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The National Record of Achievement - The Student Experience. A Critical View and School Based Study.

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Abstract

This study considers the attitudes of students at Kindsor School, an 11 - 18 comprehensive school, to the National record of Achievement. It considers the nature of student aspirations in relation to the NRA and examines the reality of their experience in producing the final document of record.

A historical perspective and an examination of some pertinent issues regarding recording of achievement, places in context the principal findings of the school-based research - that the benefits of the NRA which are most palpably felt by students and most valued by them are those which lead to a sense of personal growth and development.

The parallel, but much less certain, student belief in the potential of the NRA to assist them in the transition between school and work / training is also considered.

The study concludes that the experience of future students in this institution could be improved if the true benefits of the NRA to students are recognised and exploited.

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PART ONE

In this section the format and the summative function of the National Record of Achievement will be described. The intended purposes of the NRA and its assumed benefits will be outlined. It will be suggested that the origins from which the NRA emerged is confused, a confusion which is evident in the terminology used in the literature on Records of Achievement and in the lack of consensus about their exact nature. It will be argued that the NRA is an attempt to resolve that confusion and a means of moving the Recording of Achievement forward.

1.1 What is the National Record of Achievement ?

In December 1992, the then Secretary of State for education, John Patten, endorsed the National Record of Achievement and issued the circular which rendered the record mandatory. It was announced that as from summer 1993, all school-leavers would be required by law to take with them a National Record of Achievement which conformed to the new regulations.

In the same year the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and the Scottish Vocational Education Council, the bodies responsible for taking forward the development of the National Record of Achievement, published the first of a series of information leaflets which were released into schools and colleges in order to establish the nature of the NRA; outline the underlying philosophy and give guidance as to their potential uses and benefits.

These leaflets inform users that the National Record of Achievement consists of a number of standard sheets stored in a burgundy folder; on these sheets the following are to be presented; **Personal Details** including information about an individual's education and training history; a **Personal Statement**, to include an individual's view of his/her achievements to date and an indication of future plans. Here individuals are to record their 'best qualities' and the aspects of their lives of which they are most proud. Any vocational and academic **qualifications** or **credits** towards them are to be recorded as is a summary of **achievements**, **experiences** and **interests**. In addition to an **individual action plan**, a factual account of an individual's **employment history** is to be included. A section is provided for **attendance rate**, as is a section for **school achievements** in subject areas. The NRA, as presented in this guidance material then, is primarily a format, the content of which has been broadly prescribed.

The fact that the NRA is essentially a leaving document is noted by Stansbury (1992d)

who draws a clear distinction between the 'national system for records of achievement', which is for all students from the age of five, and the

National Record of Achievement which is a summative document for 16 year olds.

(Stansbury 1992d: 52)

However, the information contained in the explanatory leaflets makes it clear that the potential benefits to students should not be seen as arising from the document alone; due emphasis is given in this literature to the importance of the benefits to the individual offered by the processes leading to the completion of the final document. It is made abundantly clear that the document is to be developed by the individual student through the processes of guidance, review, action planning and the recording of information obtained from formal and informal assessment. The intention that these processes should be characterised by discussion and negotiation between students, teachers and others involved in training is also emphasised.

1.2 The NRA - Intended Purposes and Benefits.

1.2.1 The Multiple Benefits

The NRA, it is claimed, is just one part of a common commitment to lifelong learning and is an important means of recognising and valuing an individual's learning and achievements. It is also seen as a practical means of motivating individuals and encouraging their further personal development. It is intended that the NRA will highlight areas for personal growth and through a process of self-review, provide a framework through which a degree of planned progress might be achieved. Thus the NRA seeks to benefit students by giving them greater control over their own development and their own futures.

The NRA could be seen, then, as a practical means of empowering students, being intended specifically to help all students manage their own learning transition. As an on-going record generated over a period of time, clearly it has an additional important function to perform, that of a summary record for use with third parties.

The main functions of the NRA then are;

- 1) to assist in the transition of students between school and work.
- 2) to assist employers and others involved in the recruitment process in the selection of individuals.
- 3) to promote student self awareness.
- 4) to increase student motivation.

1.2.2 The NRA - Passport to Working Life?

The relative emphasis that was initially placed on these distinct functions can be seen in the manner in which the NRA initiative was introduced. A joint venture in 1991 between the DES and the Employment Department culminated in the release of some 20,000 free sample copies of the new National Record of Achievement folders of documentation and the invitation to schools and colleges to use them voluntarily, in any way they wished. Many schools did use them and issued them to school-leavers in 1992.

That the National Record of Achievement folder for documentation was used voluntarily was an issue of which the Secretary of State for education made great play, allowing him to claim in the 'Department for Education News' 404/92, that,

The National Record of Achievement has already proved itself. It guarantees all school leavers a passport to working life. Many schools have used it voluntarily since its launch by the Government in 1991. It is a logical next step to ensure that all school leavers will benefit from it.
(Open University 1994: 108)

This statement gave a very clear indication that one of the key functions of the NRA was to assist students in the transition between school and work. It echoed the government's policy statement of 1984;

The Secretaries of State think it important 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. To that end they believe that the summary documents of record should be based on national guidelines which would provide for a common format, the necessary minimum of defined characteristics and appropriate forms of validation and creditation.
(in Broadfoot et.al. 1991)

This suggests that the way in which the NRA was intended to assist in that transition was by providing a standardised format that would facilitate the selection of individuals. Hall (1989) was among those to recognise that the policy statement 'anticipated a significant role for the RoAs in relation to employers and others involved in recruitment.' Indeed, one of the intentions expressed in the draft policy statement was to provide as a leaving document, a short summary document of record which would be valued by employers and educational and training institutions. Thus benefits to students were conceived as being dependent on the extent to which employers and other external end users valued the document and deemed them worthwhile.

1.3 From Policy to Practice.

Whilst the emphasis which this particular function was given is clear to see, the policy document of 1984 highlighted other functions which were of potential benefit to the student. It was also intended that RoAs should widen the range of recognised achievement beyond results in public examinations, and thus provide the opportunity for credit to be given for what pupils had achieved and experienced as well as for providing evidence of personal development.

It was further intended that through RoAs, schools could develop curricula which enabled pupils to develop practical as well as personal and social skills, which were to be recorded. It was intended too, that RoAs should help pupils to improve their motivation and their self-awareness (Hitchcock 1986; Fairbairn 1988).

Clearly the NRA, as introduced in 1992, is close in spirit to the original policy statement and many of the practical guidelines which were contained in the policy document are echoed in the NCVQ and SCOTVEC literature. Amongst the more significant of the original guidelines were the recommendations that

- records should be for all pupils.
- pupil achievements were to be identified by means of regular dialogue between pupils and their teachers. This process was to be used as a vehicle for pupil motivation and for stimulating curricular review.
- a leaving document was to be produced which was the property of the pupil.
- the leaving document should provide information that was useful to employers, FE and HE institutions.
- the leaving document should give evidence of non-examined experience and should give evidence of attainment in public examinations.

It would appear that the intention of the NRA is to exploit the potential benefits offered to students by both the formative and summative elements of RoAs. Although the potential of both these elements to benefit the students had long been recognised, there appeared to be little agreement as to which performed the most important function.

1. 4. Records of Achievement - Documents, Processes or Principles ?

It is certainly true that the term National Record of Achievement has added to the already complex terminology associated with the business of recording achievement. Far from being an unnecessary addition however, the introduction of the term might well have been a conscious effort on the part of the scheme's initiators to provide a vocabulary which could effectively distinguish

between a process and the product. The difficulties which commentators in this field have had in defining the precise nature of a record of achievement can be seen in the use of the two key terms 'profile' and 'record of achievement'.

A brief consideration of the terminology might well prove illuminating for the simple reason that it provides an insight into the confusion out of which the NRA has emerged. From the outset, it would appear that difficulties were encountered in arriving at a descriptive terminology that could be consistently applied. Brown (1988); Hall (1989) ; Assiter and Shaw (1993) all draw attention to the prevalent tendency to use the terms interchangeably. Fairbairn (1988), for example, believes that the terms 'profile' and 'record of achievement' are generic names which refer to 'a loose grouping of methods of recording and reporting student achievement in schools and colleges'.

Some commentators, however, were vehement in their rejection of this practice. Sutton (1986), apparently concerned that this tendency could lead to a degree of woolly thinking about key concepts, was forceful in her defence of the 'much abused word 'profile'. In her view a profile was

A system of recording the assessment of pupils' learning which provides specific information about concepts and skills learned and attitudes developed.

(Sutton 1986: 39)

It was her view that this understanding of the term 'profile' became 'lost in the surge of interest in this area over the past few years'.

Satterly (1989) in his analysis of the terminology, has attempted to explain this apparent tendency towards the blurring of definitions in terms of the general principles which those working in this area have been anxious to promote. Thus he claims that

One of the original distinctions was that a 'profile' would describe a number of intellectual features of the child as a statement of his or her relative strength and weakness whereas 'records of achievement' (RoAs) would portray only the positive features, that is those for which credit can be given. This distinction became blurred by a recognition that only positive achievements should receive acknowledgement in both types of assessment.

(Satterly 1989: 262)

Thus the terms were used by some as interchangeable descriptors for a wide range of methods and practices connected to the assessment of students. Some commentators have been prone to gloss over this, considering it to be largely irrelevant whilst others have seen this not as a quibble about terminology but something fundamental and central to the debate about the development of the RoAs and the status they are accorded.

Broadfoot (1982) for example argued that the vast range of procedures for recording and

reporting student achievement in schools and colleges which were covered by the term 'profile' was both remarkable and damaging. It was the 'sheer anarchy of the movement' which, in her view, was the key factor in inhibiting the development of 'profiles' into qualifications of equivalent stature to public examinations.

It is remarkable that almost a decade later the lack of 'general agreement over what is meant by RoAs' was cited by Broadfoot et.al. (1991) as a major obstacle to the developmental project work of the Pilot Records of Achievement in Schools team. The confusion that existed concerning the purposes, principles, processes, content, format and patterns of use in RoAs was clearly a source of profound frustration. Important questions were raised as to whether RoAs were essentially 'a set of documents, a set of processes or a set of principles'

In view of this lack of general consensus, the PRAISE team found it necessary to put forward the following compromise definitions distilled from their observations of what influences informed the work of staff in schools. RoAs were variously defined as

- 1) A range of documents developed for the purposes of recording and reporting pupils' achievements (both formative and summative)
- 2) Specific processes and activities which have been developed to enable the recording of achievement, such as teacher-pupil discussions, target-setting and review, pupil-self assessment, the preparations of statements and so on.
- 3) A set of principles which can be applied to all teaching and learning, such as 'pupil involvement and ownership', widening notions of achievement in all learning contexts', 'positive portrayal', 'description rather than grades', 'grounding assessment in evidence' and so on.

(Broadfoot et al. 1991: 7)

Similarly the lack of consensus about what constituted RoAs resulted in the development by the PRAISE team of three metaphors; umbrella, foundation and initiative, to facilitate analysis.

This need to define by metaphor was one of the clearest indications that those involved with Records of Achievement, over a period of some thirty years, had failed to reach any clear agreement as to what constituted an RoA. It took this long to acknowledge that when two individuals were talking about Records of Achievement, they need not have been talking about the same thing. The PRAISE team (1991) seemed at last to acknowledge that a lack of consensus about what constituted Records of Achievement not only existed but was detrimental to their effective development. They admitted that RoAs failed to evolve in the way that many had hoped and failed to have anything like the desired impact.

In a sense, the statutory introduction of a common format was an inevitable response to a debate about the nature of Records of Achievement which was allowed to remain unresolved. Legislation has to a large degree rendered further debate fruitless; the questions Hitchcock (1986) raised in her summary of the main issues for debate, have been answered. The statutory introduction of the NRA can be seen as an attempt to settle the debate once and for all and to move records of achievement on so that something of their potential is at last more widely realised. If this is the case, recent legislation it would seem, has been called upon to repair the damage of the past. It is perhaps significant that the PRAISE team in their report of 1991 attributed the failure to two principal historical causes.

- 1) That the early development of RoAs was piecemeal and fragmented.
- 2) That Governmental direction and leadership were too late in coming.

Thus they acknowledged that the failure of the record of achievement movement to fulfil its promise is rooted in the very nature of its development. For this reason alone the developmental history of records of achievement is worthy of consideration.

If as some believe, the National Record of Achievement represents the end of the records of achievement story, then an attempt to trace the historical development of the movement from its grass roots origins is important, if only because it has led to the National Record of Achievement in the form that we now have it.

PART TWO

Historical Development

This section traces the development of Records of Achievement and identifies possible historical causes for the lack of consensus about their nature. It will be suggested that two parallel but essentially distinct approaches, profiling and personal recording, evolved. The fundamental differences between the two approaches will be briefly outlined. The principles of personal recording and its potential to motivate and to assist in the transition between school and work, will be examined. The decline of the movement will be attributed to an increasing desire to link recording of achievement to assessment. It will be suggested that later initiatives attempted to combine elements of profiling and personal recording, and that this was a contributory factor to the debilitating lack of consensus about Records of Achievement. The National Record of Achievement, it will be argued, is in part, a response to that confusion. The emergence of the NRA in recent years will be attributed to increased governmental involvement with Records of Achievement and the impetus provided by other external agencies.

2.1 Fragmented Origins.

The origins of Records of Achievement can be traced back to 1911 when the report of the Consultative Committee of the English Board of Education reported on the detrimental effects of examinations on pupils and teachers. Recognising the short-comings of public examinations and the need for a more comprehensive and relevant method of reporting, the Board advocated the introduction of a school-leaving certificate (Broadfoot 1982 : Fairbairn 1988).

The potential of the School Certificate examination to dominate the work of schools was a concern expressed in 1938 by the Spens Committee and one reiterated by the Norwood Committee which, in 1943, advocated a new form of leaving certificate. A two part format was proposed which would seek to provide a more informative leaving document. This would be achieved by including in addition to a section to record examination achievement, a section to record the nature of a pupil's contribution to the life of the school. The intention was that it should reflect the way in which pupils capitalised on the opportunities offered by their education (Fairbairn 1988).

In an attempt to counter the established trend of young people leaving schools in large numbers with no real qualification, the Newsom report of 1963 recommended that students should stay on at school longer and be provided with an education related more directly to adult life. Thus earlier calls for a more informative school-leaving certificate were reiterated; the envisaged certificate was termed 'a record of achievement'.

The difficulties inherent in arriving at a standard form of educational record for all secondary school pupils given the variety of organisation and curricula in different schools was realised at an early stage in Scotland. The working party set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1967, having been tasked with making recommendations about ways of recording pupil progress, recommended that official regulations at governmental level should not be used. It was thought that the prescription of any particular system backed by legislation might stifle the all important development of sustainable schemes. It was argued that it would be logistically impossible for the schools to cope effectively and efficiently with the potentially cumbersome system of individual pupil records.

Nonetheless, it was the Head Teachers' Association of Scotland initiative of 1972 which led to the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Pupils in Profile project. The SCRE profile was an attempt to present a full picture of pupils' aptitudes and interests in order to help staff offer advice on their curricular or vocational futures. It was designed to include references to leisure activities; to utilise common forms of statement but above all to be usable, comprehensible and readily available (Hitchcock 1986).

The grid format and the criterion-related checklist were designed with users' interests in mind and the qualities for which potential employers of school-leavers were believed to be looking, were included in the document. Like the systems before it, the profile was aimed at the 60% of school-leavers for whom the examination system provided no meaningful qualification. Ironically, as Brown and Black (1988) observe, it was the policy of 'Certification for all' recommended by the report of the Dunning Committee (Scottish Education Department 1977) which precluded any further significant work on profiling in Scotland.

The consequent decline of interest in the development of profiling in Scotland at this time was to mean that the Pupils in Profile project had more impact in the development of recording systems in England and Wales; many schemes based on the Scottish model developed in the 1970s and 1980s particularly in the F.E. sector where there was a clear interest in profiling based on skills checklists.

This Scottish influence represents one of two clearly discernible strands in the development of Records of Achievement in England, the other is represented by the emergent interest in Pupil Personal Recording.

