Other Achievements and Experiences sheet should include information about the student's acquisition of core/transferable skills.²⁰

Before looking at the significance of each of these features of the NRA for its role in the early 1990s, it is important to point out that some earlier records of achievement contained some of these features, but none contained all.

In terms of the new role for RoA in the 1990s - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement - the first five of these differences are undoubtedly the most significant. It is self-evident that a single national format is a prerequisite of a national policy instrument - without this there could be no control at a national level over the record's role or its use and there could be no way of ensuring that all learners had access to the same type of process. Similarly, the inclusion of a Qualifications and Credits sheet for recording all types of nationally recognised qualifications, regardless of their type or where they are gained, is a vital requirement of a record which is intended for use by all learners to record all types of achievements. This feature of the NRA, as later sections of this chapter will point out, was further reinforced in 1992, when this sheet of the NRA was made the mandatory requirement for schools reporting to parents on their children's achievements in the national curriculum and national qualifications. This was of particular significance for the way the NRA was perceived, because previous records of achievement, as Chapter 2 pointed out, had tended to be seen as an alternative form of accreditation for those unable to succeed in national qualifications

²⁰ The core/transferable skills referred to here are communications, application of number, information technology, personal skills, problem solving, modern foreign language.

and sometimes as a way of accrediting an alternative curriculum for these students.

The inclusion of an individual action planning sheet as an official section of the NRA was also of importance for RoA's new role in the 1990s, as Chapter 5 will discuss in more detail, because it provided a mechanism for students to plan future progression routes, whether into education or the workplace. It thus emphasised the linkages and the importance of continuity between one phase of education or training and the next.

The next two differences - that is the fact that the NRA contained an Employment History sheet and that the national guidance on the use of the NRA stressed the record's use in both education and workplace settings, again highlight that this is intended as a record for all learners, not just for those at school.

The final three differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement (the emphasis on student rather than institutional input into the record, the recommendation for the inclusion of a portfolio of evidence to accompany the NRA and the suggestion that the record should include comments about the student's acquisition of core/transferable skills) are possibly less significant than the first five in determining its changed role in the 1990s, although they could be very important in determining a role for the NRA in relation to lifelong learning. These are all features which are designed to emphasise the value of the NRA to the individual and thus its appropriateness for and potential usefulness to all types of learners in all types of settings. What is specifically intended here by the design of the NRA is that it should be open enough to be used by all learners and trainees, although the mandatory section only applies to those within the school system.

What this section has argued is that the differences in content between the NRA and earlier records of achievement were all potentially significant in determining a new role for RoA from 1991 with the introduction of the NRA. This will be supported in Chapter 5 by evidence from the case study. However, the realisation of that new role, as later chapters of the thesis point out, was still dependent on the context within which the NRA was being used. Nevertheless, the content of the NRA was, as later chapters of the thesis demonstrate, important in determining the shape of Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for all learners to record achievement. The next section will discuss how and why the NRA took this particular form in 1991.

Origins and development of the NRA design

In this section, I will argue that the NRA is a hybrid which owes its particular design to its origins in both academic/general education and vocational education and training, as well as in pre-16 and post-16 education. In order to examine the reasons for this design, I will trace the development of RoA separately in these two types of education.

The development of RoA in academic/general education

The first real mention of RoA as a means of providing a summative assessment of secondary school pupils' achievements in all aspects of the curriculum occurs in the Spens Report (Board of Education 1938). Since, as the above sections have shown, there was effectively no full-time alternative to the academic/general system of education in existence in England and Wales at this time (McCulloch 1990), it would be reasonable to argue that the idea of RoA therefore had its roots in academic/general compulsory education.

The idea of a summative record for school leavers (that is for those pupils not going into the sixth form) was mentioned again by the Norwood Report (Board of Education 1943):

"The suggestions we have made point to a new form of school certificate, falling into two parts. The first part would contain a record of the share which the pupil has taken in the general life of the school, games and societies and the like. It would, in short, give the reader some idea of the way in which he had used the opportunities offered to him by his education, using the term in its widest sense. The second part would contain the record of the pupil's achievements in the examination taken at the end of the main school course...Such a certificate would give a summary of the pupil's career as known to his teachers and as appraised in a test; it would be a document which would give real information about his capacities and performance as shown in the whole field of his school career."
(p.48)

This idea was further supported by the Secondary Schools' Examination Council in 1947, who saw this type of school record as a means by which young people could progress more easily into appropriate post-school training or work.

The Crowther Report (Ministry of Education 1959) continued the theme in its recommendations for a form of leaving certificate for all pupils which would serve both as an alternative and as an adjunct to formal certification.

"Some of the purposes served by external examinations can also be met by a formal assessment by the school, at the time of leaving, of a pupil's performance and attainments during his whole time at school. Irrespective of the growth of external

examinations, we recommend that thought be given to the development of a system of leaving certificates on these lines." (p.451)

This recommendation was then echoed in the Newsom Report (Central Advisory Council 1963), which also advocated discussion with those who were likely to be making use of the records for selection and recruitment:

"All pupils who remain at school until the age of 16 should receive some form of internal leaving certificate. This need not follow a uniform pattern, but local consultation between schools, the youth employment service, further education and employers would be helpful in arriving at a form most likely to be useful to the pupil. Such a certificate for some pupils would include a record of achievements in public examinations." (p.85)

What is important about this last recommendation is that, as well as supporting the notion of internal teacher assessment and localised development of RoA, as the other reports listed above also do, this report additionally mentions the inclusion of information about externally awarded formal assessments in the same document as internal, informal assessments. This is a feature that some later RoA schemes, such as the Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement, emulated (Mortimore *et al.* 1984) and that was also adopted for the NRA. As has been pointed out in earlier chapters and as I will argue later in this chapter, the significance of this feature - i.e. the inclusion of external and internal assessments in the same record - is one of the pre-requisites of the NRA being used as a tool for all learners to record achievement. The inclusion of externally validated qualifications, as well as teacher assessments, means that the NRA can be used with students of all abilities and is not being set up as an

alternative to the mainstream form of certification: rather it is embracing and encompassing it.

Novel as these ideas might have been as recently as the 1960s, the type of certificate outlined above still does not contain one of the key elements of the RoA initiative of the 1970s onwards. The type of certificate described in the Newsom Report appears to contain no element of self-assessment or student input and it is not even clear if it was intended as an open record: certainly there is no explicit mention of negotiation between teacher and student on the final content of the record.

The first documented evidence of a record of achievement which definitely includes this student input is the Record of Personal Achievement (RPA), which was piloted by Swindon LEA in 1969, and spread to about 60 schools in different parts of the country by 1975. According to Swales (1979), although the Record of Personal Achievement was designed to be offered to students of all abilities, in practice this only happened in a minority of schools where it was introduced. The fact that the record, therefore, became associated with lower achievers did nothing to enhance its reputation and, possibly for this reason, as Swales's School Council report concludes the RPA was unsuccessful in fulfilling its original aim:

"The overwhelming evidence is that RPA has not fulfilled its potential as a leaving qualification for a majority of pupils involved. Employers, with some notable exceptions have been shown to be only marginally interested." (p.91)

During the 1970s, as previous chapters have already mentioned, developments in RoA tended to be localised, teacher or institution-led, small-scale and confined to specific groups of students. Balogh (1982), for example, reports in "Profile Reports for School Leavers" :

"It is apparent that discussion and advocacy of profile reports have not been matched by the work undertaken by schools...Few schools operating profile reports appear to view them as a substitute for public examinations but this may be a pragmatic rather than a philosophic stance...Not all schools providing profile reports offer them to the entire age cohort. In some cases they have been developed expressly for the less able pupils or those least likely to be entered for public examinations." (p.46)

However, interest in the idea of RoA did not die away during this period, especially after the raising of the school leaving age in 1972, as the School's Council Report, *The Whole Curriculum 13-16* (1977), and the second report of the Study Group on the Education/Training of Young People (1976) demonstrate. The latter, for example, talks about the necessity of developing pupil profiles to replace traditional reports and statements of examination failures and successes in order to accredit the broader curriculum that it was proposing for the last two years of secondary education.

It was in the mid 1980s that RoA began to gain more credibility and to make real inroads into the secondary school curriculum with the DES 's publication of *Records of Achievement - A Statement of Policy* (DES/WO 1984). This document put forward the proposal that by the end of the decade all school leavers should receive a record of achievement which would include details about the young person's achievements in formal, externally assessed qualifications and informal internally assessed achievements, as well as recording wider experiences and abilities. In addition, funding was allocated to pilot RoA schemes along these lines in nine areas of the country and resources were provided under the TVEI Related In-Service Training Scheme for in-service training in "...assessment methods: both

formal and formative, including profiling and records of achievement." (DES 1985b)

One of the LEAs which took up this funding opportunity was the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) which produced the London Record of Achievement (LRA). This record, which is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, was designed to meet many of the requirements of the DES's Statement of Policy. Its stress, however, was on students recording their personal and social achievements, as well as their academic ones, and on teachers commenting on these in a positive manner (Hargreaves 1984). The LRA was primarily designed to support the process of recording of achievement, which was seen as a means of accrediting the kind of internally devised and school-based modular schemes of work that Hargreaves saw as so vital for raising achievement in ILEA schools, rather than as a way of recording achievements in national qualifications or assessments. The record's format reflects this focus.

However, with the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988, the DES's view of the role of records of achievement began to change to respond to this new policy.

"Many secondary schools already have developed Records of Achievement as documents summarising their pupils' achievements at 16-plus. Some are now developing similar documents for reporting on pupils' achievements to parents, in particular, in the earlier years. The Government is seeking advice from the Schools' Examinations and Assessment Council about the role of Records of Achievement in recording and reporting to parents pupils' attainments within the National Curriculum." (DES 1989, p.6)

It seemed likely, therefore, that the design of the records of achievement themselves would need to change in order to reflect this new role.

In 1990, there was further discussion of this proposal to link RoA with the statutory duty of reporting individual pupils' achievements in the National Curriculum to parents when the DES published "Records of Achievement Circular 8/90". This Circular, however, goes somewhat further, in that it encourages schools to use records of achievement for the purpose of reporting to parents and others:

"The Government sees Records of Achievement as integrally linked with the National Curriculum. The underlying principles of recognising positive achievement in all pupils are common to both. Recording of achievement schemes have often served to bring together schools' policies and practices on assessment, recording and reporting into a coherent whole. The Secretary of State applauds such developments, which are very much in the spirit of the National Curriculum. For the future, he sees Records of Achievement as a means by which achievement across the National Curriculum and beyond can be most effectively reported to a range of audiences." (DES 1990, section 30)

This development would have necessitated changes to the design of records of achievement, such as the LRA, and would eventually lead to two of the design features of the NRA - the School Achievements Sheet and the Qualifications and Credits Sheet.

The recommendation to use records of achievement for reporting to parents was finally formalised in 1992 with the publication by the DES of Circulars 5/92 and 14/92 (DES 1992a &b). These Circulars informed maintained schools that the NRA should be used as the

official reporting mechanism to parents on the achievements of all their students in the National Curriculum and national qualifications at the end of compulsory education. At a step, these Circulars linked the NRA to the mainstream secondary curriculum in a way that had never previously been done with earlier records of achievement. This, I will argue later in the thesis, not only determined the design and purpose of the record, but also its status with policy-makers, teachers and students.

The development of recording of achievement in vocational education and training

It was not until the late 1970s that there was any interest in the development of RoA for use within vocational education and training. Mansell (1982) claims that the further education sector became interested in recording of achievement in 1979, when the City and Guilds 365 Vocational Preparation Courses were being set up. However, there were few wide-spread practical developments until the early 1980s, with the introduction of the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) - finally introduced in 1985 and dependent on profile assessment - and training initiatives, such as the Youth Opportunities Programme.

"Student profiles are documents constructed by professional teachers or trainers, describing as accurately and succinctly as possible the knowledge, skills and experiences of an individual relative to a particular curriculum. They are meant to be read in their final (summary) form by employers, parents, education and training personnel and others. In the formative stage they are the common focus of concern between teacher and taught, a basis for face-to-face discussion and reflection, and an opportunity to appraise the suitability and pace of their learning programme." (Mansell 1982)

The Manpower Services Commission's (MSC) document of 1981 entitled *"Trainee-Centred Reviewing"*, for example, suggests that trainees' personal records of achievement could contribute to a profile. Also in 1981, there was a profile for the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) developed by the MSC in conjunction with the Industrial Training Boards (ITBs), the Further Education Unit (FEU), Ford Motor Company and some of the colleges offering Youth Opportunities Programmes. This profile was piloted during 1981/82. (Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit 1982)

As can be seen from the above examples, the main reason for developing RoA and profiling in vocational education and training was not as a means of valuing a broader or alternative curriculum, as had been the case in the secondary education system, but in order to find some way of defining, assessing, recording and accrediting achievements in a wide variety of contexts (Mansell 1986). The design of these records therefore reflected this purpose. They often, for example, contained checklists of competencies.

Another more significant difference between the early profiles and records of achievement originally developed in vocational education and training, as opposed to the majority of those developed for use in secondary education, was that they often included design features which required an element of student assessment and the records themselves were used formatively as well as summatively. These two features are reflected in the recommendations laid out in the FEU's Report *"A Basis for Choice"* (1982):

"The structure of the profile could be the subject of national guidelines and the terminology of assessment to be used could reflect both the objective and subjective nature of the respective assessments. Some aspects of the profile could be

constructed by the student on a self-assessment basis but this would require careful piloting. It will certainly be desirable for much of the profile to be completed on the basis of discussion between teacher and student." (para. 83)

These two characteristics of early profiles or records of achievement in vocational education and training - self assessment and the formative review process - have both since been incorporated into later developments in RoA and are two of the legacies that vocational education and training has bequeathed to the NRA.

There was a third important legacy. It was in vocational education and training that the idea of a **national** record of achievement, promised four years before in the DES's "Policy Statement on Records of Achievement", was finally realised, with the introduction by NCVQ in 1988 of the National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA). According to NCVQ:

"The National Record (here NROVA) is much more than a system for accumulating credits towards NVQs. It now provides a framework for bringing together details of previous experience, action plans - the targets for training - continuous assessment, unit credits and certificates...(It is) a means of recording and recognising achievement in a manner appropriate to employers, learners and trainers. A model for negotiated learning and competence based assessment. A system to encourage continuous learning and credit accumulation. (NCVQ 1988)

It is interesting to note that NROVA, which, as its title implies, was entirely associated with vocational education and training, was largely unsuccessful as a development despite the fact that many of its design features (e.g. the action plan) are now to be found in the

NRA. Although there is very little literature available on NROVA, (there seems, from discussion with officers at NCVQ, to have been no large-scale evaluation of the NROVA carried out) anecdotal evidence suggests that few trainees actually made use of the record and very few people outside the vocational training arena knew anything about the NROVA. It is tempting to suggest that the failure of NROVA may largely have been due to its association exclusively with low-status vocational education and training (i.e. context) rather than to its design (i.e. content).

Early developments in RoA in vocational education and training were, of necessity, largely confined to the post-16 phase since there was no vocational or even pre-vocational education and training offered in the compulsory education phase prior to the introduction of TVEI (McCulloch 1990). From 1982 onwards, however, with the introduction of TVEI, profiles and records of achievement began to make inroads into the mainstream secondary education system and, of necessity, therefore began to merge with initiatives already taking place in secondary schools as part of the DESs pilot RoA schemes.

It is during the later 1980s, I would argue, that the hybridisation in the design of records of achievement, which is eventually reflected in the design of the NRA, began to take place. During this period, the RoA literature from the Employment Department (the government department responsible for TVEI) stressed what I have termed "vocational" design features - self-assessment, action planning, transferable skills and the formative review process - (ED 1990 & 1991) at precisely the time that the literature from the DES was beginning to stress the kind of reporting of summative achievements in national qualifications and assessments (DES 1990, 1992a & b) that lies closer to early RoA developments in general/academic education.

A new role for the National Record of Achievement

What the previous section has argued is that the final design of the NRA, when it was launched in 1991, included features that reflected its origins in both academic/general education and vocational education and training, as well as in the compulsory and post-compulsory phases of education. For this reason, the NRA was potentially relevant to a much broader spectrum of learners and contexts than earlier records of achievement had been, since the design of these earlier records had been largely determined by their narrower functions. These new features of the NRA thus made it theoretically possible for the record to be used in both education and workplace setting, as well as by part-time and full-time learners of all types.

In addition to providing the NRA with the design features required to play this new role in the 1990s, Government policy also stressed the importance of this new function for the NRA.

"Young people, and adults, need a recognised means of recording their attainment in education and training. In recent years, much excellent work has been done in schools and colleges to develop records of achievement, and to link these to action planning. We want all young people to take with them into their working lives an achievement record which can be built on as they continue to learn.

In February 1991, the Government launched the National Record of Achievement (NRA) for just this purpose. It is designed to present a simple record, in summary form, of an individual's achievements in education and training throughout working life. The relevant parts of the NRA should also help schools to report to parents on the

achievement of pupils at the point of leaving school."
(DES/ED/WO May 1991, p.47)

This role as a record for all learners in a variety of different learning contexts was one that none of the earlier records of achievement had been designed for nor had been intended to play.

It is interesting to note, however, that although the two government departments responsible for the launch of the NRA in 1991 (the DES and ED) both had common reasons for supporting this initiative, for example recognising and recording achievement and ensuring a smoother transition between school, further/higher education and the workplace, there is still a marked difference in the way that they described and referred to the role of the NRA. DES documentation tended to stress the importance of the NRA as a summative document:

"The NRA, which was launched jointly by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment in 1991, serves to draw together a full record of a pupil's attainments which can be built on subsequently as a lifelong record of achievements in education and employment." (DES 1992b)

ED literature, on the other hand, laid emphasis on recording of achievement as an on-going process for improving teaching and learning. For example, in its NRA Guidance Notes of 1991, the ED stated that one of the four main purposes of the NRA is:

"...to help in the organisation of the content and delivery of learning and experience and to stimulate good approaches to teaching, training and learning so that all parties can work to ensure that the opportunities available match the needs of the individual." (Employment Department 1991)

This difference in emphasis very much reflects the difference between the historical approach to the design of RoA taken in relation to academic/general education and the historical approach taken in relation to vocational education and training, as well as the purposes that each of the Departments envisaged for the record (Broadfoot 1992). The tension between the emphasis on the NRA as a product, on the one hand, and recording of achievement as a process, on the other, is one to which later chapters of the thesis will return. What is more important for this chapter is the fact that national government policy in the early 1990s supported the use of a single record of achievement - the NRA - in both compulsory and post-compulsory education and training, and, perhaps even more significantly, in academic/general education as well as in vocational education and training. From 1991, with the introduction of the NRA, RoA had achieved a legitimacy, coverage and purpose which it had never previously attained. Moreover, the new design features or content of the NRA potentially equipped it to play a new role within the English education and training system. Chapter 5 uses a local case study to examine the parameters of this new role and the contribution that content made to that new role.

Chapter 5

A New Role for a New Record of Achievement: A Local Case Study in Tower Hamlets, 1991-1994

Introduction

Previous chapters of this thesis have pointed out the paucity of information in the literature on RoA²¹ about the NRA as a policy instrument in the early 1990s. I argued in Chapter 2 that this literature presents a problem for the researcher of the 1990s because the picture of RoA that emerges from the literature is at best multi-faceted and at worst contradictory. Much of the literature relates largely to the 1980s, concentrates pre-dominantly on pre-16 education and contains little reference either to the NRA (which, earlier chapters have argued, is a new and potentially different type of record of achievement) or to the relationship between RoA and the changed context of the 1990s. In Chapter 2, I suggested that it would be more useful to use the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - as a way of analysing the role that RoA has played in the past and might play in the future. This chapter and the two subsequent ones therefore attempt to use this theoretical framework to analyse the new role that the NRA played in the early 1990s - both locally and nationally - and the role that it might play in the future.

This Chapter focuses on the local context by drawing on a case study of how an LEA used the NRA in the early 1990s as part of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" designed to tackle low levels of post-16 participation and achievement and problems of student progression. It

²¹ By the literature on RoA, I mean the education policy literature, the policy and research literature on assessment which relates to recording of achievement (RoA) and the specific research and evaluation literature on RoA.

argues that this new role involves a focus on the local education system as a whole and the linkages between phases of that system rather than only on change at the individual institutional level. This is something which has not been a major focus of previous literature on RoA. Chapter 6 takes a broader view by examining the case study findings within the national educational context of the early 1990s and by highlighting some of the limitations that this national context placed on a policy instrument such as the NRA. Both chapters suggest that RoA (in this case the NRA) was used to address new problems in the new “medium participation/low achievement” education system context of the early 1990s and that its role has thus changed in this period. Chapter 7 looks beyond the 1990s and draws on previous analysis to suggest a role for the NRA in supporting life-long learning in a potential future “high participation/high achievement” education and training system. In all three chapters I will argue that the role that the NRA has played or might play is determined by a combination of context, content and process/product relationship, although the balance in emphasis between these three elements changes. In this chapter I will suggest that because of the introduction of the NRA in 1991, the “content” element of the framework was of particular significance in the early 1990s.

The chapter begins by introducing a model for using the NRA as a catalyst in the development of a strategic framework for addressing underachievement and problems of student progression. The model also suggests that the development of a local strategic framework for tackling underachievement and progression problems changes the function of the NRA from catalyst to essential element within that framework. This model is used to interpret the Tower Hamlets case study.

The chapter goes on to provide evidence which indicates that the specific features of the NRA (its content), as opposed to those of earlier

records of achievement such as the London Record of Achievement (LRA), were significant for its function as a catalyst. The importance of process/product relationship is also highlighted through a discussion of the different but inter-related functions of the process of recording of achievement and the use of the summative NRA within the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". The chapter concludes by suggesting that it is the power of the borough-wide "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" itself, which uses the NRA as one of its major elements, that has enabled Tower Hamlets to begin to address student underachievement and progression issues. This strategy, I argue, is powerful precisely because, in defining the role of RoA/NRA, it takes into account all three elements of the theoretical framework developed by the thesis - context, content and process/product relationship.

The chapter is divided into six main sections. The first section describes the model for using the NRA to develop a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". Section two looks at context by examining the nature of Tower Hamlets as a case study for NRA development in the early 1990s, identifying those key distinctive factors in Tower Hamlets which enabled the borough TVEI Programme to use the NRA in the way that it did. Section three concentrates on content by examining the differences between the LRA (which was the record in use in Tower Hamlets in the late 1980s) and the NRA. It then analyses the extent to which in Tower Hamlets the features of the latter affected its use as a catalyst for and element within a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". Section four focuses on process/product relationship and demonstrates how the NRA was used as a catalyst in the process of developing a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets. Section five describes the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and analyses the enhanced role of the recording of achievement process and the summative NRA document within such a Framework. Section six examines the role that the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme played in supporting the development of the Unified Guidance 14-19

Framework" in the borough. The chapter then concludes with a brief assessment of the new role for RoA in the 1990s and suggests that the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - has been useful as an analytical tool in the assessment process.

A model for using the NRA in the "medium participation/low achievement" education system of the early 1990s

Earlier in the thesis, theoretical and historical analysis and a review of the literature have been used to examine the different ways in which RoA was viewed and used in the 1970s to the 1990s.

These earlier chapters have suggested that, in the "low participation/low achievement" system of the late 1970s and early 1980s, records of achievement were largely seen as alternatives to qualifications for lower-achieving students. They argued that at that time the process of recording of achievement was designed, in the main, for use as a motivating factor for lower-achieving students in schools or colleges and the records of achievement themselves were, on the whole, assigned the role of accrediting previously unaccredited achievement, often of a vocational or pre-vocational nature. During this period, there was some consideration given to the role records of achievement might play in the selection process for employment, but the actual role they played as transition documents in the "low participation/low achievement" system of the 1970s and early 1980s was slight. This was particularly the case in relation to transition from pre-16 education into post-16 education and training, and most marked in relation to students on academic courses - i.e. those moving directly from O Level or to A Level - where no transition document, other than the certificate of qualifications gained, was normally required.

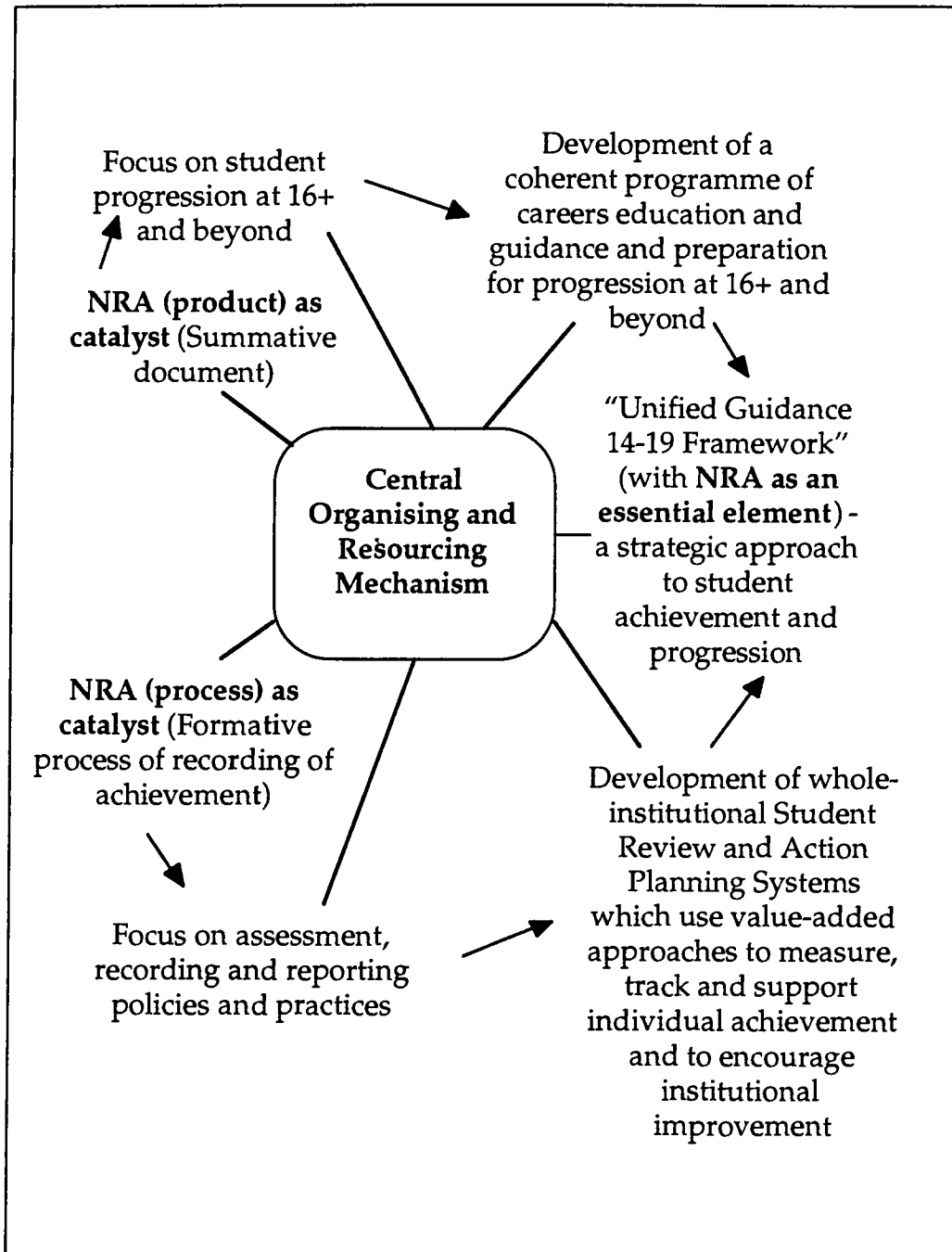
The "medium participation/low achievement" context of the early 1990s, however, presented a different picture - larger numbers of students were progressing into post-16 education and training, but their level of pre-16 achievement was more variable (Spours 1993). New types of students with a wider variety of needs were therefore entering the post-16 system. In such a system, transition and progression become more complex and increasingly raise significant issues for the education and training system to address (Hodgson & Spours 1997). This is particularly the case in the English education system of the late 1980s and early 1990s, where one of national government's responses to the increase in the post-16 participation rate was the development of new vocational qualifications such as GNVQ (DES/ED WO 1991).

