



Attending:

Alison Wolf (Chair)
Frank Bowley (DfE)
Richard Garrett (DfE)
Andrew Dickerson (Uni. of Sheffield)
Sandra McNally (CVER Director)
Charlynn Pullen (ETF)
Jenifer Ruiz-Valenzuela (CVER)
Harriet Ogborn (CVER Administrator)
Jo Cantlay (CVER Administrator)

Apologies:

Stephen Machin (CEP, LSE)
Nigel Rogers (CEP and CVER Manager)
Stephen Nickell (University of Oxford)
Frank McLoughlin (ETF)
Bev Robinson (Blackpool and The Fylde College)

Minutes from October steering group and action points

No issues are raised.

Feedback from DfE's research board

1. Frank Bowley summarised the feedback from the research board on the extension of CVER funding:

Importance of providing key performance indicators (KPIs) and making sure that CVER research has impact. Andy Dickerson asks how impact is defined for DfE. Frank Bowley gives some examples of areas that have the potential to be impactful for policy: leadership, BTECs and UTCs, among others. However, CVER research needs to be considered as a strategic investment that produces analysis for the long-term. Alison Wolf underlines the need for the Centre to be known throughout the DfE so it is the first port of call to access latest research when questions come up in the Department (in addition to its dissemination activities through DfE). It was agreed impact could be described by a narrative around practical ways CVER engages with policymakers and stakeholders; and document impact where possible. In addition, CVER should continue to monitor the outcome indicators recorded in the Interim Report.

2. Priorities to include in forthcoming CVER research include:

- (1) Apprenticeships (quality *versus* quantity trade-off). Alison Wolf mentions that we have some solid findings on low earnings differentials to some types of apprenticeship and recommends writing a new piece about this research to synthesise findings. She thinks this could also apply to other areas in due course. Alison Wolf feels this would be of interest to the mainstream press, BBC Business correspondent or the Financial Times. Sandra McNally noted that such a piece is being planned for work CEP is doing for the Industrial Strategy and could be part of this output.
- (2) Social mobility
- (3) Raising the participation age and crime
- (4) Quality in further education
- (5) Demand for skills

Action: Sandra McNally to write accessible note on Apprenticeships (late March/April).

3. For 2020, synopsis of CVER findings and implications for policy, particularly around these five areas: Frank Bowley suggests having more policy papers that are a synthesis of findings and what this means for policy. He suggests this doesn't wait until the end of CVER's funding. Sandra McNally feels there is scope to do this, as CVER is building a body of work.

4. Continue research to inform policy on qualifications – such as the level 4-5 qualification review. Frank Bowley mentions interest from DfE into research on FE/technical qualifications provided in HE.

DfE's research board is happy for CVER to research technical education issues that arise within Higher Education. There was a discussion about the project proposal by Speckesser on comparing returns to level 4/5 qualifications to university degrees. Alison Wolf mentions the shift from 4-5 qualifications to full degree over time; and the limitations of looking into level 4-5 qualifications due to the small numbers being undertaken and the particular characteristics of those who enrol. Sandra McNally explains that a team led by Speckesser is trying to do research on qualifications at levels 4-5 that are comparable to degrees in HE, in order to be able to compare like for like. Alison Wolf wonders if it is possible to look historically at this issue too and Sandra McNally says that she will ask the NIESR team to incorporate this into their research project. She also notes that work from Speckesser and McIntosh will inform the Level 4/5 qualification review.

5. There was a useful discussion about differential gender choices and implications in technical education. The differential gender choices on the sector of apprenticeships (and the lower returns found for women) could feed into the work on social mobility. It will also be a part of the policy paper about apprenticeships referred to above.

6. On documenting impact, Sandra McNally appealed to policy makers to cite research used in government publications.

Action: Frank Bowley to arrange meeting with Philippa Lloyd, Director General of Higher and Further Education (HE/FE) at DfE.

Action: Sandra McNally to ask the NIESR team to incorporate some historical aspect of a comparison of Level 4/5 qualifications and degrees into their research project. For example, they could look at one of the cohort studies to do this. It would be useful to document some change over time in the composition of Level 4/5 qualifications.

Presentation on Progress of the CVER Programme and Discussion

[Slides attached]

1. Sandra McNally summarises key performance indicators and gives examples of how engagement and impact will be demonstrated. Frank Bowley thinks it is useful to write a couple of pages setting out how it responds to DfE's research board requirements.

2. Sandra McNally presents the evaluation of the apprenticeship levy proposal. Alison Wolf mentions that there is an issue with (seeing) early apprenticeship starts and the time employers have to spend the funding (2 years). Andy Dickerson discusses the potential identification strategy. Richard Garrett mentions that the EPS survey is not available this year. Sandra McNally notes that researchers are aware of data limitations to address this question but that this is nonetheless an interesting project that is worth pursuing. The SG agrees.

3. Vocational education and social mobility: Sandra McNally explains the proposal made by McIntosh for the Interim Review and also the work that Sheffield and NIESR plan to use as a collaboration between CVER and the Sutton Trust. Amongst other things, this looks at the role of providers for influencing progression, etc. Frank Bowley agrees, and thinks that this project could also expand to make an explicit comparison between HE and FE in terms of social mobility. Alison Wolf suggests comparing degrees of HE in FE. Charlynn Pullen says that overall 10% of HE degrees are awarded by FE institutions and that Jill Jameson, at the University of Greenwich, has done some work in the area. However, there are difficulties over FE colleges accrediting Level 6. Richard Garrett mentions that the "FE learners and apprentices social mobility survey" could be useful for this project.

4. Frank Bowley agrees that the BTEC research can now be submitted to CVER as a briefing note.

5. The SG agrees that the following research proposals can proceed: an evaluation of the apprenticeship levy; vocational education and social mobility; Labour market and earnings effects of university compared to higher technical education; The effectiveness of blended, online and classroom learning: Re-analysis of data from a Randomised Control Trial (Scoping Study)

6. Sandra McNally summarises the CVER written outputs that are expected to be published very soon, among which the impact of marginally obtaining a Grade C in GCSE English, a briefing note on human capital tax credits and a DP on utilisation and payoff to VE skills.

7. The CVER conference will be on 6-7 September with Jeff Smith as a keynote speaker. Frank Bowley suggests writing to Minister of State Anne Milton, inviting her to give a keynote at the conference.

8. Sandra McNally explains that CVER has agreed to be a partner on the 5th International Conference on Employer Engagement in Education and Training in July.

9. Sandra McNally summarises other events being planned by CVER: (1) round table with awarding bodies at LSE about the GCSE English paper; (2) possible event about technology and skills; (3) more co-organised events with NIESR.

Action: Sandra McNally to write a short note responding to Research Board feedback.

Action: Sandra McNally to send letter to Minister of State Anne Milton, with invitation to conference

The next meeting of the Steering Group will be held on 12 June.

Summary of Action points

1. Sandra McNally to write note on Apprenticeships (late March/April).
2. Frank Bowley to arrange meeting with Philippa Lloyd, Director General of Higher and Further Education (HE/FE) at DfE.
3. Sandra McNally to write a note on CVER's response to the Research board feedback.
4. Sandra McNally to write to Anne Milton, with invitation to speak at the annual CVER conference.
5. Sandra McNally to ask the NIESR team to incorporate some historical aspect of a comparison of Level 4/5 qualifications and degrees into their research project. For example, they could look at one of the cohort studies to do this. It would be useful to document some change over time in the composition of Level 4/5 qualifications.
6. Sheffield and NIESR to include in their research plans a comparison between HE and FE in terms of social mobility