2.2 The Promise of Pupil Personal Recording.

The primary aim of Don Stansbury's Record of Personal Achievement was to move the development of personal qualities to the centre of the schools' concern and to provide a system of documentation to support it. The idea of personal recording began in Swindon in the 1960s as a new way of motivating, organising and qualifying school leavers. It was conceived as a new way of bridging the gap between school and employment. Stansbury's personal conviction was that the changing nature of employment necessitated a change in emphasis in education if young people were to be given a chance to gain employment of any kind. He believed that school leavers needed documentary evidence of their strengths because ultimately there was no way of motivating, organising and qualifying all pupils through examinations. He argued that what was needed was a better balance between academic and personal education; this could only be achieved by the introduction of a formal device that would balance the structural support that the examination system gave to the academic side of education. The Personal Record of Achievement was designed to provide that balance.

Thus in the Personal Record of Achievement, personal qualities were revealed through documentation based on a system of personal recording which was both noncompetitive and non-judgemental. The record consisted of extensive, pupil-compiled documents often in the form of open ended accounts of experiences which the students themselves deemed to be of value or significance. As such, they contrasted strongly with, and represented a rejection of, the teacher controlled checklist approach which had characterised many of the Scottish initiatives and now characterised those of F.E. institutions.

The crucial differences between profiles and personal records were essentially those of intention and form. A profile was conceived as having a predetermined form which could be applied to a number of pupils who could be compared in ways and in areas dictated by the profiler. It was seen essentially as a description of a pupil, the form of that description having been drawn up before the profile was made. A personal record completed by the pupil, on the other hand, did not have a predetermined form, nor did the same items appear in all records, by virtue of the fact that

they were personal and individual. A profile sought to compare pupils by deciding in advance the points of comparison whereas a record was not a means of comparing people at all but rather, a means of revealing and affirming individuality. In brief, a profile contained assessments and a personal record of achievement did not.

Personal recording was an attempt to communicate the fact people are valuable as individuals, not for what they know and can do but for what they are. As such it was designed to celebrate the unique quality of people as individuals and was concerned with getting students to recognise their own uniqueness. Central to the philosophy of RPA was the belief that young people not only need to know what their qualities are but also need reliable and usable evidence to enable them to communicate those qualities to others. It was recognised that students need confidence and a genuine basis for self esteem and that assessment alone is not able to provide for that need. Stansbury further believed that the employability of school leavers could be improved by increasing their self-knowledge, their self reliance and their confidence. Personal recording reflected the belief that the educational system should be appropriate to the changing nature of employment; since technological advances in the world of work was systematically reducing the value of knowledge and skills that machinery could replicate, it was deemed important that students should be brought to a more explicit understanding of the unique nature of their personal qualities. As Stansbury argued,

To be employable people now have to be different. They require different, human capabilities. They will not be employed for what they cannot do or for what they do not know.

(Stansbury 1992d:19)

In this way people can be qualified for a particular job because they possess the right personal qualities. Because a record of experience has the potential to reveal personal qualities, the record is in essence a qualification, one that anyone can obtain and which is not dependent upon comparative assessments.

A record showed something about the students as individuals; it was not the same kind of information that is usually communicated by an examination result (which is a measurement on a scale formed by a process of comparison). Nor, being based on an individual's self estimation, was it like the information communicated by a third party judgment. This of course, had implications for those receiving the records. It was argued that those looking at records should not be engaged in judging or assessing or examining the young people who produced them but simply getting to know them by reading their records. The assumption was, that if an employer could see

what an individual had done, they would be in a better position to predict what they would be capable of doing.

2.3 The Demise of Personal Recording ; the rise of assessment

Whilst those involved with the personal recording initiative were always clear about these distinctions, others less familiar with its particular character were inclined to confuse it with systems with which they were more familiar. The initiative was dogged by the difficulties which some in education seemed to have in grasping the idea that it was not intended to be connected to assessment.

The result, of course, was a blurring of the distinction between the ideas of profiles and records of achievement which, if the conclusions of the PRAISE team (1992) are to be believed, hampered the development of the Records of Achievement movement and limited its impact. T.D.Swales, who had evaluated the RPA scheme for the Schools Council in 1975 - 76, is reported to have declared that

It is extremely unfortunate that the two radically different approaches have become linked not only in the public eye but also in the mind of key professionals,
(Stansbury 1992d: 21)

It is perhaps a significant factor in the subsequent development of records of achievement that attempts were made to unify these two opposing strands in a way which Stansbury never intended. Indeed he accepts some measure of personal responsibility for this tendency to regard profiling and personal recording as having grown up from the same root, attributing it to the title given somewhat misguidedly to the enterprise.

The word 'achievement' was wrongly chosen because it associated recording with the business of determining and documenting achievement and threw the emphasis back onto traditional ideas about making comparisons between students which are dependent upon systems of measurement and assessment.

As Stansbury acknowledges, in designing a new system, it was very important to drop the word 'achievement' and to get right away from it. The result was the Record of Personal Experience which was launched in 1974. In Stansbury's own estimation the RPE was a 'better version' of the RPA and by 1983 it had been adopted by 82 schools. However, the national initiative to develop Records of Achievement from 1984 made it difficult for the grass roots development of personal recording to continue. By the time the National Record of Achievement

was finally introduced in 1992, RPE was in use in just one school (Stansbury 1992 c).

Stansbury's correspondence on the matter is interesting and throws light on how the Record of Personal Experience came to be excluded from the national initiative when at the outset it had seemed central to it. He contends that the government had expressed an interest in RPE and that Sir Keith Joseph had become 'personally convinced of the case'. However, when the national initiative eventually got under way,

The rules were written so that every participating project had to include
an examining board and that was impossible for RPE
(Stansbury 1994 Personal Correspondence)

Involvement in the initiative under these conditions was impossible precisely because the key fact about personally compiled records is that they are not connected to the idea of assessment. The RPA and the RPE were conceived as alternatives to assessment and not as alternative ways of making an assessment.

Thus Stansbury perceived profiling as an extension of assessment and argued that personal recording is not possible within a system of assessment; the two elements being grounded in competing ideologies. Checklists of pre-specified items, which characterised profiling, represent an instrumentalist view of achievement whereas the open-ended statements on personal records represent a child-centered and progressivist view which places at the heart of education the personal development of the individual.

So much space has been devoted to a consideration of Stansbury's personal recording schemes, the RPA and the RPE, because they occupy an important place in the history of the development of Records of Achievement. They represented part of the 'continuing effort to escape the mould of elitist education and achieve greater relevance to the needs of the great majority of young people' (Stansbury 1992d) and were a response to the call of the Newsom Report for a 'valid major incentive' that was not based on the idea of an examination.

They are important too because they were so influential in shaping subsequent developments. As Fairbairn (1988) acknowledges,

The principles involved in personal recording embodied in the original RPA scheme
has been an already strong and widely spread influence on the profiling system.
(Fairbairn 1988: 40)

The above examination, then, is a useful backdrop against which to interpret and assess the subsequent developments of the records of achievement movement. It is illuminating too, to consider the reasons for and the implications of the failure of personal recording to take hold in view

of Stansbury's contention that,

the space which a system of personal recording might have occupied has been filled by the national system of records of achievement...and by the National Record of Achievement

(Stansbury 1992d: 53)

2.4 Beyond Personal Recording - Later Developments

In spite of Stansbury's belief that the two cannot be incorporated into a single system, much of the subsequent development of Records of Achievement throughout the 1980s, was characterised by efforts to combine profiling and personal recording.

The Evesham High School, Personal Achievement Record (PAR) was introduced in 1979, having been directly influenced in its design by both the SCRE profile system and Stansbury's RPE. It incorporated a mix of pupil initiated recording with a checklist of predefined skills; being one of the first school based profiles to do so. The format of the record provided separate pages of listing Language skills, Maths skills, and Personal and Social skills. Space was provided to list subjects studied and exam results whilst personal achievements were to be recorded in a separate section. The system was to be pupil initiated but teacher authenticated.

Meanwhile, 1982 saw the inception of the Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement, a scheme which also sought to combine elements of profiling and personal recording through its so-called P.G.E. components. The P (or personal record) component was to contain a description of personal experiences and achievements within and beyond the curriculum. It was conceived as having a formative function, as its concern was the self-development of the individual. The G (or graded assessment component) was to be a record of curricular achievements based on assessments made jointly by teachers and pupils in relation to criterion referenced assessment frameworks. The E (or examination) component was to consist simply of a record of all examination results.

The scheme is important to an understanding of the development of Records of Achievement primarily because it represents an initiative which extended beyond an individual organisation or consortia of organisations. The scheme brought together the LEAs of Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Somerset and Coventry; the Oxford Department of Educational Studies and significantly, the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations. This was a clear demonstration that a much more coordinated approach to profiling than hitherto witnessed was possible.

In some ways this initiative was a watershed in the development of Records of Achievement, as from this point on, schemes tended not to be devised in individual institutions in response to their own individual needs, but tended to be developed in more coordinated ways. This trend, Fairbairn (1988) suggests, culminated in the launch of the DES funded pilot scheme in Records of Achievement, perhaps the most significant move towards the nationwide coordination of the developmental work which had hitherto been carried out in individual institutions.

The task of discovering the exact nature of the development in individual schools was taken up by the Schools Council which initiated a wide ranging enquiry conducted by Janet Balogh, her much quoted report being published in 1982.

Stansbury (1992d), however, points to the limitations of the survey and to its success in creating an illusion of what was happening in schools. In his detailed analysis of Balogh's attempts to obtain information relating to 'profile reporting' he exposes the selective nature of the study. He draws particular attention to the exclusion of many schools from the survey because the schemes operating there did not meet the pre-specified criteria for inclusion. Ultimately, the published findings appear to have been based on only nine carefully selected schools. Thus Stansbury saw the project as little more than an exercise in finding schools that were doing what the Schools Council wanted, one which created an artificially generated profile movement which served only to confuse public and professional perceptions about what actually was going on. What it did do, perhaps more significantly, was to reinforce the primacy of assessment.

2.5 Governmental Involvement.

It was perhaps the potential of the movement to act as a vehicle for the communication of assessments which led eventually to governmental interest and the nature of their involvement. We are reminded of the centrality of assessment by the fact that once the national initiative began, the inclusion of an examining board in any project was a prerequisite for participation.

In 1983 the DES declared its involvement with the publication of a draft policy on Records of Achievement announcing the intention to establish a pilot scheme on the basis of which it would develop a National Record of Achievement for use in the secondary schools of England and Wales. The intention was to put in place arrangements under which, by 1990 all young people would have a Record of Achievement on leaving school. Given the rate at which most educational developments take place, Murphy (1986) and Gipps (1990) argue that the move from grass root initiatives to

government policy was extraordinarily rapid. What is in question, perhaps, is the authenticity of that grassroots movement or whether, in fact, the grassroots movement which most influenced policy was the one which had the largest groundswell of support. The fact that governmental involvement was accompanied by a growing emphasis on aspects of assessment is perhaps significant.

Of some significance too, perhaps, is the fact that the draft policy was openly criticised for failing to emphasise the formative processes of profiling which had become increasingly the area of focus for many school-based developments. Although this was remedied in the final document it may well have betrayed at an early stage, the government's apparent bias towards summative records and end products. Indeed, Assiter and Shaw (1993) have argued that the focus of Records of Achievement shifted in the late 1980s, placing the emphasis onto the document of record, the summative record to be used as a means of entry into employment, Further or Higher Education.

The policy led to the funding of 9 pilot schemes (in 22 LEAs) and a national evaluation body, the Pilot Records of Achievement in Schools Evaluation (PRAISE), was established. The Records of Achievement National Steering Committee (RANSC) was also established to receive reports from the scheme and the national evaluation and was tasked to report on the feasibility of a national scheme.

It would appear that the 1988 Education act was not without influence in shaping another interesting development at this time. Perhaps sensing the potential that Records of Achievement had as a means of recording and reporting the achievements of individual pupils in the new National Curriculum, the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) were drawn into consultation with RANSC to examine the requirements for reporting National Curriculum Assessments to parents. The final RANSC report (1989) was widely circulated and the expectation still was that Records of Achievement would become mandatory in 1990. However it did not and the apparent failure of the government to endorse its original policy statement,

created a mood of despondency among many involved with the development of RoAs and checked the growth of RoAs and the head of steam for development.
(Broadfoot et al. 1991: 3)

The subsequent hiatus in the leadership of central government may well have proved problematic for the more coordinated development of Records of Achievement that some had been looking for. Broadfoot (1991) believed that the initiative maintained its momentum primarily because schools and LEAs which had invested heavily in terms of time, commitment and

resources were reluctant to change existing policies and practices. She argues that whilst this 'gathering momentum generated by the schemes themselves' might well have contributed to the survival of the initiative itself, it may well have had a negative impact long term, serving to ensure that the confusion surrounding Records of Achievement was allowed to continue unchecked for a little longer.

The momentum for the continuation of Records of Achievement also may well have gained weight from another external agency. In 1989 all Chief Education Officers were given guidelines on the use of Records of Achievement within the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. The recommendations were remarkably similar to the recommendations of the RANSC report except in their relative emphases. Here the summative document was to be the area of prime focus as was the recording of skills and generic competencies and, perhaps more significantly, action planning. Profiling and individual action planning were built into TVEI contracts and the involvement of many LEAs in TVEI initiatives was widespread. How much this influenced later developments, is a matter of speculation but for the first time those pupils leaving school in 1995 will have been involved in a process of personal action planning as part of their Record of Achievement activities.

As has already been shown, by 1992, the national scheme was given a new lease of life with the introduction of the NRA. In many ways it was a direct descendant of previous record of achievement initiatives and shared with them much that is worthy of discussion. In other ways, it has emerged as something unlike its precursors. Attempts to reconcile these almost contradictory strands have thrown into the arena of debate some issues which in spite of their familiarity, remain nonetheless problematic.

PART THREE

3 Some Issues Considered.

This section examines some of the potential weaknesses inherent in the NRA. It will be argued that that the two forms of motivation it offers can often be in tension. The potential of the NRA to motivate all students in any significant way will be questioned and objections that it actually discriminates against some students will be raised. The question as to whether the format of the NRA is the one of most use to employers will be examined through a brief consideration of employers' perceived needs. It will be contended that user prejudice could well diminish the intended impact of the NRA. Philosophical objections that the NRA performs a restrictive function and represents a form of surveillance and social control will be noted. It will be argued, however, that the most serious threat to the success of the NRA is the extent to which the system lends structural support to academic achievement, according it higher status than the recording of personal achievement and experience.

3.1 Motivation : Process or Product ?

One of the key ways in which records of achievement have always sought to benefit students is by increasing their motivation. It is argued that the increased motivation arises from two distinct sources; from the variety of interactive processes which recording achievement promotes and from the document which is invariably the end product of these processes. However, there seems to be little evidence that the two sources lend themselves to simultaneous exploitation. It would appear, rather, that the two sources of motivation are not necessarily compatible.

Traditionally, supporters of the Record of Achievement movement have tended to align themselves with one of two broad groups,

for some the emphasis is upon the formative role and consequent changes in the curricula and teacher pupil relationship, while for others equal or greater attention is given to a summative role in aiding a young person's transition to work, further education or training.

(Burchell 1987: 231)

Traditionally, however, there has been wide acceptance that the most significant motivational benefits arise from the formative processes. Brown (1988) reminds us that some record of achievement schemes considered the process of such supreme importance that they were 'toying

with the idea of not producing a summative document at all', believing such a document to be of marginal importance compared to the impact of Records of Achievement on the teaching / learning relationship. James and Stierer (1988) also indicated how many developers regarded the formative process as the most important aspect of records of achievement, placing a great deal of emphasis on refining teacher assessments and giving pupils more responsibility in assessment and recording. The underlying belief was that motivation would flow from participation and ownership. This was very much the focus during the 1970s and schemes were characterised by the process of individual target setting, recording and reviewing. The claim has always been that the formative process has a beneficial effect on pupils' learning and their levels of attainment.

Similarly, It has often been argued that pupils benefit from the formative processes of recording achievement because of the increased communication between teacher and pupil which improves the quality of the relationships between the teacher and the taught. This in itself enhances student self-esteem and improves motivation. Both self esteem and motivation are further enhanced by the fact that individual student progress is the shared aim of teacher and student. Diagnostic assessment becomes the focus of interaction and source of motivation.

Thus, through self reflection, students are helped to develop self-awareness and self confidence, indeed, Assiter and Shaw(1993) as advocates of the NRA, see this to be its primary purpose; they argue that the NRA should be seen as a document that sets in train a process of reflection and reviewing that continues throughout ones life.