In addition, as a recent Tower Hamlets report indicates (LBTH 1995a), achievement at GCSE has a significant effect on whether students progress into further education or training or exit the system at 16+²². If an LEA wishes to increase levels of post-16 participation, in order to raise the qualifications base of the whole cohort, it is therefore necessary to find tools to address underachievement in the secondary phase of education. Thus the key issues for the English education system of the early 1990s were underachievement, lack of progression and rising, but possibly depressed, post-16 participation rates (Hodgson & Spours 1997). It was into this context, that the NRA was introduced by the Department for Education and Science and the Employment Department in 1991.

In this section of the chapter, I propose a model for the use of the NRA in this "medium participation/low achievement" context of the early 1990s (see Figure 4 overleaf). In the sections which follow, I will attempt to use this model to interpret the Tower Hamlets case study.

²² The LBTH 1994 Destination Tracking Study, which used data on 1657 Year 11 students, shows that in 1994, 95% of Year 11 students with 5 A*-C grades stayed on at school or went to college at 16+. Only 68% of those with fewer than 5 A*-C grades stayed on. Of those with no qualifications at 16+, only 27% stayed on and only 4% left to go to a job.

Figure 4:
A model for using the NRA in the "medium participation/low achievement" education system of the early 1990s



Essentially, I wish to suggest that there are two major functions that RoA can fulfil in the "medium participation/low achievement" context of the early 1990s and that each of these functions depends on secondary, special and post-16 institutions using the formative process of recording of achievement, as well as using the NRA as a summative document. Both functions also depend on the existence of a local organising and resourcing mechanism which encourages, shares, develops, supports and refines practices and ideas over a period of time (in Tower Hamlets, for example, it was the borough TVEI Programme which played this role).

The NRA as catalyst²³

The model for using the NRA in the context of the early 1990s, illustrated at Figure 4, p.148, shows the NRA summative document being used as a catalyst to encourage those responsible for tutorial programmes (e.g. Year 11 heads and tutors in secondary and special schools and tutorial staff in post-16 education institutions) to look outwards and beyond their institutions and to engage with the next stage in a student's progress. According to the model I am proposing, this, in turn, encourages these same staff to develop a coherent programme of guidance and preparation for further education, training or the workplace at 16+ . This development then culminates in the introduction of a strategic approach to student underachievement and lack of progression, such as the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", within which the NRA becomes one of the essential elements.

The bottom half of Figure 4 shows the formative process of recording of achievement associated with the NRA also playing a role as catalyst.

²³ I use the term catalyst here to mean something which starts a process of change. However, I am aware of the limitations of this term in this context, since the term catalyst, when used in a chemical context, refers to a substance which does not itself change during the chemical reaction. This, as my model will demonstrate, is not the case with the NRA. As the NRA becomes part of the Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework, it and its role does change by becoming part of the Framework. The term catalyst, however, is a useful one for describing the initial function of the NRA in Figure 4.

However, in this case, an emphasis on this formative process is shown as stimulating those responsible for curriculum and assessment planning (e.g. heads of department and assessment co-ordinators in secondary and special schools and programme directors in post-16 institutions) to look inwards and to focus on internal policies, practices and systems which might help individual students to achieve more highly and thus to move from one level of learning to the next. The model suggests that this focus on student assessment, recording and reporting practices can encourage those responsible for curriculum and assessment planning to develop a coherent whole-institutional approach to Student Review and Action Planning Systems. These require value-added dimensions in order accurately to measure, track and promote student achievement (see Spours & Hodgson 1996; Hodgson 1997a).

Thus, in this model, the summative NRA and the formative process of recording of achievement have each been used to stimulate different types of development - one which is essentially outward-looking and focuses on the future of students beyond the education institution, the other which is fundamentally inward-looking and focuses on institutional improvement. In both cases, however, the function is one of a catalyst. In both cases this catalyst is used to encourage the development of a whole-institutional systems approach. In both cases it can lead to the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" within which the NRA and recording of achievement are subsumed, becoming instead essential elements of this strategic approach for addressing student underachievement and lack of progression.

Before moving on to look at the second use of the NRA (i.e. as an essential element in a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"), it is important here to describe the model illustrated at Figure 4, p.148, in a

little more depth and to begin to make some suggestions as to how the NRA might be used as a catalyst in this way.

The previous chapter has considered the differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement and later sections of this chapter focus on the differences between the LRA and the NRA. For the purposes of this section, it is only necessary to highlight two of these - the fact that the NRA is designed to be used by the whole 16+ student cohort and the fact that it focuses on a student's future plans. Both of these features are significant for an understanding of the use of the NRA as catalyst.

Turning firstly to the use of the NRA summative document as a catalyst, I propose in my model that the introduction of this document stimulates those responsible for tutorial programmes and progression in schools and colleges to focus more closely on student progression at 16+ and beyond. Progression, however, has not traditionally been a significant pre-occupation of secondary schools or even colleges. There is a tendency for these institutions, particularly since the introduction of local management of schools and FE college incorporation, to concentrate their attention on what is happening within their own four walls.²⁴ However, proposals in the model are based on the assumption that because of the NRA's universal application across the student cohort and its forward focus, its introduction tends to raise awareness within schools and colleges of its potential use in progression and transition. Once awareness has been raised, the impetus to use the record for student progression is reinforced by a very practical consideration within institutions - the amount of time and energy that it

²⁴ For proof of this attitude towards progression issues, one only has to ask institutions how many of them systematically collect and analyse destinations statistics on their students. Now, colleges, and increasingly schools, are being legally required to collect such data and the situation is changing. Until recently, however, few institutions would claim to be either collecting or analysing data on student achievement and progression routes. This was an operation that was traditionally carried out by the local education authority, often with little reference to individual institutions in public reports (see Hodgson 1997b).

takes to complete the summative record. Most institutions would not consider investing such a large amount of curriculum, student and staff time simply on an end-of-phase report. The use of the summative NRA as an essential part of the selection and recruitment process for further education or employment, however, provides them with some justification for and some positive outcome from this outlay of resources. It also, as the Tower Hamlets case study demonstrates, gives the record more credibility in the eyes of students.

The second step of the model, which suggests that institutions are more likely to move from a focus on progression and transition to the development of a coherent programme of guidance and preparation for progression at 16+ and beyond, possibly requires less explanation. In the context of the early 1990s, with the number and complexity of post-16 options available to young people growing, there was a greater need than ever before for a more detailed examination of the various options available at the end of compulsory education and thus an extended period of careers education and guidance and preparation for transition. The incorporation of this type of preparation into a broader and more coherent framework, such as the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", is a logical subsequent step, or an example of what Fullan might call "organised common sense" (Fullan 1982).

The summative NRA, in its role as catalyst, has thus been used to generate a series of reactions that culminate in the development of a strategic approach to student progression. The "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", however, also provides a strategic approach to student achievement. It is here that the process of recording of achievement acts as catalyst.

Figure 4 illustrates how the introduction and development of the formative process of recording of achievement acts as a catalyst for focusing schools' and colleges' attention on their internal assessment,

recording and reporting systems. This is because it is these systems which support students in the production of NRAs that can be used for progression purposes. As the OFSTED/Audit Commission report of 1993 points out, for positive post-16 progression to take place, it is necessary for students to be able to make informed and realistic choices from the range of courses available to them at 16+. The argument behind the model proposed here is that effective assessment, recording and reporting systems have the potential to help students to clarify their levels of attainment and achievement and to identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to make more informed decisions about their future options. These systems may not, however, have the capacity to offer students strategies for improving their overall progress.

It is the next step in the model (i.e. the development of Student Review and Action Planning Systems), that provides the mechanism for students, in conjunction with their tutors, to devise strategies for addressing their weaknesses and for improving their overall levels of achievement in order to progress. Moreover, the use of value-added measurement within Student Review and Action Planning Systems²⁵ provides tutors and students with the data to look at individual progress. It also provides institutions with information that they can use to examine how effective their teaching and learning strategies are in raising levels of student achievement (Spours & Hodgson 1996; Hodgson 1997a).

The model goes on to suggest that it is this kind of Student Review and Action Planning System that then becomes the central mechanism for supporting students within a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

²⁵ This term was used in the early 1990s in Tower Hamlets but has now largely been replaced by the term 'formative value-added system'.

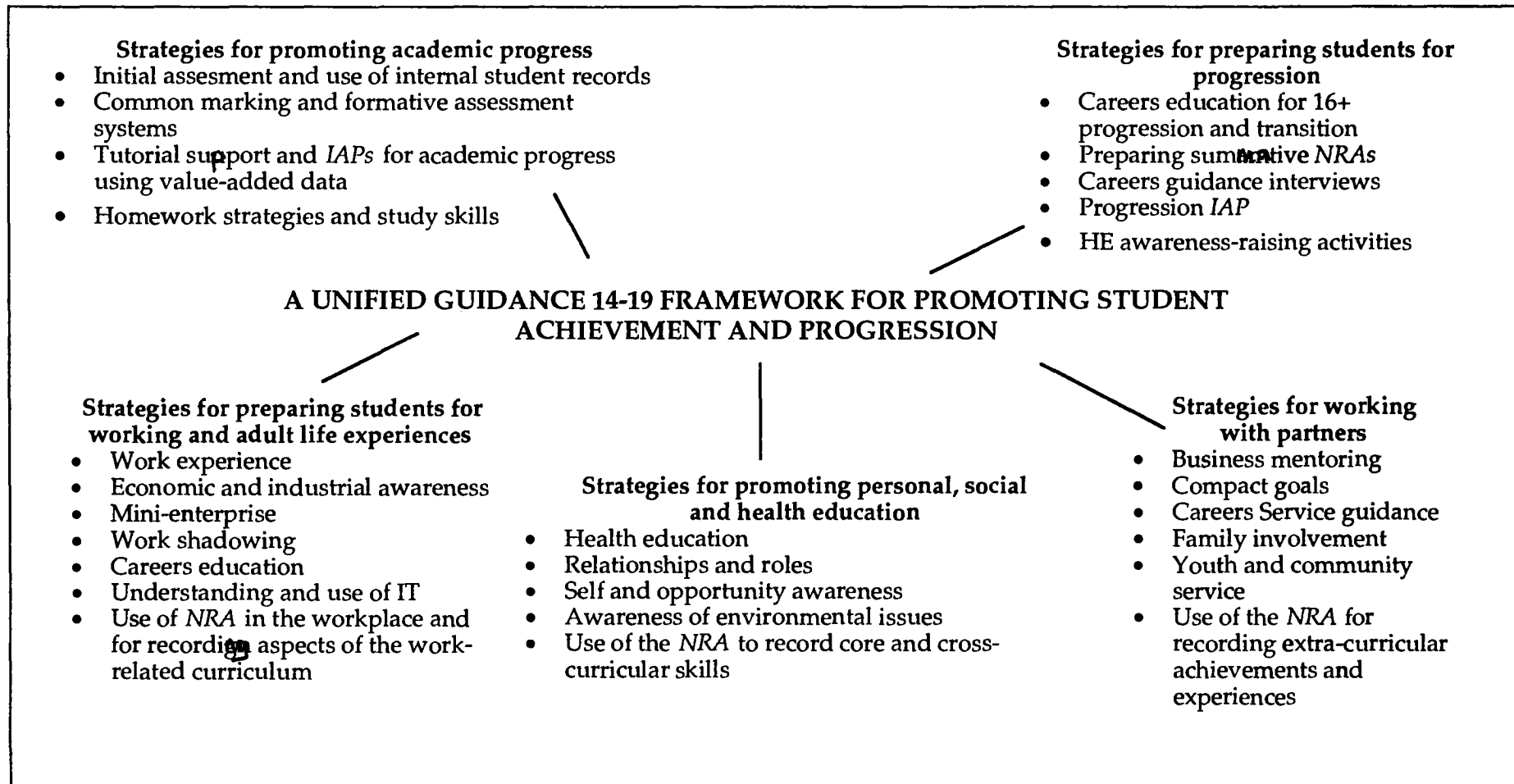
The NRA as an essential component of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"

The second function for which the model suggests the NRA can be used in the context of the early 1990s is as an essential element in a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" for promoting student achievement and progression . Figure 5 overleaf illustrates the key components of such a Framework and demonstrates how, in this function, the NRA with its integral individual action plan is no longer acting as a catalyst in developing institutional systems, but has become a part of the Framework itself.

The term "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" is here used to describe a co-ordinated and coherent approach to the delivery of the National Curriculum, (including its cross-curricular themes), within compulsory education and the delivery of a broad and integrated curriculum post-16. It is an attempt to turn what could be seen as a set of fragmented (and at post-16 level, narrow) subject-specific learning experiences into a more coherent and holistic experience for the secondary and post-16 learner. A "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" also aims better to equip the learner to make decisions about future options by providing a series of progressive learning experiences (e.g. work experience, business mentoring) which prepare her/him for life beyond school or college.

The process of recording of achievement and action planning are central to this approach since they provide a student-centred approach to learning, as well as a means of tracking individual student achievement and progression. It is this information about individual student progress which the institution requires in order to encourage future learner achievement, to provide the individual support required by each student and to guide the learner in making realistic choices future progression pathways (Spours & Hodgson 1996; Hodgson 1997a).

Figure 5:
The key components of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" for promoting student achievement and progression



Pivotal to a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" is the setting up of a whole-institutional tutorial system which is linked to the institution's internal and external assessment, recording and reporting cycles. This tutorial system includes regular review points where student and tutor (sometimes together with a parent or parents) discuss the student's overall progress on the basis of data received from both academic and pastoral staff. Following an individual action planning process, student targets are set and the student and her/his tutor monitor progress against these in the period leading up to the next review and action planning session. In this way the student is made more aware of her/his progress as a learner and has the opportunity to take more control over the management of her/his own learning and progression. For its part, the institution is able to demonstrate its commitment to raising achievement and promoting progression for each individual student.

The "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" thus provides both a method of promoting student entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, which goes beyond the confines of National Curriculum subjects pre-16 and a narrow qualifications-bound curriculum post-16, and also a structure which aims to support student achievement and progression within the institution and beyond.

As a key element in a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", recording of achievement using the NRA can therefore be seen as part of a broader, more coherent and student-centred curriculum framework for 14-19 year olds, as well as an essential component of an institutional system for raising levels of student achievement and progression.

The importance of a central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism

Up to this point, I have attempted to describe a model for the use of the NRA in the "medium participation/low achievement" system of the

1990s. In order to complete this model, however, it is necessary to look at one further element contained in Figure 4 - the role of a central organising and resourcing mechanism. It is this type of mechanism which provides the initial resources, leadership and direction required to use the NRA to work as a catalyst, as well as to support the type of development that subsequently results.

A later section of this chapter will look in more detail at the support mechanisms required for the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets in the context of the early 1990s. However, it is necessary here to give a brief overview of the main features and functions of such a central organising and resourcing mechanism in order to examine the importance of its role within the model at Figure 4.

The model, as described thus far in this chapter, has concentrated on the way that the NRA has been used as a catalyst. From this discussion one might assume that simply by introducing the NRA into schools and colleges, the series of chain reactions set in motion by its introduction would then follow automatically. In reality, this is, of course, unlikely.

The reality for schools and colleges, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, was one of bombardment by a whole series of national legislation and initiatives related to the curriculum (e.g. National Curriculum, TVEI), qualifications (e.g. vocational qualifications, GCSEs), human resource development (e.g. teacher appraisal, Investors in People) and financial management (e.g. LMS and FE Incorporation), often with conflicting aims and always with conflicting demands on financial and human resources. In such a context, strategic planning and sustained, incremental development of any type would have been difficult without some kind of central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism to support it. The use of the NRA and recording

of achievement to develop a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" along the lines that I have described above, is no exception.

Although there are specific features of the NRA which, I have argued, make it more suitable than earlier records of achievement for use as a catalyst for the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", these, on their own, are not likely to be powerful enough to stimulate the kind of development illustrated in Figure 4. In order for this kind of sustained, systematic and progressive development to take place, there is a need for some kind of well-resourced and flexible but targeted central mechanism which can keep development on track while continually transmitting and receiving ideas in order to transform practice over time (Fullan 1982). The model for the use of the NRA in the "medium participation/low achievement" system of the 1990s is thus incomplete without this extra and important dimension.

In order to arrive at some of the essential features of such a central organising and resourcing mechanism, it is useful firstly to look at the ways in which this mechanism would have to operate in order to support the catalytic use of the NRA illustrated in Figure 4. Figure 6 overleaf lists the type of features that this mechanism would have to display alongside the functions that it would be required to carry out.

Figure 6:
Functions and features of a central organising and resourcing mechanism for supporting the use of the NRA as a catalyst in the development of a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”

Function	Features
To provide readily accessible information on the NRA and recording of achievement for a variety of audiences	Up-to-date information source with publishing capacity
To create a forum for institutions to discuss NRA implementation and its wider implications in terms of policy and practice	Well-resourced and responsive network with connections beyond the immediate area where development is taking place and the power to turn locally negotiated decisions into local policy
To monitor and support the quality and effectiveness of NRA implementation on a borough-wide and on an institutional basis	Capability, financial ability and power to create and deliver a relevant borough-wide quality assurance system
To provide resources for institutional and borough-wide INSET and development in order to stimulate ideas, share issues and disseminate good practice	Capacity to deliver effective and varied training and to offer leadership, funding and documentary support and for developing new ideas and good practice
To articulate and develop policy on a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”, to publish policy documents and support related development work	Policy forum and network which has the power to formulate policy and then to resource and support the translation of policy into practice

As can be seen from Figure 6, the features that such a mechanism would need to possess are all related to three major areas: financial resources, human resources and locally-recognised and legitimate power to determine policy. It is these features which equip such a central organising and resourcing mechanism to support the use of the NRA as a catalyst in the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

However, the fact that the model at Figure 4 is incomplete without a consideration of the type of central organising and resourcing mechanism needed does not detract from the central importance of the NRA in this model. It could be argued that there are policy instruments other than the NRA which, given this type of central organising and resourcing mechanism, would also have had the same kind of catalytic effect as the NRA in the context of the early 1990s. The fact remains, however, that the NRA had three features which made it ideally suited for this purpose - its capacity for universal application across the whole 14+ cohort and within any institutional setting, its focus on progression and its potential position at the centre of whole-institutional assessment, recording and reporting systems. Given a central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism to support it, the introduction of the NRA was able to provide an important starting point for moving secondary, special and post-16 institutions from the position of implementing one more initiative - a record of achievement - to creating the type of whole-institutional and systems approach to progression, achievement and guidance encapsulated in the concept of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

The Tower Hamlets case study discussed below will demonstrate one particular manifestation of this model.

A focus on context: the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as a case study

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) is situated just to the east of the City of London. During the period of this case study (1991-1994), it had a rising population which is richly diverse culturally, linguistically and racially. It is one of the poorest of the London boroughs and suffers from many of the features that are commonly associated with inner-city environments, such as poor housing, unemployment, poverty and educational underachievement.

However, although there are many features of LBTH which make it typical of an English inner-city area of the 1990s, it also has distinctive features because of its ethnic mix. There are few local authority areas in England which have such a high proportion of school-age children from a Bangladeshi background and such a high number of students overall who speak a language other than English at home. It is important to point out here that in this study I have not attempted to analyse the particular effects that these demographic differences might have had.

During the period of this study (1991-1994) educational attainment at 16+ improved in LBTH. In 1991, 13.1 per cent of Year 11 pupils gained 5 grades A-C at GCSE with the average pupil performance score being 17.1 points. In 1994, however, 18.6 per cent of Year 11 pupils gained 5 grades A-C at GCSE, with the average pupil performance score climbing to 22.7 points. In addition, during the same period, the rate of post-16 participation in full-time post-16 education in Tower Hamlets rose from just above 60 per cent to over 70 per cent. Although the post-16 participation rate was therefore similar to the national average (68 per cent), the attainment rate in Tower Hamlets was still very low in comparison with national figures (43.3 per cent of pupils gaining 5 A-Cs at GCSE).

The LBTH post-16 education system in Tower Hamlets at the time of the study could be described as a "mixed economy" comprising both school and further education provision - with academic qualifications largely concentrated in the former and vocational education, certainly at Advanced Level, almost exclusively provided in the latter.²⁶ The context was therefore one of institutional competition but also of overall student expansion in the post-16 sector as a result of rising rolls and of increasing post-16 participation rates.

It was into this context that the NRA and the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement²⁷ were introduced in 1991. At that time, I can find no evidence that any other LEA area in England had either an agreed post-16 progression agreement of the type developed in LBTH or used the

²⁶ From April 1990 Tower Hamlets Local Education Authority (LEA) took from the Inner London Education Authority control over all the education institutions within the borough. At that time, as well as primary, nursery and youth provision, these included 14 secondary schools, seven special schools, some off-site provision for non-attenders and one adult education institution. From September 1991 to August 1994 - the period during which the majority of data pertaining to this thesis was collected - changes had taken place in the nature of secondary and post-16 education in the borough as a result of a post-16 reorganisation process, one of the 11-18 schools became grant maintained, two of the Catholic secondary schools amalgamated and two new secondary schools were created. However, for the majority of the period from 1991-1994 there were eight 11-16 schools (three all-boys and the rest co-educational), seven 11-18 schools (3 all-girls and the rest co-educational), seven special schools (one all-boys, one all-boys residential and the rest co-educational), off-site provision and one further education (FE) college. The last was created from an amalgamation of accredited adult education provision, the local sixth form centre and that local FE provision which had previously belonged to two other colleges but happened to be located in the borough. The data that was collected for this thesis relates to all of these institutions, except for the two new 11-16 secondary schools. These two schools were excluded because they were not in existence at the beginning of the data collection process.

²⁷ "The Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement is a partnership arrangement between LBTH secondary and special schools, post-16 providers, the Careers and Guidance Agency, TVEI, Compact and business partners to promote smoother transition between pre- and post-16 provision by:

- *increasing the flow of information about post-16 courses and their entry requirements,*
- *making the recruitment process between pre- and post-16 providers more explicit,*
- *focusing on student intentions and individual action plans,*
- *using the NRA as a means of providing detailed information on student achievement and potential,*
- *empowering applicants at interview by allowing them to demonstrate their commitment to further study (including the successful completion of Compact goals)." (LBTH 1991a)*

NRA as extensively for post-16 student transfer.²⁸ Tower Hamlets thus provides a unique example of early LEA-wide NRA development.

What is also important for an understanding of the context in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994, the period of the case study, is the existence of a borough-wide TVEI programme which, although devolving the majority of resources to individual institutions, took a strong LEA-wide 14-19 approach to raising levels of achievement and progression by encouraging the development of whole-institutional and cross-phase strategies for addressing the problem. The fact that the Tower Hamlets TVEI programme chose to operate this type of central organising and resourcing function, is, as I will demonstrate in subsequent sections, significant in terms of NRA development. Although other parts of the country were still benefiting from TVEI funding at the time of this study, the way that TVEI functioned in different parts of England varied considerably so Tower Hamlets cannot be considered as in any way typical in terms of its approach to TVEI.

There are two major reasons why I have used Tower Hamlets and its secondary and post-16 educational institutions as the case study material for this thesis. Firstly, Tower Hamlets provides a good example of early extensive NRA development and the use of the record as a central force within an LEA-wide strategy for raising achievement. Using Tower Hamlets as a case study has thus made it possible not only to examine the catalytic effects of the use of the NRA at an early stage in its development, across a whole borough and within a variety

²⁸ As a result of the emphasis of the LBTH Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) programme, sufficient financial and person resources were allocated to education institutions in Tower Hamlets to encourage all secondary and special schools (except one which chose to start NRA development work with its Year 10 students in September 1991 and did not therefore use the NRA with Year 11 students until September 1992) to begin using the National Record of Achievement with their Year 11 students in September 1991. In addition, all 11-18 schools and Tower Hamlets College introduced the NRA to Year 12 students in September 1992. Since the NRA did not come into existence until February 1991, there were few, if any, areas of the country where NRA development was so rapid or so extensive. Certainly none of the other London boroughs took on the NRA either at such an early point in its history or in such a systematic way across all its education institutions.

of different education institutions, but also to examine its enhanced function as part of the borough's "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".²⁹ Secondly, because of my position as advisor in LBTH, it was possible to gain access to educational institutions and to talk with and collect detailed information from a wide range of people affected by the NRA - teachers, lecturers, senior managers of LBTH secondary, special and post-16 institutions, admissions tutors, students, local education personnel and employers. For a detailed discussion of the methodological issues which my role as developer and researcher in Tower Hamlets raises for the thesis, the reader is referred to the Preface, where these are described and debated in some detail.

²⁹ The concept of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" is discussed in some detail later in this chapter. The following brief extract from Tower Hamlets documentation on this subject should serve as a working definition at this point:

"In practical terms unified guidance seeks to relate tutorials, recording of achievement, individual action planning, careers education, personal, social and health education and the work-related curriculum into a single and deliverable framework. It is an attempt to promote an awareness of the centrality of the learner as a learner and not just a pot to be filled with subjects. It seeks to make explicit the issue of individual achievement, motivation and sense of direction."

Extract from the Editorial in the Tower Hamlets TVEI newsletter, Network TVEI, (Number 2, Spring 1993)

Earlier chapter in the thesis use theoretical and historical analysis and a review of the literature to examine the changing role that RoA played from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In this chapter, the Tower Hamlets case study material ³⁰ is used to focus on the role of the NRA in one particular London borough in the medium participation/low achievement context of the early 1990s. It thus provides an example of how the NRA was used as a catalyst in the development of, and an essential element in, a strategy for addressing student underachievement and problems of progression, which are part of the context of the early 1990s. This case study also raises questions about some of the significant constraints that such a strategy faced within that context. These are discussed in some detail in Chapter 6.

A focus on content: the significance of using the NRA as the summative record of achievement in Tower Hamlets

Previous chapters of the thesis have included general discussions of the differences between the NRA and earlier records of achievement. This section concentrates on the specific differences between the NRA and the London Record of Achievement and then goes on to describe how the Tower Hamlets case study illustrates the significance of these

³⁰ The case study material collected as part of this thesis includes:

- i. quality assurance data (in the form of questionnaires completed by all secondary, special and post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets and reports written by Tower Hamlets Education Inspectorate) on the implementation and use of the NRA in Tower Hamlets over a period of three years from its introduction in 1991;
- ii. personal notes, support documentation and records of the introduction of the NRA into Tower Hamlets institutions from 1991 to 1994;
- iii. data collected as part of the monitoring process for the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement (1991-1994);
- iv. a postal questionnaire survey of 500 (125 responses) employers in the LDDC area carried out in March/April 1992 and designed to find out their opinions of the NRA;
- v. a series of tape-recorded interviews with 31 Tower Hamlets post-16 students over a period of two years (1992-1994) - this was the first cohort to have experienced the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement;
- vi. a survey of pre-16 student and secondary school staff views of individual action planning in six schools in Tower Hamlets (just under 500 student questionnaires);
- vii. questionnaires, completed by 31 staff in a sample of Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions, about teacher/lecturer views on the strengths and weaknesses of the NRA.
- viii. tape-recorded interviews about their perceptions of Unified Guidance with 11 NRA co-ordinators in a representative sample of Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions in December 1994/January 1995.
- xi. questionnaires from 344 Tower Hamlets Year 11-13 students on their views on the NRA, Spring 1995

differences. The section argues two main points - firstly, that it was the introduction of the NRA into all Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools in September 1991 which stimulated the growth of RoA practice in the borough and secondly, that it was the particular features of the NRA, as opposed to the LRA (the record previously used by the borough), that encouraged institutions to use RoA in different ways than they had previously. In other words, this section argues that the differences between the NRA and the LRA were significant in equipping the former for its use as catalyst in the development of a Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". However, as a later section of this chapter outlines in more detail, it was the TVEI Programme in Tower Hamlets that provided the support and resourcing for this catalytic development to take place.

There was a history of RoA in Tower Hamlets prior to the introduction of the NRA in 1991. As part of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) until April 1990, Tower Hamlets, like other boroughs in the Greater London area, had participated in the LRA Scheme. This Scheme, which provided both centralised and institutionally-based INSET and support, was set up to encourage the development of recording of achievement using the LRA in all ILEA secondary and special schools. Tower Hamlets' participation in the LRA Scheme continued until April 1991.

However, when all the secondary and special schools in the borough began to introduce the NRA into their institutions in September 1991, as evidence from the first set of NRA quality assurance questionnaires³¹

³¹ These questionnaires were completed by all LBTH secondary special and post-16 institutions in the autumn term of each academic year as part of the three-stage LBTH Quality Assurance process. They contained questions about all aspects of the institution's support structure for recording of achievement and the NRA and thus provided a detailed annual snapshot of NRA development in each LBTH institution. Each institution was then visited in the spring term by a member of the LBTH TVEI Central Team to follow up issues raised in the autumn term questionnaire. This visit formed the second stage of the LBTH Quality Assurance system for the NRA. The third stage involved a cross-borough sampling of completed NRAs in the summer term of each academic year.

shows, it was apparent that RoA development was far from extensive and that, on the whole, it did not have a high profile within Tower Hamlets institutions. Not all schools were using the LRA and practice varied considerably. While a few schools were using formative assessment and recording practices which led up to the completion of the summative document in Year 11, the majority of schools were only involved in supporting students to gather together material for a minimal summative record during Year 11. There was no evidence of RoA taking place post-16. LRA quality assurance systems were in operation but, in practice, the LRA Central Team was so small and the area its advisors had to cover was so large that it was impossible for these advisors to develop or even to monitor RoA practices within individual schools in Tower Hamlets. In addition, as later parts of this section will suggest, the LRA as a summative record was not highly regarded by LBTH institutions because of its perceived lack of currency value with employers and post-16 education providers.

This low level of RoA development is born out by the responses made by Tower Hamlets institutions to the first set of NRA quality assurance questionnaires sent out in the autumn term of 1991 by the TVEI Central Team to each secondary and special school in the borough. As Figure 7 overleaf indicates, in the autumn term of 1991, few NRA Co-ordinators, for example, said that they felt the time allocated by their institution to support the production of quality summative documentation was adequate and even fewer felt that it was adequate to support the formative assessment processes which underpin RoA. Only six institutions had organised an NRA validation panel in their institution and very few mentioned that they were building on previous LRA practices in response to any of the questions asked. Of the 20 institutions who completed the questionnaire (one co-educational 11-16 school and the Tower Hamlets Individual Tuition Centre did not return

Figure 7:
Selection of responses to Tower Hamlets Quality Assurance
Questionnaires 1991 and 1992

	Number of Institutions			
	1991		1992	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Adequate time for completion of quality summative NRA	4	16	15	5
Adequate time to support formative RoA process	3	17	15	5
NRA Validation Panel set up	6	14	14	6
Assessment, recording and reporting policy exists	5	15	12	8
Assessment, recording and reporting policy includes NRA	2	18	8	4*

Note

* 6 institutions said they were in the process of writing an assessment, recording and reporting policy which included the NRA

their questionnaires), only five claimed that they had an assessment, recording and reporting policy and even fewer (two) said that this included a section on the NRA.

By September 1992, however, one year after the introduction of the NRA into all Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools and as a result of institutional participation in a local TVEI-sponsored NRA INSET and Development Programme (described in more detail in a later section of this chapter), the picture in Tower Hamlets was very different. All secondary and special schools had introduced the NRA and all, except one, had issued a completed record to their Year 11 students. All Year 11 students in the borough (except those in one school) had been given the opportunity to use their NRA as part of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement and LBTH post-16 institutions had begun to introduce the use of the NRA as part of their tutorial programmes. More than double the number of institutions now claimed to have an assessment, recording and reporting policy and of these the majority included a section which dealt with the NRA. Finally, several schools in the borough in their secondary transfer publicity mentioned the fact that they were using the NRA - a good indicator of the profile the school was giving the record.

The fact that this amount of development work took place in Tower Hamlets in the space of one academic year as a result of introducing the NRA in place of the LRA can partly be explained by the TVEI Programme's emphasis on this area of work. However, it also suggests that there were features of the NRA which made it more attractive to institutions and more suited to stimulating change in the borough than the LRA had been. It is to these features that I now wish to turn.

Apart from the fact that the NRA has more sections (eight) to it than the LRA (three), there are five significant differences between the two records as Figure 8 overleaf illustrates. In this section, I shall be

Figure 8:
Major differences between the National Record of Achievement (NRA) and the London Record of Achievement (LRA)

NRA	LRA
Standard format which is nationally recognised	Only used and recognised within the Greater London area
Specific sheet for national qualifications and credits	No sheet for national qualifications and credits
Inclusion of Individual Action Plan	No Individual Action Plan
Statements about students to be largely positive but to include areas for development	All statements about students contained in the LRA had to be of an <i>"entirely positive"</i> (LRA, 1990) nature
Employment history sheet	No explicit reference to employment

discussing the first four of these in relation to the Tower Hamlets case study, since they are all relevant to the data, but I shall only make passing reference to the fifth difference, since it does not impinge on the Tower Hamlets case study.

The importance of a nationally recognised format

It is clear from the national support, research and evaluation literature that the idea of a **national** record of achievement was high on the agenda of many of the reports and evaluation studies of recording of achievement. As early as 1985, the HMI Report on recording of achievement (DES 1985a) recommends that a national framework be developed. All the large-scale evaluation studies which followed echo this recommendation. The "Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Extension Work in Pilot Schemes" (Broadfoot *et al.* 1991), published at almost the same time as the introduction of the NRA itself, further suggests that the national guidelines should encompass post-16 as well as pre-16 RoA practices. They argue that this is one of the most likely ways in which the influence of RoA could be extended to all pupils and would gain credibility with employers and further/higher education providers.

It certainly appeared that for Tower Hamlets, as for many other local education authorities in very different areas of the country, such as Cheshire, the Wirral and Lancashire, the fact that the NRA had a nationally recognised format was very important and there was an LEA-wide decision to move from using a locally or regionally recognised record of achievement to using the NRA (North West RoA Group 1992).

In the case of Tower Hamlets, the borough decided to move from using the LRA to using the NRA as soon as the NRA was officially launched in February 1991, despite the fact that, at that time, the borough held a three-year contract with the LRA Scheme (April 1990-April 1993) from

which it had to extricate itself. A Tower Hamlets Committee Paper of July 1991 formally recommended the borough's withdrawal from the Scheme. This was a decision which was supported by all Tower Hamlets special, secondary and post-16 institutions, who appreciated the increased credibility and currency value of the NRA, as opposed to the LRA.

Comments from teachers and lecturers who responded to a Tower Hamlets questionnaire on the role of the NRA in 1994 suggest that it was partly the NRA's national status that encouraged their institutions to accept and develop RoA so quickly from September 1991:

"'National' has a wider 'currency value' with employers." (Year 11 tutor, LBTH Questionnaire on Role of NRA, 1994)

"It looks better than the LRA and of course being National there are grounds for thinking it would be more widely understood." (A Level tutor, LBTH Questionnaire on Role of NRA, 1994)

This was particularly the case from 1992 onwards, when parts of the NRA became the statutory means of reporting to parents on their children's achievements in the National Curriculum, GCSEs and/or vocational qualifications at 16+. From this point onwards, there was a very obvious practical reason for schools to use the NRA.

The argument that the NRA's national status was one of the reasons that Tower Hamlets schools and post-16 providers implemented the record so quickly tends to be borne out by the amount and extent of development that took place during the first year of its introduction, when this is compared with the slow and patchy development that had taken place previously with the LRA.

The significance of the "Qualifications and Credits" sheet in the NRA

The second distinctive feature of the NRA outlined in Figure 8 (p.170) - its inclusion of both formal qualifications and informal achievements - is something which potentially gives the document more currency value as a selection tool for further education providers and employers. Previous records, such as the LRA, were largely seen as alternatives to formal qualifications and therefore concentrated on reporting achievements other than these qualifications. The NRA, however, as well as stressing the importance of students' achievements across and beyond the school or college curriculum, also included a specific sheet entitled "Qualifications and Credits", which was intended to provide a vehicle for recording the student's formal qualifications. The NRA thus contained information on both formal qualifications and informal achievements and could be seen as providing a more credible and holistic picture of the individual.

The NRA's potential to act as a more credible selection and recruitment tool for employers and post-16 providers distinguished it from the LRA, which had always suffered from lack of credibility. The London Docklands Employers' Survey on the NRA (LBTH 1992a), for example, found that one in five of the employers who responded considered all sections of the NRA of use in recruitment and nearly one third chose the NRA as the most useful source of information about a potential employee. Several responses, of which the two below are examples, also stressed the importance of having qualifications and credits as part of the record:

"Qualifications and credits are still the best guide for prospective employers, but achievements outside school are important too."

"I would like to hear from the student through a personal statement. However, the student's qualifications and credits will make the ultimate decision."

For institutions in Tower Hamlets, therefore, there was more incentive to introduce the NRA, since it was more likely actually to be used by school-leavers and by those interviewing them. In the words of one of the Year 11 tutors who responded to the July 1994 questionnaire on the NRA:

"NRA has a much higher profile in this institutions than previous RoA - its requirement for college etc. has meant substantial Year 11 input and effort."

The inclusion of a Qualifications and Credits sheet in the NRA highlighted the importance of formal qualifications in student achievement and progression (a necessary reminder of the need for high teacher/lecturer expectations in a low-achieving borough such as Tower Hamlets). From 1992, this sheet also linked the NRA to achievement within the National Curriculum (DES 1992a &b) and thus emphasised the NRA's relationship with the whole secondary education phase rather than simply with the last two years of compulsory education. In Tower Hamlets, it was this whole-institutional achievement focus which, as the section below describes, stimulated the growth of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and highlighted the central role of assessment, recording and reporting within it.

The importance of the Individual Action Plan in the NRA

All records of achievement - the LRA included - have encouraged institutions to focus on student self assessment and a review of individual progress because their use demands that the student regularly reviews her/his progress and writes a statement based on this for her/his final record. The NRA, however, unlike earlier records of achievement, stresses the importance of individuals planning for the future as well as reflecting on the past. The importance of this process

has been recognised by the inclusion of a separate Individual Action Plan sheet as part of official NRA stationery since September 1993.

The inclusion of an Individual Action Plan in the NRA, and the development work within institutions on individual action planning that resulted from this, stimulated Tower Hamlets students and those who supported them to focus on reflection, decision making, forward planning and target-setting as well as on a review of past achievement.

"It (the IAP in the NRA) provides a discipline for students to think about their future." (Post-16 tutor)

"I think it is useful the way it (the NRA) furthers forward planning via IAPs." (Year 11 tutor)

"Action planning is seen as integral to the process, not a 'final document' in the sense of completion of Year 11 - i.e. a sense of life-long learning." (Year 11 tutor)

"(The IAP) Gave me a clear picture of what I was going to do." (Year 11 student)

As later sections of this chapter argue, the inclusion of an IAP in the NRA encouraged institutions in Tower Hamlets to recognise the use of the summative NRA in student transition and progression and thus to support the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement. It also stimulated institutions to develop the formative action planning processes which became a central element of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Approach".

The focus on areas for improvement

The fourth feature of the NRA which distinguishes it from earlier records of achievement such as the LRA - that is its emphasis on

statements which describe areas for improvement as well as commenting positively on achievements - is also something which makes it potentially more useful as a tool for progression into further education or training. As the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement document points out (LBTH 1991a), one of the main functions of an interview for post-16 education or training courses is to ensure that students choose an appropriate course or training programme at 16+ and are thus able to progress effectively. The more detailed and realistic the picture of the student is, the more likely s/he is to be placed on a course where s/he can achieve to her/his full potential and where s/he can be given the support s/he requires. The NRA, I would argue, is more able to provide such a picture than earlier records of achievement, such as the LRA, which insisted that statements in the record should be *"entirely positive"* (LRA 1990).

The LRA Guidelines (LRA 1990) constantly stress the importance of positive statements. Under the Student Statement section, for example, the guidance reads :

- "1. The purpose of the Student Statement is to provide students with an opportunity to describe their achievements and personal strengths.*
- 2. The Statement should be entirely positive".*

under the School or College Statement section it says:

- "1. The purpose of the Statement is for the school or college to present a broad and positive summary of the student's achievements. It should not therefore refer to areas of weakness."*

under the Samples of Work section it states:

"1. The purpose of the Samples of Work section of the London Record of Achievement is to allow students to illustrate their achievements with a selection from their best pieces of work."

finally, under the Summative Profiles section it reads:

"3. ...The teacher statement should provide a positive, detailed record of the student's achievement and progress within the course... Predictions should not be included in the teacher statement."

From the case study material, it appears that many of the Tower Hamlets Year 11 tutors and others who had previously supported students in preparing their LRAs felt that the LRA's heavy emphasis on the "entirely positive" had marred its credibility as a tool for progression into further education or employment. Comments, such as those below, indicate that teachers felt that the NRA's different approach was likely to be more productive in terms of the record's use value in selection and recruitment to further education or the workplace:

"Prefer the more honest rigorous approach (of the NRA)."

"Identifies areas for development."

"More concentration on matching pupils with colleges."

"Positive statements undervalue the true sentiments that need to be highlighted."

(LBTH Questionnaire on the Role of RoA Using the NRA, July 1994)

Teachers' concerns about the lack of credibility of an "entirely positive" record of achievement seem to be borne out by the LBTH survey of

employers' views on the NRA (LBTH 1992a). As one of the employers who responded commented:

"The idea (of the NRA) is good, however, a great deal depends on the information given and its accuracy. To be of real value, the record must (be) objectively and honestly completed by the teachers."

This is a view which is echoed in a college admission tutor's remark in response to the question, "In what ways do you think recording of achievement using the NRA differs from the kind of recording of achievement that used to take place with earlier records of achievement?" (LBTH Role of the NRA Questionnaire, July 1994):

"Prefer samples of work to best work of LRA. LRA was more patronising."

Although the support literature on the NRA does not directly suggest that students and others who complete their NRA should include negative statements in the record, it does suggest that there should be indications of areas for development.

"...individuals should be encouraged to use the Personal Statement to identify areas of potential which could be developed in the future."
(NCVQ 1992, p.4)

"Whilst the NRA summarises the individual's achievement to date, the processes involved in recording achievement also involve planning for future development." (NCVQ 1992, p.5)

Also the very inclusion of an Individual Action Plan and an Employment History sheet in the NRA suggests that the student is looking forward to what s/he can develop next rather than merely reflecting on past achievements.

The NRA was thus seen, both by those who were preparing students for progression and transition and by those who were recruiting and selecting students in Tower Hamlets, as potentially of more use in the progression process because it provided a more realistic and holistic picture of the student than the LRA had done.

Before concluding this section, it is worth pointing out that the way that Tower Hamlets responded to the NRA was not necessarily typical of all inner London boroughs. According to an MA Report by Erica Lanigan, "The Development of Individual Action Planning in Secondary Schools" (1994), secondary schools in the London Borough of Islington displayed considerable initial resistance to the introduction of the NRA.

"The introduction of a National Record of Achievement whilst possibly giving more status to records of achievement generally initially caused some tension. During the (recording of achievement) development work schools had produced their own house style within the framework of the LRA. Quite naturally they wished to continue in this way, so what appeared to be the prescriptive nature of the National Record administered by the NCVQ carried a certain amount of disillusionment. However, as with most government initiatives it soon became apparent that it would be possible to interpret the guidelines and continue to produce Records of Achievement in a similar format to before but using the official stationery." (p.13)

The model of NRA development described earlier in this chapter has emphasised the importance of having a central organising and resourcing mechanism to support and mould RoA ideas and practices over a period of time in order to bring about the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". The model suggests that, despite its inherent advantages in comparison with earlier records of achievement such as the LRA, the NRA cannot act as a catalyst for the development of a strategic tool for addressing student

underachievement and lack of progression unless such a central mechanism exists. The Islington case study referred to in the quotation above appears to support this point.

In Islington's case, it seems that there was no strong central direction encouraging schools to use the new features of the NRA in a novel way or to work with other institutions to develop a borough-wide response to the initiative. Rather it seems that there was support for schools to maintain the *status quo* and for each institution to continue to make its own individual sense of RoA. It is not surprising, therefore, that there has been no equivalent to the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" developed in Islington, despite the gradual introduction of the NRA into secondary and special schools in that borough.

In conclusion, it can be argued from the Tower Hamlets case study material that the features of the NRA which distinguished it from the LRA gave it the potential to play a new role within the borough. Its national format, its inclusion of formal qualifications and its less dogmatically positive style, made it more acceptable than the LRA to those selecting and recruiting students locally (post-16 institutions and employers). This, in turn, encouraged those preparing students for transition (schools and post-16 institutions) to give a higher profile to the record because of its increased currency value. The inclusion of an individual action plan made the record potentially a more powerful instrument for stimulating secondary and special schools to look beyond their institutions and to focus on preparing students for progression. Finally, the individual action planning process associated with the NRA and the Qualifications and Credits sheet of the record, which became in 1992 the mandatory format for reporting to parents on their child's achievements in GCSE, vocational qualifications and the National Curriculum at 16+, removed the Year 11 label from the NRA and helped to encourage secondary and special schools to focus on

whole-school assessment, recording and reporting policies and practices.

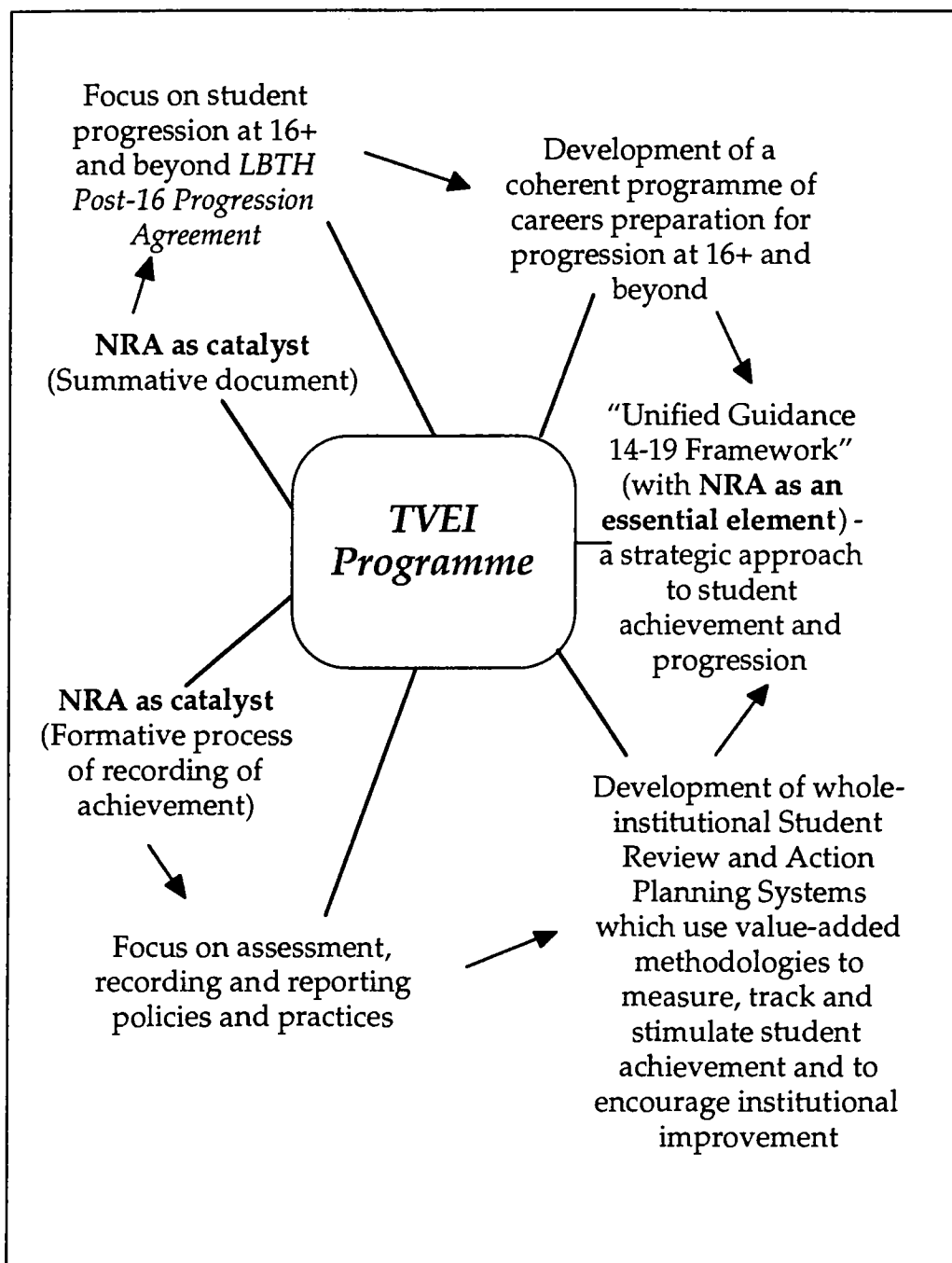
However, as the Islington case study referred to above suggests, the way that the NRA was used as a catalyst for introducing a borough-wide achievement and progression strategy in Tower Hamlets required the direction and support of a central organising and resourcing mechanism such as the TVEI Programme. This point is taken up in a later section of this chapter which examines in more detail the type of support and resourcing that was provided by the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme.

A focus on process/product relationship: the NRA as a catalyst

The first section of this chapter described a model of how the NRA could be used as a catalyst for change in the national education context of the 1990s. This section and the two which follow use this model to interpret the Tower Hamlets case study. Here, I concentrate on the way that the NRA was used as a catalyst for the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994. In the following section, I analyse the role that the NRA then played within such a Framework. Finally, I describe the important part that the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme played in supporting and resourcing NRA development in Tower Hamlets.

However, before using the case study material in this way, there is a need to provide a variant of the generic model illustrated at Figure 4 which more specifically describes the situation in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994. This variant is shown at Figure 9 overleaf. The two differences between this variant, which is particular to Tower Hamlets, and the generic model shown at Figure 4 (p.148) are that it includes reference to the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement and to the Tower Hamlets

Figure 9:
The use of the NRA as a catalyst for the introduction of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets 1991-1994



TVEI Central Team. The first, although not an essential feature of the generic model, nevertheless, as this section will demonstrate, proved an additional stimulus for focusing Tower Hamlets institutions on the issue of progression. The second different feature is referred to in Figure 4 simply as a Central Organising and Resourcing Mechanism: in the Tower Hamlets case it was the TVEI Programme which fulfilled this function.

The model of a role for the NRA in the early 1990s, described earlier in the chapter and illustrated in Figure 4 (p.148), relies on making an initial distinction between the NRA as a summative document and the formative process of recording of achievement using the NRA. The model suggests that although the summative NRA document (product) and the formative process of recording of achievement both act as catalysts, their catalytic functions are different and are designed to bring about different but inter-related results. The former (product) encourages those responsible for tutorial programmes to look outwards and beyond their institutions and to focus on student progression. The introduction of the latter (process) stimulates those responsible for curriculum and assessment planning to look inwards and to focus on internal policies, practices and systems which might help students to move from one level of learning to the next. In order to examine these two different functions, therefore, this section is divided into two parts - the first examines the catalytic effect of the use of the summative NRA (product) in Tower Hamlets and the second looks at the catalytic effect of the process of recording of achievement using the NRA (process).

It is important to state at the outset of this section, however, that in terms of the Tower Hamlets case study, this division between product and process, which is helpful for an initial analysis of the data in terms of the model, is not necessarily one which practitioners always make or use with any consistency. In addition, as the model itself indicates, the distinction between the summative NRA and the process of recording

of achievement, which starts out as a very important feature of the model, itself becomes more blurred over time as the catalytic effects of the NRA diminish and the record and the process themselves both become elements of a borough-wide but institutionally tailored strategy for addressing student underachievement and lack of progression in the early 1990s.

Product: the summative NRA as catalyst

In what follows I wish to use the case study material to argue that from the time when the NRA was accepted by the LEA as the record of achievement to be used by all secondary and special institutions in Tower Hamlets, three things began to happen. Firstly, there was an increased focus in those institutions on student progression post-16 which led to the forging of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement. Secondly, these institutions began to develop more coherent and comprehensive institutional programmes of careers education and guidance and preparation for progression at 16+. Thirdly, with the introduction of the NRA into post-16 institutions from September 1992, Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions perceived the need for a common borough approach to support student progression and raise levels of achievement. This resulted in the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

In order to describe the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets and to analyse the role of the NRA within the development of this borough-wide strategy, it is necessary briefly to trace the history of the concept and its links with the NRA in the borough.

During the autumn term of the academic year 1990/91, Tower Hamlets TVEI set up a borough working party to promote RoA. Members of this working party expressed a great deal of scepticism about the LRA, the Record of Achievement in use in the borough at that time, and

showed concern about its low profile both within their institutions and in the post-16 progression process. As one NRA co-ordinator from an 11-16 school said:

"Before the NRA, recording of achievement was done on a very ad hoc basis, there wasn't an overall co-ordinator. There wasn't a person appointed to actually bring it all together." (NRA Co-ordinator interviews, Spring 1995)

By the time the NRA was launched in February 1991, there was already a consensus within the borough that it, rather than the LRA, would be the summative record of achievement which would be used in all Tower Hamlets institutions. As earlier parts of this chapter have pointed out, there was a great deal of faith in the idea that a national record of achievement would have more currency value in any progression process than a local record would.

It was at this time too that the first hints of a local post-16 progression agreement using the NRA were mooted. The forging of a formal agreement was seen by NRA co-ordinators in secondary and special schools as one means of persuading those supporting students with RoA that the final record would have a real function in the post-16 progression process. This had previously not been the case in Tower Hamlets and had led to some cynicism about the currency value of the summative record of achievement and, therefore, to some dissatisfaction about the amount of effort put in by both staff and students to produce it. As one of the senior management team in Tower Hamlets College said:

"I think that the practice of it has been very difficult arising from, I think, probably an ILEA concept of recording of achievement - that is the LRA - which wasn't always totally objective and which people, for good reason, were quite scared of actually ensuring that the evidence

that was in it, you know, two things. One was the extent to which that actually represented what the individual student could do and the other was the extent to which the teachers were prepared to be honest. So I think it's had a rocky introduction and I think partly that was, in a way, there was a lot of suspicion at the beginning because of the way that the LRA had developed." (NRA Co-ordinator interviews, Spring 1995)

Discussions about the importance of using the NRA as a progression tool were recorded in the report of the first borough-wide conference on the introduction of the NRA on 14th March 1991. Three of the action points from this conference indicate a willingness to look in more depth at the use of the NRA and IAP for post-16 progression purposes:

"Detailed discussions and guidance on the use of NRA in progression required."

"Need to consider how self-assessment and individual action plans (IAPs) and action planning could be included (in the RoA process)."

"Need for working party to be set up to consider use of documentation for progression and publicity/briefing materials required."