It is clear that the agencies responsible for the development of the NRA are anxious, on the face of things, to promote the processes rather than the product. Using the NRA; Guide for schools (1994) seems to deliberately play down the final document by identifying summary recording as only one of four processes which comprise an overall process of continuous recording. Action planning, assessing, reviewing, all of which are underpinned by an additional process of guidance, make up the other elements which, taken together, are to be seen as the 'principles of recording achievement.' This tendency to emphasise process rather than product is clearly evident in the guidance notes, which encourage students to consider the NRA in terms of it uses, the different circumstances in which it can be used and the variety of people with whom it can be used. Particular attention is drawn to the benefits it can bring in increasing a student's skill in completing applications and performing effectively in interviews.

Butterfield (1990) argues convincingly that it is not the document that will most benefit a student at interview, but the skills of self-evaluation that have been developed during the

compilation of the document; thus the student who has grown within the context of recording achievement, in the broadest sense, will be most advantaged by the possession of a document of record. Harlen et al. (1994) are mindful of this, perhaps, when they advise that,

The establishment of records of achievement as a regular structure for summarising achievement at intervals during pupils' school careers would provide a natural base for the government's National Record of Achievement.

(Harlen, Gipps, Broadfoot and Nuttall 1994: 279)

Underlying such advice, one feels, is a sense of unease that the formative processes developed in schools might be under threat from an NRA which may be seen, all too easily, as a user oriented product. It is not unreasonable to assume that those institutions with well developed programmes which seek to use the formative process for effecting curricular reform; for enhancing the quality of relationships and for the improvement of student learning, will do everything within their power to continue to use them, the obligation to produce an NRA summative record, however, does not make these procedures inevitable.

Brown (1988) argues that the production of user oriented documents often has the effect of imposing constraints on the processes that are encouraged for formative use. In the case of the NRA the real danger exists that the efforts of students and teachers will be geared to the production of a document by a given deadline and that the beneficial, formative processes will not be fully engaged. In such a case it could be argued that such processes will become peripheral to the business of recording achievement rather than central to it. Indeed, it has been argued in relation to Records of Achievement that,

If they are not introduced alongside compatible methods across the whole spectrum of teaching and learning, they will sound a discordant note, and much of their potential will be lost.

(McGuff 1990: 119)

Because it is possible for the NRA to exist outside the context of students' normal learning, the fear is that all the processes leading to the production of the NRA might become little more than 'bolt' on in character and whilst seeming to build on sound record of achievement principles, need not necessarily do so.

It could be argued, for example, that Action Planning, the newest dimension, seeks to empower students by focussing on the ways in which they can take hold of their own futures and by providing a structure through which they can take responsibility for making decisions about their lives. Whilst discussion, reflection and self review are encouraged, the whole process could be regarded as a rather artificial attempt to develop, what behaviourists would term, an 'internal locus

of control' (McGuff 1990). Certainly, it compares unfavourably with similar attempts to empower students through the processes which permeate the teaching / learning interactions where the changes effected, it could be argued, take place in a more meaningful context and are actually more central to the personal development of students. The intended impact of processes such as Action Planning, may well be diminished if they are seen as necessary primarily for the successful completion of a document. If the importance of the summative document becomes dominant in the minds of teachers and students the potential of the formative processes to significantly affect the lives of students will be diminished.

Assiter and Shaw(1993) argue that the introduction of the NRA represents just such a shift in emphasis, away from formative onto the summative document of record. Burchell (1987) argues that possession of the summative record alone has the potential to boost the confidence of the individual and so increase motivation. The motivation thus offered is of a practical, tangible nature and one that impinges directly on the lives of young people. Possession of something which is designed to help students in their search for jobs or training places, represents a very immediate source of confidence and motivation.

There are, however, dangers inherent in seeking to motivate by too strong an insistence on the value of the document as a passport to employment or training. There is a danger that the increased confidence that many believe arises from the possession of a completed document of record, might be based on false promises and unreal expectations. This has implications for the way in which the National Record of Achievement is 'sold' to students in the initial stages. Any motivational benefits achieved will soon be lost if students, convinced by well intentioned teachers that the record will improve their job prospects, learn the hard way that the document guarantees nothing concrete in the employment market.

It must be said, that as yet the National Record of Achievement is unproven as a currency and as Burchell (1987) observes, too little is known, in general, about the way such documents actually do assist pupils in the transition between school and work / training. The NCVQ & SCOTVEC guide for schools (1994) gives some guidance as to how the NRA is intended to assist students in making that transition. Significantly, this guidance is couched in language which promotes the idea that this is to be achieved either through the growth and development of the individual or through their active engagement with the exercise. In explaining that the NRA can be used with a variety of people ranging from careers officers, trainers, work placement supervisors, Youth Training managers, the guidance literature points out that the value

of the document is dependent, in part, upon 'students sifting, selecting and summarising that information appropriately'. Moreover, it is made abundantly clear that the document is not to be viewed as an end in itself and that its value lies not in the possession of it but in the new skills that ownership necessitates.

In developing a summary record, students should be encouraged to consider the various circumstances in which they might wish to use their NRA, and how best to communicate their achievements effectively. This focus can increase students' skill in completing college/job applications, and in interviews, where it can enhance confidence and interview skills.

(NCVQ & SCOTVEC 1994: 5)

Great care appears to have been taken to avoid any statements which might imply that the NRA provides an automatic passport to employment or training. Thus potentially misleading statements such as

The NRA can promote individual's access to education and training throughout their lives

(NCVQ & SCOTVEC 1993: 3)

which appeared in the 1993 version of this information leaflet, seem to have been carefully edited out. The reasons for this apparent shift of emphasis are unclear. It might be a response to criticism that in promoting too strongly the functional benefits of the NRA, an opportunity for the personal development of students is lost. It might also reflect a growing awareness that the overstated and largely unsubstantiated claims that the NRA is a 'passport to working life' are being taken too literally and, more significantly, that the NRA has not lived up to expectations in this regard.

The impression created by this shift in emphasis is that the document is as much for the student and their personal development as it is for other outside agencies who might seek to use it. It could also be interpreted as a move to divert the criticism, which is sometimes made, that summative documents are of most benefit to employers seeking to differentiate between candidates in a process of selection (Pole 1993). Stansbury (1992a) argues that the sole function of summative documents which insist, as the NRA does, on a standard format is to allow comparisons to be made more effectively and assessments to be made more easily.

3.2 A Format for Selection or Motivation?

In spite of the attempts of the NCVQ and SCOTVEC to anticipate them, questions still remain as to who benefits most from the NRA, students or those involved in selection for

employment or training and whether the principal function of the document is to increase motivation or to facilitate selection.

If the National Record of Achievement has the two main functions of being a source of motivation for the students on the one hand and a source of information for employers to make selections between students on the other, then it may well be open to the charge that, as a coherent system, it is seriously flawed. Hargreaves (1986) argued strongly that the motivation and selective purposes of Records of Achievement are incompatible in important respects. Central to his claims are the two closely related issues of content and format.

It has long been recognised that the choice of format for any final, summative document is not without significance. McGuff (1990) acknowledges that the choice of format and the design features of the documentation carry within them very clear messages about the purposes they are expected to serve. Burchell (1987) argued that the impact of any profile would depend as much upon the form in which they were presented as upon the information they contained. The format chosen for the NRA, with its almost total emphasis on open-ended prose statements generated by pupils in consultation with teachers, confounded the predictions of several commentators (Burchell 1987 ; Satterly 1989) and represented a total rejection of the other available formats namely grids; checklists and comment banks.

It has been argued (Hargreaves 1986) that the more open-ended the final statement of a summative document is, the more the motivational aims are served and conversely that where the prose summary is more closed and involves the student less, the motivational impact is less strong. Superficially, then, it might appear that the designers of the NRA's standard format have placed student motivation as the highest priority. The rejection of comment banks, which tended to assist employers in the selection process and tended to eliminate from the final document any real sense of individuality, could further be interpreted as favouring pupils' motivational needs above the needs of employers. The format which makes extensive use of discursive student statements, it could be argued, is likely to produce a summative document which is highly individual and unlikely to be confused with that of any other pupil.

Such claims, however, warrant careful examination. Critics would argue, that far from promoting highly individualised records, the standard format encourages a uniformity which serves the interests of the employer rather than those of the students. Stansbury (1992a) in his attack on the National Record of Achievement documentation argues that the insistence on a standard format is in tension with at least some of its expressed aims.

Central to his argument is the belief that summative documents with a standard format actually fail to motivate. It is commonly agreed that motivation is directly related to the degree of student involvement and the extent to which a given task is student-initiated (Hitchcock 1986). As far as the summative document is concerned, we are reminded by Hargreaves (1986) that,

Where this final statement is an open-ended one in which the choice of mentioned activities and experiences, the qualities they imply and the very words in which all these things are expressed are heavily influenced by the pupil, motivational ends could well be strongly fostered....Where the prose summary is more closed...the consequences for motivation are likely to be less positive.

(Hargreaves 1986: 208)

The NCVQ & SCOTVEC guidance literature continues to insist that the success of the NRA depends on the standard format, claiming that

If the NRA is to be effective as a national document, consistency of presentation is important.

(NCVQ & SCOTVEC 1994: 5)

Critics could argue that the NRA is about sameness and conformity; a charge of which the developers seem all too aware. In the same document, users are advised that the standard sheets provided may be compiled in an 'order which best suits the student'. This could be interpreted both as an attempt to create an illusion of freedom and an attempt to appease the critics who claim that the standard format severely limits the students' capacity to use the document to their best advantage.

The impression that the NRA gives students any degree of expressive freedom is arguably a false one. Not only are the sheets provided standard, so too are the areas on which students are invited to comment. In the NRA the prescription of format and of content are inextricably linked. Allowing students to compile the sheets in any order they wish, does not address the central problem. The NRA can be seen as a stifling document which does little to promote the expression of individuality. Indeed, the NRA meets most of the conditions identified by Hargreaves (1986) for a document which has limited motivational benefits; students do not have a completely free choice about the activities or experiences mentioned and achievements and, moreover, experiences must be evaluated and assessed, not simply described.

This has implications for the linguistic demands of the task which increase the difficulty of the whole exercise. The recording of achievement and experience has become a very abstract and difficult literary exercise which is beyond the capabilities of too many students. Stansbury (1992a) argues the point convincingly. He claims the provision of standard A4 sheets to be used for open-ended discursive prose contributions makes a degree of literary skill essential if pupils are to

particularly where it was provided in a pupil's personal statement.

Both Burchell (1987) and Pole (1993) have claimed that the principal use of summative documents, as seen by employers, is in providing a useful starting point for discussion at interview, giving the student more confidence and the employer more fruitful avenues to explore. Its usefulness in performing the more complex function of matching individuals to particular posts is more limited. It is limited, Pole (1993) argues because of the failure of the NRA to meet one of its own stated aims, that is to produce documents which are sensitive to the characteristics, achievements and experiences of individual pupils.

Given that employers have expressed an interest in the personal statement section and have indicated that the main function of the document is to aid discussion, a convincing argument could be mounted suggesting that a less restrictive structure and a more individualised document might benefit both students and employers. If a more individualised record would provide more fruitful areas for discussion at interview and thus give the employer a clearer picture of the candidate as an individual, the validity of a format which impinges on that could seriously be questioned. Whilst the NRA might superficially seem to assist employers in making comparisons between students, it may fail to assist them as efficiently as it might in providing them with what they seem to require, an opportunity to engage with the candidate as an individual.

It is interesting to note in this connection the objection raised by Stansbury (1992a) to the initial proposals that the NRA should be limited to four sides of A4. He argued that the length of summary documents which contained records of experiences and achievements compiled by students were likely to vary in length and should be allowed to do so for the simple reason that

Some records are long. Some are short. Some reveal many interests and activities
Some reveal consuming specialisms. All records are different because people are
different.

(Stansbury 1992a: 77)

Although Ashforth (1990) suggested that the survey evidence pointed to the fact that a recommended maximum length would find favour with many employers, he also indicated that the point at which a summary document was deemed to be unhelpfully long, depended on a number of variable factors - the size of the employing institution, the type of vacancy, the number of applicants and the recruitment procedures involved. It would be possible to argue that, from an employers' perspective, it was never essential for a standard format to be developed. It might well be the case that the movement towards a standard format was based upon assumptions of

PART FIVE

School Based Research

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this school-based study was one specific aspect of achievement procedures followed at Kindsor School, an 11 - 18 comprehensive school, in year eleven, of the final summative document, the NRA. The purpose of the study was to establish as accurate a picture as possible of the reality of the experience of students engaged in the process of the production of the document. The context and the research methods employed appear at the end of this section.

An attempt was made to elicit the thoughts and feelings of the students. A universally administered questionnaire and a series of selective, semi-structured interviews were conducted. It was hoped that such a study would yield sufficient evidence to allow an evaluation of the procedures which have been established in Kindsor School leading to the production of the NRA. It was hoped that this evaluation would highlight areas for further consideration. It was hoped that this evaluation could be usefully addressed in an attempt to improve the experience of students engaged in the same process.

In reporting the findings, information will be drawn freely from the interviews; an attempt will be made to highlight any significant relationships. An attempt will be made to analyse the information generated by the questionnaires. Although a comprehensive breakdown of the results is provided in appendix 1, the following is a summary of the findings.

5.2 Student Definitions

During the course of the informal interviews, all the interviewees were asked to define the NRA. The responses given were revealing. The NRA was defined as:

A record of the things you've done; the things you'd like to do; the things you've passed, achievements, feelings about subjects and different people.
Jenny

...it contains your personal statement which tells you about yourself and what I've done...it tells you things like that.
Michelle

employers' needs which were ill-founded.

It would appear that the developers of the NRA do make several assumptions about the needs of employers. First that employers need to be able to differentiate between candidates effectively and that documents which look broadly the same and contain broadly the same types of information can help them do that. Second, that the documents are capable of providing the sort of information that employers want. Third, that employers themselves have a clear idea about what they are looking for and finally that all recruiters and employers are looking for the same things.

Goacher (1983) highlighted the problems that exist with assuming that all employers agree about what a record of achievement should contain. He contends that agreement about what is required of a young recruit is possible only at the most superficial of levels. Not only are some employers uncertain about what skills or characteristics their recruits would require but

Much selection at small organisation level is inevitably dealt with in an intuitive, certainly an unanalysed way. Large organisations use more sophisticated techniques and while they may be prepared to allow some aspects of the selection process to be accomplished by other means, it must be doubted if they would wish to lose control over their own specific processing.

(Goacher 1983: 47)

The standard format may well have been an attempt by the developers to introduce an element of conformity into the selection procedures used by employers but one which was based either on false assumptions or sweeping generalisations about employers' needs. Assessments like Goacher's, if accurate must raise serious doubts about the capacity of the National Record of Achievement to play anything but a supporting role in the selection process.

Stansbury (1992a) claims that one reason why his system of personal recording did not emerge as the dominant form was because employers had never really been consulted about their needs. Whilst it is probably true that more needs to be known about what employers want from the NRA and how they react to it, a number of serious attempts have been made to solicit the views of employers. For example, Pole (1993) reminds us of the five areas identified by the CBI as those which should be included in a summative document, namely

- * information about the student (Factual data; information about interests).
- * information about the school.
- * attainment in core skills / basic abilities.
- * examination results and other qualifications
- * personal comments / record giving evidence of attendance, punctuality dependability etc.

Also recorded by Pole (1993) were the four areas identified by employers involved with the London Record of Achievement scheme as being most useful for recruitment purposes :

- * details of extra-curricular activities.
- * details of what the student has experienced or been involved with
- * details of plans and ambitions
- * details of key achievements and how the student has developed over the past five years.

It would appear that such information has proved useful for the developers of the NRA as all these elements are represented in the most recent documentation.

3.4 Content, User Prejudice and Censorship.

The requirement to provide sections giving factual information - personal details; employment history; attendance; qualification and credits would provide little difficulty for most students, although that is not to say the call for their inclusion is without serious implications. The requirement for students to record a summary of their achievements, experiences and interests, on the other hand, is perhaps a little more problematic.

The potential benefits to students are two fold; the inclusion of such material would allow potential recruiters the opportunity to get to know the students as individuals and would provide a focus for more meaningful discussion at interview. Secondly the processes of collecting, sifting, selecting, summarising and reflecting upon evidence of achievements and experiences has the potential to enhance student self-awareness and confidence.