The first draft of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement was produced at the "NRA and Progression Residential Conference" on 21st and 22nd June 1991³² and refined through a written consultation process and discussion in NRA/Progression Working Party meetings³³

³² Residential conferences were organised by the TVEI Central Team and were normally attended by at least one representative from each borough secondary, special and post-16 institution, as well as others working with them, such as representatives from the Careers Service and the Tower Hamlets EBP.

³³ These were open-access meetings chaired by a member of the Tower Hamlets TVEI Central Team and usually attended by representatives of at least half the borough secondary, special and post-16 institutions, as well as others working with them, such as representatives from the Careers Service and the Tower Hamlets EBP.

during the first few weeks of the autumn term of 1991/1992. The version of the Agreement which was to be used in 1991/1992 was then launched at a conference on 29th October 1991.

The eight elements of this first Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement³⁴ clearly highlight the important role for individual action plans and the NRA in the transition process. The document then lists timetables and action plans for each of the partners involved - i.e. Tower Hamlets College, secondary and special schools, Careers Service and Inspectorate - in order to ensure that the aims of the Agreement are fulfilled.

It is significant that at this early stage, the Careers Service was seen as one of the key partners in the Tower Hamlets Progression Agreement, because its involvement also helped to indicate to institutions the importance of preparation for transition, careers education and guidance and action planning for the future - all key elements in the later "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". In October 1991, the

³⁴ "1. The improved exchange of information about post 16 courses and the improvement of guidance on the range of post 16 opportunities within the borough. This could lead to the production of an **initial action plan** drawn up by the student and endorsed by the school (see draft pro-forma in Appendix 4)

2. The provision of accessible and practical information about criteria for entry to post 16 courses e.g. general or core skills required to be able to cope with the early stage of a post 16 course. For 1991/92 the progression agreement will focus upon student motivation towards the intended area of study.

3. Student entitlement to an early interview where the **action plan** is used to clarify their intentions and to recommend appropriate provision (February onwards).

4. Preparation of NRA documentation by school tutors for inclusion in the **NRA folder or portfolio for use at course interview** (March onwards).

5. Preparation and selection of course work evidence by students and school tutors for inclusion within the complementary portfolio in time for the course interview.

6. The development of the course interview process in which college tutors use **NRA documentation and evidence from the portfolio as a means of matching applicants for a range of courses.**

7. Improved feedback from college tutors at the end of the course interview as to the exact status of the student in the admissions process and with advice to schools' tutors on the next step for the applicant.

8. School tutors' reappraisal of the student's position and where necessary the provision of further guidance based upon the outcome of the course interview." (LBTH 1991a, p.2)

minutes of the first NRA/Progression Working Party³⁵ meeting (3/10/91) record the beginnings of a co-ordinated borough approach to student recording of achievement, guidance and progression and highlight the important role of the NRA in this.³⁶

In November 1991 a TVEI-sponsored, borough-wide, residential conference on Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) was held. The report that was produced as a result of this conference demonstrates the first written evidence of representatives from Tower Hamlets schools, the College, the inspectorate and the Careers Service recognising the linkages between the NRA, individual action planning (IAP), CEG and post-16 progression and seeing the benefits of forging the first three into a coherent framework for addressing the fourth.

It was also after discussion at this conference that the borough IAP Task Group was formed and was charged with producing borough guidelines on IAP. Its explicit links with NRA are referred to in the NRA/Progression Working Party minutes of 4/12/91.³⁷ These same minutes also record a further step in the co-ordinated borough approach to student progression and guidance:

"LBTH Careers Service intends to have completed the majority of its interviews with year 11 students by January 1992 so that Summaries

³⁵ During the academic year 1990/91, there had been a borough-wide Recording of Achievement - later NRA Working Party in existence in Tower Hamlets, but it is significant that from September 1991 with the introduction of the NRA and the new focus on student progression and the active use of the record as a transition document in the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement, the borough working party changed its name to "NRA/Progression Working Party".

³⁶ *"The careers service has an NRA awareness raising INSET session planned for all careers officers who work with Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools. Careers officers will then be in a strong position to support schools with the NRA and action planning in particular, to use NRA documentation with year 11 students and to raise awareness of the NRA with employers."*

³⁷ *"In order to start work on these guidelines a small task group has been formed and includes representatives from the inspectorate, the careers service and the CEG working party. The task group would ideally like two representatives from the NRA/Progression Working Party to join them in this work."*

of Guidance can be used with the NRA to aid the action planning process (for post-16 progression)."

The ideas emerging from the TVEI November residential conference on Careers Education and Guidance - that is that students in Years 10 and 11 would benefit from a more co-ordinated and unified approach to NRA, CEG and IAP involving both internal and external partners - can be seen as beginning to percolate through to institutions by the spring term of 1992. Towards the end of the academic year 1991/92, NRA co-ordinators in Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools were asked to complete a brief questionnaire on NRA and Progression Agreement development in their institution as part of the evaluation of the first year of NRA implementation. When asked open questions about what they wanted to concentrate on for 1992/93, four of the 22 institutions made reference to developing the links between NRA, CEG and IAP and providing a more integrated type of guidance/tutorial programme for students.

When Year 11 tutors and Year Heads in Tower Hamlets secondary schools were asked to comment on the first year of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement, they also indicated that they would welcome more liaison with colleagues responsible for CEG in their institution.

"More involvement by Year 11 tutors in progression as well as NRA documentation process."

"Develop links with CEG re. progression agreement."

"Meeting and planning with TVEI co-ordinator. Links with careers officers. Training tutors to extend NRA."

(LBTH, Post-16 Progression Agreement questionnaire, Summer term 1992)

These comments indicate the beginnings of a realisation by Year 11 tutors of the importance of working with other relevant staff (e.g. careers officers, work experience co-ordinators, PSHE co-ordinators) to provide a co-ordinated approach to student guidance and progression, rather than seeing their role simply overseeing the completion of the summative NRA.

By the end of June 1992, the report produced as a result of the TVEI-sponsored residential conference on the NRA suggests that the concept of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" has been consolidated and the term "Unified Guidance, Progression and Achievement Programme" is already in use.³⁸ In addition, the action points and suggestions for development work arising from the conference outline both borough and institutional intentions of further curriculum development in 1992/1993 as a result of agreement on the concept of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" (LBTH 1992b).³⁹

³⁸ *"Throughout the conference, in both plenary and workshop sessions, delegates discussed the implications for institutions of implementing a unified guidance, progression and achievement programme. Such a programme could bring coherence and continuity to the work currently being done in Careers Education and Guidance (CEG), Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), the National Record of Achievement (NRA), the Work-Related Curriculum (WRC), the Post-16 Progression Agreement, Compact and Individual Action Planning (IAP). IAP could be seen as the central mechanism for drawing all the aspects of the programme together into a coherent whole for the learner...It is clearly vital that all elements in the unified guidance, progression and achievement programme are developed within an overarching framework in order to ensure coherence and continuity. However, none of the groups at the conference had enough time to develop such a framework in any detail."* (LBTH 1992b, pp.14-15)

³⁹ *"1. Institutions to consider their response to the concept of a unified guidance, progression and achievement programme.*

2. During 1992/93 TVEI Central Team to investigate the amount of curriculum time and space institutions are giving to the elements within a unified guidance, progression and achievement programme...

5. TVEI Central Team, in conjunction with institutions, to draft a framework document on the creation, potential and implications of a unified guidance assessment and achievement programme." (p.17)

- *"Audit of institutional development on unified guidance, assessment and achievement programmes - followed by sharing of good practice.*
- *Conference in late November on developing a borough approach to a unified guidance, assessment and achievement programme 14-19+.*
- *INSET on the building and development of an institutional guidance, assessment and achievement team."* (p.21)

During 1992/1993 many of the institutions in Tower Hamlets began to introduce elements of, or structures to support a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". These are reflected in their TVEI plans for 1993/1994. Two residential conferences were held on the subject - one in November 1992, the other in March 1993 - a borough Unified Guidance Task Group was formed in December 1992, borough documentation on the subject was published through TVEI and the term Unified Guidance even began to appear in school staff's job titles and descriptions. Development during this academic year was restricted mainly to the secondary phase, however, but within both mainstream and special schools.

By the beginning of the academic year 1993/94, the idea of developing further the post-16 aspect of a Unified Guidance Programme, which would build on the pre-16 model being implemented in several secondary schools was raised by the Unified Guidance Task Group. Several proposals were put forward at the TVEI Post-16 Residential Conference in November 1993, where a Unified Guidance approach was perceived as a means of raising achievement, broadening the post-16 curriculum and ensuring student entitlement to this broader curriculum. The NRA was seen as the main mechanism for recognising and recording achievements within this broader curriculum and NRA Co-ordinators were both well represented in and had an influence on all discussions on Unified Guidance.

At the end of the academic year 1993/94, as the result of a TVEI-sponsored INSET session, a "Post-16 Unified Guidance Staff Development Pack" was planned and representatives from each of the post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets undertook to write sections for it.

As is evident from the above, the concept of, and curriculum development associated with Unified Guidance were slower in making their mark in Tower Hamlets post-16 institutions than they had been in

secondary and special schools. This is possibly partly as a result of the later introduction of the NRA and TVEI into post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets (1992 rather than 1991), but also for other reasons which related to the national policy context and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Curriculum development associated with Unified Guidance in pre-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets, on the other hand, continued to move forward quite swiftly during the academic year 1993/94, as the "Unified Guidance, Achievement and Progression Approach: Update of Current Developments in the Borough", January 1994 (LBTH 1994a) and the TVEI plans for 1994/95 (1994b) demonstrate.

One can argue that by July 1994 - the end of the period covered by this case study of Tower Hamlets - the concept of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was understood by many key staff in Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions and that the curriculum development associated with this concept was having an effect in the majority of the secondary and special institutions in the borough, although not to such an extent in post-16 institutions. This argument is supported by interviews carried out with 11 NRA co-ordinators in January 1995, to which I will refer in greater detail in the following section.

Despite what has been discussed above, it would, of course, be an exaggeration to suggest that the development of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets came about solely as the result of the introduction of the NRA. Other external local factors, such as the Tower Hamlets TVEI goals, support mechanisms and resources, the successful development of the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement (itself stimulated by the introduction of the NRA) and the close partnership between Tower Hamlets Careers Service, the TVEI Central Team and the Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership,

were clearly also influential in this development. In addition, as the interviews quoted in a later section of this chapter will demonstrate, although acknowledging the importance of the NRA and recording of achievement in the development of a “Unified Guidance 14-19 framework”, individual institutions identified different reasons for the introduction of Unified Guidance into their own institutions related to their own institutional priorities, pressures and stage of development.

Notwithstanding all of this, as I have argued above, the initial discussions of the Unified Guidance concept at a borough level took place largely as part of NRA development and, as the borough priorities for this area of work⁴⁰ suggest, ideas were mainly elaborated

⁴⁰ ***"NATIONAL RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT: PRIORITIES FOR TOWER HAMLETS 1991/2***

- 1. Continuing the high level of consultation, support and participation.*
- 2. Ensuring that all Year 11 students receive a fully completed and validated NRA by July 1992.*
- 3. Ensuring that all LBTH NRAs are consistent, credible and of high quality.*
- 4. Creating a quality assurance and validation system that facilitates 3.*
- 5. Integrating the NRA into institutions' assessment, recording and reporting systems.*
- 6. Making the LBTH Progression Agreement work.*
- 7. Evaluating all aspects of the first year of NRA implementation." (LBTH 1991b)*

"NATIONAL RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT: PRIORITIES FOR TOWER HAMLETS 1992/3

- 1. Continuing the high level of consultation, support and participation - focusing particularly on post-16 institutions.*
- 2. Ensuring that all Year 11 and Year 12 students receive a fully completed NRA by July 1993.*
- 3. Ensuring that all LBTH NRAs are consistent, credible and of high quality.*
- 4. Encouraging an integrated and unified approach to assessment, guidance and recording of achievement.*
- 5. Developing the borough guidelines on individual action planning and encouraging institutions to implement them as part of the integrated and unified approach mentioned above.*
- 6. Developing, refining and extending the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement and continuing to monitor its effectiveness.*
- 7. Monitoring and evaluating all of the above through the NRA quality assurance process." (LBTH 1992c)*

"NATIONAL RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT: PRIORITIES FOR TOWER HAMLETS 1993/4

- 1. Continuing the high level of consultation, support and participation in development - focusing particularly on post-16 institutions.*
- 2. Ensuring that all Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 students receive a fully completed NRA by July 1994.*
- 3. Ensuring that all LBTH NRAs are consistent, credible and of high quality.*
- 4. Encouraging an integrated and unified approach to assessment, guidance, progression and recording of achievement which covers Years 7-13.*
- 5. Refining the borough guidelines on individual action planning and encouraging institutions to implement them as part of a Unified Guidance, Achievement and Progression Framework.*
- 6. Developing, refining and extending the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement and continuing to monitor its effectiveness.*
- 7. Monitoring and evaluating all of the above through the NRA quality assurance process." (LBTH 1993a)*

on at NRA/Progression Working Party meetings. No other element of the borough TVEI programme concentrated in such a focused and step-by-step way on the development of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". When the NRA was first introduced in 1991/92, the borough priorities for this area of work largely related to the production of quality summative NRA documents for all year 11 students, by the second year there was more concentration on developing and refining borough and institutional systems and practice in relation to recording of achievement and Unified Guidance and by 1993/94, the majority of priorities are of this latter nature. It is therefore possible to argue that it was the NRA which acted as the original catalyst for the introduction of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

Process: recording of achievement as a catalyst

The HMI Report on Records of Achievement (DES 1988) states that in those schools where RoA was established, it was seen to be having a positive effect on assessment practices and that there was a wider variety of assessment methods being used with larger numbers of students.

Returning to Figure 9 (p.182) - the model of the use of the NRA in Tower Hamlets 1991-1994 - I wish to argue here that the introduction of the NRA into Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions in 1991 also initially encouraged these institutions to focus on the formative processes of assessment, recording and reporting. However, I then want to go on to argue that the emphasis on individual action planning, encouraged by the format of the NRA and supported by the borough's TVEI Programme, stimulated Tower Hamlets institutions to move beyond this focus. They began to develop whole-institutional Student Review and Action Planning Systems which themselves became an essential element of the borough's strategic

approach to student underachievement and lack of progression - the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

In this section I describe the catalytic effect that the introduction of the process of recording of achievement using the NRA had on assessment, recording and reporting practices in Tower Hamlets institutions during the period from September 1991 to July 1994. However, before doing that, it is important to point out the relationship between the progression issues, described above, and the borough's emphasis on strategies, such as RoA and individual action planning systems, which it hoped would help to raise levels of achievement.

During the time of this case study, one of the major barriers to successful and productive post-16 progression within Tower Hamlets was perceived as underachievement pre-16. Those involved with the introduction and implementation of the NRA in Tower Hamlets recognised that no amount of formalised preparation for progression at 16+ of the sort enshrined in the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement, would, of itself, solve the problem of unsuccessful or short-term post-16 participation (Spours 1991b &c; LBTH 1991c). There was a realisation that unless Tower Hamlets institutions began to do something to address the whole issue of underachievement, a progression process using the summative NRA would serve little purpose in the long run. These studies argued that it was underachievement, particularly at intermediate level (Level 2 in the NCVQ framework) that prevented many students from progressing into further education. In addition, there was the practical issue of the need to train students over time to develop the skills of self-assessment, action planning and statement writing required by the NRA. These two reasons led NRA co-ordinators in Tower Hamlets institutions, particularly from September 1992 onwards, to concentrate increasingly on developing and supporting formative assessment, recording reporting and individual

action planning rather than simply on the completion of the summative NRA.

Thus, in Tower Hamlets, apart from stimulating the development of institutional assessment, recording and reporting policies, the aspect of assessment, recording and reporting on which the process of recording of achievement had most effect from 1991-1994 was the development of whole-institutional individual action planning systems. These systems, in turn, led to a re-examination of assessment methodology, particularly as it related to schemes of work, individualised learning and support programmes, marking systems and value-added measurement and methodology.⁴¹ It is worth pointing out here, however, that although I will make reference to these last four terms, the discussion which follows will concentrate largely on the development of institutional assessment, recording and reporting policies and whole-institutional action planning systems, since these were the areas where development was most evident in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994. It was also changes in these areas which initially contributed to the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

Individual action planning has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter, but, at that point, I tended to focus on the relationship between individual action planning and careers education and guidance (that is its role in transition and progression at 16+), rather than on the relationship between individual action planning and formative assessment, recording and reporting practices. In this section, I will concentrate on the latter and will therefore be referring to developments which relate to the whole secondary and post-16 phases rather than just to the Key Stage 4 and post-16 phases.

⁴¹ *"The principle of value-added methodology is that it measures the progress made by a student on a course and hence the 'value added' by the course."* (Spours & Young 1994, p.1)

As Figure 8 (p.170) illustrates, at the beginning of the academic year 1991/1992 only five Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools had an assessment, recording and reporting policy and, of these, only three had a section within them which dealt with the NRA. By the beginning of the following academic year, 12 of the schools had policies and eight of these contained a section which dealt with the NRA. There was no other specific development work on whole-school assessment, recording and reporting systems in secondary and special schools taking place in the borough during this period. It is therefore possible to claim that the increase in the number of assessment, recording and reporting policies in Tower Hamlets secondary and special schools happened as a direct result of the introduction of the NRA and of its support by the TVEI Programme.

One can make a similar argument for Tower Hamlets College. According to responses to the Tower Hamlets NRA Quality Assurance questionnaires 1992/1993 and 1993/1994, Tower Hamlets College, which only officially began taking part in the TVEI-sponsored NRA Development Programme from September 1992, had no assessment recording and reporting policy at the beginning of the academic year 1992/1993, but did have such a policy in place within one year of the introduction of the NRA.

Finding data to support the argument that the introduction of the NRA and the setting up of a borough-wide TVEI Programme to support it led directly to an increase in institutional assessment, recording and reporting policies is one thing. It is, of course, much more difficult to claim that they also led to the development of whole-institutional assessment, recording and reporting practices and individual action planning systems. Here, however, as well as the borough NRA Quality Assurance data, there is material from the NRA Progression Working Party, from conference reports and from teacher/lecturer questionnaires and interviews which supports this argument.

These data contain more information about developments in assessment, recording and reporting practices in individual institutions than they do about whole-borough developments, nevertheless there are some pieces of evidence which provide indications of the latter and it is to these that I propose to turn first.

Firstly, the report of the NRA Quality Assurance visits made during the spring term of 1992 (LBTH 1992d) states:

"Ten institutions (five of them special schools) commented on the need to redesign the timetable in some way in order to allocate more time to NRA-related activities such as one-to-one reviewing, action planning and statement writing."

Secondly, the NRA/Progression Working Party minutes of 14/5/92 note that the IAP Task Group has completed the first draft of the borough IAP Handbook. This Handbook, which includes examples of IAP documentation from across the borough, is a practical manifestation of borough development in this area.

Thirdly, 25 of the 31 teachers/lecturers who responded to the LBTH questionnaire entitled "The Role of Recording of Achievement Using the National Record of Achievement" (July 1994) answered "Yes" to the question: "Do you feel that the NRA plays a role in assessment, recording and reporting practices in your institution?" When asked to say in what way, six of the respondents said that it had encouraged more systematic whole-institutional assessment, recording and reporting, five mentioned that there was a concentration on new types of reporting and six said that action planning development was now taking place as a result of the introduction of the NRA. Examples of comments included:

"Tutor assessment now looks back 5 yrs."

"Individual action planning is a useful practice encouraged by NRA. A culmination of ar&r (assessment, recording and reporting)."

"Improved reporting to parents. Use of NRA model to influence Parents' Evenings. Integral part of whole school ass/rec policy e.g. (NRA) has been focus for introduction of IAP throughout school."

I will turn now to some examples of Tower Hamlets developments in assessment, recording and reporting practices in individual institutions which can be seen to have come about as a result of the introduction and implementation of the NRA.

Towards the beginning of the first year of the introduction of the NRA (1991/1992), the NRA/Progression Working Party minutes show evidence of individual institutional developments in assessment, recording and reporting practices. (LBTH, NRA/Progression Working Party minutes, 3/10/1991)

This development is echoed in the report of the first set of NRA Quality Assurance visits to institutions carried out in the spring term of 1992 which notes that in one school they had:

"decided to reinstate tutor periods for 1992/93, partly in order to allow NRA-related activities to take place" (LBTH 1992d, p.2) and that "One special school which did not previously use self assessment with its students is now piloting a new system of assessment which incorporates this." (LBTH 1992d, p.3).

By June 1992, all secondary, special and post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets were asked to complete a questionnaire entitled "Review of the National Record of Achievement Development Year 1991/92" which contained a series of open-ended questions on the introduction and implementation of both the NRA and the LBTH Post-16 Progression

Agreement. Almost without exception those who completed the questionnaire mentioned the need to develop whole-institutional assessment, recording and reporting practices, including IAP, in those sections of the questionnaire which related to future action or development. Responses under the question "What now has to be tackled?" include, for example:

"Whole school formative assessment/NC"

"1. Raising greater awareness of staff on IAP processes. 2. developing NRA in lower school. 3. Improving students self-assessment skills."

"Development of IAPs and subsequent skills in process as well as product. Formative assessment. Y7-9 NRA."

Responses under "Targets 1992/1993" include:

"100% of students to have action plans."

"Perfect IAP process."

"Audit assessment. Lower school NRA development."

"1. Build on staff awareness of NRA. 2. Development of tutorial system. 3. Records of Achievement throughout school. 4. Student awareness."

From individual institutional responses to NRA Quality Assurance questionnaires completed in the autumn term of 1992/93, it appears that some of these intentions were already being put into practice:

"All pupils are involved in the above processes (review, assessment, recording and target-setting) throughout the school. The school's ARR

(assessment, recording and reporting) system evolves into part of the NRA as pupils progress from Yr. 8..."

"Termly reports (for students from Years 7-9) which include review of progress and target setting. Hope to increase use of IAPs through INSET this year."

"Self assessment processes being introduced. Pupil profiling and portfolio development being introduced as part of school's ARR policy."

"Introduction of self-assessment and work sampling related to NC (National Curriculum)."

"NRA has helped focus our ARR system and structure a curriculum within the senior department."

"Teaching becoming even more individual student focused..."

By the end of the three-year period of this study (August 1994) there is evidence from two borough documents on individual action planning, "Tower Hamlets Individual Action Planning Handbook, Summer 1994" (LBTH 1994c) and "Student Review and Action Planning Systems in Tower Hamlets" (LBTH 1994d), that not only the ideas and concepts connected with individual action planning, but also the practices and systems in relation to these, had begun to make themselves apparent in Tower Hamlets institutions.

The "Tower Hamlets Individual Action Planning Handbook, Summer Term 1994"⁴² contains examples of IAP documentation in use in several

⁴² This was the second Individual Action Planning Handbook to be produced in Tower Hamlets during the period under study here. Its revision, as the foreword indicates, has been necessitated by the changing nature of practices over the two years between the publication of the first document (LBTH 1992e) and this one (LBTH 1994c).

different secondary and post-16 institutions in the borough and the "Student Review and Action Planning Systems in Tower Hamlets" report (LBTH 1994d) provides examples of different IAP systems employed at that time in four secondary schools and Tower Hamlets College. An example from one school demonstrates how the idea of an individualised student review system percolated through to whole-school assessment, recording and reporting cycles and spawned a modularised delivery of Schemes of Work with common school-wide assessment points.

There is no doubt, therefore, from the evidence cited above that there was considerable development of assessment, recording and reporting policies and practices and of individual action planning systems in many of the Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions during the period from September 1991 to August 1994. This often initially evolved from those same institutions focusing on the process of recording of achievement using the NRA and trying to use it as part of a whole-institutional individual action planning system designed to raise levels of achievement. These whole-institutional systems, when combined with the guidance and progression strategies that institutions were developing to increase and sustain student post-16 participation rates, discussed above, together formed the major elements of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

The Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"

This section is divided into three main parts: the first examines the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and highlights the issues it attempted to address at both a borough and at an institutional level; the second part concentrates on the different role that the Framework actually played in individual institutions in Tower Hamlets and the third part examines the particular function of the NRA

and the process of recording of achievement within the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”.

The Tower Hamlets “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”

Earlier sections of this chapter have both attempted to define what the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” is and how, in Tower Hamlets, the introduction of the NRA and recording of achievement acted as a catalyst for the development of the Framework both at a borough and at an institutional level. This part of the chapter describes the Framework from a wider variety of perspectives and draws extensively on interviews with NRA Co-ordinators in eleven Tower Hamlets institutions in early 1995 to demonstrate both the complexity of the concept and the way that it was used by different agencies for different purposes or, perhaps, more accurately, to reflect different emphases.

Within Tower Hamlets there are at least three different ways in which the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” can be viewed: firstly, from an LEA perspective, and this in fact varies according to which LEA agency is describing the Framework, secondly, from an institutional viewpoint and thirdly, from an individual student perspective.

From a borough perspective, as has been discussed in earlier sections of the chapter, in the period under study (1991-1994) the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” was seen as a key strategy for raising achievement and promoting student progression. It was a strategy which was developed and led centrally by the Tower Hamlets TVEI Central Team but it also gained active support from the Chief Education Officer (CEO) and the Education Strategy Group (ESG) within the borough, from the Tower Hamlets Careers Service (CS) and from the borough’s Education Business Partnership (EBP). Each of these agencies, of course, pragmatically emphasised certain aspects of the Framework in order to reflect its own key objectives. So, for example, the CEO and the ESG were particularly interested in those

aspects of the Framework which they considered might contribute to a rise in GCSE results at 16+ and post-16 participation rates as well as to the forging of a coherent borough-wide approach to the 14-19 curriculum and post-16 provision. The CS, on the other hand, saw the Framework as a means of promoting its particular interest in impartial individual student guidance. While the EBP saw the potential for using the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" as a vehicle for raising the profile of work-related activities within secondary, special and post-16 institutions. Finally, at its most pragmatic, the TVEI Central Team perceived the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" as a way of ensuring that all the elements of the TVEI programme (e.g. RoA, the work-related curriculum, careers education and guidance, individual action planning, student-centred teaching and learning styles) could be drawn together into a meaningful and coherent framework. In the short term, it was thought that such a Framework would make it more likely that secondary, special and post-16 institutions would deliver all the various elements of TVEI in a more coherent way. In the longer term, by embedding these elements within a whole-institutional strategy, it was felt that institutions would be more likely to continue to develop them beyond the end of TVEI funding.

This last emphasis is illustrated in the definition of "Unified Guidance" which is contained in an editorial in the Tower Hamlets TVEI newsletter, Network TVEI , (No. 2, Spring 1993).

"In practical terms unified guidance seeks to relate tutorials, recording of achievement, individual action planning, careers education, personal, social and health education and the work-related curriculum into a single and deliverable framework..."

Much of the strength of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", therefore, appears to have lain in two main factors; firstly, its attempt to bring coherence to a number of activities which

institutions were being encouraged to deliver as part of TVEI; secondly, the way in which it could be interpreted and used by different agencies to work in different ways on tackling the problems of student underachievement and lack of progression in Tower Hamlets.

It was evident from in-depth interviews conducted with eleven NRA co-ordinators in the spring term of 1995, that TVEI co-ordinators and senior management teams in different Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions, although broadly in agreement about the main elements of the Framework, had also chosen to emphasise certain aspects of the Framework rather than others. These different approaches rose from their desire to meet the needs of their own particular student body and institutional objectives. Over half of the interviewees, for example, stressed the fact that the Framework had helped their institution to focus more clearly on students as individuals and the student's experience of school as a whole:

"What we have been trying to promote is linking together the various aspects of school life that centre on the pupils, so we are looking at monitoring achievement, recording of achievement, pupil guidance, in terms of individual tutorials, the relationship with the tutor, PHSE and trying to link it all together into a whole with the pupil as the centre and the tutor being the key person." (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational 11-16 school)

"The student is the structure for the system. You put systems on top of this." (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational special school)

"I think it is the rest of the curriculum that actually makes a successful learner out of the pupil. It's those elements that can't be touched by subject-specific And how one prepares for the various stages of transition, making decisions, so decision-making must come in there. How you assess where you are, how well you are doing, which is not

easy because you need whole-school policies to back that up.” (NRA Co-ordinator in girls’ 11-18 school)

“It’s a Framework that basically ties up PHSE, NRA, CEG, everything to do with developing the child as a person, with the academic bit fitting in, but not the academic bit on its own. It’s the whole person.” (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational 11-18 school)

“RoA, PHSE, mentoring, more student involvement, focusing more of the PHSE work more on the student and his learning, recording of achievement and generally getting him to understand where he’s going. It’s all very fragmented at the moment and I think it’s like really to bring it all together.” (NRA Co-ordinator in boys’ 11-16 school)

Other interviewees stressed the importance of the guidance and progression focus of the Framework:

“The UG Framework, as I see it work, is giving every individual student the opportunity throughout their school/college career, to know what opportunities are available to them and also to build on their strengths and interests within that.” (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational post-16 institution)

“I think it’s guidance in terms of careers and progression at 14+ and 16+. I think it’s all the tutorial guidance that happens within the institution, in terms of advising pupils about their work and those are probably the main strands, what’s happening inside the school in terms of the guidance that pupils are receiving from form tutors, subject teachers and all the guidance that is happening in school and externally, in terms of careers and progression.” (NRA Co-ordinator in boys’ 11-18 school)

“Bringing all the different strands of guiding the student through his route in education on through to further education together and they would include Careers, further education, recording of achievement and other forms of guidance within the school whether they be educational or social.” (NRA Co-ordinator in boys’ 11-16 special school)

Finally, one NRA Co-ordinator, who was also the Assessment Co-ordinator at her school, emphasised the assessment focus of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” within her institution:

“It brings together the whole strands of assessment, in all its meanings, reporting and action planning for individuals, reports for departments or the whole institution.” (NRA Co-ordinator in girls’ 11-18 school)

It is not possible from the data collected to make any detailed comments on how individual students within Tower Hamlets perceived the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” between 1991-94. They were not asked this question, partly because it was unlikely that they used or even knew the term at that time. However, there is some evidence in the tape-recorded interviews with post-16 students and the student questionnaires on IAP, which were collected as part of this thesis, that gives an indication of what students thought about those elements of the Framework with which this chapter is particularly concerned - i.e. the NRA and IAP - during this period. There is also a small amount of evidence that can be gleaned from the questionnaires that students completed after the first year of using their IAPs and NRAs as part of the Post-16 Progression Agreement in Tower Hamlets. From both pieces of evidence, it is apparent that the majority of students who responded to the questionnaires had experienced individual action planning and the NRA. They saw both as positive and could also often explain what they were trying to achieve by working on them. The student experience of and perspective on the “Unified

Guidance 14-19 Framework" is examined in more detail in Section 3 below.

The role that the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" played in different institutions in Tower Hamlets

As the previous section has indicated, there were quite marked differences in the way that the concept of ^aUnified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was perceived by representatives from Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions. These, as one might expect, are reflected in the way that each institution actually translated the concept into practice, since it is at this point that each institution has to decide which aspects to emphasise or develop, depending on its own priorities or particular approach (Fullan 1982). This is borne out by the fact that institutions did not always use the term "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", but used their own terminology (e.g. PRAISE, Academic Review Days, Tutorial Support) to describe the innovations that they ~~were~~ gradually bringing in under the banner of "Unified Guidance".

From an analysis of the eleven interviews carried out with NRA co-ordinators, there appear to be three major overarching issues which Tower Hamlets institutions claimed they were using the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" to address to a greater or lesser degree. The first was raising levels of achievement, the second was the incoherent and often *ad hoc* delivery of cross-curricular themes or of those aspects of the curriculum that were not governed by external qualifications and the third was the "pastoral/academic divide". By this last term I mean the distinction that is drawn in an institution between its so-called "pastoral work" (that is the type of support that has traditionally been provided for students by tutors and heads of year and which focuses largely on students' behaviour and social problems) and its "academic work" (that is the type of support and learning that has traditionally been provided for students by subject

teachers/lecturers and heads of department/programme area managers and which focuses largely on students' academic achievement and progress) (Watkins & Thacker 1993).

Turning to the first issue, it appears that during the period 1991-1994, some Tower Hamlets institutions were using the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" as a means of raising achievement by focusing on individual student progress, motivation and support:

"I'd say it's been of benefit within our own institution because it's made us focus on individuals and trying to raise the standard. We don't make excuses for lack of achievement because of the type of students we've got, but at the same time you perhaps don't push them as far as you should and this has made us focus more. 'Yes, they should be able to do this and that and let's really see if we can get them to do this and that.' If we don't reach 100 per cent, if they reach 80 per cent, then it's better than aiming for 60 and getting 60." (NRA Co-ordinator in boys' special school)

"Certainly in raising achievement and movement on the use of profiles, the move to formative and individual work review sessions, the link with careers and guidance and the kind of progression, the link with the NRA." (NRA Co-ordinator in girls' 11-18 school)

"I mean I just see it as part of a general quality education. The advice that's given to students and how you build on a student's strengths and weaknesses and aspirations are just part of the whole, total experience." (Vice Principal, FE College)

As regards the second issue (incoherence or *ad hoc* delivery of cross-curricular themes or of those aspects of the curriculum that are not governed by external qualifications), many of the interviewees claimed that the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was seen by their

institution as a means of bringing together and making sense of disparate and often discretely delivered elements of the curriculum such as work-related experiences, careers education and guidance, personal, social and health education.

"I think the main issue it addresses in my opinion, especially in our school, is the fact that you have three different streams - Careers, PHSE and NRA - working independently and there's no coherent idea as to where all three are leading and yet all three are to do with the pupil and their achievement. So it's a framework to tie in loose ends and look at a complete person rather than three different strands." (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational 11-18 school)

"Well now it is timetabled and there it is, one thirtieth of everybody from year 7 to year 13. It is now a vehicle for delivering other elements of careers work, work-related curriculum but also we use it to celebrate." (NRA Co-ordinator in girls' 11-18 school)

The third issue which the interviewees claimed they were using the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" to address was the "pastoral/academic divide". Here it appears that special, secondary and post-16 institutions were using the ideas contained in the Framework to promote the role of the tutor in monitoring the academic progress of, as well as providing the pastoral support for, her/his tutees. For most institutions, this was a new and enhanced role for the tutor. This approach is controversial, since it can be seen as challenging or even undermining the role of the subject teacher/lecturer - traditionally the higher status role - and raising the status of the tutor.

"I think the area that we wanted to move most on was how the form tutor could actually assist learning and then everything came out as a direct result of this, so these are the processes we might introduce to move away from the pastoral role...anything I now have to deal with on

a discipline side, it's now always their learning that is the focus. No matter what the problem is, I always start with the learning." (NRA Co-ordinator, girls 11-18 school)

"(It's) attempting to take on those key issues of co-ordination between the pastoral and the academic." (NRA Co-ordinator, girls 11-18 school)

"In our institution I think what it's done is it's pulled together much more of the role of the form tutor." (NRA Co-ordinator, boys' 11-18 school)

In order to address any of the three issues outlined above, it would be necessary eventually to take a whole-institutional approach to the problem and this, as several institutions pointed out, was what the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework encouraged them to do.

"Well if I answer from our institution, I think it has meant a lot of whole-school policies have been introduced or reviewed and whole-school practices have been introduced..." (NRA Co-ordinator in girls' 11-18 school)

For institutions and for Tower Hamlets LEA there were strong advantages in having a strategy which involved changes of a whole-institutional nature, since they could be tied in with Institutional Development Plans or Post-OFSTED/FEFC Action Plans. However, this also meant that progress towards implementation of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was quite slow in many institutions and required considerable discussion and debate.

"The concept of Unified Guidance as a whole has not been accepted within the SMT (Senior Management Team) of the school. There are members of the SMT that are trying to promote it as a concept and the

discussion has gone on intermittently over the past year and we've got to the point where the issue is being forced and we are having a Saturday conference on UG for the SMT alone on the 14th January...I am convinced of its potential value to our pupil, but, we've yet to win the argument within school to put the resources behind it to make it work." (NRA Co-ordinator, co-educational 11-16 school)

"I think just that as a school we've now reached the point where we're very comfortable within those systems. I think it took us a while to adapt and to get ourselves in line." (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational special school)

"Things like Unified Guidance, which comes from the outside, go to the management and get their own sort of interpretation put on them and then in some form come to lecturers but not always in a form that is unified across the whole college because they come through different managers from different schools (here in the sense of programme area) who've obviously got their own priorities on it." (NRA Co-ordinator in FE College)

The use of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" as a response to the overarching issues of student underachievement and lack of progression therefore appeared to be in evidence in all of the institutions visited across Tower Hamlets in December 1994. The nature and extent of this development, however, clearly varied widely from institution to institution and reflected specific institutional priorities.

The function of the NRA and recording of achievement within the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"

Earlier in this chapter I attempted to demonstrate how the NRA and recording of achievement were used as catalysts in the development of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". This section

uses the Tower Hamlets case study material to analyse the particular function of the NRA and the process of recording of achievement within the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” and suggests that by 1994 there was a change in their function from catalyst to essential part of that Framework.

In common with earlier sections of this chapter, this section will also make a distinction between the function of the summative NRA document (including its IAP) as a product and the function of the process of recording of achievement and individual action planning. It will also distinguish between borough, institutional and student perspectives on the function of product and process within a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”. For this reason, the section will draw extensively from the interviews with NRA Co-ordinators carried out in January 1995 and from student questionnaires and interviews, as well as from borough NRA quality assurance data and documentation on the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”.

The function of the summative NRA document (product) within the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”

According to the Tower Hamlets LEA documentation on the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”, there are two major functions for the summative NRA within this Framework. Firstly, it provides a means of recognising and accrediting all the elements of that Framework. Secondly, it acts as a tool for progression into further/higher education, training or the workplace from 16+.

When asked the question, “In your view, what role do the NRA and recording of achievement play in the Unified Guidance Framework?”, the eleven NRA co-ordinators interviewed did mention both of these functions, but they placed far greater emphasis on the first than on the second. In addition, the NRA was seen very much as a mechanism for ensuring student entitlement to a broader curriculum and as a means of

celebrating student achievement - both of which relate more strongly to internal institutional issues rather than the world beyond the institution.

"The NRA tends to stop things falling through the net, it makes them do all the bits. They're all going to do them anyway, but would you do them if the NRA wasn't there? Would they get that time? Would you allow them off timetable for the morning to write their work experience debrief if the NRA wasn't a product at the end of it?" (NRA Co-ordinator in girls' 11-18 school)

"Well I mean it's a way of bringing all those strands together and ensuring that they've all been covered, basically, because it is quite difficult, particularly when you're in a big institution and you've got people doing lots of different courses to make sure that it's all covered and certainly the NRA is a way of recording everything - peoples' experiences across the board." (Vice-principal, FE College)

"I'd just like to say there's a slight change in my view. I remember saying at a meeting at the time that recording of achievement in our school can be recording of the lack of achievement in comparison with other schools. To a certain extent there is still that there. Most 16 year olds in our school do not achieve to the level of 16 year olds in comprehensives. But the value of the NRA and the look on the boy's - 16 year old's - face when he gets his NRA and actually sort of sees what things people have written about him - positive things- which are not lies, which are true and you can actually see it and also his folder of good work as the end result, you can see something positive in that which actually makes the process more positive in my mind. " (NRA Co-ordinator, 11-16 boys' special school)

This emphasis on the NRA summative document as a means of celebrating achievement, of motivating students and of boosting their

self-confidence seems to be borne out by the responses of the 31 students who took part in a two-year borough survey of Tower Hamlets post-16 students from 1992-1994.

"If you sort of look at the NRA folder, like, if you look at the comments that teachers gave you and you sort of see that you're really good at this subject, it can help you to decide what you want to be." (Amina)

"It's actually built up my courage to go and get this course and tells you you can do it, you know, especially the NRA." (Razia)

Here, however, the students are also making reference to progression and to the use of the NRA outside or beyond the institution. There is, in addition, some evidence from the responses of the 30 students who completed questionnaires after taking their NRAs to interviews at Tower Hamlets College in 1992, as part of the LBTH Post-16 progression Agreement, that they had found the record of use in the progression process. 29 of the 30 said they were happy with their NRA, all of them had taken it with them to interview and had had it used by the interviewer, 27 were happy with the way that their NRA was used at interview and 29 said that, in their opinion, the interview had been fair.

In summary, therefore, it appears from the data collected that Tower Hamlets LEA, secondary, special and post-16 institutions and students all had broadly similar perceptions of the two major functions of the summative NRA within the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework". They saw it firstly as a means of recognising all types of student achievement, and secondly as a tool for use in application for further/higher education, training or the workplace. However, the institutional representatives tended to stress the former and the students, to a certain extent, emphasised the latter.⁴³

⁴³ A larger-scale survey of Tower Hamlets students' views on the NRA, carried out after the period of this case study, bears these findings out (LBTH 1995b).

The function of the process of recording of achievement and individual action planning within the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"

Tower Hamlets documentation on the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" suggests that the process of recording of achievement and individual action planning motivates the student by recognising and building on her/his past achievement. Moreover, by involving the student in reviewing her/his own learning, this process encourages the development of skills such as self-awareness, decision-making, forward-planning and the management of learning.

Several of these skills are highlighted in teacher and lecturer responses to a questionnaire on the role of the NRA completed in July 1994. When asked in an open question to indicate what they felt the main strengths of the NRA were, six of the 30 respondents mentioned structured student self-reflection and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and seven said that it encouraged students to think about future/progression issues. Similarly, when asked to comment on what they felt the main strengths of the process of recording of achievement was, nine teachers/lecturers mentioned the idea of student structured self-evaluation and self-development. Responses to these two questions included:

"...The value it (the NRA) places on what they have done and can do. The way in which it encourages a considered evaluation of themselves and the achievements. The way it furthers forward planning via IAPs."

"The self-evaluation involved in the personal statement and the choice of best work and the IAP."

"The process of putting it (the NRA) together enables pupils both to display and develop a variety of skills - written communication, evaluation, planning for the future etc."

These responses were further supported by many of the comments made by the NRA co-ordinators interviewed in December 1994, who particularly stressed the importance of students having access to accurate information about their progress in order to be able to manage their own learning and progression more effectively:

"I see it as probably the first time when they've probably had some control over their own records of work or some say in what they are saying about themselves." (NRA Co-ordinator in 11-16 school)

"What I've found is that students have been completely unaware of how they're assessed, they know it's essays or they know it's data responses but they don't know within that framework how they get their marks, how it is they get some marks for knowledge, some marks for evaluation, application and so on. But they don't know that. I think there's an assumption that we make as lecturers that they do know it because we've given them the syllabus at the beginning of the term. And what I've been trying to do is to work more on that. There is a real role within both NRA and Unified Guidance and action planning - I mean it should come into the whole area - that students are fully aware of how they are going to be assessed on the course." (NRA Co-ordinator in FE College)

"I think the main advantage with individual action planning is that it actually helps students in the very early stages to sit down and think about where they might want to go and how they might get there, what they need to get there." (Vice-principal, FE College)

"The other thing is the kind of diagnostic issues, spending more time with kids doing diagnostic work so that one can best advise them what they must do to move from here to there." (NRA Co-ordinator in girls' 11-18 school)

In all of these responses there is a recognition that recording of achievement and individual action planning have encouraged institutions to reflect on the way that they teach and assess students, as well as on the way that they advise them about future options.

There are two pieces of Tower Hamlets case study data that provide evidence of student views on how recording of achievement and the action planning processes associated with it have helped them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and to plan for the future. These are, first, responses to a questionnaire given to students in March/April 1992 as part of the monitoring of the first year of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement and second, responses to questionnaires given to Year 8, Year 10 and Year 11 students in six Tower Hamlets schools in the spring term 1994 about their views on individual action planning.

The first small set of data reflects students' views on the preparation they had received from action planning and compilation of the NRA at the end of the first year of the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement. Of the 30 Year 11 students who responded to the questionnaire, 26 felt that they had been adequately prepared for their interviews with Tower Hamlets College and 28 said that they had a clear idea of the course they wanted to take before the first interview with the college. Although it would be unrealistic to claim very much from this, there appears to be some evidence here that students had found the recording of achievement and action planning processes helpful in developing their skills of self-awareness and decision-making.

The second set of data, which is much larger (nearly 500 students from Years 7, 8, 10 and 11) and which relates to a later period in the study when action planning practices were more extensively in place in Tower Hamlets, demonstrates more clearly how helpful pre-16 students feel that action planning is for increasing their self-awareness, personal and work organisational skills. The quotations below are taken from

the report of the survey, "Where are we now and where do we want to be? Staff and student perceptions of individual action planning in six schools in Tower Hamlets, Spring 1994" (LBTH, 1994e). The first relates to Year 8 students and the second to Year 11.

'We do individual action planning to set ourselves targets to know ourselves better, and to improve ourselves, we should know what we are good at and at what we are bad at.'

'I think individual action planning is very useful because it helps you to get to know yourself better and to be honest about yourself.'

'To help you get what you want out of education and to tell you what things you need improving yourselves.'

Students gave similar responses to the question 'What do you think are the benefits of individual action planning?', although there were more comments about confidence, self reliance and preparation for the future in these remarks.

'I think the benefits of individual action planning is that you assess yourself. You know what to improve on rather than someone else telling you. This gives you the urge to improve.'

'It helps you, yourself honestly to say what you are doing good at and bad at. It helps you at your interviews.'

When asked why they thought they did individual action planning, the majority of Year 11 students in two of the schools surveyed mentioned the idea of using individual action planning as a tool in making decisions about future career and education options. However, a sizeable number of students in one of the schools (24 per cent) also

commented that they thought individual action planning helped them reflect on themselves and on their abilities. Responses included:

'To plan what you want to do in the future, and to put all your ideas into place.'

'Gives you a fair idea of where your at.'

'It helps you to plan ahead and work towards your targets as you acknowledge them.'

'You learn about yourself and your own standards.'

'It's useful in setting yourself goals, because you decide yourself what you're working for and where you're going. It set's things out for you clearly.'

'You discover exactly what steps you need to take, what you have to do, everything is put into perspective. At the moment there are so many choices of courses, colleges and jobs, it's easy to get confused.'

There does, therefore, seem to be a large degree of consensus from teachers, lecturers and students firstly about the function of the process of recording of achievement and individual action planning within the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and secondly about its actual effects within the borough during the period of the case study.

Some conclusions on the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework"

This section has argued that the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", which was developed by the borough TVEI Programme as a strategy for addressing student underachievement and lack of progression, was both accepted and developed by Tower Hamlets secondary, special and post-16 institutions during the period of this case study (1991-1994).

Each institution, as has been indicated above, seemed to have a broadly similar understanding of the concept of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”, but tended to emphasise different aspects of this Framework according to its own stage of development and priorities. However, the case study data suggest that there is considerable agreement between students, teachers, lecturers and managers from different institutions about the function of the summative NRA and of the process of recording of achievement within that Framework. The summative NRA (and the recording of achievement process connected with it) was seen as a means of recognising and accrediting all the elements of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” and as a tool for progression into further/higher education, training or the workplace from 16+. The process of recording of achievement and individual action planning was perceived as motivating the student and encouraging the development of skills such as self-awareness, decision-making, forward-planning and the management of learning. In this sense it could be claimed that both product and process had had a distinct but complementary part to play in the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”. It is clear from this that by 1994 the NRA had moved beyond its function of catalyst in the development of the Tower Hamlets “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” and had been subsumed as an essential element within that Framework.

The role of the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme in supporting the development of the NRA and the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”

In an earlier section, this chapter looked at the important role played by a central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism within a model for using the NRA in the “medium participation/low achievement” education system of the early 1990s. I argued that in the context of the 1990s it was this type of mechanism which provided the initial energy required to use the NRA to work as a catalyst, as well as to support the kind of development that subsequently resulted. Figure

6 (p.159) was used to illustrate the functions and features of such a mechanism.

As I pointed out, the features such a central organising mechanism required to operate effectively were all related to three major areas: financial resources, human resources and locally-recognised power to determine policy. In this brief section, I will argue that the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme had all three of these and that it was in the combination of all three that it was able to support both the implementation of the NRA and then the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

In terms of financial resources, the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme had approximately £2.5 millions to spend on TVEI-related developments over a period of five years from 1991-1996 - a not inconsiderable sum in times of financial restraint. It would be reasonable to expect that this level of funding on its own might well have stimulated some kind of change within Tower Hamlets. However, here I would like to argue that it was not only the amount of funding available which helped to stimulate change within the borough, but also the manner in which the funding was used. In order to argue this point, it is necessary to go into a little detail about the way in which the Tower Hamlets TVEI Scheme allocated its resources, because it is this method of resourcing which, I would argue, allowed the Scheme to wield some of its influence in the borough in relation to the NRA and the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework".

As with all TVEI Programmes, funding in Tower Hamlets had to be concentrated on the 14-19 age group, had to be directed towards certain broad areas of curriculum development and had to be divided between all the participating secondary, special and post-16 institutions within

the borough.⁴⁴ As long as the use of the funding could be justified to the Department of Employment, which was the body allocating resources, Tower Hamlets LEA could use its own discretion as to how it disbursed the budget it had been allocated.

LEAs in different parts of the country managed their TVEI Schemes in different ways. Some allocated all funds directly to schools and held very little at the centre for co-ordination, others used the majority of their TVEI budget to appoint Advisory Teachers in a variety of TVEI-related curriculum areas. Tower Hamlets LEA went to neither of these extremes.

The way that TVEI was organised in Tower Hamlets was intended to provide a strong central policy drive while allowing schools and post-16 institutions enough autonomy to be responsive to their own internal policy direction. The Tower Hamlets TVEI Central Team agreed with its participating institutions the following principles for using TVEI resources.

1. Only two thirds of the total TVEI budget for Tower Hamlets would be disbursed to institutions, the remaining one third would be kept at the centre to pay for the TVEI Central Team and a programme of central INSET events, conferences, working groups and publications.
2. Each of the secondary schools, regardless of roll, should be allowed the same amount of annual funding.
3. Each special school would receive about a quarter of the annual amount allocated to secondary schools.
4. Post-16 institutions would receive their funding on a student *per capita* basis.

⁴⁴ In Tower Hamlets all secondary, special and post-16 institutions, except one, decided to participate in the TVEI Development Programme.

5. Each institution would know its five-year and annual budget entitlement in advance, but would have to submit plans for the use of this funding on an annual basis.
6. Plans would have to take account of both borough and institutional priorities.
7. Annual institutional plans would be vetted by a "Curriculum Task Group" made up of institutional representatives and members of the TVEI Central Team.
8. The membership of this "Curriculum Task Group" would change on an annual basis.
9. Each institution would appoint a TVEI Key Person (or Persons). This person would control the institutional TVEI budget, disseminate TVEI ideas and policy within the school/college, form a team of others within the school/college to take policy forward, attend borough meetings regularly, and take part in an annual monitoring and evaluation process led by the TVEI Central Team.

As can be seen from the above, these principles for disbursing TVEI funds both encouraged full participation from and collaboration between each of the institutions involved and also gave the borough a means of ensuring that institutions were aware of and, to a greater or lesser degree, followed the central collectively-decided policy direction. The way that the TVEI funding was allocated therefore meant that there was a financial incentive for TVEI Key Persons to use their funding in a particular way, according to the central policy thrust. However, it also provided them with a degree of autonomy in the way that they then interpreted borough policy within their own institutions, as well as the possibility of collaborating with colleagues across the borough to shape future central policy.

As has been already mentioned at the beginning of this section, the second major requirement of a central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism is adequate human resources to lead and

support policy development. As a result of the way that TVEI funding was allocated in Tower Hamlets - see point 1 above - there was enough funding within the budget to finance a small TVEI Central Team and to encourage borough-wide collaboration. The TVEI Central Team had the capacity to organise borough-wide INSET and working groups in order to stimulate ideas, share issues and disseminate good practice. It also had the ability to articulate and shape policy in areas such as RoA and the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", to publish policy documents and to support and evaluate the subsequent translation of policy into practice.

None of this would, however, have been possible without the TVEI Programme's locally-recognised power to determine policy - the third major requirement of a central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism. It was the context within which the NRA and the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" were being developed from 1991-1994 as much as content of these two initiatives which allowed the TVEI Central Team to take on this role.

The context in the early 1990s was one of financial constraint (hence the power of TVEI funding), a move from the London-wide power-base of the ILEA to the borough wide power-base of the Tower Hamlets LEA (hence the appeal of a borough-wide and locally relevant policy framework), institutional competition (hence the desire to adopt strategies for raising levels of achievement and progression), constant change within 14-19 education (hence the need to find a relevant local response to chaos and confusion) and, finally, lack of coherence for the 14-19 phase as a result of LMS and FE incorporation (hence the search for a local agency to provide a forum for collaboration). As a result of this context, supported by the fact that the TVEI Programme was directly line-managed by the Chief Education Officer and the fact that the original Central Team had its origins in the borough inspectorate, the TVEI Programme was accorded locally recognised power to

determine, mould and monitor education policy related to the 14-19 phase.

It is evident from comments made during the interviews with NRA Co-ordinators in Tower Hamlets that they both recognised and acknowledged this role for the Tower Hamlets TVEI Programme.

“I think it (the Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”) came partly from a growing awareness in Tower Hamlets , as far as I can see promoted by people like the Tower Hamlets TVEI Team, that there were these enormous gaps and inconsistencies in what we were doing...A lot of what we have done in the institution has been guided by the borough Framework and in a sense the school had input into how the borough Framework took shape so we were recognising our needs in the work that was being done in a way that perhaps we wouldn't have done if we had just been doing that on an institutional basis. So I think it was very useful to have the borough taking a focus and developing it and all the work that went on in terms of working groups and training sessions and people pooling their expertise and knowledge. I think it was something which schools needed to address which the borough made possible.” (NRA Co-ordinator in boys 11-18 school)

“I think obviously that the TVEI Scheme coming in gave the framework and also the funding and also the work that was going on prior to that with the post-16 advisory team. That again was, I mean, I think there were a group of people really who acted as a catalyst for these ideas to be widely accepted...if you want me to give my opinion on how it developed, I think there's been a lot of very good people in the borough who have worked extremely hard and it's due to their efforts really that we've got anything like this.” (Vice-principal, FE College)

“My personal feeling sitting from in here is that the whole initiative has been a unifying one across the borough and we've been able to use

support, feed off one another on those things and as a borough we seemed to be very focused on what our ultimate aim was about - raising achievement and staying on rates.” (NRA Co-ordinator in girls’ 11-18 school)

“My perception was that it was a team of people working in Tower Hamlets who had an interest in a lot of very important areas and gradually realised how these linked and made them link and enabled the rest of us to see that...I feel first of all an intense gratitude for having been around at the time when all this thinking was going on and having learnt from that process and everything that was going on, and seeing what was happening in the borough and having an amazing amount of support and ideas and being kicked up the pants to make us do things - it’s all been very important.” (NRA Co-ordinator in girls’ 11-18 school)

“I think a lot of hard work from a very committed team and that’s the TVEI Team in the borough. I think without their overall shifting of pieces about and making sure that the jigsaw fits, we’d still go on doing our own thing.” (NRA Co-ordinator in co-educational 11-18 school)

The TVEI Programme in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994 was thus in a good position to act as the central organising and targeted resourcing mechanism described in Figure 6 (p.159). It had all of the three major features of such a mechanism - the financial resources, the human resources and the locally-recognised power to determine policy. It was therefore able firstly to provide the initial energy required to use the NRA as a catalyst in the development of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” and secondly to support the implementation of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” across the borough’s secondary, special and post-16 institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter has used a local case study to examine a new role for RoA (in this case the NRA variant) in the early 1990s. According to the literature on RoA, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, this initiative was largely used to bring about curriculum and assessment reform and to provide alternative accreditation for lower achievers within a single phase of education. Earlier chapters have argued that the “medium participation/low achievement” context of the 1990s threw up new challenges for a policy instrument such as RoA. This local case study has illustrated how RoA was used in a new and different way in this new and different context. Firstly, the NRA was used to address the new and pressing issues of underachievement and effective student progression. Secondly, it was used to bring about change not in a single institution, but across and between all the secondary, special and post-16 institutions in this LEA area. Thirdly, it was used not as a tool in its own right but as one of the elements in an LEA-wide strategy for tackling underachievement and problems of student progression - “The Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”

In describing this case study, I have used the three elements of the theoretical framework (context, content and process/product relationship) developed in Chapter 1 to analyse the role that the NRA played in a local LEA context. I have attempted to demonstrate that the inter-relationship of all three of these elements jointly determined the role that the NRA played in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994. It could therefore be argued that this theoretical framework might prove a useful tool for describing a role for the NRA in the national context of the 1990s and in a potential future “high participation/high achievement” education system. The two chapters which follow test out this theory.