There is an argument, however, which suggests that the NRA is not necessarily the best vehicle for exploiting these benefits. The difficulties caused by the requirement to reflect upon, evaluate and assess these experiences rather than simply to describe them has been dealt with elsewhere. Because the NRA tends to be completed with one eye on the use to which it will be put by employers and other end users involved in training and recruitment, important issues relating to user prejudice become significant .

Hargreaves (1986) highlights the problems which might arise if the achievements deemed to be important by a pupil or the evidence provided in support of them do not reflect the kind of qualities or experiences valued by employers. Pupils who happen to declare their identity through activities, experiences and achievements which signal adherence to conventionally acceptable norms will have little difficulty, it is argued, in putting their documents to successful use as they are likely to conform to employers' perceptions of the qualities which are most appropriate to employment. Those who seek to declare their identity through more unconventional activities and experiences are likely to find themselves in a more difficult situation because they do not conform

to the perceived expectations of recruiters.

The dilemma faced by those responsible for guiding students in the production of their record, is this; should they risk prejudicing a pupils' chances of employment by allowing them to include information which might be unfavourably received or should they seek to create a favourable, but essentially false, impression with employers and in so doing suppress important aspects of the pupils' individuality. The centrality of the teacher's role in all this is recognised by those who claim that there are

...powerful forces operating within the schools which communicate to pupils the kind of activities which are and are not acceptable.

(Broadfoot et al. 1990: 100)

Implicit in this is the suggestion that it is schools or individual teachers rather than employers who effectively make the decisions about whether or not activities and achievements are socially acceptable. The question is, are teachers qualified to make such important judgments and are they justified in doing so? Do teachers really know what an employer will find acceptable or unacceptable? Do teachers know how employers will react to unconventional elements in a summative record? More to the point, do employers themselves know what they want or how they will react to the unexpected or the unconventional? Are the best interests of pupils served if there is the chance that the very aspect of their personality which might attract the attention of a prospective employer has been edited out by a well-meaning but over cautious teacher?

For some, the issue of user prejudice is no issue at all unless it is the teachers themselves who indulge their own prejudices because

It is fundamental to the idea of records of achievement that users have prejudices. The only people who must not exercise their prejudices are the teachers.

(Stansbury 1992d: 48)

Stansbury takes issue with the authors of the National Evaluation Scheme for Records of Achievement and with the teacher who, as reported in the evaluation, chose to suppress the record of a student because of his insistence on recording the statement, "I play darts for the Marquis of Granby". Stansbury argues that it was not the boy who was at fault for failing to recognise how such comments might be negatively received by employers but the teacher, who was at fault on two counts; firstly for perpetuating the assumption that records are written primarily for the benefit of an external audience and secondly for assuming that the prejudices of that audience can be accurately predicted.

The case highlights the dangers which arise when teachers take on the responsibility for

censoring the document of record. What must be recognised, however, is the fact that they are forced into this invidious position because of the uncertainty as to whether the main purpose of that document is aiding employers in the selection of candidates for employment or in aiding the personal development of the students.

It could be argued, that any system which not only allows but encourages an adult to reject as unworthy an achievement or experience which a pupil deems worthy of recording, becomes a system of assessment which benefits, in a mechanical way, the external user and which misses the opportunity of being of direct personal benefit to the individual pupil.

3.5 Surveillance and Control.

Hargreaves (1986) highlighted similar philosophical concerns which are raised by Records of Achievement. The personal record component, for all its potential contribution to a pupil's personal development, was seen as having

...an extraordinary capacity to restrict young peoples' individuality, to discipline and control them through the power of a pervasive and intrusive pattern of personal assessment.

(Hargreaves 1986: 214)

As such the whole system could be seen as a covert system of surveillance and social control. In a now well known analogy, Hargreaves make use of Foucault's coined expression 'panopticism' to highlight the dangers that those engaged in self-reflection and self assessment are exposed to. It is argued that students are opening themselves to external observation whilst being unaware that such observation is taking place. The suggestion is that pupils should be free from the processes of self assessment and self evaluation which, rather than being a benefit to them, serve only to limit them in this potentially damaging way. Moreover, such processes may be little more than a subtle means of encouraging individuals to internalise regressive social norms. There may be a case too for suggesting that some areas of personal experience should remain outside the domain of assessment, irrespective of whether the assessment be carried out by oneself or those in positions of authority. It is, however, the assessments carried out by external examinations and which are backed by a considerable weight of authority which have the greatest potential to undermine the impact of the NRA.

3.6 Hierarchies of Achievement

It could be argued that one of the fundamental weaknesses of the NRA resides in the fact that the results of external examinations are printed alongside the records of personal experience and achievements. That the two appear in the same document is an inevitable source of tension. It is a natural reaction of employers to respond more strongly to the former, simply because this is what employers have always done. Fairbairn (1988) citing Goldstein and Nuttall (1986) points out that there exists a 'hierarchy of achievement' in which academic accomplishments are traditionally accorded a higher status. In order to compensate for this there are important practical considerations, not only as Burchell (1987) realised, in terms of offering better education to pupils in how to present and exploit documents at interview but also in the need for better liaison between schools and the employers in order to ensure that employers are better prepared to receive the documents. Whilst it is true that the level of awareness of employers is likely to increase naturally as more and more pupils leave school with the National Record of Achievement, there is a sense in which something practical must be done to redress the balance between the importance accorded to the record of personal achievement and that accorded to the record of external examination results.

If nothing is done to change the perceptions of employers, there is always the danger that they will find it difficult to resist attaching prime importance to the examination grade. If this is the case, the recording of personal achievements and experiences becomes little more than an entertaining sideshow. This is particularly significant for the less academic student for whom the recognition of a wider range of achievements in a wider range of contexts, represents a real opportunity to show themselves to advantage and compete, not by virtue of their performance in examinations but by their performance as people. Viewed in this way, the NRA remains little more than a reporting system with a controlled slot for a personal contribution, which is helpful to the academic successes but which gives nothing to the rest. If this is true, then the NRA may well serve only to promote the same culture of success that academic qualifications have always promoted, with the least academic being the ones to suffer.

To alter this situation would take a genuine act of will. Stansbury (1994), in private correspondence, reports how Sir Ron Dearing recommended that the recording of achievement of the least academic should be reviewed but how financial and technical restraints meant that an

enquiry into the whole issue made it possible to consider only the reporting of their academic achievements. The resulting proposal that pupils performing below level G in GCSE should have the steps of their performance delineated more accurately, serves only to exacerbate the plight of the less academic as it becomes possible to pin-point with even greater accuracy just how unsuccessful they have been. In a sense, it is this insistence on the superiority of formal and academic qualifications over personal ones, which the NRA helps to promote, which may result in its ultimate failure.

If such failure is to be avoided and if students are to benefit from the massive time investment which is demanded of them in simply producing the document, then it is incumbent on those involved in guiding them toward that end to exploit every opportunity to make the enterprise meaningful and worthwhile. In order to do this more effectively, a greater understanding of how students perceive the benefits of their involvement with NRA is needed.

PART FOUR

Research Methods.

It was decided at an early stage to elicit student opinion by means of questionnaire and informal but structured interviews with students. In conducting interviews with students, I was aware that I would be following a well established tradition of educational enquiry, interviews being acknowledged as an important means of eliciting information. I was further persuaded by the fact that informal conversations with students had yielded a good deal of casual information; I was anxious to create some kind of structure whereby the information received could be recorded and organised and thus gain some credibility as usable research data. The decision to use a questionnaire was prompted by my desire to test whether the views and opinions expressed by any individual were representative of the views held by the majority of the population. The decision to administer the questionnaire to the whole year group involved in the compilation of the NRA rather than a sample drawn from that population, was prompted by the additional desire to acquire, as far as possible, a comprehensive picture of what information was actually finding its way into the summative documents of school leavers. From this point of view alone, the principle of 'the more respondents the better' applied.

4.1 The Questionnaire

4.1.1 Designing the Questionnaire

Because the study as a whole was motivated by a desire to explore issues which were of genuine concern to the students themselves, the decision was made at an early stage to involve the students themselves in the compilation of the questionnaire. Thus, a mixed group of twenty students drawn from across the ability range and representing all five of the year eleven tutor groups were informed of the nature of the intended research. They were asked to generate a series of questions which, in their opinion, would best elicit from the whole year group, genuine responses regarding the NRA and their experience of compiling it. Over a hundred questions were generated in this way.

The students' questions were analysed and grouped according to common areas of concern or interest. Questions generated fell broadly into the following categories.

- * Purpose : what are records of achievement for?
- * The Role of the Teacher : how do they introduce the NRA?
: in what ways do they help?
- * Completing the sheets : deciding what to write

: putting thoughts and feelings into words
: using IT
- * The demands on time : is the time spent on it worth it
- * Uses of the document : how does it help?
: how does it help in getting a job?

Whilst a number of questions could be assigned to all the above categories, the two areas which generated most questions, and which were therefore deemed to be areas of greatest concern, were those relating to the level and nature of teacher support and the actual composition of the final document.

It did not prove possible to use a selection of the questions in their raw form as had been originally intended. Many questions were thought to be more 'leading' than would have been permissible and too many others were expressed in such a way that they would have elicited an open ended response. The decision was made that the questions on the questionnaire the questions should be 'closed' to facilitate the collection and interpretation of data from what would inevitably prove to be a large response. Unfortunately, this decision was not communicated to the twenty students responsible for the generation of the initial batch of questions and the opportunity to use their questions in an original form was lost. However the questions which finally did appear were designed to explore the same areas of concern and the exercise was deemed worthwhile for it established at an early stage that the issue was one which generated strong feelings and about which they had many concerns.

Whilst the decision to include only closed questions in the questionnaire could be defended on the basis of ease of data analysis, it gave rise to misgivings about whether the students were being artificially channelled into making responses with which they did not fully agree. It was hoped that the provision of a space at the end of the questionnaire for more open ended responses would provide an opportunity for the expression of strong opinions which the somewhat restrictive format might well have denied. It was also hoped that any views expressed in this section would be strongly held and would allow an element of cross-verification, serving either to confirm responses made elsewhere or, indeed, to raise issues not previously addressed. The decision

seemed to be in part vindicated by the feedback from the twenty five students involved in the pretest of the questionnaire; none experienced any sense of frustration at the rigid format, or expressed the opinion that they were unable to give a response which truly reflected their standpoint. Prior to the pretest, a draft questionnaire was circulated to those tutors with year eleven students engaged in the final stages of the compilation of their summative document, and amended in the light of their comments and criticisms. The principal alteration was one of nomenclature; the draft questionnaire referred throughout to the National Record of Achievement. It was pointed out that the target population had not been introduced to this term and that this might be a potential source of confusion. Thus the term Record of Achievement was substituted.

4.1.2. Pretesting the questionnaire

A pretest group of twenty-five students was selected and asked to take part. They were similar to the target group but not ultimately part of it. This group comprised fifteen year ten students, in the first year of preparation of their summative documents and ten year twelve students who were engaged with the up-dating of their recently completed documents. Whilst no specific problems were reported, important information was gathered about the time that was needed to complete the questionnaire, information which was communicated to those tutors who had agreed to administer the questionnaire on my behalf.

4.1.3. Administering the questionnaire

In view of the fact that the intention was to target the whole of a year eleven group it was decided to administer the questionnaire 'at a stroke', in the same tutorial period at the same time. This took place, significantly, in the first tutorial period following the official deadline for completion of the document. Thus, all students were likely to be in possession of a recently completed document of record, a fact which may well have coloured their responses.

4.1.4. The Respondents

The intention had been to administer the questionnaire to an entire year group; in the event this did not prove possible. On the day in question, ninety-five year eleven students were on roll

(forty-eight boys; forty-seven girls), ninety-two of whom were present. Responses were received from only seventy-seven students (forty girls and thirty-seven boys). Thus only 81% of the whole year group were surveyed (ie 77% of boys in school and 85% of girls). The reasons for this shortfall were never investigated nor was any attempt made to survey the remaining students at a subsequent date. The response was nonetheless considered large enough to reveal reasonably reliable general trends.

4.1.5. Collating the data

Three basic principles underpinned the format which was devised for the collation of data. It was deemed important that the responses of individuals could be retrieved if necessary; that cross-referencing between specific elements of an individual's responses was possible and that the response could be examined on a gender basis. Thus, each script was given an identifying code number and each individual response was logged on a series of analysis sheets using that code. In this way, all the above principles were adhered to although in the event the scope of the study such a detailed breakdown proved unnecessary. All open ended comments were examined and loosely categorised according to subject. Again the identifying code would make retrieval possible if and when required.

4.2 Research Methods - Interviews.

The intention was to conduct a series of informal but structured interviews which would be recorded on audio-cassette. A series of questions was prepared which broadly aligned with the categories reflecting student concern highlighted by the earlier exercise in which students themselves generated questions. Indeed, a number of the questions to be used in interview were taken verbatim from the students themselves. Several questions were prepared in each of the following broad categories Motivation; Help and Support; Using the NRA; Effects and Outcomes; Fairness/ Equality of Opportunity. Some attention was given to the wording of each question before they were transferred to a series of prompt cards, one for each theme, which were to be used during the interview. There was no predetermined order in which the questions would be asked although it was determined that each subject would be broached with each of the students.

The flexibility of this approach allowed students freedom to talk about issues other than

about
facts &
opinion,
everyday

than those which had been decided upon.

Volunteers were sought as the interviews were scheduled to take place in what was the students' free time. It was therefore impossible to select interviewees on the basis of their known views. The ideal interviewees would have been those with strong views both positive and negative but it did not prove possible to ensure this. The only control I was able to exercise was in ensuring a gender balance. As it transpired, all but one of the interviewees were known to me which may well have had a positive influence in terms of their willingness to talk frankly and openly about their views and feelings.

⁶Eight interviews were conducted in all. Four of the interviewees were male and four female; four were students in year eleven and four in year twelve; all were on the verge of leaving school with their completed NRA.

The interviews themselves were conducted in informal surroundings. The purpose of the interviews was shared with the students and, with their permission, the interviews were recorded on audio-cassette. The duration of the interviews varied between twenty and thirty five minutes. Salient points from each interview were transcribed and student views were grouped according to theme areas of contrast and commonality were identified. One interview was transcribed in full.

6 interviews
kind of
person
views
and feelings

20 - 30
minutes

It just summarises your achievements, experiences of me and all my education things as well...basically it's about me...about myself and how I feel.
Michael

However imprecise these definitions appear to be, there is a sense in which these perceptions shape the nature of the NRA. Definitions framed by others count for little; the NRA is what the students believe it to be. Interestingly, during the course of the interviews some of the students, without prompting, effectively defined the NRA for themselves. For Richard, it is a 'remembering book'; for Michael, "it's like sort of a diary of me and how I've come through life". These significantly concise definitions, encapsulate, what is for them, the essence of the NRA. It could be argued that there are two dimensions to these definitions; they appear to be made up of elements of 'received wisdom', which are simply repeated, and 'original' elements which come naturally from within. To some extent this reflects the nature of the students' experience of the benefits of the NRA as revealed by the study; there are some benefits in which they believe because they are told of them and some they believe in because they experience them first hand.

5.3 Is the NRA worthwhile ?

The final question on the questionnaire asked students to declare whether they had found the experience of putting together an NRA worthwhile. 87.8% of students responded positively. In spite of this only 49.4% of students declared that they had found the experience an enjoyable one. The issue of enjoyment will be considered in due course, but what these figures seem to indicate is that a sizable minority of students considered the experience to be worthwhile in spite of an indifferent experience in producing them. That they did not let this fact affect their assessment of the worth of the enterprise, may well suggest that they sense that issues other than enjoyment are at stake. It is clear that students have emerged from the experience with a sense that they have been involved in something worthwhile. One possible explanation would be that they feel that they have, at the end of the day, produced something that is going to be of benefit to them.

5.4 Perceived Benefits.

The evidence suggests that students believe they are, indeed, involved in something worthwhile because they have at the end of it something which they can use when entering the

employment / training market. 96% of all students declared the intention of using the NRA in helping them apply for a job or college place. The immediacy of that prospect perhaps did not entirely account for that response, as 80.5% expressed the intention of keeping the record updated, although it is true that their reasons for so doing are not revealed. Nor indeed is there any guarantee that such a high proportion of students will actually do so.