Chapter 6

National Lessons from the Tower Hamlets Case Study

In earlier parts of this thesis I have argued that one of the major weaknesses of all the different types of literature on RoA is that they tend to discuss this initiative in a relatively context-free way. Although there is often discussion of why RoA has been introduced and what the intended outcomes are from this initiative, there is rarely detailed analysis of the context within which these outcomes are intended to be realised. The literature thus largely ignores the extent to which either the local or the national educational policy context has determined the role that RoA has been able to play within an individual institution, across a local area or within the English education and training system as a whole.

However, as I have argued in earlier chapters, a consideration of the education policy context is vital to any discussion of the role that RoA has played or might play at the local or national level in the English education and training system. Moreover, it is not enough to consider the national or local education policy context simply in terms of the educational issues that it throws up and therefore that RoA has been expected to address; it is also important to consider to what extent this same local or national context has, in addition, affected the impact and outcomes of the initiative itself.

What this chapter argues is that the role that RoA played in the early 1990s, as exemplified in the Tower Hamlets case study, was not only determined by the need to address certain problems of the "medium participation/low achievement" context of that period, but was also limited by some of the key elements of that context. In the Tower

Hamlets case study, for example, the NRA, which was used as part of a borough-wide strategy to address low levels of achievement, participation and progression, was limited in its ability to fulfil this role at a local level by four key contextual aspects of the national education and training system identified in Chapter 1 (Figure 2 pp.28 &29) - the qualifications system for 14-19 year olds, institutional competition, employers' use of qualifications for selection and recruitment and the higher education selection process.

The preceding chapter argued that the use of the NRA in the Tower Hamlet case study constituted a new role for RoA in the 1990s in four different ways. Firstly, it was used by all 14-19 students (regardless of their programme of study) across a local authority area rather than being seen as an initiative largely for lower achievers or for students on particular courses. Secondly, it was seen as a tool for addressing problems that RoA had not previously been used to address (underachievement and lack of progression). Thirdly, NRA constituted one part of an LEA-wide strategic 14-19 framework rather than being used as a tool on its own. Finally, the NRA was part of a system-wide approach rather than being limited to use in one institution or one phase of education.

This new role for the NRA as part of the Tower Hamlets Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework could be seen as an example of what, in this thesis, I have referred to as Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all students to record achievement.

However, in this chapter I argue that, despite the development of a well-supported and potentially powerful local example of this Phase of RoA development, the four key factors related to the national education policy context mentioned above (the qualifications system for 14-19 year olds, institutional competition, employers' use of

qualifications for selection and recruitment and the higher education selection process) limited the role that the NRA was able to play within this local Framework.

The chapter goes on to draw three major conclusions from the case study. Firstly, I suggest that the impact of these national contextual factors resulted in the NRA being of more benefit to learners in compulsory education than to those in post-compulsory, even though it was seen as a tool for all learners. Secondly, I argue that these four contextual factors had more impact on the use of the NRA as a summative document than on the use of the process of recording of achievement, but that the use of the latter is to a large extent based on the credibility of the former. Finally, I use the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - and the case study to demonstrate why the NRA was unable to address the two major issues that national policy makers intended it to address in the early 1990s. These were the "academic/vocational divide" and the need to create a climate for "lifelong learning" to overcome the perceived "skills shortage" in the UK (Employment Department 1991; NCVQ 1993).

I conclude by arguing that the Tower Hamlets case study represents a proactive local approach to the use of the NRA within an unsupportive national educational policy climate. The role that the NRA played in the case study was shaped by the local and national context, but also relied on the fact that the NRA was different from previous RoA formats (i.e. its content) and that both process and product were used in different ways to stimulate the development of the Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework. Any proposals for movement towards Phase 3 of RoA development - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning - are likely, I suggest, to require a discussion of changes in the balance between all three elements of

the theoretical framework developed in this thesis - context, content and process/product relationship.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section returns to the Tower Hamlets case study and uses the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship - to analyse the significance of this case study in terms of a new role for RoA in the early 1990s. It particularly highlights the way that the national educational policy context limited the role that the NRA was able to play in Tower Hamlets, despite the record's new format. This section concludes that this context would have been likely to have had a similarly limiting effect beyond Tower Hamlets. Section two focuses on the role that policy makers intended the NRA to play in the early 1990s and argues that the national education policy context made it impossible to use the NRA for this purpose. The final section uses the case study to draw some lessons for national policy in this area and argues the case for using the theoretical framework of context, content and process/product relationship to discuss a potential new role for NRA as part of a high participation/high achievement education and training system.

A new role for RoA in the 1990s: a discussion of the Tower Hamlets case study

As earlier chapters of this thesis have indicated, during the 1970s and 1980s RoA was largely used at the school or college level to attempt to bring about assessment or curriculum reform and to provide an alternative form of accreditation for learners who were unlikely to gain formal recognition for their achievements through the national qualifications system of the time. This is what I have referred to in this thesis as Phase 1 of RoA development. During this time, RoA was generally viewed as something which primarily concerned

teachers, pupils and schools and, towards the end of this period, trainers, lecturers, students and colleges as well. It was therefore an initiative which largely remained internal to the education system and, in many cases, to one particular school or college.

There was little emphasis in Phase 1 of RoA development on how RoA might be used as a tool for facilitating progression between phases of education or on the role that it played within the education system as a whole. Although there were some attempts at this time to involve employers and further/higher education providers in RoA development work, these attempts were on the whole rather small-scale and largely unsuccessful (DES 1988; Broadfoot *et al.* 1988 & 1991).

The way that the NRA was used in the Tower Hamlets case study, however, as I have argued in Chapter 5, constituted a new and different role for RoA, which I have termed Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. This role differed from the role in Phase 1 because the focus was broader - the NRA was used by all 14-19 students across a whole local authority area and was seen as part of a system-wide strategic approach to address problems previously not overtly associated with RoA (progression and achievement), rather than as a free-standing initiative for a limited number of students. Here, I will use the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 - context, content and process/product relationship to discuss this role in more depth.

Context - national and local

The national education policy context of the early 1990s - the period of the Tower Hamlets case study - has been described in some detail in Chapter 1 and is summarised in Figure 2 (pp.28 &29). The education system of the late 1980s and early 1990s is there referred to

as a “medium participation/low achievement” system and the four major elements of this system which had a bearing on participation and achievement rates are identified - the qualifications system for 14-19 year olds, the labour market, post-16 provision and institutional organisation and government and regulation. To some extent, as this section will demonstrate, all of these factors had an impact on the role the NRA was able to play in the early 1990s.⁴⁵ It was this context which formed the background to the Tower Hamlets case study and which both determined the approach that the LEA took to RoA and, at the same time, also limited the success of this approach.

In Tower Hamlets during the early 1990s, as the previous chapter pointed out, it was recognised that the borough had a long way to go to reach national achievement levels for pupils at all stages of education and there was a relentless focus on increasing both post-16 participation rates and levels of achievement for all pupils. The NRA, and more particularly the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” to which it led, were seen as mechanisms for supporting this mission. Therefore, rather than using the NRA to address issues of accreditation for lower achievers, in Tower Hamlets it was used as a motivational tool to recognise and value the achievements of all learners in all borough secondary, special and post-16 institutions. The importance of it being a record for all students, whatever they were likely to gain in terms of national qualifications, was a strong underlying principle and one which reflected national policy for the NRA (DES/ED/WO 1991).

⁴⁵ There are of course very important economic and social contextual factors (e.g. student poverty, parental attitudes and the recession) which also undoubtedly had an effect on the role that the NRA was able to play in the early 1990s. I do not propose to discuss these here, however. The data gathered for the thesis relate almost exclusively to educational factors and it is therefore these which I will examine and discuss in this chapter.

In order to reinforce this principle, the NRA was used to facilitate progression between pre- and post-16 provision through the introduction of the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement. It was recognised that without a formal written agreement, whereby all post-16 institutions in the borough were committed to using the NRA as part of the selection process for all students progressing to post-16 study, the use of the NRA as a transition/progression document was unlikely to become a reality for the majority of Tower Hamlets students. Without such an agreement (and some degree of monitoring of the practice associated with it) there was no guarantee that institutions would use the NRA rather than relying simply on the use of predicted GCSE results for selecting students for post-16 courses. Moreover, the climate of institutional competition prevalent in the early 1990s, as a result of national government policy, required the LEA to act as an impartial broker in the post-16 transition process.

This type of facilitation and brokerage role is not something which one institution or even a group of institutions was likely to be able to sustain over time, particularly in the 1990s climate of institutional competition. It was also a role for the LEA which institutions themselves recognised as new and potentially valuable. As two Deputy Heads of 11-18 schools in Tower Hamlets said:

"My personal feeling sitting from in here is that the whole initiative (the 'Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework') has been a unifying one across the borough and we've been able to use support, feed off one another in these things and, as a borough, we seem to be very focused on what our ultimate aim was about - raising achievement and staying-on rates."

"A lot of what we have done in the institution has been guided by the borough Framework and in a sense schools had

input into how the borough Framework took shape, so we were recognising our needs in the work that was being done in the borough in a way that perhaps we wouldn't have done if we had just been doing that on an institutional basis."

The importance of having an impartial broker to support the development of RoA and to bring different education institutions together to recognise the summative record's role in the progression process also emerges from the research findings of the Sussex University Project on RoA and HE (Gretton 1992) and the Wigan RoAHE Project (Wigan RoAHE Project 1992).

This use of the NRA as part of a local progression agreement process in itself thus constituted a new role for RoA, because it was an attempt to go beyond the bounds of one institution and to influence the use of the record of achievement not only within but also across and between institutions and phases of education.

Finally, the fact that the NRA was seen not as an educational initiative in its own right but as part of a wider strategic approach - the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was both a new role for RoA and was also again very much a response to the national policy context of the time. It was recognised that providing students with a record of achievement built up through a process of recording of achievement was not sufficient. As the previous chapter has pointed out, there was a recognition in Tower Hamlets that students needed both better preparation for progression as well as processes which supported them to achieve pre-16, so that they were actually able to progress and to have a wider choice of post-16 options. The "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework", which used the NRA and the process of recording of achievement/action planning as essential underpinning elements, was designed to address this need. This was

a much more ambitious role for RoA than that which is described in the literature pertaining to the 1970s and 1980s.

If Tower Hamlets LEA's interpretation of the national educational policy context of the early 1990s shaped the role that it used the NRA to address, the national education policy context also, at the same time, limited the effectiveness of this role, particularly in relation to students in post-compulsory education. There are four major features of this national educational policy context which appeared to be primarily responsible and each are discussed in turn below - institutional competition, a divided and powerful qualifications system, employers' use of qualifications for selection and recruitment and procedures for admission to higher education.

Institutional competition

The use of the NRA as a student-centred tool for progression between stages of education and training relies on two basic conditions: firstly that the student is provided with impartial and realistic information about the choices on offer to her/him at the next stage; and secondly that there is an agreement by those involved in the selection process that the NRA will be used as part of that process. The latter point will be looked at in more depth below. Here I wish to concentrate on the first factor - the provision of impartial and realistic information.

From 1988 onwards, with the introduction of local management of schools (LMS), the setting up of grant-maintained schools, the publication of league tables, the privatisation of local careers services, the introduction of training credits and the incorporation of further education colleges, there was a gradual erosion of the power of the LEA and a gradual increase in the autonomy of individual institutions in the secondary and post-16 sectors.

This resulted in a context in the early 1990s where institutional competition was widespread and where there was no public statutory authority to oversee or to rationalise the post-16 curriculum or institutional offer in any particular local area (Schagen *et al.* 1996; Hodgson & Spours 1997). In addition, the fact that the new type of vocational courses - GNVQs - were both general in nature and suitable for full-time education provision meant that school sixth forms and sixth form colleges, as well as further education colleges, could begin to extend their post-16 offer to include vocational programmes (FEDA/ IoE/Nuffield 1997). Since all three types of post-16 institution could thus now provide a similar full-time qualifications offer for 16-19 year olds, there was more direct competition between these three types of providers than was the case when the majority of vocational awards was of a more specialised nature and could, in the main, only be realistically offered by further education colleges (Schagen *et al.* 1996; FEDA/ IoE/Nuffield 1997).

When institutional competition in the post-16 education phase is so strong, funding is based on student numbers and there are few local regulators to determine the spread and nature of post-16 provision in any local area, there are powerful incentives for institutions to try to recruit and retain as many students as possible. As press articles of the period under study (Merrick 1994; Nash 1994; Education 1994) and reports by the RSA (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995) and the NFER (Schagen *et al.* 1996) have pointed out, this is not a climate which is conducive to realistic, open and impartial guidance for students based on individual student need. It is not, therefore, a climate where a document such as the NRA, which is intended to help each student to receive impartial advice and guidance based on her/his individual strengths, weaknesses and progression needs, can be used to its full advantage in the post-16 progression process.

The Tower Hamlets case study provides a good example of how institutional competition began to make itself felt in the early 1990s and was, in some cases, having a detrimental effect on the local Progression Agreement between pre- and post-16 institutions (LBTH 1992f & 1993b).

As has been stated in the previous chapter, the post-16 education system in Tower Hamlets from 1991-1994 was a "mixed economy" (Spours 1991a) with both 11-18 schools and Tower Hamlets College competing to provide 16+ academic and, increasingly during this period, general vocational courses. There was naturally, therefore, an element of rivalry among the various institutions, which was particularly acute in relation to the small pool of higher-achieving students and became more evident as a result of the introduction of LMS in April 1991 and the incorporation of further education colleges in April 1993.

In 1991, when the Tower Hamlets Post-16 Progression Agreement was first discussed, the demand for post-16 places in Tower Hamlets was at least equal to the supply of post-16 places in the borough, as a result of rising rolls and an increasing post-16 participation rate overall (Spours 1991b). Even at this time, however, there was only a small number of post-16 students adequately qualified to take up Advanced/Level 3 type study and several of the schools, as a local inspection report pointed out (LBTH 1990), found it very hard to create viable sixth-form groups in a number of subjects. It was into this increasingly competitive environment that the NRA and the LBTH Post-16 Progression Agreement were introduced.

Although initially the LEA, Tower Hamlets Careers Service, Tower Hamlets Post-16 Education Inspectorate Service and the TVEI Programme acted as "brokers" for bringing all the post-16 providers in the borough together, there were few financial incentives for

these institutions to collaborate. The introduction of FE incorporation removed all of these incentives except TVEI funding. At this point, the only type of pressure that could be brought to bear on all the borough's post-16 institutions to encourage them to cooperate for the sake of student choice and effective progression was moral pressure.

It is therefore hardly surprising that one of the areas where the Tower Hamlets case study shows the Progression Agreement working least effectively is in relation to the 11-18 schools in the borough (LBTH 1992f & 1993b). There are carefully-veiled hints in the LBTH inspectorate reports on the Progression Agreement, both in 1992 and 1993, that 11-18 schools were not fully collaborating with the spirit of that Agreement. Some were attempting to ensure that as many as possible of their Year 11 students, particularly those who had the potential to take up advanced level programmes, went on into their own sixth forms, rather than being given advice and information on the full range of post-16 options available within and outside the borough.

The 1993 report, for example, says in relation to the 11-18 schools:

"Tower Hamlets six 11-18 schools each took a different approach to the LBTH Progression Agreement. All six schools interviewed all their own Year 11 and their Year 12 students on one-year courses about their progression intentions, prior to their students having direct contact with other post-16 providers inside the borough or beyond. These 1:1 internal progression interviews were not monitored, but it appears that neither the NRA nor an individual action plan was normally used as the focus for the interview..."

In none of the above schools were all Year 11 students interviewed by Tower Hamlets College and in most schools where a College representative was invited to come in to interview students, the numbers being interviewed were small - less than a quarter of the cohort. This figure is considerably lower than the Careers Service figure for those actually entering further education or Tower Hamlets College in 1992." (p.4)

"There is clearly a large difference in the practice of 11-18 and 11-16 schools in relation to entitlement interviews with Tower Hamlets College (THC). This is not surprising given their different relationship with the College. However, it is concerning that so few students are being given the opportunity to talk individually with THC representatives about courses at a further education college." (p.6)

Equally, a response from a Careers Officers written after observing the entitlement interviews in one of the secondary schools in March/April 1992 illustrates the reverse side of the coin:

"When courses were not available at the college (Tower Hamlets College) students were asked to take the prospectus away and find an alternative course, which was absolutely appalling. Boys were told to do courses which didn't really cover their interests e.g. a pupil wishing to do Graphics was told to do BTEC Art and Design which fractionally touches on Graphics."

If the NRA and individual action planning are intended as tools to help students assess their own strengths and weaknesses and make decisions about the most appropriate form of progression in the light of this assessment, then it is essential that students are provided

with impartial information upon which to make decisions about their future. As the Tower Hamlets evidence above demonstrates, where there is institutional competition, the power of the NRA and individual action planning to fulfil their intended role as useful instruments within a student-focused careers education guidance and progression process is substantially reduced.

A divided and powerful qualifications system

In earlier chapters of this thesis I have written about the powerful role that the qualifications system plays in the English education and training system. I have also argued that the fact that there is a divided post-16 qualifications system, and that the academic route leads to a wider variety of high-status and better-paid occupations, means that young people do not effectively have a free choice of what to study post-16. They may have more likelihood of gaining a qualification from following a vocational course, because of the different assessment regime and curriculum it offers, but they may still opt for the more prestigious A Level route post-16 in order to ensure their access to an increased number of and better progression routes (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993; Schagen *et al.* 1996). As both the Audit Commission/OFSTED and the NFER studies show, opting for an A Level course, despite poor GCSE results, is more possible in a climate of institutional competition, since there is an incentive for post-16 institutions to lower entry criteria for their courses in order to entice more students to study at their institution and thus attract more funding.

The effects of this divided and powerful qualifications system can be seen as having three major limiting effects on the use of RoA, all of which were in evidence in the Tower Hamlets case study and particularly prevalent in the post-16 phase.

Firstly, because qualifications are so powerful, anything which is not directly related to their acquisition finds it difficult to acquire curriculum space. The kind of broadening cross-curricular skills and knowledge which were promoted by the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets, and which could be recognised in the NRA, were therefore often marginalised. This position was further exacerbated by the fact that the FEFC funding formula did not support this type of "enhancement curriculum" (Young *et al.* 1994).

Secondly, because qualifications were still being used as the major tool in selection for further/higher education, training or the workplace, the power of the NRA as a selection tool was of necessity limited.

The third limiting effect emerges from the second. Since the currency value of the NRA in the selection process was often questionable, it was more difficult for institutions to argue for devoting time to the formative and summative recording of achievement processes associated with the NRA.

I will turn firstly to the marginalisation of those broad cross-curricular skills and knowledge (e.g. problem-solving, working with others, personal, social and health education, citizenship, industrial and economic understanding) which are not recognised or accredited overtly by qualifications but which can be recorded in and recognised by the NRA. In Tower Hamlets these skills were developed as part of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and were seen as a means of providing breadth and coherence to both pre- and post-16 curricula. Their importance was potentially particularly relevant in terms of breadth post-16, because of the narrow focus of most post-16 programmes of study.

However, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” developed much more quickly in pre-16 than post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets during the period of the study. This was partly due to the earlier introduction of TVEI and NRA in secondary schools, but was also because the post-compulsory curriculum was so dominated by the post-16 qualifications system that anything else tended to be seen as an unnecessary and expensive luxury, something which might well have to be pared down if funding became tight.

“The whole area of UG (Unified Guidance) and NRA is time-consuming and the problem is that, we, as a school, for example are going to find resourcing harder and harder over the next few years...” (Deputy Head, 11-18 School)

In addition, it has to be borne in mind that pre-16 the NRA was the mandatory format for reporting to parents of sixteen-year olds and there was thus more of an incentive to use it also as the recording mechanism for the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" - a role for which it was specifically designed. There was no similar incentive post-16.

It is therefore significant, but possibly not surprising, that it was only at the end of the period covered by the Tower Hamlets case study, and some two years behind their pre-16 colleagues, that the post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets, with the promise of resources for their individual institutions, met as a group to design a joint “Post-16 Unified Guidance Tutors' Handbook” (July 1994). It was thus only towards the end of the period of the case study that post-16 students began fully to benefit from the development of Unified Guidance programmes.

The second limiting effect that the divided and powerful qualifications system had on the use of the NRA in Tower Hamlets 1991-1994 was to limit the record's credibility as a tool for use in applying for higher education or employment. Employers and higher education admissions tutors, as the sections below will demonstrate, tended to use performance in national qualifications, in preference to any other evidence, for selecting candidates for jobs or university places. This not only debased the value of the NRA document itself, because it was often not considered by selectors, but also devalued the broader skills developed as part of the Unified Guidance programme.

It was therefore particularly among staff and students in post-16 institutions in Tower Hamlets that the NRA was at its least credible in the period being studied. Several of the teachers/lecturers who responded to the questionnaire on the role of the NRA (July 1994) saw the NRA's lack of currency with employers and HE providers as one of its major weaknesses, as did a number of the young people interviewed as part of the two-year study of post-16 institutions (1992-94).

Finally, since, during this period, the NRA was perceived by Tower Hamlets post-16 institutions as having little currency value with higher education providers and employers, in comparison with national qualifications, both the summative NRA and the formative recording of achievement processes which led up to it were often marginalised and inadequate time was devoted to them. RoA was seen by some as an unimportant bolt-on activity which took away time from the main business of post-16 education. As one post-16 tutor commented in July 1994:

"(The NRA) Can seem of little importance beside actual A level results."

This attitude was conveyed to their students, as two of those interviewed illustrate:

"They (NRAs) haven't been used. I think NRAs are really, how shall I put it? NRAs are just useless. I've never used it and I can't see myself ever using it again. It's just been taking up so much of everyone's time because if you don't give it to them on time you have to type it yourself. It's taking people so much, so long. They have to be doing NRA when they should be doing revision or something." (Priti, 1994)

"It's a pain cos you never know what to put in them and half the time you don't know whether they're going to be useful. Although they are. I mean at this present time there should be a week or something or two days, you know you can just sit there and do nothing but your NRA. But you haven't got time to do that, so it's like trying to cram it in around assignments." (Margaret, 1994)

As all the recording of achievement literature stresses (e.g. Burgess & Adams 1985; Hitchcock 1986; Pole 1993) , and the Tower Hamlets case study material echoes, it is only when students are fully involved in the process of recording of achievement firstly, that their summative records become of any value to them and secondly, that they benefit from the process of recording of achievement. It is only in these circumstances that students actually begin to develop skills such as self awareness, forward planning and target setting. As one of the NRA Co-ordinators in a Tower Hamlets 11-18 school commented:

"I don't think the NRA is being used in post-16 for post-16 progression the way I would like it to be used. To start with I think it's being done because it's got to be done. There is no real commitment to it either by the pupils or by staff, Pupils

say, 'We've done it, why do we have to do it again?' but they don't see the progression issue at all and staff feel, 'Well, we've said we're going to do it, so we might as well make them do it'. So that's my personal opinion. It's not being used as a tool and I think it's not being used as a tool because it's not that widely recognised...There are particular problems with higher education and employment."

It is easy to see how Tower Hamlets post-16 institutions were unable effectively to break out of the vicious circle that had been created. The summative NRA was perceived as of little use value, therefore little time was devoted to its preparation or to the important process of recording of achievement, thus the quality of the record suffered and it was perceived as even less credible by end-users. It is here that the limiting power of the qualifications system on the potential use of RoA was possibly felt most acutely in Tower Hamlets. It could be argued, therefore, that post-16 students in Tower Hamlets benefited less from RoA, and the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" as a whole, than pre-16 students did. This position echoed findings from a contemporaneous national review of the use of the NRA (David Garforth Agency 1994).

Employers' use of qualifications for selection and recruitment

Turning now to the issue of using the NRA as a link between education and training or the workplace, one recent publication which provides a review of how the NRA is being used in employment (David Garforth Agency 1994) makes the following statement about the use of the NRA for recruitment to the workplace:

"Although several employers expressed an intention to change their recruitment processes to make better use of the NRA, it is clear that in more than half of the interviews for

school leavers in medium/large companies, the NRA did not play a part...these figures reveal a disappointing picture of at least between one third and one half of employers not using the NRA as part of their selection procedures." (p.6)

This finding may be "disappointing", but it is not surprising since it is clear from earlier local studies (LBTH 1992a; Leicestershire TEC 1993) that the marketing which ED and NCVQ claimed they had carried out with employers, following the introduction of the NRA in 1991, had had little effect. What these local studies showed was that employers, although positive about the NRA when they knew what it was, were still largely unaware of its existence in the early 1990s. This situation had not been ameliorated by the fact that according to the Leicestershire study:

"Often students do not actively use their NRA after school, even when given the opportunity to do so." (p.11)

Possibly one of the reasons for students not using their NRAs after school is because they have no faith in its credibility in the workplace, particularly when compared with the importance of qualifications.

"I think that students see it as not really relevant to what they're doing because I don't think they're all convinced that anyone is going to look at it." (Vice Principal, Tower Hamlets College)

Students have good reason for this scepticism. In the report of the survey of LDDC employers' views on the NRA (LBTH 1992a), it emerged that the most popular section of the NRA for employers was the "Qualifications and Credits" sheet - chosen by 38 per cent of

the sample. This choice was supported by comments from employers such as:

"Qualifications and Credits are still the best guide for prospective employers, but achievements outside school are important too."

"I would like to hear from the student through a Personal statement, however, the student's qualifications and credits will make the ultimate decision."

Anecdotal evidence from a few of the students in the two-year study referred to above also bears this out. For example:

"Well, it's a shame because none of the employers want to see it (NRA). If you ever ask, if you need a job, no one really acknowledges it." (Peter, 1992)

Similarly, there appear to be only isolated examples as yet of employers, such as Rover, using the NRA as part of their initial assessment or on-going training procedures (David Garforth Agency 1994). As this Employment Department report points out, when the NRA is not actively perceived by young people as being an important link either in progression from education to the workplace or in progression within the workplace, they are unlikely to accord the record much importance. Both the NRA and the processes which lead up to its production are thus devalued and the potential of the record to become a useful progression tool is reduced.