There is clear evidence to support the view that students believe in the potential of the document to be of use to them in improving their prospects of securing employment or gaining a college place; 84.4% believing that to be the case. This would appear to leave a tiny minority

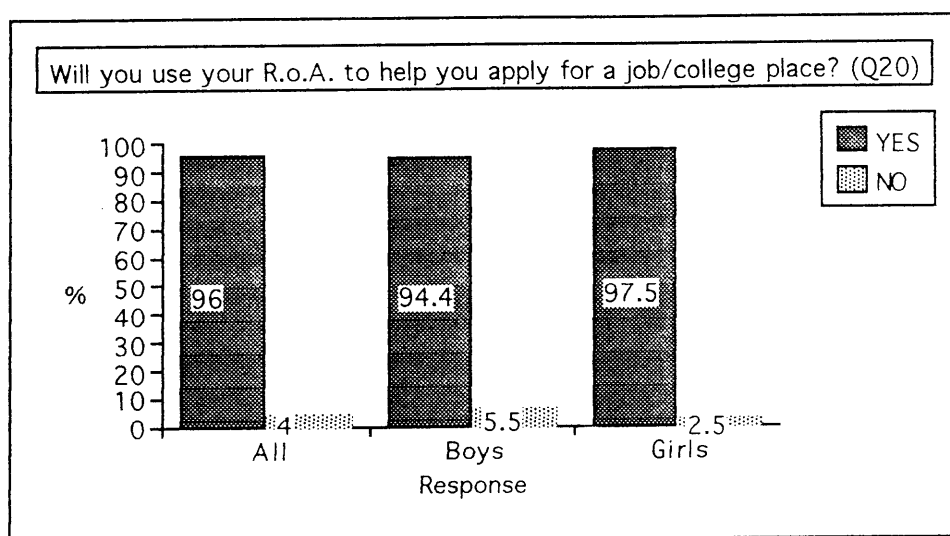


Fig. 1 Intention to use.

(11.6%) who intend to use the document without any real belief that it will help them. Indeed there was evidence amongst those interviewed that there was an 'if you have it you might as well use it' philosophy. Michael believed that not to use it would make the whole exercise a waste of time, whilst Guy believed, "You have to use it to benefit from it". The principal way in which students envisaged using the document was in an interview situation. 88% believed that the NRA would be of use to them in an interview situation whilst only 52.6% believed that the document would help them during the application stage to actually get an interview.

A majority of the students (70.6%) believed the NRA to be a document of mutual benefit to both applicant and employer, although 22.7% believed the employer to be the main beneficiary. The questionnaire failed to explore the ways in which these benefits were felt although the interviews did give some insight into student perception in this area.

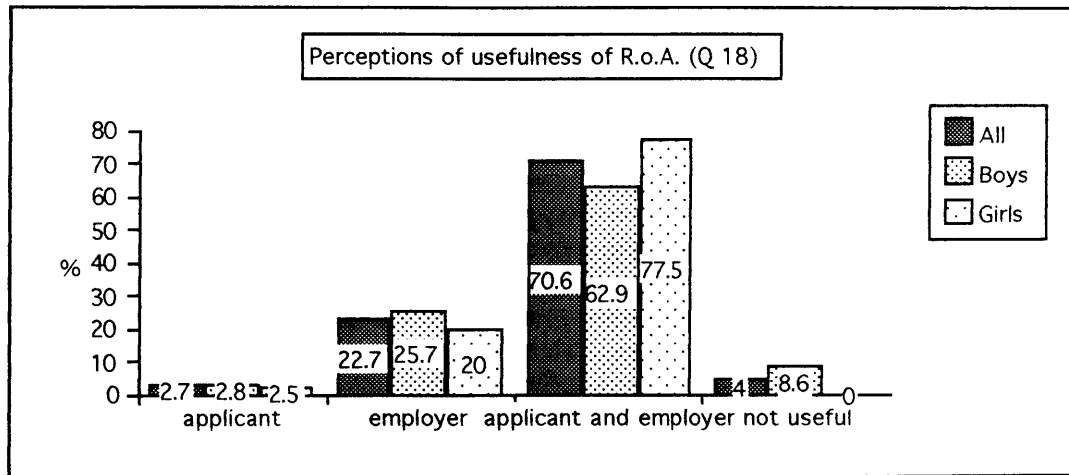


Fig. 2. Perceptions of usefulness.

5.5 Using the Document.

Before examining those perceptions, it must be said that in the vast majority of cases any such perceptions must have been based either on second hand reports, imaginative projection or wishful thinking. Of those surveyed, only 19.5% had used the NRA to support a job application. Although the questionnaire failed to provide any evidence of the numbers who had actually used them in interview, the likelihood is that it is significantly fewer than this, particularly if students had interpreted this question as relating to full time employment only.

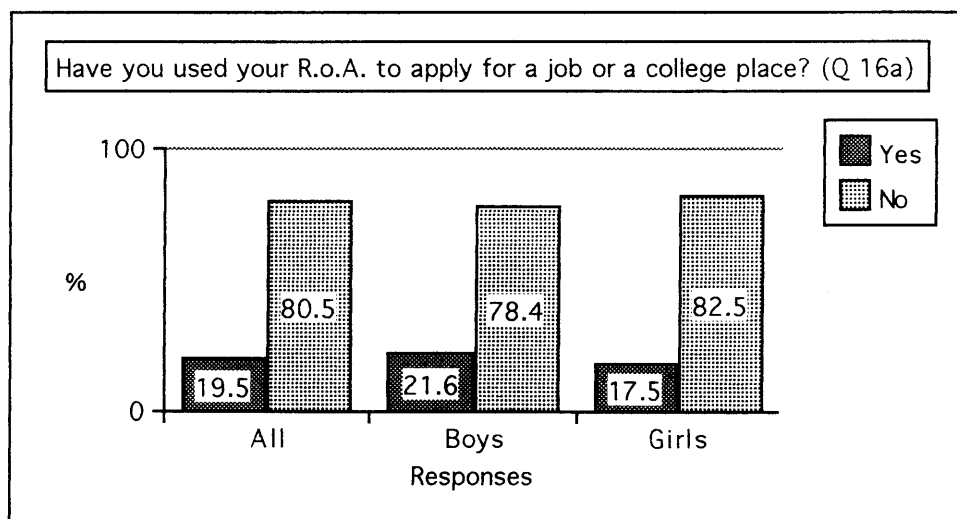


Fig. 3. Experience of Use

Of those interviewed, only two had first hand experience of using them in an interview

situation. Michelle told of how the NRA had been influential in securing holiday employment and how those responsible for making the appointment, having had no prior knowledge of the NRA, were impressed by the document. This in itself indicates the importance of the schools' role in ensuring that all local employers are made familiar with the system. There was evidence to suggest that a number of other students had achieved similar success in using their NRA to acquire holiday or weekend employment. Kim also reported experiencing the benefits of the NRA first hand; on the strength of the experience which had been recorded in the document she was offered entry to GNVQ course at a higher level than the course she had originally applied for. Kim's success was known to other students and both Richard and Michael referred independently to it in their interviews. There is little doubt that the motivation of other students was fuelled by witnessing the successful use of documents and hearing feedback about positive reaction to the them. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that in this survey 74.4% of students were aware of others using them and thus alive to these possibilities. The students themselves recommend as a suggested improvement, the establishment of more structured networks for the dissemination of such potentially motivating information.

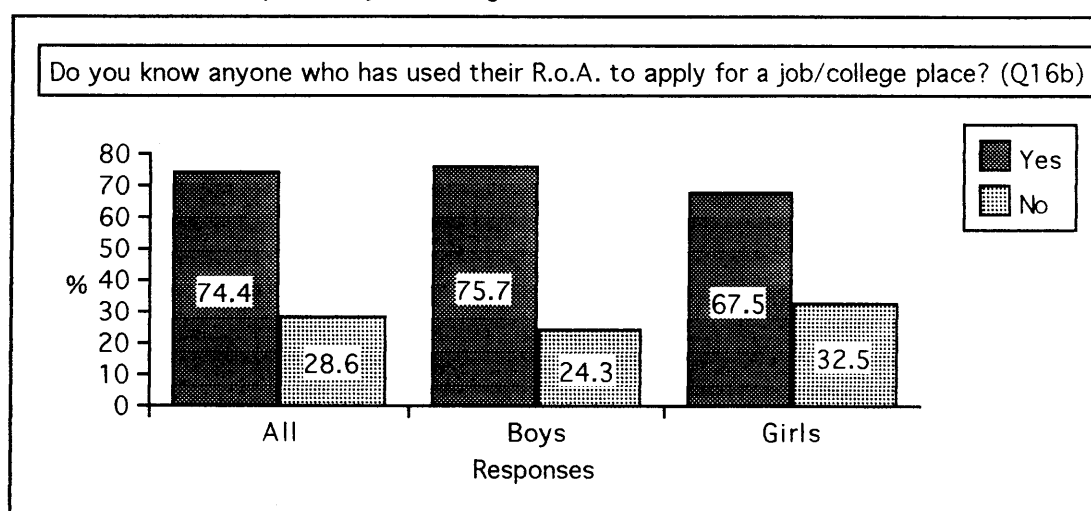


Fig. 4. Awareness of use by others.

It emerged through the interviews, that there was a degree of uncertainty about the mechanics of using the NRA either before or during interview. Only one student, for example, indicated they had any idea about how the NRA could be used to support an application. If a similar ignorance is responsible for the unusually low percentage of students believing that the NRA can help them get an interview, then it might be an area which needs to be specifically addressed across the board at Kindsor School. Developing in students a better understanding of how best to exploit their documents was a concern of Burchell (1987) and is a central theme of the

NCVQ & SCOTVEC (1994) guidance literature. Pole (1993) records a similar lack of understanding about the mechanics of using R.o.A.s amongst the students in his own survey. Such ignorance, it could be argued, threatens to limit the effectiveness of the NRA.

What is clear, is that steps need to be taken to clarify the use of NRAs in interview. Of those students interviewed, three believed that they would take the initiative, if necessary, and hand over their documents to the interviewer but hoped that the documents would be requested. Similarly, whilst there was general agreement that the main purpose of the document was to improve the quality of discussion, the students were divided as to the main focus of consideration. One hoped that the interviewer would focus on those elements which the applicant values most; one believed that the main focus was most likely to be experiences; two believed it would be the personal statement and yet another believed they they would all be subordinate to a consideration of examination results.

5.6 Four Key Sections.

The questionnaire revealed important data in relation to the four main sections of the NRA at that time; the personal statement; employment history; the record of experiences and the core skills. As action planning was not a feature of the NRA prior to 1994, no evidence was available from those documents completed in that year. Student response to the action planning component would inevitably become part of any future research in this field.

In respect of the four sections, students were asked to identify which they thought was most important; which they found easiest to complete; which they found hardest to complete and

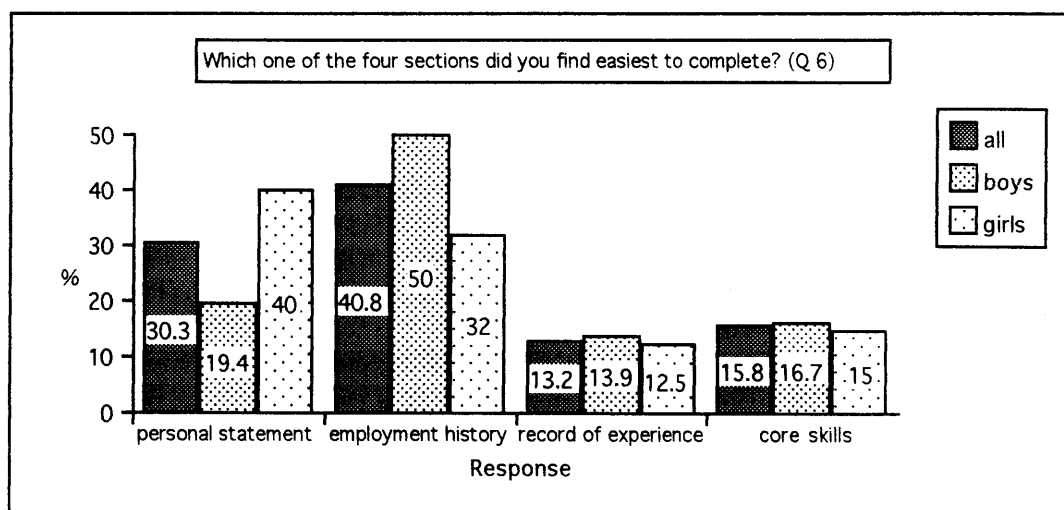


Fig. 5 . Ease of completion.

which they considered to be of most interest to prospective employers / recruiters. The intention was to explore the degree of match or mismatch between what students themselves valued and what they perceived as being of value to outside agencies. On a practical level, it would highlight those sections which students found problematic and provide a focus for future developmental work aimed at providing support for students and improving their experience. In spite of a certain ambiguity in the first of these elements (it failed to take account of the potential reasons for which students could consider the section important), some interesting data was revealed.

For example, the employment history section was thought by more students to be more important to recruiters than to students themselves (20% against 3.9%). Ironically this section was found to

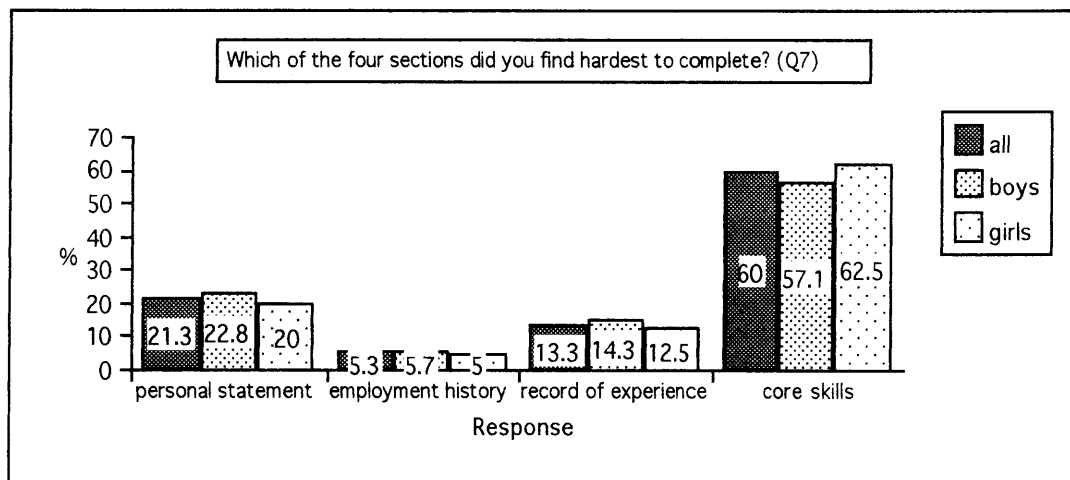


Fig. 6. Difficulty of completion.

be the easiest to complete by the greatest percentage of students (40.8%). The section which most students found hardest to complete was that dealing with the Core Skills (60%) and yet this was deemed to be the second most important section from their own perspective as well as from that of employers. The sum total of this is that students may well feel that they are completing with ease sections which they do not value and are struggling to successfully complete the very sections that they believe to be of most value to others. If this interpretation is accurate, it would be logical to view this paradoxical situation as a demotivating factor.

Interestingly, only two sections emerged as being considered important to students, those relating to the Core Skills (22.4%) and the Personal Statement (67.1%). The same two sections featured highly in terms of student perceptions of what would interest employers/ recruiters. These figures would seem to indicate that at least 15% of the students, attached most value to something which they felt was valued less highly by employers, namely the Personal Statement. This seems to evidence a degree of uncertainty on the part of students as to whether their

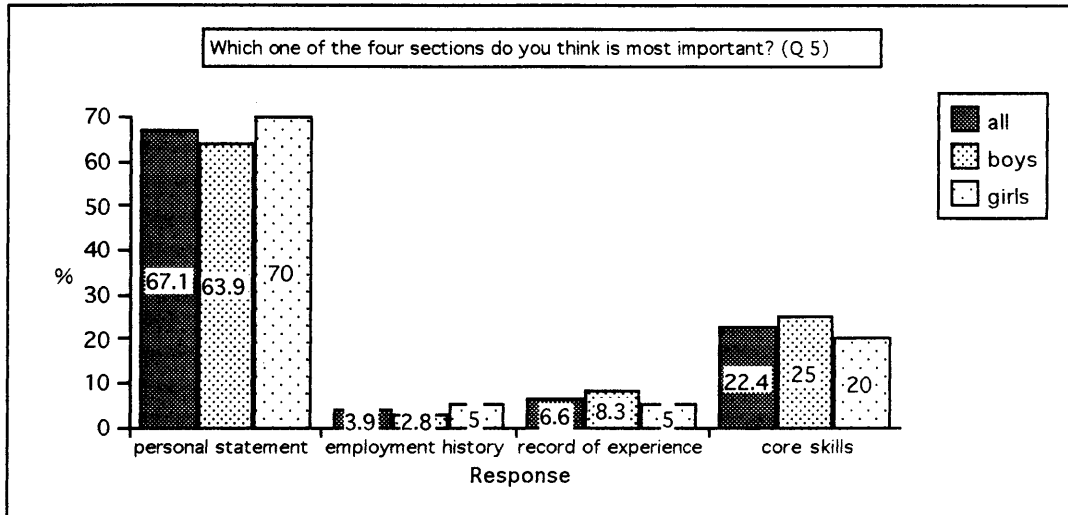


Fig. 7. Importance to student.

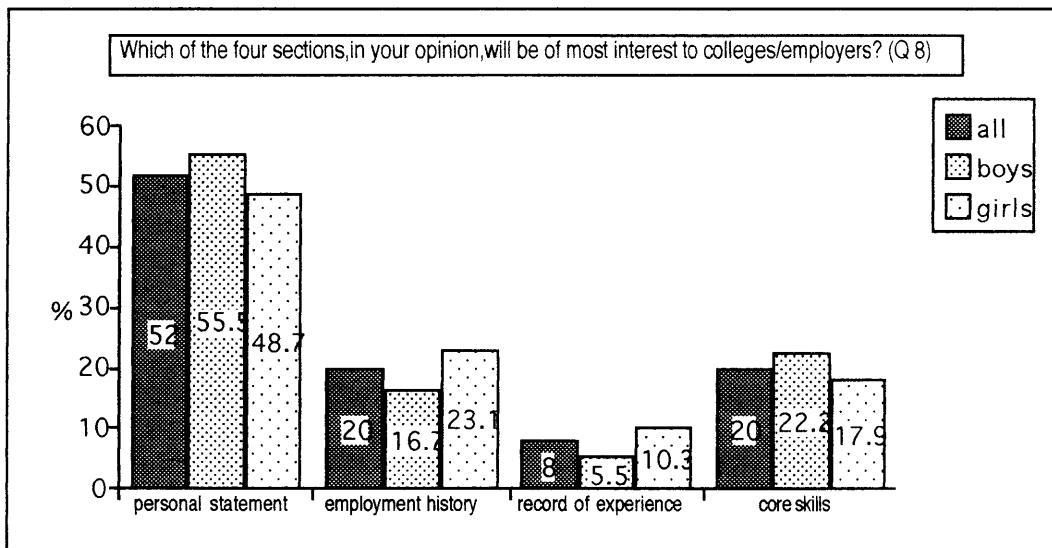


Fig. 8. Perceived importance to employers / recruiters

values are the values held by prospective employers. Such tension might be a demotivating factor but this would require further verification. However, the survey did provide evidence that in other contexts the mismatch between student views and employers perceived views does have a demotivating effect; where students believe that employers are interested primarily in examination results, they are less likely to take the business of recording achievement seriously. There is a case, perhaps, for greater efforts to be made to clarify for students exactly what is valued by employers and what is not. However, as has already been seen, it is questionable whether employers themselves know what they value or whether all employers value the same things.

5.7 The Personal Statement

The importance of the personal statement to students was more than confirmed by those who were interviewed. It was by far the section which was commented upon most frequently and in the most positive terms. Typical was Jenny's response to an enquiry about which section she felt would be of most use to her,

My Personal Statement because it shows what sort of person you are,... your feelings...how you go about things...and more about you rather than your education... it's your own identity really.

Jenny

There is little doubt that some students see the Personal Statement as an extension of their personality. In recalling her feelings in an interview situation where an employer was reading the NRA, Michelle reported,

I thought, "Oh no! If he doesn't like it, he's not going to like me."

Michelle

Of those interviewed Michelle was not alone in believing that the degree of self identification adds to feelings of nervousness in interview and the sense that rejection is more personally felt if the document does not bring success. In the main though, there was a general consensus that the principal value of the Personal Statement lies in allowing a potential employer to see what kind of person the applicant is

It gives the college an idea of your personality

Jenny

They'll see from my Personal Statement what kind of person I am.

Tony

I think that when an employer sees it they'll think, "This is a person."

Maria

It was perhaps the desire to have their individuality recognised that lead the majority of respondents to the questionnaire (52%) to believe that the Personal Statement was the element in which employers were likely to be most interested. As has been seen elsewhere, research by Ashforth (1990) would, in fact, support this assumption. The fact that more than anything else students require employers to recognise them as people with a worthwhile contribution to make would also lend support to many of Stansbury's arguments as presented earlier.

The fact that 90.9% of the respondents felt that employers wanted to know about them as people as well as workers may well represent an element of wishful thinking. When students talk

about employers responses, references to 'hope' abound, thus Richard,

I'd hope they'd take an interest in what I do 'cos if they'd employ me, I think they need to take an interest in what you're actually like yourself outside the work area.
Richard

This may not be, in reality, the employers' stance (more needs to be known about that), the point is that students are prepared to believe it is. At any rate, 89.6% believed that the NRA should be considered as an integral part of the application process. Given the evidence that for many, the Personal Statement is almost synonymous with the NRA, it is tempting to suggest that this figure is so high because the majority of students believe it is the contribution they have to make as people which represents their best chance of gaining employment. Students believe in themselves as people and appear anxious that employers do too.

5.8 The NRA and Personal Development

The views expressed by those interviewed suggest strongly that the NRA is useful to many students in that it helps them develop a better sense of their own identity and to establish a sense of their own self worth. It would appear to do this in a number of ways.

First, as Richard observes, the document itself, as a kind of 'remembering book', facilitates the process of looking back; a sense of self worth is achieved by surveying all one's achievements and experiences. The document fulfils the valuable function of drawing these together. This act of reflection itself can clearly engender strong feelings.

When you start you've got absolutely nothing and you build it up, like your past really. It just makes you feel good.

Jenny

I feel very proud of myself that I've done all this. It's all my own work. It's me.
Michael

Nor is this a passive, self-indulgent, backward looking process; it is a process with clear motivational potential. One student rationalises it thus,

I think it helps me move on. It shows what I'm capable of and that I can do the same sort of thing again and keep going and going and get really good.
Michael

5.9 Self - perception

The document would appear to have the power not only to improve the students' self

perception but also to enhance others' perceptions of them. Two of those interviewed observed that the document has the potential to promote peer interest. It allows students the opportunity to talk publicly about aspects of their lives, experiences and personalities which would not otherwise be mentioned. Students report also that teachers and even parents come to look at them in a new light often according them unaccustomed respect. In the case of Tony the respect was more general,

I suppose a lot of people think you're a layabout and that, but once you've got it all there, everything you've done... you've achieved in school, they might think the better of you.

Tony.

5.10 Confidence

Almost all the students interviewed reported that involvement with the production of an NRA had resulted in an increase in confidence although only one indicated that the new found confidence had a direct influence on his behaviour,

I just find it gives me a bit more confidence when I'm talking to people.

Michael

for all the others, the confidence seemed to be of the 'inner peace' or 'inner strength' variety and was linked to the notion of self discovery. Two of the girls interviewed, with outwardly different personalities, summed up the the changes brought about in this way,

More confidence. I've found out about myself. The person I want to be which has helped a great deal.

Maria

It gives you a big ego really...[laughs]...you've got actually something that's personal. It identifies you as your own self instead of just passing exams and certificates because so many others will have them..so it's an identity really.

Jenny.

5.11 Enjoyment

There was agreement too that enjoyment of the whole experience was directly related to the fact that it was a highly personal piece of work in the students were given an opportunity for self reflection and discovery. More specifically enjoyment was linked directly to the composition of the Personal Statement, Michael going so far as to report that enjoyment for him did not enter the

process until work on the statement started.

Another vital factor influencing the level of enjoyment appeared to be the degree of collaboration between students. Student interchange was seen by those interviewed as being vital to the success of the compilation stage of the NRA. Both Michael and Richard revealed that whilst in their experience, group work was not a strategy which was deliberately cultivated by the supervising tutor, it tended to evolve anyway. Jenny reported how group work and the spirit of cooperation sprang, in her experience, from an uncertainty and anxiety about what was required and an inability of some to make progress alone.

5.12 Cooperation and Collaboration

This slowly evolving pattern of group work, which led naturally to cooperation and mutual help, was characterised, in Maria's opinion, by a lack of competition. Richard believed the initial competitiveness between students which he observed, was due to a lack of understanding of the intentions of the NRA and soon passed, being replaced by an ethos of greater cooperation. Richard accepted the inevitability of this working pattern leading to informal comparisons being made; others provided incidental evidence that this was in fact the case. The comparisons, however, tended to be supportive rather than hostile in nature. The only areas where informal comparisons of the documents were seen to reveal significant differences between students were those of quality of expression and degree of technical accuracy.

This might support the view that the NRA is, indeed, a document which discriminates against the less academic and is perceived to be such by students. This tended to be a matter of concern for those students who experienced such difficulties and those students who did not. Maria believed that, in the final analysis, the lack of competition and rivalry was due to the fact that the document is a highly personal record and that students, almost naturally, respect the fact that everyone is an individual and everyone is different.

Because so many students seem to see the act of collating experiences and achievements for the NRA as a means of shaping their identity, it could be argued that group collaboration has a large part to play in that. Evidence from the questionnaire may support this as 80.8% of the students surveyed claimed that they had gained ideas about what to write from talking to other students. Even if the claims that this interaction is a source of personal growth are overstated, the statistic which seems to support those claims, must have implications for the ways

in which tutors structure any sessions in which students work on their NRA .

In retrospect, it is a source of regret that the questionnaire did not seek to enquire into student perception of the personal development potential of the NRA. The interviews revealed that it was this aspect of the NRA which brought the most profound benefits; the study left me in doubt as to how representative the experience of these few students was of the experience of the whole year group. The 67.1% of students who highlighted the importance for them of the Personal Statement perhaps gives some indication that it was, whilst the fact that only 49.9% stated that they had enjoyed the experience raises some doubts. All but one of those interviewed declared unequivocally that they had enjoyed the experience. Significantly, the source of this lack of enjoyment was identified by the student as being the role adopted by his supervising tutor.

5.13 The Role of Teachers

It was clear from the outset that one of the major concerns of the students was the nature of the teachers' role in the whole process of compiling the summative document. Attempts to

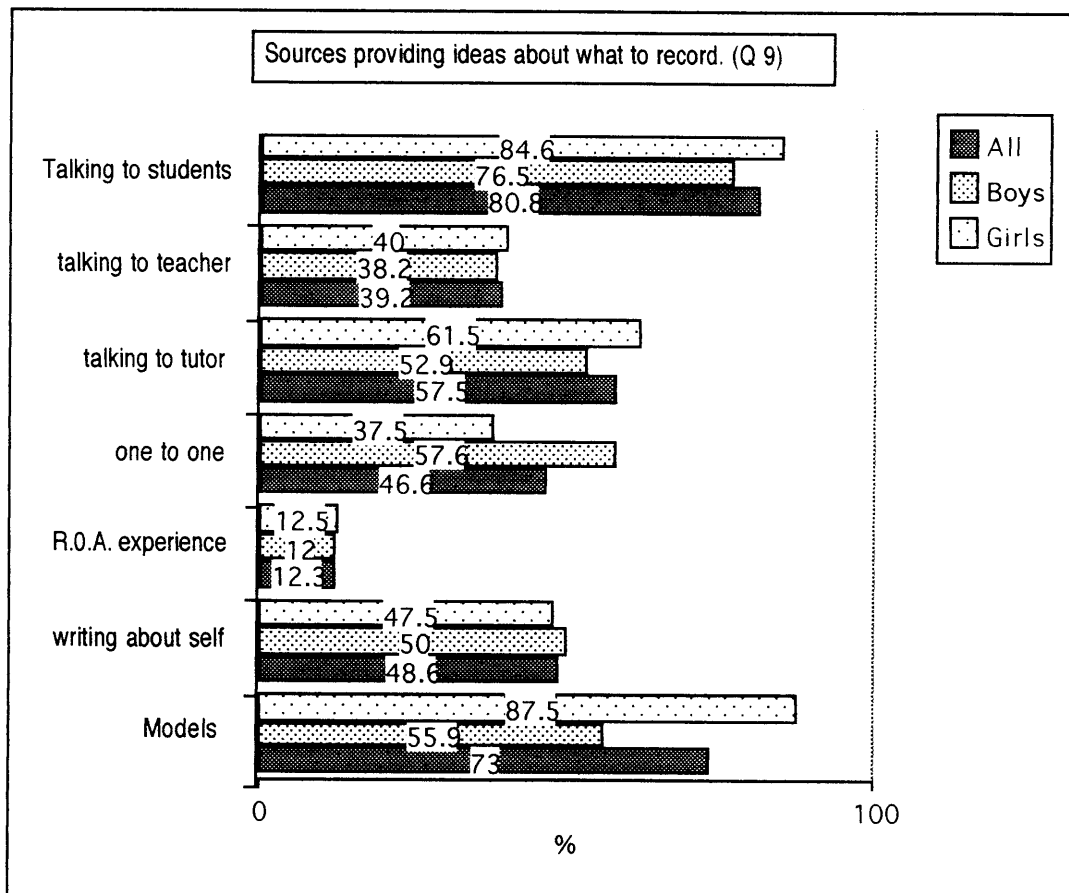


Fig. 9. Source of Student ideas.

explore this concern by means of the questionnaire were flawed in the sense that the specific question encouraged students to consider the role of the teacher primarily as one of providing ideas about what to write; it became clear in interview that students had more sophisticated perceptions of the teachers' role. However, what the questionnaire did reveal was that only 57.5% of students gained ideas about what to write by working with their tutor in NRA sessions; 46.6% from the 'one to one' interviews with the tutor and only 39.2% from talking to subject teachers about skills and experiences.

Comments from those interviewed were also revealing on this issue. Both Richard and Jenny were in agreement that the tutor is the best person within school to oversee the compilation of the summative document. By virtue of the unique personal relationship that is likely to exist between student and tutor, it was thought that tutors would be better placed to ensure that the document brought out the individuality of the student.

Attempts in interview to explore how far students related the NRA to the Record of Achievement initiatives which were being carried out in contexts other than the tutor period and by individuals other than the tutor, were largely unsuccessful. Without exception, the students interviewed saw the contribution of subject teachers in such superficial terms as how far teachers offered practical help in the IT room and the extent to which the record encouraged informal chat. It may be that there is a case here for the school to develop ways of making more explicit the connection between the compilation of the summative document and all the other Records of Achievement processes in school which are well developed and which have been externally validated.

The students themselves acknowledged that their own experience could be further improved if the teachers were better informed about the NRA before they embarked on the role of supervising the production of the final document. Michelle, Jenny and Tony commented independently that tutors, sometimes by their own admission, appeared to know little about principles and purposes of the NRA and were unable to respond adequately to some of the more sophisticated enquiries that students made. In mitigation, it could be stated that the NRA was at the time a new development and that the knowledge, experience and expertise of the staff will naturally improve. However, the fact that in Kindsor School the tutorial staff attached to any one year group changes each year, highlights the need for good internal liaison to ensure that staff experiences are shared and that lessons learned are communicated. One area which might be worth further enquiry is the extent to which the experiences of an individual tutor, having been

through the process with a year eleven group, affects their own practice in subsequent years when they revert to tutors lower down the school.

5.13.1 A Motivational Role

There was a degree of consensus that one of the chief contributions of the tutorial staff was in providing motivation. The motivational function, it appears is achieved in a variety of ways. There is evidence to suggest that teachers used a form of external motivation by stressing the status of the NRA as a legal document. For some students this proved to be an effective, if crude, strategy although at least six students found it necessary to comment in their open-ended written responses that they felt the teachers over-exaggerated the importance of the document. Another form of external motivation was the constant 'chivvying' which the students observed. Whilst many acknowledged this was probably necessary, Guy, Kim and Michelle commented that the pressure was too intense and the constant 'nagging' became ultimately a source of frustration and demotivation. For Tony, at least, this was the reality of the experience.