Procedures for admission to higher education

During the early 1990s, there was a rise in the number of young people wishing to progress into higher education (HE) and, at least at

the beginning of this period, these aspirations were supported by government policy for expansion of the HE sector and abolition of the distinction between universities and polytechnics (The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997). Using the NRA as an active part of the progression process from FE to HE was, therefore, increasingly important in terms of the record's overall credibility within the system, since this process involved larger numbers and more varied types of students. It was additionally important to demonstrate both to students and their teachers and to higher education admissions tutors that the NRA could be used effectively as part of the HE admissions process. Firstly, this was necessary because HE providers have traditionally relied very heavily on academic qualifications as the means of selecting students for courses. Secondly, because, as much of the RoA literature emphasises, earlier records of achievement had been largely associated with lower-achieving students (Fairbairn 1988; Broadfoot 1996).

However, recent national and local research (David Garforth Agency (1994); Leicestershire TEC 1993; Edwards *et al.* 1993; Cleaver 1993; Hustler *et al.* 1993), as well as that from Tower Hamlets, would suggest that the NRA has not been extensively used as part of the HE admissions process or within HE courses except where specific projects have been set up to encourage its use (Gretton 1992; Wigan RoA and HE Project 1992; Paczuska 1992; Hustler *et al.* 1993). According to the research, this is partly because, with increasing numbers of students progressing to HE, fewer applicants are being given interviews and therefore cannot use their NRA at this stage of the admissions process and partly because there still appears to be a large degree of both ignorance and distrust of anything except traditional qualifications. Cleaver (1993), for example, states:

"Progression from FE to HE was a particular problem area. Responses to ROAs within HE were either uninterested or negative." (p.10)

The fact that in 1993 there was a restriction placed on HE expansion (The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997), particularly in certain subject areas, made the whole HE admissions process even more selective and meant that HE institutions did not have a strong incentive to change the way that they used qualifications (mainly A Levels) to select students for courses - particularly popular courses. The status of academic qualifications in the selection process therefore rose at the direct expense of any other alternative selection tools, such as the NRA.

In Tower Hamlets, this lack of recognition of the NRA by HE providers, which reflects practice elsewhere in the country (Edwards *et al.* 1993), had a strong demotivating effect on post-16 students. There were seven students interviewed as part of the Tower Hamlets two-year study of post-16 students who were applying to university. Of these seven students only one was actually able to use his NRA for interview. His views of the NRA were thus much more positive:

"I used the NRA on the interview day. That's really essential because, as I bring that along and she, she told me that the NRA really reflects a lot about me and she don't have to ask a lot of questions." (Wang, 1994)

than those of his less fortunate fellow Year 13 students:

"I took my NRA to all my interviews but none of the interviewers wanted to see it. I offered it but they said 'Oh no,

it's OK' They liked the information on the UCAS form."
(Rohima, 1994)

As the NRA Co-ordinator at Tower Hamlets College said during an interview in December 1994:

"I find that at this time of the year getting them to do NRAs in relation to HE isn't a problem, because they've all done their UCAS forms and there is this gap between having filled in their UCAS stuff and having got that sent off and their interviews coming up. It's only when some people start coming back from interviews and interviewers have ignored NRAs that then you get a real downturn in them doing them or doing them to any level. They should all take their NRAs with them because they've said they've got them on their UCAS form, but it is a disincentive if HE institutions and employers don't look at them."

To summarise this section, there appear to be four major, closely interrelated factors of the national education policy context which were primarily responsible for limiting the use of the NRA in its new role as part of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets in the early 1990s - institutional competition, a divided and powerful qualifications system, employers' use of qualifications for selection and recruitment and the higher education admissions process. These factors were most acutely felt in the post-16 sector, where they had a noticeable effect on the credibility and therefore the development and use of the NRA with post-16 students. Of the four factors, the second - the role of the divided and powerful qualifications system - was of most significance since, as has been argued above, it impinges on and contributes to each of the other three. These contextual factors thus meant that the NRA and the process of recording of achievement, although intended to benefit all

14-19 learners, in fact were of much greater benefit to pre-16 than to post-16 students. Moreover, as I will argue in the following two sections, these contextual factors had a differential effect on the impact of the process of recording of achievement and the impact of the summative NRA document itself. Both of these points, as the final section of this chapter concludes, need to be taken into consideration when putting forward proposals for a new role for the NRA as part of a “high participation/high achievement” education and training system in this country.

Content

Both Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 go into some detail about the significance of the differences between the content of the NRA and earlier records of achievement for the former’s use in the early 1990s. I do not propose to reiterate those arguments here. However, it is important to bear in mind these important new features of the NRA when considering its impact in Tower Hamlets. Of particular significance, the previous chapter argued, were the NRA’s national status and the fact that from 1992 parts of the record became the mandatory format for reporting to parents on individual student’s achievements in the National Curriculum and external examinations at 16+. These two new features, as I argue in Chapter 5 (pp. 171-174), had a strong impact on persuading Tower Hamlets schools initially to introduce and use the NRA as part of the “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework”. The latter feature of the NRA, however, did not, for obvious reasons, have the same impact for post-16 institutions. So here, once again, there was less incentive for post-16 institutions to give a high profile to the summative NRA.

There were, on the other hand, other new features of the NRA which were of equal relevance to both pre- and post-16 institutions

(for example, the inclusion of an individual action plan) and two which were of more significance for post-16 institutions - the inclusion of an employment history sheet and the fact that statements about students included areas for development as well as positive comments. This latter feature, as well as the inclusion of a qualifications and credits sheet in the NRA, was of particular importance when post-16 providers were selecting students for post-16 courses.

In summary, it could be argued that the new content of the NRA was important in stimulating the development of the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" in Tower Hamlets, particularly, as Chapter 5 argues, the record's national status and its focus on forward planning and progression. However, there is some justification for suggesting that these new features of the NRA played a stronger role in getting developments underway in schools than they did in post-16 institutions. Nevertheless, in both types of institutions, it is useful to look at the different but inter-related impact of the process of recording of achievement/individual action planning and of the summative NRA itself.

Process/product relationship

I return in this section to the distinction between the role of the process of recording of achievement/action planning and the role of the summative NRA in the Tower Hamlets case study in order to examine the impact of each of them and to draw some lessons for future policy in this area. Here I wish to argue that, although in the early 1990s, the national policy emphasis in relation to RoA was more strongly placed on the product than on the process with the introduction of the NRA in 1991 (Broadfoot 1996), one of the salient features of the Tower Hamlets model for the use of the NRA was that it relied on a judicious balance of both process and product.

As we have seen from Chapter 5, in the Tower Hamlets case study both the process of recording of achievement/individual action planning and the summative NRA each had its own unique and important role to play in the development and implementation of a “Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework” (see Figure 9, p.182).

Earlier sections of this chapter have argued that the national education policy context of the early 1990s had a particularly damaging effect on the credibility of the summative NRA in the eyes of students and, to some extent teachers/lecturers, because of its lack of currency with employers and HE providers. It is tempting to suggest, therefore, that it is the process of recording of achievement which played a more significant role in the Tower Hamlets case study, simply because it had less constraints placed upon it by the national educational context of the time. Individual institutions have no control over the way that they are funded, the divided and powerful qualifications system, the HE admissions procedure or the labour market and they can do little to influence the way that higher education providers and employers view the summative NRA. They can, however, contribute to the building of local systems or frameworks which have the process of recording of achievement at their heart and which motivate and help students to achieve and progress within their local area.

The problem with this analysis is that it ignores the strong evidence from the Tower Hamlets case study which suggests that both teachers and students are unwilling to engage in the process of recording of achievement/action planning and to undertake wider programmes of study if there is no tangible final product to which they see their efforts being directed. Since in the 1990s there was no way of recognising these skills and achievements other than through the NRA, the NRA remained a very important summative document for students and teachers in Tower Hamlets (LBTH 1995b). It would

have been hard to convince them of the type of arguments reflected below:

"It must be stressed that the record of achievement and the action plan is for the individual not the institution of employer. Employers' interests lie in the outcome - the qualities and attitudes which the record and plan help to develop in individuals." (CBI 1994 p.20)

Where Records of Achievement are established in the 16-19 institution there are certain perceived benefits. Students become more reflective about themselves and their learning." (Malcolm Deere, Secretary of the Standing Conference on University Entrance, quoted in Wigan RoAHE Project 1992, p.1)

What the Tower Hamlets case study tends to suggest, therefore, is that both process and product were important for establishing the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" within Tower Hamlets and that it will be important to consider the subtle inter-relationship between the two in any future proposals for the NRA.

Conclusions

Using the Tower Hamlets case study as its basis, this section has explored the new role the NRA played in the earlier 1990s in comparison with the role that RoA played in the previous two decades. This has been described in the thesis as a move from Phase 1 of RoA development (RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely for used as accreditation for lower achievers) to Phase 2 (the NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement).

In the 1970s and 1980s, RoA was largely seen as something internal to the education system and often as an isolated initiative which related to one set of students, one course, one particular institution or a single phase of education. At its most adventurous, RoA development was associated with assessment and curriculum reform at the grassroots level. In addition, there was an idea that RoA could provide some kind of alternative to national qualifications for lower-achieving students.

The Tower Hamlets case study, on the other hand, shows the NRA being used as one element in a wider connective system for raising achievement and promoting progression within and across a number of institutions in a local area. In this example, the NRA is used as a vehicle for recording and supporting all students' achievement in national qualifications and other broader curriculum areas. This new connective role for RoA within a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" recognises the limitations imposed on it by the national education policy context, but works within these, rather than attempting to provide an alternative to them.

What this chapter has also pointed out, however, are the limitations of a local strategy such as that employed in Tower Hamlets. Where the national education policy context is one which actively encourages institutional autonomy and competition, and the qualifications system is one which favours selection and division, local strategies, while useful, can only hope to paper over the cracks that need to be repaired at a national level. The national education policy context of the early 1990s, therefore, at one and the same time, both stimulated and limited the new role for RoA that is exemplified in the Tower Hamlets case study.

From the wider research that I have referenced in earlier parts of this section, what is also clear is that these national contextual factors were making themselves felt in other areas of the country too. It is to this wider picture that the next section of this chapter now turns.

The NRA as an instrument of national education policy

If the Tower Hamlets use of the NRA in the early 1990s was ambitious in comparison with the use of earlier records of achievement in the 1970s and 1980s, it was positively modest in comparison with the lofty ambitions that the DES, ED and NCVQ had for the NRA. As the quotations below demonstrate, from 1991 onwards, the DES, ED and later the NCVQ (who took over responsibility for the NRA from 1992) saw a particular role for the NRA in addressing both the problems of the “academic/vocational divide” and the need to create a climate of “lifetime learning” to overcome the perceived “skills shortage” in the UK. (All emphasis in the quotations which follow is my own).

“I believe that the NRA can become the linchpin in producing a better skilled and motivated workforce so essential if individual companies and this country are to flourish in highly competitive world markets.” (Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State for Employment, December, 1992)

“Without a commitment to life-long learning neither individuals nor countries can develop or prosper. The learning styles needed to promote this commitment depend crucially upon the review and recording of achievement and upon continuous planning for the future.” (ED 1991)

“Entitlement to a quality assured NRA can contribute to a definition of Foundation Learning Target Four which

encourages education and training provision to develop breadth, self-reliance and feasibility. This provides a firm basis for its use as a vehicle for lifetime learning.

Fundamental to this concept of 'lifetime learning' is the commitment of both the individual and providers of education and training. The NRA is a vital tool in both developing and demonstrating this commitment.

The NRA not only builds upon the potential for Records of Achievement to motivate and support the individual through all stages of decision making, but provides a national framework for managing learning and presenting a broad range of achievements." (NCVQ 1993.)

Here indeed was the expression of a new role for RoA in the early 1990s! Instead of remaining something which primarily concerned teachers and was internal to the education system (or even one school or college within that system), RoA was now expected to be something which reached out beyond the education system to link the worlds of education, training and the workplace.

To turn this type of rhetoric into reality would have required considerable support, co-operation and partnership between education and training providers, individual students and employers at a national, regional, individual institution and individual student level. In the event, as the *Dearing Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds* (Dearing 1996) points out, this type of support and co-operation did not in fact materialise.

This is not altogether surprising when one considers how, as the Tower Hamlets case study illustrates, other conflicting national education policy initiatives of the time were operating in complete

opposition to this kind of goal. During the early 1990s, individual education institutions were becoming more, rather than less, autonomous and the academic/vocational divide in the qualifications system was becoming more rather than less polarised because of the government's insistence on retaining A Levels in a particular form (Broadfoot 1996; Hodgson & Spours 1997). This kind of competitive and selective education environment, combined with continuing economic recession and a government which relied on market forces and exhortation rather than on legislation to bring about changes within education and the workplace (Tett 1996) was certainly not conducive to the development of a partnership approach between education providers, employers and individual learners to address national problems. Using the NRA to address the problems of the "academic/vocational divide" and the need to create a climate of "lifetime learning" to overcome the perceived "skills shortage" in the UK was thus not possible in the early 1990s. It could be argued that national policy makers suffered from an overemphasis on the power of content to the neglect of the power of context (Raffe 1984)!

Lessons for national policy on the NRA

This brief concluding section will argue two points. Firstly, I will suggest that the Tower Hamlets case study raises a number of important issues in relation to the use of the NRA as part of national education policy. Secondly, I will argue that it would be useful to use the theoretical framework developed in this thesis (context, content and process/product relationship) as a way of conceptualising a future role for the NRA.

The Tower Hamlets case study, described in Chapter 5, exemplifies a new role for RoA in the early 1990s and illustrates what I have termed Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy

instrument for use with all learners to record achievement. It demonstrates the use of the NRA and the process of recording of achievement as catalysts in the development of a strategic framework (the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework") for addressing underachievement and problems of student progression across a local authority area. It also shows how the NRA was used by all 14-19 students as a transition tool in a local progression agreement and how the process of recording of achievement/individual action planning was used as part of a "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" to support student achievement and to focus students on future progression pathways.

What this chapter has argued, however, is that this strategic approach, although basically operating within the context of a full-time local 14-19 education system, was still not able to overcome the effects of factors beyond that local system. Although in Tower Hamlets the NRA was intended to be used with and to benefit all 14-19 year olds, and the "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" was designed to reflect this aspiration, as I have argued in the first major section of this chapter, both the NRA and the Framework in fact proved of more benefit to pre-16 than to post-16 students.

The national education policy context of the early 1990s thus both influenced the original design of the Tower Hamlets "Unified Guidance 14-19 Framework" and, at the same time, limited its effectiveness. The chapter identified four major features of the national context in the early 1990s that were primarily responsible for limiting the effectiveness of the NRA as an educational tool in Tower Hamlets - institutional competition, a divided and powerful qualifications system, employers' use of qualifications in selection and recruitment and procedures for admission to higher education - and suggested that these factors were likely to have had similar effects beyond the area of the case study.

To some extent this chapter has therefore pointed out the limitations of a local "bottom up" initiative, even when that initiative appears to be in concord with national education policy (in this case the introduction of the NRA as a record for use with all learners).

In Figure 1 (p.26) I have laid out a theoretical framework for the discussion of the role of RoA which suggests that it is the inter-relationship of three elements - context, content and process/product relationship - which determine the role that RoA has played or might play in the English education and training system. I have used this theoretical framework in this chapter to analyse the role that the NRA played in the Tower Hamlets case study 1991-1994 and I have suggested that although the new national format of the NRA - content - was important for RoA's new role in the 1990s, the process/product relationship and the national context also strongly shaped this role. It is because national education policy makers largely ignored the latter two elements of this framework, I would argue, that they overestimated the role that the NRA could play in the early 1990s. It is for this reason that I suggest that the theoretical framework developed in this thesis - context, content and process/product relationship - might usefully be used to discuss a future role for the NRA. The chapter which follows attempts to do just that.

Chapter 7

Towards Phase 3 of RoA Development: the NRA as a Tool for Supporting Lifelong Learning

Introduction

There are three areas on which the majority of those writing about RoA (and more specifically the NRA) in the mid 1990s agree (for example, Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Halsall & Cockett 1996; Dearing 1996 and Broadfoot 1996). Firstly, they recognise that the NRA has had limited success as an instrument of national policy: it has neither become widely accepted by those outside the education system nor has it had a strong effect on the education and training system in this country. Secondly, they consider that the NRA has the potential to become a more useful instrument of national policy. Thirdly, they argue that it should have a role in supporting lifelong learning - what I have termed in this thesis Phase 3 of RoA development. Where these writers do not agree is on the way that this new role might be developed. This chapter sets out to examine the areas where there is consensus and the areas where there is disagreement and then to add its own dimension to the debate by way of conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

The chapter is divided into three major sections and a conclusion. The first section briefly explores two concepts - lifelong learning and a "high participation/high achievement" education and training system. It then examines the potential relationship between these two concepts and the NRA. Section two analyses the way that recent education policy literature - and particularly the four sources cited above - have conceptualised the role for the NRA in supporting lifelong learning. Section three argues for a particular approach to a new role for the NRA in supporting lifelong learning as part of a

move towards a future "high participation/high achievement" education and training system. This section distinguishes between the role played by the process of recording of achievement and the role played by the NRA as a summative document. At various places throughout this chapter I use the theoretical framework developed by this thesis - context, content and process/product relationship - as a tool of analysis. The chapter concludes the thesis by drawing together the current debates on a new role for the NRA and by suggesting that a new approach is required to conceptualising a future role for the NRA.

Lifelong learning, a "high participation/high achievement" education and training system and the NRA

There is no way in which this brief section could hope to explore in any depth the concepts of lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system. Each concept on its own could quite easily form the subject of a book or books. What I attempt to do here is simply to provide sufficient background on these concepts to be able, later in the chapter, to discuss the role of the NRA in supporting both.

For the purposes of this chapter, I am assuming that there is a strong and clear link between the concepts of lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system: each, I would suggest, is fundamentally dependent on the other. This assumption is based on the premise that high participation and high achievement are not concepts which are of relevance solely to young people and initial education and training, but are goals which are also equally important in relation to adults and lifelong learning. Moreover, a high participation/high achievement initial education and training system, as much of the literature on the education of adults points out (e.g. Sargent 1991; McGivney 1990), is often seen as

a vital precursor to a successful system of lifelong learning, because those who have a successful early experience of education are more likely to go on to further education and training as adults.

However, the link between the concepts of lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system is not easy to reference in recent education policy literature because there tends to be a divide between the literature on adult or work-based learning, where the former concept has tended to be defined and discussed, and the literature on 14-19 education, where the latter concept has largely been developed and debated⁴⁶. Both sources use analyses such as international skill comparisons (e.g. Green & Steedman 1993) to argue for the need to make changes in the education and training system in this country, but the former focus particularly on part-time education and training and adult learning and the latter on full-time or initial education.

⁴⁶ There are, however, two recent papers (Young 1995 and Young *et al.* 1997) which take the debate further - and helpfully cross the boundary between these two types of literature. The first of these challenges the assumption that a high participation initial education system - what Young refers to as "the schooling model" - will automatically lead to a learning society. Young identifies four models of a learning society. The first - "the schooling model" - sees high participation in full-time post-compulsory education as a feature of a learning society. The second - "the credentialist model" - takes as its starting point that everyone should if possible be qualified. The third - "the access model" - concentrates on the role of the individual learner in the learning society and her/his access opportunities. The fourth - "the educative model" - (Young's preferred model) focuses on the form of learning and the need for a more diverse and connective relationships between learners, educational specialists and sites of learning and production. The second paper (Young *et al.* 1997) then returns to these four models - renaming the fourth model "reflexive" - in order to discuss the relationship between the idea of the learning society and unifying academic and vocational learning. I make reference to these two papers in this chapter and I would also like to acknowledge their usefulness in clarifying for me some of the links between four concepts which I use extensively in the thesis - high participation/high achievement education and training systems, lifelong learning, the learning society and the arguments for unification of the English post-compulsory curriculum. Although the discussion of the relationship between the ideas in these papers and RoA cannot be taken further in this chapter, since it would take me beyond the boundaries of the specific focus of this thesis, this is an area which would undoubtedly profit from further research and debate.

The concept of lifelong learning is not a new one, in the sense that it has for a long time been championed by those involved in adult education (Raggatt *et al.* 1996). However, it is only in the last five to ten years that it has become an almost ubiquitous phrase in national education and training policy literature in the UK, often closely associated with its sister concept "the learning society".

The recently perceived need to promote lifelong learning as a way of contributing towards the building of a learning society is a response to a variety of significant societal changes, some of which are related to the specific context in Britain and others of which relate to the wider European and even the global context (Van der Zee 1996). Those who argue for the importance of lifelong learning stress different dimensions of this changing context - social (e.g. Jansen & van der Veen 1996), cultural (e.g. Field 1996) and, most often, economic, workplace organisational and technological (e.g. Clarke 1996; Ashton & Green 1996). They argue that this new context, which is likely to change even more rapidly in the future as a result of technological advances and global economic responses to these advances, presents an unprecedented challenge to our current concepts of education and training (Young 1995; Young *et al.* 1997). There is a need, it is suggested, for a change in the way that we think about education and learning (e.g. Reich 1993; Ball 1995). It is as important to focus on learning throughout life as it is to focus on initial education, in order to ensure that fewer people consider that their education and learning finish at the end of their period of compulsory education (e.g. Stock 1996; Ashton & Green 1996). There is an emphasis in the literature on commitment and investment in lifelong learning by individuals and employers as well as by government (e.g. Commission on Social Justice 1996) and a search for ways of widening participation in learning (e.g. Kennedy 1997) and using new technologies to facilitate learning (e.g. Cooper 1996). However, as Young *et al.* (1997) point out, what much of the

literature has tended to underplay or even ignore is the changes that specialised places of learning, such as schools and colleges, will have to undergo in order to play their role in stimulating lifelong learning and building a learning society.

Lifelong learning, as this chapter comments above and as Chapter 6 also pointed out, is a concept with which RoA (and latterly the NRA) has often been linked. A number of national policy makers and academics, as the references in those sections testify, have argued the potential for the NRA to be used as a means of supporting lifelong learning. They suggest that the NRA has the ability to encourage learners of all ages to reflect on and to record achievements and experiences gained through learning undertaken in a variety of formal and informal education and workplace contexts. Moreover, the design of the NRA, as earlier chapters of this thesis have indicated, was specifically intended both to enable and to stimulate this kind of activity.

Similarly, in the literature cited in Chapter 1 to describe the model of a high participation/high achievement education and training system, there is a recognition of the potential use of RoA to support such a system. However, as I indicated in that chapter, there is little discussion of what this role might be. I do not propose to discuss the concept of a high participation/high achievement education and training system here, since it has already been outlined in Chapter 1 and the key aspects of such a system are laid out in Figure 2 on pages 28 & 29. What is important for the discussion in this chapter is the type of role that those writing about this system have seen for the NRA. This forms the subject of the section below.

The role of the NRA in supporting lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system - a review of the recent literature

Recent national government policy literature has argued, as I have indicated earlier in this thesis, that the NRA has a role in supporting lifelong learning (e.g. DES/ED/WO 1991; NCVQ 1993, Research International 1993; Dearing 1996). Interestingly, however, neither RoA nor the NRA is referenced in the index to Raggatt *et al.*'s (1996) seminal edited volume, *"The Learning Society: Challenges and Trends"*, which discusses the concept of lifelong learning extensively. Even in Cooper's chapter on "Guidance and coherence in flexible learning" (Cooper 1996), there is no reference to RoA or the NRA. From my research, it appears that it is only in the education policy literature concerned with 14-19 education and training, that the link between RoA and lifelong learning has been made by academics (e.g. Finegold *et al.* 1990; Royal Society 1991; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Halsall & Cockett 1996; Broadfoot 1996). It is these sources too where the need for and features of a high participation/high achievement education and training system and the role of the NRA within this are discussed. I therefore draw on these sources and Dearing's *"Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds"* (Dearing 1996)⁴⁷ for this section of the chapter. My discussion will therefore centre largely around full-time 14-19 education. I am aware that this focus is limited in relation to the concept of lifelong learning, because it excludes the part-time and adult perspective and also the role of employers and the workplace. However, there is a strong argument for focusing on initial education and training because it is here where the skills and attitudes required for

⁴⁷ Since the Dearing Report was published in March 1996, a number of joint NCVQ /SCAA working groups have been working on turning the Report's proposals into practical guidelines for implementation. One of these working groups has been focusing on the proposals for changes to the NRA, as outlined in Chapter 6 of the Dearing Report, and has put forward recommendations for a renamed NRA, possibly to be known as Progress File or ProFile. At the time of writing this thesis, these recommendations are still very much at the 'drawing board' stage and I have therefore chosen not to comment on them here.

participation in lifelong learning are first nurtured and developed. It is also the area upon which the research for this thesis has largely focused.

Chapter 1, which identified the features of a high participation/high achievement education and training system, as depicted in the education policy literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s, concluded that there was little in this literature about the role of RoA. Discussion really ended beyond the point of an expressed desire that a summative record of achievement should be the instrument used to recognise all types of achievement in all types of education and training and that it should then be used as part of the selection and recruitment process for further/higher education or the workplace (Finegold *et al.* 1990; Royal Society 1991). This literature therefore only touches on the role of RoA within a high participation/high achievement education and training system and does not specifically consider the new features of the NRA.

Halsall and Cockett (1996), Crombie White *et al.* (1995), Dearing (1996) and, to a lesser extent, Broadfoot (1996), however, take a fresh look at RoA from a mid-1990s standpoint. They not only discuss the features of the NRA in some detail, but also link it less with assessment and more closely with the process of learning, and, in particular, with the concept of lifelong learning. The first three sources take as their starting point that there is a consensus on the need for lifelong learning which will both increase the skills and knowledge base of the British population and improve its capacity to innovate. They also all recognise that the NRA has a role to play in promoting and supporting the concept of lifelong learning, since it has the capacity to be used at all stages of education, within different learning contexts and by a range of learners of all ages. This is a very fruitful link in terms of the process of recording of achievement, but it does not, in itself, address the problem of how to gain recognition

for the summative NRA within the current policy context. In particular, it ignores the problematic relationship between the summative NRA and the qualifications system. This is an issue which Chapter 6 argues is significant in terms of gaining real recognition for the NRA, both by those using the record for supporting learning and those using it for selection and recruitment.

Halsall (1996), for example, sees great potential in the process of recording of achievement:

“There are few more direct measures of active engagement in the learning process or of responsibility, accountability, empowerment and performance than being centrally involved in reflection on one’s learning, in identifying future goals and learning needs and, indeed, in marshalling evidence to testify to one’s achievements, in other words, than in being involved in recording achievement.” (p.94)

At the same time, he also recognises that the NRA has as yet largely failed to fulfil this potential, because it has not been universally adopted in 11-16 schools, is less in evidence in post-16 institutions and has failed to make any real impact in higher education or in the workplace, particularly among smaller companies. Halsall largely sidesteps major issues, such as the fact that the NRA is part of a voluntarist education and training system and that it is strongly affected by its problematic relationship with the national qualifications system. Instead, he chooses to concentrate on two more easily tackled practical reasons for the relative failure of the NRA - the lack of a national quality assurance system and the lack of linkages and understandings between stages of education. He ends his chapter on RoA by recommending the development of local and regional networks which might improve such linkages and understanding.

This pragmatic approach is very much in the tradition of earlier RoA literature and, to some extent, mirrors the work of the case study used in this thesis. It represents a desire to create some kind of order out of chaos; some kind of practical piecemeal local/regional solution to a larger national systemic problem. However, as Chapter 6 argued, the proposals Halsall makes are unlikely to take deep root while the NRA remains outside the national qualifications system and is thus seen as of secondary importance in selection for employment and further/higher education and training. The emphasis in Halsall's chapter is still on individual responsibility - both at student and at institutional level - to collaborate and to make use of the NRA in a voluntaristic system and in a climate which encourages division, competition and selection. This does not, I would argue, seem either a practical or a viable approach in the longer run, because it relies on the power of content, and largely sidesteps the issue of context and the important balance between process and product. Halsall's solution, just like the Tower Hamlets solution illustrated in the case study, might enable all learners theoretically to have access to the NRA, but could not ensure that the NRA would be used by all stakeholders to support lifelong learning.

In their chapter in the same book (Halsall & Cockett 1996), Hustler and Hodgkinson come nearer to recognising this problem. They argue that student-centred teaching methods, which lie at the heart of initiatives such as recording of achievement, are not enough on their own to ensure student empowerment within the education system, because of the nature of the context in which the learning is taking place. They make a useful distinction between, on the one hand, student empowerment and autonomy in the classroom, which is possible within the current education system and is supported by the process of recording of achievement, and, on the other hand, the type of real student empowerment and autonomy

which would allow learners to make impartial and informed choices about their education and career pathways and would require changes in the context beyond the classroom. These are the kind of contextual changes, I would suggest, which those arguing for a high participation/high achievement education and training system envisage as pre-requisites for such a system - for example a unified qualifications system and legislative changes in the relationship between employers and the education system (Finegold & Soskice 1988; Finegold *et al.* 1990; Royal Society 1991; National Commission on Education 1993 & 1995a & b; Crombie White *et al.* 1995; Hodgson & Spours 1997).

The RSA document (Crombie-White *et al.* 1995) and the Dearing Review (Dearing 1996) also attempt to demonstrate how the process of recording of achievement might be used in a more productive way to encourage greater learner participation and achievement by making a connection between this process and the concept of management of learning. Both documents see management of learning as one of the essential skills which underpin the concept of lifelong learning, with an understanding that this concept implies the negotiation of individual learning pathways through the education and training system. Again the connection between the process of recording of achievement and the process of management of learning is a useful one. However, the emphasis here, as in much of the official government and recent academic literature on RoA (Butterfield 1995; Murphy & Broadfoot 1995; CRAC/NICEC 1995), is on empowering learners so that they can take on the responsibility for making this connection and thus the concept of lifelong learning a reality. There is almost an assumption that if the individual is equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge, s/he can make her/his own pathway through the education and training system and into employment, regardless of how that system is constructed and what is inherently valued within it.

Again, this is an argument which neglects the powerful limiting effects of context. Firstly, this emphasis on the individual ignores arguments about cultural capital and the inequalities in the social system which prevent learners from starting or competing on a "level playing field" in terms of education. Secondly, it ignores financial and geographical factors which restrict access to education. Thirdly, and of more relevance for this thesis, since it has chosen to concentrate on issues related specifically to the education and training system, this argument ignores the effect of the current academic/vocational divide within the education system. As earlier chapters of the thesis have argued, this divide together with the low status of the vocational route effectively determine individual learners' choices by encouraging learners to opt for the high status academic route, regardless of their likely success within this route. All of these three reasons limit the extent to which the individual - however well equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills - can successfully make her/his own pathway through the education and training system and into employment.

In terms of content, Dearing recommends an interesting and innovative addition to the summative NRA document, which highlights the Record's role in promoting the skills associated with management of learning.

"The NRA should have a major role in developing skills in planning and managing one's own learning through a self-contained section, based on specially designed worksheets, which guide the student through the process. The section should be worked out in consultation with schools and colleges." (Dearing 1996, p44)

Dearing goes on to recommend that accreditation should be given for students undertaking this process in order to raise its status.

Once more, in theory, this is a useful suggestion, which could be of potential relevance to part-time and adult students, as well as to full-time 16-19 year olds. The importance of having accreditation which includes the full range of learners is self-evidently vital to the concept of lifelong learning.

However, one is left with real reservations about Dearing's suggestion that the NCVQ unit "improving own learning and performance" might be used to accredit the process of management of learning. There must be concerns with using units which were originally associated with GNVQs for this purpose. Firstly the use of such units is problematic because GNVQs, in their current form, are recognised as having severe design weaknesses (FEDA/IoE/Nuffield 1997). Secondly, there are those who argue that it is not possible to assess and accredit decontextualised transferable skills (Wolf 1991). Thirdly, as the thesis has argued in earlier chapters, RoA has suffered in the past from its association with the low-status vocational track and the use of this type of accreditation would serve to revive that unhelpful legacy. Finally, and most importantly of all, there is an issue about giving separate accreditation to the development of management of learning skills unless these skills are seen as a necessary part of all learning programmes and of all nationally recognised qualifications. Unless they are formally built into the qualifications structure and are required for progression into further and higher education, these skills and the accreditation associated with them are unlikely to gain credibility. To provide ineffective or low-status accreditation for management of learning skills and to take a voluntaristic approach to their inclusion within learning programmes, I would argue, could have a severely damaging effect on the whole concept of management of learning.

In contrast to the book by Halsall & Cockett, there is a willingness in the RSA document and in the Dearing Review to try to tackle not

only the "easier" issue of a role for the process of recording of achievement in supporting lifelong learning, but also, to some extent, the more difficult problem of a role for the NRA as a summative document. Both publications suggest that the NRA should have greater currency as a summative document than is currently the case. Both recommend that the NRA should be the place where all achievements - both formal qualifications and others relevant experiences - are recorded and recognised. Employers and further/higher education providers should then be exhorted to use this record as part of their selection process and as an on-going recording mechanism. At its best, then, the NRA is seen as a kind of portfolio for the collection of all relevant information on an individual.

"In the NRA, employers are looking beyond nationally recognised awards for evidence of qualities and achievements which vary according to the level and kind of job vacancy they are looking to fill." (Dearing 1996, p.43)

"...the NRA is intended to subsume in importance all other reports of achievement, including GCSE results, and provide a coherent lifelong record of all academic, vocational, employment and personal achievements." (Crombie White et al. 1995, p.43)

These are laudable aims, but exhortation alone is unlikely either to raise the profile of the NRA or to increase its use, as both the case study described in this thesis and the CRAC/NICEC report (CRAC/NICEC 1995) suggest:

"Although considerable advances have been made, neither the NRA, nor the related processes of reviewing, recording,

reporting and planning are yet adequately embedded in any sector.” (p.2)

Where students have nationally recognised qualifications, other forms of information about them are likely to take second place at the point of selection for higher/further education or employment, particularly where there are large numbers of applications for a limited number of places or jobs. Those other forms of information, therefore, take second place for learners and their teachers/lecturers/employers and both the NRA itself and the process of recording of achievement, as the Tower Hamlets case study demonstrated, tend to lose credibility or to be marginalised.

In summary, other than suggesting that a new and more flexible qualifications structure would require the use of RoA, the education policy literature of the late 1980s and the early 1990s had little to say about RoA. It thus had little to contribute to the question of how the NRA might be used to support lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system. Three more recent publications - Halsall & Cockett (1996), the RSA policy document on 14-19 Education and Training (Crombie White *et al.* 1995) and Dearing's Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds (Dearing 1996) - break this mould. In all three of these sources there is considerable discussion of how the process of recording of achievement, particularly when linked with the concept of management of learning, might be used to develop the kind of skills required to translate the concepts of lifelong learning and a high participation/high achievement education and training system into practice.

In relation to how the summative NRA might be used within such a system, however, Halsall & Cockett, Crombie White *et al.* and Dearing have less that is new to contribute. They, like the authors of

the majority of the early education policy literature invest considerable faith in the content of the record itself. They assume that the NRA will be able to play a useful role in supporting lifelong learning as a nationally recognised portfolio of all the achievements of a particular individual, whether these are gained in education or in the workplace and whether they have national accreditation attached or not. The NRA is seen as something additional to and greater than any of the individual qualifications or achievements that it contains and as a means of recognising achievements at any point in an individual's lifetime. In their view, the summative NRA can thus, like the process of recording of achievement, be described as supporting the concept of life-long learning.

Although Dearing then also goes into some detail about how the NRA might be used in interviews for both higher education and employment, the problem of how one might get employers and higher education providers to use the NRA in this way is not addressed. Similarly, there is little practical discussion of how, beyond exhortation, employers might be encouraged to support their employees in recording achievement. There is thus, once again, a question mark over whether in the current national education context the NRA will be used by enough employers and higher education providers to make it worthwhile for individual learners to use it and for teachers, lecturers and employers to support them in this process.

Halsall & Cockett (1996), Crombie White *et al.* 1995 and Dearing (1996) all subscribe to the view that the NRA should have a role in supporting lifelong learning and each provides new and interesting perspectives on how this role might be realised. However, if one uses the theoretical framework developed in this thesis - context, content and process/product relationship - for analysing their approaches, it is clear that while these writers address the issue of

content and, to a certain extent recognise the issue of process/product relationship, they do not address the thorny issue of context. The proposals are therefore, I would argue, unlikely to take the NRA beyond what I have termed Phase 2 of RoA development - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement.

Towards Phase 3: NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning

In this section I will argue that there needs to be a new approach to the discussion about the use of the NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. If, as I have argued throughout this thesis, it is a combination of factors - context, content and process/product relationship - which determines the role that RoA plays in the English education system, then any discussion of a new role for the NRA will have to consider all three factors.

The problem with the literature outlined above is that it makes suggestions for a new role for the NRA in supporting lifelong learning without considering all three of these factors and their inter-relationship. Moreover, as the case study analysed in Chapter 6 of this thesis demonstrates, it is the national education policy context which is possibly the strongest of the three factors and this is precisely the factor which Halsall & Cockett (1996), Crombie White *et al.* (1995) and Dearing (1996) tend either to ignore or not fully to tackle. All three of these sources tend to take the national education policy context as a given and then to propose the most appropriate role for the NRA within this context.

This approach, I would suggest, is very similar to the type of approach that those writing in support of RoA in the 1970s and 1980s took. In the 1970s and 1980s, as I have illustrated earlier in the thesis,

RoA was seen very much as a student-centred initiative that could be used to address problems caused by the national policy context of the time. In that literature, as in the literature of the mid 1990s, there is an underlying desire to bring about change - albeit piecemeal and internal to the education system - in the way that learning and accreditation takes place. There is never a full recognition, however, of the limits that the national education policy context is likely to have on this aspiration.

The most that this type of approach is likely to bring about, I would argue, is local piecemeal change such as that illustrated by the Tower Hamlets case study. Used in this way, the NRA may, as that case study demonstrates, play a role in supporting many learners to achieve and progress and may even help them better to manage their own learning. In a certain sense, it can therefore be seen as supporting lifelong learning. It cannot, however, in itself be seen as making the concept of lifelong learning a reality because it does nothing to challenge or change the underlying national education policy context.

What I will argue here is that, to some extent, the approach to RoA taken by some of the education policy literature of the early 1990s (e.g. Finegold *et al.* 1990; Royal Society 1991) is possibly more productive than that taken by Halsall and Cockett (1996), Crombie White *et al.* 1995 and Dearing (1996). Although this earlier literature does not discuss RoA in any detail, what it does do is to look at the national education policy context first, to suggest changes to that context (e.g. the introduction of a unified qualifications system) which are intended to support the move towards a high participation/high achievement education and training system and then to make proposals for the use of RoA within this new context. It does not, therefore, see RoA as a separate initiative with any power to bring about change on its own.

In the two sub-sections which follow, I will argue that the NRA has the potential to be used both to support lifelong learning and to contribute to making this concept a reality - what I have termed in this thesis Phase 3 of RoA development. However, I will also argue that any proposals of this type will need to consider all three elements of the theoretical framework developed in this thesis - context, content and process/product relationship - since all three determine the role that the NRA might play. In common with much of the recent education policy literature (e.g. Finegold *et al.* 1990; Royal Society 1991; National Commission on Education 1993 & 1995a & b; Crombie-White *et al.* 1995; Richardson *et al.* 1995; Hodgson & Spours 1997) I argue that the introduction of a unified qualifications system is a contextual pre-requisite for a high participation/high achievement education and training system and thus for movement towards the realisation of the concept of lifelong learning.⁴⁸ The introduction of this type of qualifications system would therefore also be a contextual pre-requisite of Phase 3 of RoA development.

In these sub-sections I consider the role of the process of recording of achievement and the role of the NRA summative document (product) separately because each has a separate but complementary contribution to make to a new role for the NRA. In each sub-section I will draw on evidence from earlier parts of the thesis briefly to evaluate the role that RoA has played in the past and then to suggest

⁴⁸ Young *et al.*'s (1997) recent paper "Unifying Academic and Vocational Learning and the Idea of a Learning Society" takes this debate further. In this paper, the authors argue that it is useful to see unifying academic and vocational learning as a strategy for achieving a learning society, but that there is a need to see both the concepts of unification and of a learning society as multi-dimensional. I have not referenced or discussed this paper here, because Young *et al.*'s concept of unification is wider than the unified qualifications system to which I am referring in this chapter. I recognise, however, that it would be useful to explore the relationship between RoA and dimensions of unification since the role of underpinning processes, such as recording of achievement, is still relatively underdeveloped in the literature on unification.

a possible future role in a high participation/high achievement education and training system.

Process

From previous discussion within the thesis, it appears that there are four distinct but inter-related ways in which the process of recording of achievement has been used.

- Firstly, because of its emphasis on recognising all aspects of achievement (Hargreaves 1984), this process has provided teachers/lecturers and learners with a means of valuing breadth and diversity of study and experiences at all stages of learning and in all contexts. It has thus encouraged students and, to some extent, employees to consider all aspects of achievement as valuable.
- Secondly, as a mechanism for reflecting on past achievement and then assessing future options in the light of this reflection, recording of achievement has been used by teachers, students and careers officers as part of careers education and guidance programmes. It has also been used by employers and employees as part of appraisal systems. In both cases it has encouraged students or employees gradually to take more responsibility for planning their future progression and career pathways.
- Thirdly, recording of achievement, diagnostic assessment, and action planning have been used by teachers/lecturers and students as part of formative value-added systems in schools and colleges to encourage students gradually to take more responsibility for their academic performance, particularly in post-16 qualifications.

- Fourthly, as described in the Dearing Review, but as yet under-developed in practice, recording of achievement has been used by teachers/lecturers/employers to help learners understand more about the process of learning, about their own preferred learning styles and, from this, about how to take more responsibility for their own learning programmes.

The considerable consensus over the value of all of the above to the goal of lifelong learning is summed up by Murphy and Broadfoot (1995):

"Equally central to this vision (a 'whole society committed to learning') is the need to equip individuals with the skills and resources they need to become self-reliant and self-motivated learners. The skill to assess what has and has not been learned, to evaluate personal learning needs and goals; to choose the appropriate route in order to achieve these goals is vital to the vision of a learning society. It is for this reason that recent decades have seen an explosion of interest in developing new, student-centred forms of recording learning achievements, 'learning logs', 'portfolios', profiles, records of achievement and personal action plans which are a host of different international initiatives which are geared towards this end."

(P.249)

However, as the thesis has already demonstrated, the current qualifications system neither recognises these four aspects of recording of achievement in any formal way, nor does it provide a flexible or open enough system for these skills, once developed, to be put into practice in any effective way. Despite the consensus on the value of the four aspects of recording of achievement highlighted above, unless there are fundamental changes to the qualifications system which will provide learners, teachers, lecturers and

employers with incentives to develop these skills and lifelong learning habits, they will remain at the level of isolated examples of good practice.

If, on the other hand, there were a more flexible, unified qualification system which required students, as part of their initial general education to mix applied, theoretical and practical study, which rewarded breadth as well as specialisation at advanced level, which accredited a wider range of general learning and personal skills, which used a common point system across the qualifications system and which used a variety of assessment modes without according higher status to any particular mode, then it would be possible and, in fact, necessary for students to develop the four aspects of recording of achievement outlined above.

There would be a reason to value all types of achievement, since these would all be integral to the qualifications structure. There would be a reason to develop greater skill in the planning of future progression and career pathways, since there would be genuine choices to make, rather than choices skewed by the existence of a single prestigious route within the qualification system. There would be a reason for all learners to take more responsibility for their academic performance on all types of courses, because it would be possible to develop value-added methodologies for all qualifications pathways. Finally, there would be a reason for learners to understand and to take greater responsibility for their own learning programmes, because there would be genuine choices to be made in terms of routes, combinations of modules, modes of study and forms of assessment. In this sense, recording of achievement as an integral part of a unified qualifications system could make a real contribution to building a system of lifelong learning.

It is important to accept, of course, that the introduction of a unified qualifications system and the use of recording of achievement within this system in no way ensures that the process of recording of achievement will be used or valued beyond the education system. I recognise that making the concept of lifelong learning a reality relies on changes beyond the education system, but wish to argue that changes within compulsory and initial post-compulsory education systems are a possible and useful starting point for wider changes beyond those systems.

Product

I begin this section by reviewing the kind of role that the summative NRA has played in the past, including how it was used in the Tower Hamlets case study. I then propose a more significant role for it in supporting and promoting lifelong learning. As in the previous section, I recognise the limitations of the current national education policy context and argue that the NRA will not be able to play this role except as part of a unified qualifications system. I also argue for further contextual changes to address the problems associated with a voluntaristic education and training system. Although the solution I propose in this section is a rather tentative one, this should not detract from the fundamental argument which is that if the NRA does not become an integral part of the qualifications system, then not only will the record itself lack credibility, but so too will the broad learning skills that it is designed to accredit and encourage.

Earlier parts of the thesis have demonstrated that the summative NRA has been used within the current education and training system for three distinct but interconnected purposes:

- Firstly, unlike any other form of accreditation currently in existence in the English qualifications system, the NRA has been used by teachers, lecturers and employers to accredit

achievements and experiences for learners at different levels and in different contexts.

- Secondly, the NRA has been used to recognise achievements and experiences that are beyond those recognised within the national qualifications framework and to present them in a coherent form.
- Thirdly, as illustrated by the Tower Hamlets case study, the NRA has been used as part of local progression agreements to encourage a more student-centred focus to the selection and recruitment process. By this I mean that the student is encouraged to demonstrate to admissions tutor/employers how what s/he has achieved equips her/him for a specific course/job. This process is thus intended to prevent admissions tutors/employers from selecting students wholly by using qualification requirements.

Currently, however, as Chapter 6 points out, the NRA is unlikely to be used in the above way beyond the local or regional context, because it is seen largely as an adjunct to a student's qualifications profile. In the final analysis, it is the student's qualifications profile which has value in relation to selection for further/higher education and training or employment. This is particularly true of higher education, where applicants are increasingly not interviewed and selectors therefore need a shorthand method of distinguishing between large numbers of candidates applying for courses. Grades or point scores in advanced level qualifications are usually used for this purpose. Additional achievements or experiences recorded in the NRA and transferred to the UCAS form are considered only as a secondary selection device, despite the fact that these additional skills and qualities may well demonstrate a potential student's abilities to manage her/his own learning and therefore to succeed on a higher education course (Gretton 1992; Wigan RoAHE Project 1992)

This situation is compounded because, although it is the minority of post-16 students who actually progress to higher education, progression to higher education is seen as the highest status outcome from post-16 education for schools and colleges, and their way of operating is usually geared to this end. If grades or points in advanced level courses are the main outcome recognised by higher education providers, it is on these that schools and colleges focus. Since, under the current qualifications system these grades and points are largely to be gained through narrow subject specialist knowledge, then it is on this, rather than on the broader more generic knowledge and skills required to develop autonomous learners, that teachers and lecturers will concentrate (Schagen *et al.* 1996; Spours 1996). Broader, more generic knowledge and skills, along with recording of achievement and the NRA itself, are accorded a poor second place.

It is not enough to duck the issue and to suggest, as Butterfield (1995) does, that the process of recording of achievement is what is important and that the record itself is of secondary importance.

“Whereas in traditional education/training provision the courses might have been the organising principle, that principle is now located with the individual’s outcomes. The individual seeks guidance (recognised to be crucial in this model) and needs a high degree of self-awareness to initiate and interact with the sources of guidance. The individual becomes, in effect, the organising principle of the learning and the individual pathway through learning exists only with the individual. The NRA provides the document in which this pathway can be recorded and the focus for the individual to reflect upon, discuss, understand and take control of the achievements of learning and the future targets of learning,

but that Record is less valuable than the process of reflection and growth that underlies it. (p.100)

Unless the NRA itself is seen to be of value, then, as the Tower Hamlets case study demonstrates, the processes that lead up to and are recorded in that record will also not be valued. The inter-relationship and balance between process and product, as this thesis has argued, is an essential factor in the role that the NRA plays.

Nor is it enough to assume, as the Dearing Review does, that the NRA will be used because employers and HE providers are exhorted to use it. Currently, both employers and HE providers are entirely free to use whatever methods of selection they see fit: there are no financial or other incentives for them to use the NRA. This type of voluntarism, as the Tower Hamlets case study has shown, places an unrealistic and impractical responsibility on the individual learner to engage an unknowledgeable or even an unwilling interviewer in a dialogue about the NRA. When there is no incentive in the education system to record wider achievements and to engage in the process of recording of achievement, then, as the Tower Hamlet case study shows, students and their teachers/lecturers will begin to question not only the NRA but the process that leads up to it as well.

If, as the recent education policy and assessment literature suggests, there is a consensus on the need to develop learners who have both specialist and broad knowledge and skills and who have the skills and incentive to learn and to achieve throughout life, then it is also important to develop a mechanism which recognises and supports this. The NRA could potentially play such a role. However, there would seem to be three preconditions required for it to operate as a means of accrediting and therefore encouraging the development of this new type of learning even in the education context. The first and third of these preconditions relate to context and the second to content and process/product relationship.

Firstly, there would need to be a unified qualifications system, such as that described in the previous section, which would recognise the NRA as the official medium for recording and recognising all achievements within that qualifications system.

Secondly, the content of the NRA itself would also need to be changed to reflect its use as an integral part of a unified qualifications system. The content of the document would need to be open and flexible enough to encourage the formative process of recording of achievement in a variety of contexts while, at the same time, acting as a summative record of achievement in the new qualifications system. There are, of course, inherent tensions in this demand which would need to be addressed (Paczuska & Turner 1997). In order to support the focus on lifelong learning, it would also be important for the summative document to demonstrate the holder's ability to assess and evaluate her/his own learning.

One possible solution might be, for example, if the final and most important mandatory section of the NRA became one where the learner provided a synoptic statement on her/his whole learning programme and its significance to her/him as a learner. In order to have any status and relevance, it would be necessary for this synoptic statement to be seen as a mandatory part of all levels of qualification. At advanced level, it would need to be accorded equivalent status to the kind of synoptic assessment that would be required of all advanced level courses. It would therefore have to be assessed in the same way that other parts of qualifications are assessed. In order to assure its credibility and status, it is likely that assessment of the NRA synoptic statement at advanced level would have to include some external element. It would also need to be awarded a point score for HE admission purposes. This point score would not necessarily be of relevance to all end users, but would be likely to have weight in HE selection. If limited in length, the NRA synoptic

statement could be used in its entirety as part of the HE admissions process or its point score could simply be used to boost the learner's qualifications profile. The NRA portfolio could, in addition, be used as evidence to support claims made in the synoptic statement.

Thirdly, there would need to be a change in the HE admissions process to accommodate the above changes in the qualifications system. The first and most important change would be that all HE providers would be required to use the NRA as the medium for entry to higher education. It is likely that legislation or financial incentives would have to be used to ensure that this in fact took place. This would be more practicable if the NRA, as suggested in the paragraph above, were integrated with the qualifications system. The second would be that the HE admissions process, as several academics have already argued (Robertson 1992; Higgins 1993), would have to adapt its timetable to accommodate this change. The admissions process would thus have to take place later than it currently does, but it would be based on stronger evidence of advanced level study and would also be able to take into consideration potential candidates' skills as learners, as well as their knowledge and skills in a variety of subject area/areas.

Although the proposals for the NRA outlined above have been considered only in relation to the HE admissions process - because this is something over which national government has more control through its funding mechanism - there are obvious parallels with the employment application process. If, as much of the recent national government and education policy literature claims, employers are looking for employees with broad generic skills and the ability to learn, as well as for those with a high degree of subject specialism:

"Employees in today's business environment need specialist knowledge and skills but equally an ability to learn how to learn." (Labour Party March 1996)

"Employers' interests lie in the outcome (of recording of achievement) - the qualifications and attitudes which the record and plan help develop in individuals." (CBI 1994)

then the type of proposals outlined above would appear also to be of benefit to them. The fact that the NRA would be an integral part of the qualifications system could only add to its credibility in the eyes of employers.

However, I recognise here, as in the previous section that there are currently few incentives for employers to use the NRA for selection and even fewer for them to continue to use it within the workplace. This is an area which goes beyond the scope of this thesis and requires further research.

To summarise - in this section I have argued that the NRA could provide a useful mechanism not only for supporting lifelong learning, but also, as part of a unified qualifications system, for contributing to building a system of lifelong learning. However, this new role for the NRA could only be realised if there were changes to the national education and training context (the introduction of a unified qualifications system and a new approach to the HE admissions process) and if the content of the record itself were changed to encourage both the formative process of recording of achievement and the summative use of the product itself.

I have also here made some tentative proposals about content. I have suggested that in order to fulfil this new role, the NRA would need to be designed to contain a record of the broader curricular elements required by a unified qualifications system. It could also

contain, as it does now, information about each individual learner's particular achievements and experiences. This type of information would, of course, differ from individual to individual. However, there could also be a mandatory section of the NRA which would be common to all learners, if they wished to obtain accreditation within the national qualifications system. In this section, the learner could attempt to make sense of and to bring coherence to all her/his recent learning experiences and achievements. This statement could be used as the means of claiming credit for all levels of qualification within the national qualification system. Credit at any level could be partially dependent on the quality and credibility of the learner's synoptic NRA statement. The NRA could thus provide both a mechanism for collecting and collating disparate types of achievements and learning experiences, and also an incentive for learners to reflect on and make sense of their own learning, in order to progress within a nationally recognised qualifications structure. In this way, the NRA could be seen as genuinely supporting the concept of lifelong learning within the initial post-compulsory education and training system.

Conclusion

This thesis has defined and discussed three phases of RoA development - Phase 1 (1969-1991) - RoA as a widespread but locally determined education initiative largely used as accreditation for lower achievers; Phase 2 (1991-1997) - NRA as a national policy instrument for use with all learners to record achievement; and Phase 3 (a potential future phase) - NRA as a tool for supporting lifelong learning. Throughout the thesis, I have argued that the role that RoA played in Phase 1 and Phase 2 was determined by a set of three inter-related factors - context, content and process/product relationship - of which the first was ultimately the most powerful.

This chapter has therefore suggested that any proposals for Phase 3 will also need to take these three factors into consideration.

In this chapter I recognise the strong arguments that some of the most recent education policy literature puts forward for using the NRA to support lifelong learning. At the same time, however, I also suggest that these aspirations are unlikely to be realised, because they do not take full cognisance of the limitations imposed by the national education policy context. In the final part of the chapter I therefore argue for a different approach to the question of how to use the NRA to support lifelong learning: one which takes into consideration the theoretical framework developed by the thesis - context, content and process/product relationship. The practical proposals I then put forward for realising this new role for the NRA are tentative and serve only as an example of how this new approach might be used. They also do not attempt to go beyond the bounds of the education system. They do, however, within this narrow area, attempt to take the three factors of context, content and process/product relationship into consideration.

In this final chapter of the thesis, I conclude that the NRA could be seen as a useful tool for the future as an integral part of a unified qualifications system designed to support lifelong learning. However, I have also suggested that this potential future role will only be realised through an approach to the NRA which recognises the determining factors of context, content and process/product relationship. This approach does not, as those writing about RoA in the past have often done, see the NRA as an isolated policy initiative which on its own is likely to bring about change. Rather there is a recognition that it is only in conjunction with other initiatives and within the right kind of context that the NRA will be able to play a useful contributory role in translating the concept of lifelong learning from rhetoric into reality.

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