...half the teachers got a bit carried away really..always getting on your back about doing it all the time. It gets a bit boring and you really get sick of it. You just want to pack it all in. You just really hate it after a while.

Tony

Thus, teachers appeared to be treading a very fine line between motivating students and demotivating them. Again, perhaps there is a case for developing awareness amongst tutors of the use of more positive strategies for providing motivation. The expertise clearly exists but perhaps the motivational potential of tutors could be more fully exploited if it were less ad hoc in nature.

There is evidence that some students responded most positively to tutors' attempts to motivate them when that motivation was based on the use of praise. The data from the questionnaire aside, some students did look to the tutors for advice about what to include in their documents and appreciated their efforts when, as a result, they were able to recognise the value of experiences and achievements that they had previously undervalued or ignored. Tony was one to acknowledge this,

My First Aid, St. John's Ambulance that we do in Outdoor Ed. One, Two, Three Cross awards, I wouldn't have really thought of putting that in to go to college. It's not the sort of thing you need to go to college but it shows that you've got abilities and that you can do something.

Tony

Richard argued that access to the tutor as a source of advice was an important factor and that lack of access could be a demotivating influence leading students to abandon the enterprise. Both Tony and Michael note that problems were caused by the unavailability of subject teacher at the time when statements relating to core skills need validation. The potential that casual remarks made by teachers have to influence student perceptions of the NRA is indicated by Tony who believed that the typical response of teachers to the validation of core skills was, "Oh God, another one!". The implications for the school are clear; teachers need to be aware of the potential impact of negative comment, however jocular their intent, and perhaps more significantly more structured approached to that validation process might alleviate any tensions inherent in the present, rather haphazard 'system'.

5.13.2 Supporting the less academic

It was noted that access to teachers for most students was limited because most of the teachers' time was taken up by a minority of students. Michael observed that teachers spent most time helping those students who found written expression difficult whilst Richard, Tony and Guy were in agreement that one of the tutors' key functions appeared to be in monitoring the technical accuracy of documents. This was deemed to be an important function, for those interviewed were very clear that the ability to express oneself and handle language could 'make or break' a document, even ones which were otherwise well supported by evidence. Kim realised that those who were most linguistically adept would be most advantaged whilst Michael believed that those who were least likely to benefit were those who had difficulty articulating their feelings or writing about themselves in a positive way. Indeed, this seems to be a problem for the 36.4% of the respondents who identified that they would have liked more help in this area. Whilst it was acknowledged that students experienced difficulties in writing about themselves for a variety of reasons; lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, fears of boasting, it was felt that it was the weakness in technical aspects of expression which was most likely to disadvantage the individual. It was nowhere suggested that the help offered to the less academic in this way was resented or that it impinged upon the validity of those documents; students saw the correcting of the technical aspects of a document a legitimate function of the teacher and one which was necessary if the question of inequality related to ability was to be addressed.

5.13.3 Censorship Role

More contentious was the censorship role which many teachers clearly adopted, where control was exercised over what went in to the final document. More significant was teacher intervention concerning the way in which students expressed themselves. Guy believed that the teachers were careful in ensuring that, "Students don't express it too much in their own way." It was recognised too that teachers did have a degree of control over what went in to the document. Guy for example claimed, "Your teachers make sure you've got the right things down." It was commonly agreed that teachers were only likely to sanction production of the final version when they were "happy with it". For many this function was a helpful one but for Tony, at least, it was perceived as little more than destructive fault-finding.

Perhaps the most impassioned response made by any of the students interviewed came from Tony who objected strongly to his tutor's insistence, in line with Record of Achievement principles, that only positive statements found their way into the summative document. This, he believed denied him the opportunity of expressing honest but essentially negative views which, in his opinion, would have given third parties a more accurate impression of his true personality. Tony's comments about what would have improved his experience of completing the NRA are illuminating here,

If we'd done it in our own style, in our own way, the way we wanted to, instead of having teachers' opinions. Like the work experience. I wanted to be more honest about what it was really like but the teacher would say, "It reflects the sort of person you are. If you say, 'I didn't enjoy it at all, it was boring and all that,' they'd say I'd got a bad attitude,"... but if you did it yourself you could just be honest.

Tony

As a consequence of this, Tony was unable to view his document positively, believing it to be more a reflection of the teachers' views than his own ("Some bits are what I wanted to put in.. but most bits are what the teacher like...suggested.")

The RANSC report (1989) is clear in its insistence on the students' sense of ownership of the document if the credibility of Records of Achievement is to be preserved and student motivation maintained. It is clear in this case that both were compromised. Stansbury (1992) highlighted a similar case where a student encountered the problems of tutor censorship having insisted on recording that he played darts for a local pub. He argues how the dilemma faced by the tutor in this case would have been no dilemma at all had the principles of ownership been truly

applied.

It would appear too, that there is some support among students for Stansbury's (1992a) objections to the limitations imposed by the standard format and by the linguistic demands imposed by the assumed formality of the document.

Both Guy and Richard express some frustration at the similarity of the completed document, ("You've all got the same things down, except in your personal statement." {Guy}). Michelle, Richard and Tony all expressed some frustration at the fact that too little space was provided for them to record their achievements and experiences as fully as they would have liked. They were of the opinion that the more detailed a document is, the more information it contains, the more beneficial it will be to the student in an interview situation. Jenny, who had derived pleasure from the fact that work on the NRA was so highly personal, expressed the view that although the work was relatively free, it could have been more so. Kim's comments about how the experience could have been improved echo Tony's, "If we'd done it in our own style", in that she would have appreciated the freedom to write it in her own way and to "...make it more catchy". There is a sense here in which teachers, in responding to the perceived formal demands of the document, may well be guilty of conspiring, albeit unwittingly, to limit their students' capacity to fully express their individuality. Whilst this might enhance the practical and functional benefits of the documents it may equally serve to limit their impact in contributing to the personal development of the students. Whether or not this is an issue depends on whether the real benefits of the NRA are in the practical or the affective domain.

5.14 What Students Record.

One of the principal aims of the survey was simply to discover what features of their lives students, across a whole year group actually recorded in their NRA. The intention was also to ascertain which features if any, students thought should be included in the document and whether there was a perceived hierarchy of experience or achievement which might prove significant. It was hoped that the questionnaire would indicate whether the majority of students actually do have the experiences which they believe are accorded most value. Issues like these, it was felt, might well influence the degree to which students actually believe in the document as something which represents their best interests. If a system promotes experiences which are unknown to groups of students, then it is unlikely that they will value that system or its instruments very highly.

In an attempt to ascertain some of this information, students were given a list of twelve items which are typically included in documents of record and asked to indicate whether any reference was made to them at any point in their NRA. Students were also asked to identify the three elements which they felt to be the most important.

The elements which students believed to be of importance, irrespective of whether they appeared in their documents, were Achievements connected with school (eg. post of responsibility / awards); Regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job / holiday job); Achievements not connected with school, with 52.8% ; 48.6% and 36.1% of respondents respectively including them in their top three.

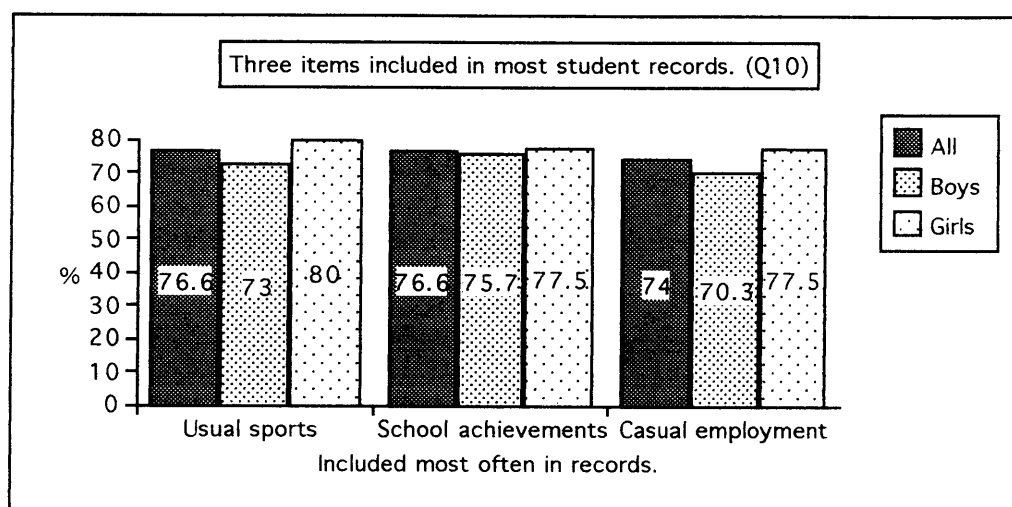


Fig. 10. Three items appearing in most student records.

Achievements connected with school was the feature which appeared most often in students' documents (ie. 76.6% of cases). The other two elements did not feature as prominently in student records. 'Achievements not connected with school' appeared in the records of 64.8% of students whilst 'Regular paid employment' was the least well represented of all the elements, appearing in the records of only 49.4% of students.

It might well be the case that the way in which students ranked different elements was influenced by their perceptions of how third parties might respond. Thus it appears that many pupils do not have regular paid employment but consider it to be the thing which employers are most looking for. If this is indeed the case, students could be forgiven for doubting the potential of the document to serve their best interests. In a similar way, 'casual paid employment' appears in the records of 74% of the students, the third highest of all the elements, but with only 11.1% placing it in their top three in terms of importance, it could be argued that students exhibit a tendency to undervalue those experience they have and over emphasise the importance of those

they do not.

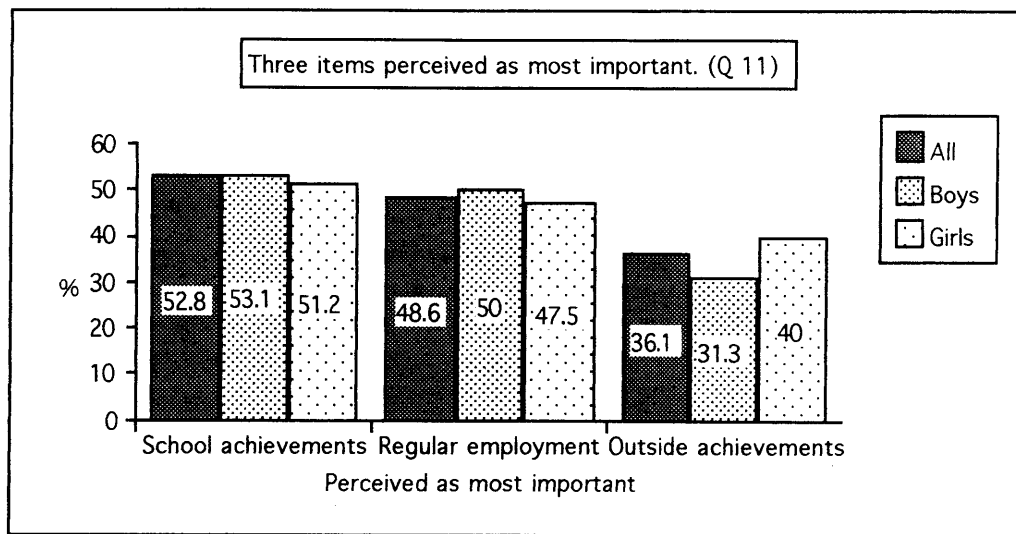


Fig. 11. Three items perceived as being most important.

If this is true, the NRA may well have the potential to engender feelings of inadequacy in a way that may not be clearly evident to the students themselves.

Interesting too, are the other features rated lowly in terms of their perceived importance, 'travel to other countries'; 'school trips' and 'living abroad'. Interestingly, two of the three elements were placed on the list because they were deemed to be of particular significance to the group of students surveyed. Indeed, students were specifically encouraged to exploit in their NRA the fact that they were living in Germany, that many had lived in Hong Kong and Cyprus and most had opportunities for travel in continental Europe with the school. Many did so; 51.9% mentioned foreign travel; 63.6% included details of school trips but only 66.2% (instead of the potential 100%) mentioned living abroad in their record. Whilst the fact of living abroad would have been automatically reflected elsewhere in their document (eg. educational history) at least a third of students appear to have failed to exploit this, either in their personal statement or in their record of achievements and experiences. If this is the case, it might well strengthen the argument that the NRA may contribute to a subconscious tendency amongst students to undervalue activities and experiences which, to the individual concerned, are routine and commonplace.

It is interesting to note too, that all the features rated highly in terms of their importance were connected with easily identifiable achievements. Those which were lowly rated were those which represented personal experiences, the value of which are much less easy to quantify. If you have a post of responsibility at school you get a badge; if you achieve something you get a certificate; if you have a job you get a pay packet but what you get if you live or travel abroad is a

question which students seem to have difficulty answering. The ability to reflect on experience and evaluate the intangible benefits is clearly a skill which students need to develop more fully.

Indeed, 46.1% of those surveyed believed they needed more help in deciding which skills or experiences to include; 44.2% believed they needed more help in explaining what they had gained from their experiences; add to this the number who have the same needs but have simply not recognised them, then there is clearly a case for suggesting that these areas are specifically addressed as an integral part of the records of achievement activities undertaken in school.

An intriguing question remains; does the NRA and the way students are prepared to compile it, lead students to value their personal achievements at the expense of their personal achievements?

Of course, the vital question of what constitutes an achievement and what constitutes an experience is automatically raised. However that debate is resolved, the fact remains that in their own estimation of the relative importance of the NRA to themselves and to prospective employers, the 'Record of Experience' section was rated lowly on both counts. Only 6.6% considered it to be the most important section in terms of personal value, whilst only 8% thought it would be the area of most interest to colleges and employers.

Of course, the high level of importance attached to the Personal Statement may well account for this poor showing and would accord well with the belief expressed elsewhere that the students most value the NRA for the way it represents an extension of their personality. If, however, the figures do reveal that the NRA is providing structural support for the recording of achievement at the expense of recording experience and if it is true that the recording of experience is central to the process of self-discovery which students appear to value, then it may well be the case that the NRA is operating against the best wishes and the best interests of the students. Stansbury has argued, and continues to argue that it is the recording of experience, not the recording of achievement, that has the greatest potential for serving both the personal needs of students and the practical needs of society. He has argued too, that the NRA has effectively wiped out the personal recording of experience and perhaps there is evidence in this study to support at least some of these claims.

5.15 Equal Opportunities - Gender

The design of the questionnaire and the choice of interview subjects was motivated, in part, by a desire to explore whether the NRA itself or the processes adopted at institutional level

raised any gender related issues. The RANSC report (1989) had highlighted the possibility that Records of Achievement had the capacity to advantage or disadvantage some groups of students in a way that was 'quite contrary to the intention of the initiative'. Pole (1993) recommended that any review of the Records of Achievement process should explore whether any gender or racial differences were apparent. The unique character of the school's student intake and the resultant homogeneity in terms of ethnic origin and social class, made gender the natural focus for any exploration of equal opportunities issues. Moreover, gender issues were the key equal opportunities focus, at the time of the survey, both for the school and for the authority as a whole. Thus this research had the potential to contribute in some small way to that general gender based enquiries that were being conducted across the whole authority in a variety of areas.

Data from the questionnaire indicated that boys tended to record more items than girls in their NRA; whether this represents a true picture of their patterns of experience or whether it merely indicates boys' determination to utilise their experiences by including them in a document of record is intriguing. The fact remains, that clear differences did emerge.

When directly questioned about their perceptions of gender differences in relation to the NRA and the processes leading to its completion, the students were unanimous in the belief that there was no difference between boys and girls in terms of the opportunities afforded them. There was some informal observations by boys that girls tended to exhibit greater patience and application whilst working on their NRA, whilst some of the girls observed that boys were prone to making false or exaggerated claims in their documents but the evidence was never based on anything more than general impression and anecdote.

The students tended to believe that the greatest inequality of opportunity was experienced by the less academic, less literate students and arose from the 'emphasis on writing' which the recording procedures naturally promote (RANSC 1989). There was a belief too that equality of opportunity was closely related to the personality of the individual irrespective of gender. Thus the dynamic, the enthusiastic and the confident were seen as being particularly advantaged. As one student from the pretest phase of the survey commented,

Not everyone has the same chance to produce an impressive R.o.A. because everyone is different. The more popular or bold will do the more impressive things than the shy, withdrawn person because they don't have the same support from friends or large groups.

Jennifer

However, equality of opportunity, as far as this small group of students was concerned, was more frequently seen in terms of the provision of equal access to the IT facilities. Indeed the school's

policy that students should use school word processing facilities to produce their own documents created an additional category of advantaged students; those with good IT skills or those with access to word-processing facilities at home. Thus it was not the NRA itself which was responsible for this perceived inequality but the procedures for compilation adopted by the school. The survey findings, interestingly enough, revealed that this policy might indeed have gender implications of which the students themselves are unaware. 35% of girls as opposed to 24.3% of boys believed that they needed more help in the IT related process of typing up the final document.

This itself, seemed to be part of a generally observable trend as more girls declared themselves in need of help in almost every aspect of the process than did boys. 35% of girls and 18.9% of boys stated that they needed more help in understanding why they were compiling an NRA. 55% of girls claimed they needed more help in deciding what experiences to record as opposed to only 36.1% of boys. In terms of needing more help in writing positively about themselves, 47.5% of girls expressed this need against only 24.3% of boys.

The evidence is inconclusive and may well indicate little more than a general willingness on the part of girls to acknowledge the need for help. It certainly exhibits a greater sense of perceived anxiety about the process which may itself indicate a more general tendency among girls to want to be seen doing the 'right thing'. This may be supported by the fact that 87.5% of girls believed that their efforts would have been greatly improved by the provision of good models of previously completed NRAs; only 55.9% of boys expressed the same opinion. 40.5% of boys claimed to be clear about how to update the NRA having left school whereas only 25.0% of girls were confident enough to make this claim.

Whilst acknowledging that a discrepancy might well exist between the perceived needs and the real needs of students, it would at the same time be irresponsible to ignore these findings totally. Equality of opportunity cannot be assumed and the issues at least warrant further enquiry. The RANSC report (1989) for example urged that,

The difficulties that many girls have in one-to-one discussion with male teachers
(and boys with female teachers) should also be recognised.

(RANSC 1989: 8)

Whilst the survey revealed no evidence about this particular aspect of the one-to-one interviews, which are seen as an integral and highly valued part of the Record of Achievement processes at the school, the evidence suggests that boys gain more from them than do girls. 57.6% of boys and only 37.5% of girls believed that such interviews were of direct benefit to them in providing information for the inclusion in their NRA. Whether this supports the tendency, noted in the

RANSC report (1989), for girls to concentrate on relationships and boys to concentrate on the document and its effect on an external audience is unclear but the reasons behind this statistical discrepancy must be worthy of examination.

However there may be some support for the view expressed in RANSC that boys do concentrate more than girls on the recording of concrete achievements. It was interesting to note that it was the enquiry into what gets recorded in the students' documents that revealed some of the greatest differences in gender response. 73% of boys, for example, against 57.5% of girls included achievements that were not connected with school. More boys than girls recorded membership of clubs out of school (73% against 47.5%) and perhaps more significantly 78.4% of boys recorded details of school trips and visits and only 50% of girls. If involvement in records of achievement, emphasises the importance of such trips and visits for inclusion in the NRA, then the school has a responsibility to ensure that they are providing all students with an equal opportunity for involvement in them. The figures would seem to highlight the need to at least monitor the situation to ensure that the school is not guilty of providing opportunities for some but not others. Interestingly it was a girl student who raised the issue in her written comments at the end of the questionnaire,

I have only been given the chance to go on two school trips in the whole of my secondary school life, whereas I have seen many of my friends go on trips open to their subject classes which I am not in.

Nikki

If it is true that boys do exploit their out of school experiences more than girls, perhaps more needs to be done within school either to encourage girls to make better use of their outside experiences for documentary purposes or provide more opportunities for girls in school to redress the apparent imbalance.

Whilst much of this evidence could be used to argue, albeit tentatively, that the NRA and the processes leading to its completion tend to favour boys, a counter argument could be mounted based on the fact that 40% of girls found the Personal Statement the easiest section to complete as opposed to only 19.4% of boys. The perceived importance of the Personal Statement both to students and employers has been noted elsewhere, but the difficulty which boys appear to encounter in its completion may be significant. The questionnaire did not reveal the reasons for this difficulty but it is possible that the reason resides in the nature of the demands imposed by this particular section. The Ofsted report (1993) 'Boys and English' suggests that boys have more difficulty than do girls in writing in an expressive mode and in expressing feelings. Whilst specific

help in this area is something which would benefit all students, boys might well benefit most from additional teacher input.

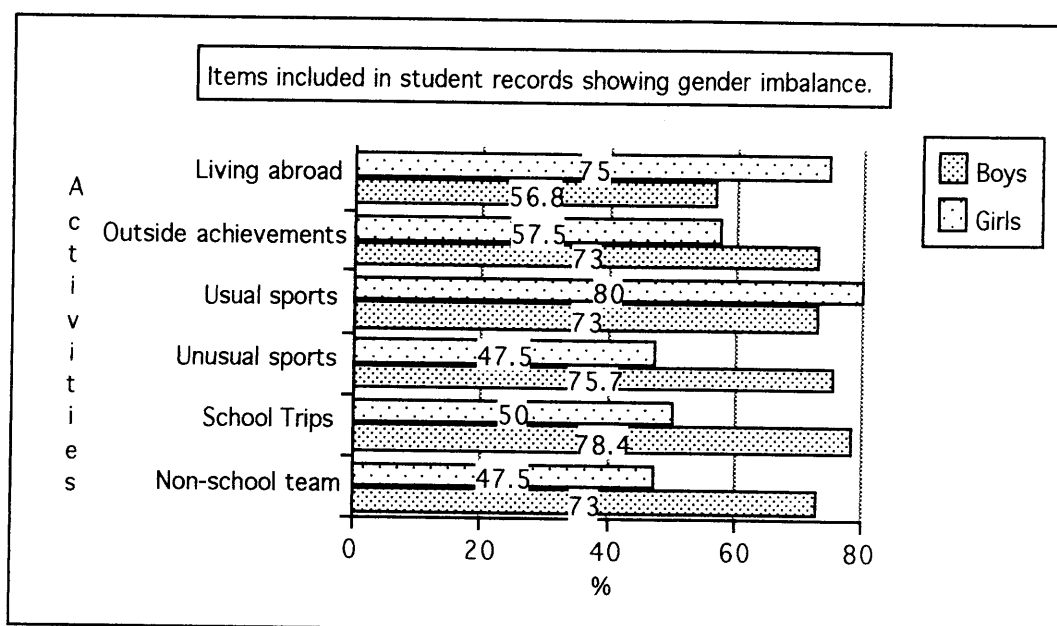


Fig. 12. Items recorded showing gender imbalance

However, perhaps rather predictably, boys expressed least interest in receiving help in any context but, most significantly, in writing about themselves in a positive way; 24.3% of boys acknowledged this need as opposed to 47.5% of girls. Whilst this highlights yet another example of how those most in need of assistance are the least prepared to recognise it, it also serves to highlight the dangers inherent in attaching too much significance to student responses which are highly subjective in nature. It is with this in mind that some issues for consideration at institutional level are introduced together with recommendations for improving the NRA experience of students in Kindsor School are offered. Indeed, some of the suggestions which follow were made by the students themselves and arose directly from their experience of putting together their NRA.

5.16 Improving the experience of students - Issues for consideration

5.16.1 Preparing the ground.

There is evidence to suggest that the experience of completing the NRA in years ten and eleven could be enhanced by a more varied approach to the recording of achievement lower down the school. For some students the sheer repetitiveness of the records of achievement processes in the lower school can have a damaging, rather than beneficial, effect. As one student remarked,

RoAs can be boring because it is the same questions over and over again as in half term reviews in student diaries. It is the same questions repeated which is boring.
Girl Year 10

There may well be a case for suggesting that the headings which appear in the final summative document completed in year eleven are not used lower down the school. Alternatively a different focus could be introduced for each year so that identical information was not merely replicated year in year out. Attempts should be made in the lower school to vary the ways in which students are encouraged to collect and reflect upon achievements and experiences similar to those which will eventually appear in the NRA. The introduction of record keeping in the lower school could be more covert and avoid the mere duplication of the forms dictated by the NRA.

Alternative strategies introduced to create a more varied RoA experience in the lower school could also be geared towards addressing some of the difficulties which upper school pupils claim to have experienced. Thus activities could be designed which increase the students' confidence and skill in talking and writing about themselves, with a particular emphasis, perhaps, on increasing their experience of using the language and structures necessary for the articulation of thoughts and feelings. Such measures might well serve to overcome the embarrassment which some students feel when first met with this requirement. A greater emphasis on the creation of 'positive only' cultures might also prove rewarding. Students must be brought to the realisation that there are times when it is quite legitimate to talk about oneself in a positive way. That students tend to have anxieties about their abilities to assess themselves accurately has been noted elsewhere (Goacher 1983) so clearly the potential exists for developmental work to be carried out in this important area.

It is important, too, that students at all levels, are exposed to positive staff attitudes. It is important that staff are able to communicate to the students that they are at least knowledgeable about the NRA and have the capacity to help them as and when necessary in order to achieve a positive climate in which Records of Achievement and the NRA can thrive. There are, of course, INSET implications here in order to ensure that staff themselves are fully aware of the underlying philosophy of Records of Achievement and their potential benefits to students. Of particular importance here is the awareness of student perceptions about the nature of those benefits. It would seem important that teachers strive to build upon the real benefits which students actually recognise and feel rather than confine themselves to potential benefits which are assumed to exist by third parties. It is important too, on a more practical level, that all teachers involved in any

aspect of recording achievement are aware of the nature and the purpose of the ultimate objective, the NRA. For staff to gain this awareness only when they are directly implicated in the production of the document is probably too late.

5.16.2 Introducing the NRA

Such prior awareness is necessary if the students are to be inducted into the final stages of the process, the production of the document of record phase, in a meaningful and accurate way. There is evidence to suggest that staff tend to stress at this stage, both the legality of the document and its potential usefulness for gaining employment. Whilst this stance is understandable and defensible from a motivational point of view, the uncertainty about the exact status of the NRA in terms of its actual impact in the job market would appear to call for some caution. It is important for the long term success of the initiative, that teachers avoid making false, exaggerated or unsubstantiated promises. Some students in the survey claim to have reacted negatively to such crude and over-insistent strategies.

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that students are not interested in empty rhetoric but only in claims that can be substantiated and backed up with hard evidence. Three practical suggestions made by students themselves called upon the school to

- 1) Compile statistics relating to the successful use of the NRA.
- 2) Provide case studies showing where and in what ways students had benefited directly from the possession of an NRA.
- 3) Show videos of students who had enjoyed the experience giving their personal accounts of why they enjoyed it.

Such an approach would be beneficial in that students would gain an insight into the way some of their peers see the value of the NRA not solely in terms of its functional potential but also in terms of the potential it has for developing confidence and a sense of personal identity.

There was no evidence to suggest that teachers 'sold' the NRA to students in such a way, concentrating instead upon the potential benefits they bring in the search for employment. In spite of this many students saw the NRA's potential for contributing to their personal development as their most beneficial aspect. For many, the creation and the possession of the document was more important than actually using it. As the majority of students, it would seem, will not use their NRA prior to leaving school, it would make good motivational sense if they could be made aware of how they may have already benefited from the document as well as being made aware of how they might benefit from it, in a more practical way, in the future. Whilst there is no guarantee that this

would work for all students, it is clearly a dimension which teachers should not be afraid to explore. There is evidence to suggest that students may well be more receptive to this approach than to the functionally based one which teachers seem traditionally to employ. If teachers are to pursue the line that NRA will be of benefit in interview and in helping gain employment, much more needs to be done in terms of discovering how exactly the NRA contributes in those areas. There is evidence to suggest that students require teachers to provide more in the way of hard evidence to substantiate those claims.

5.16.3 Increasing Student Enjoyment

The motivational benefits of such an approach would clearly be preferable to the extrinsic motivation in the form of the constant harring and haranguing of students which many claimed detracted from their enjoyment of the experience. There is evidence again to suggest that many students enjoy the process, particularly those elements which require them to focus on themselves, and that it is the interventions of teachers that make the task a chore. Teachers perhaps need to recognise more fully the potential which the process has for pupil enjoyment and to exploit those elements which students most enjoy; thus student talk and interactive approaches leading to the compilation of the document should perhaps be promoted more. Students also commented that their enjoyment of the exercise diminished if they were required to produce numerous handwritten, preparatory drafts. In a process which already appears to disadvantage the less literate student, too great an emphasis on this form of redrafting can only serve to exacerbate the problem.

5.16.4 Demands on Time

Perhaps allied to this are the concerns expressed by many that the whole process was too time-consuming. Students seemed to be in favour of a much more sharply focussed programme which did not impinge upon personal time.

Interestingly, in spite of many incidental protestations about demands on time and informal reports from staff about student complaints about time demands, evidence from the survey suggested that only 22.7% of students believed that too much time had been spent on the NRA as opposed to 18.7% who believed that too little time had been spent and 58.6% who believed the

time spent was just right. The timing of the survey itself, shortly after all students had completed their NRA, may well have been influential here as the figures do not reflect the feelings of students as expressed to their tutors at different times during the two year period of production.

5.16.5 Use of Computers

The comments of many about the difficulties caused by the requirement that each student word process their own final document, related principally to technical difficulties with typing and logistical difficulties in gaining access to IT facilities. In spite of this, there was general agreement that this requirement was justified by the resulting quality of the finished document which was a clear source of pride to many. Practical suggestions made by the students were that those needing technical help should be identified at an early stage and given extra support; that every available measure be taken to safeguard the information stored on disc to avoid its accidental deletion; that carefully timetabled sessions should seek to avoid the almost inevitable last minute rush and bottleneck on resources and that the amount of students' personal time which had to be committed to the act of completing the document should be minimised.

5.16.6 The Presentation Ceremony

The evidence too, vindicated the school's policy of holding a Records of Achievement ceremony on the students' last day in school. Students freely admitted that such ceremonies raise the status of the enterprise and provide the student with a final boost of confidence as they leave school. Students also argued that the ceremony was an influential factor in shaping the perceptions of their parents as to the significance of the document and in some cases for shaping parental perceptions of the students themselves. The impact of such a ceremony would be strengthened yet further by making the event a whole school event so that students engaged in the process of recording achievement lower down the school will be provided with positive and tangible examples of its status. Much of this accords with the views stated in the RANSC report (1989).

5.16.7 Attitudes of Parents

Whilst some reported that their parents did not appreciate the importance of the NRA until

the ceremony, others reported the involvement of parents at a much earlier stage; a minority claiming that, in fact, parents are the best people to help a student compile some elements of the summative document. On the strength of this evidence, there is a case for arguing that more strenuous efforts on the part of the school to involve parents in the process, or at least to enhance parental awareness of the initiative, would be rewarded. Indeed, more than one student in interview intimated that it was their parents who persuaded them to take their NRA to interviews for holiday or Saturday jobs when the students themselves were reluctant to do so. On this very simple level, parents clearly have an important role to play in ensuring that the NRA movement gathers momentum and meets some of its expressed aims.

5.16.8 Liaison with Local Employers

Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that greater efforts perhaps need to be made to alert employers to the nature and purposes of the NRA. Students attempting to use them to gain employment, as the school had encouraged them to believe they should, were surprised at how little the employers they approached appeared to know about them. If schools want to maintain the credibility of the NRA, it would seem imperative that they make every effort to educate local end-users, starting with those employers to whom the first student approaches are likely to be made. Perhaps efforts in the first instance should be made to those employers who provide students with holiday or weekend employment; use of the documents in such contexts would perhaps enhance student confidence in using the document when seeking full time employment or training. There may be a case, too, for arguing for the production of a good quality interim document at an earlier stage to enable students to test its potential in real contexts.

5.16.9 Making Best Use of the Document

It has long been argued by some commentators that students need training in the use of their summative documents, and this indeed is a major theme in the most recent guidance material issued by NCVQ and SCOTVEC. There is sufficient evidence to believe this aspect is still underdeveloped in this particular institution. Opportunities for students to practice talking about their documents to third parties need to be provided. This need not necessarily be in the context of mock interviews; presentations to peers or students in other year groups would at least provide

some practice in using the document.

Of course, the contention is that the students who are best prepared to exploit their summative documents are those who have grown up in a culture which has embraced Records of Achievement in its most integrated form. There is some evidence to suggest that the students at Kindsor school saw no connection between their Records of Achievement experiences throughout the school and the production of the final document of record in years ten and eleven. It would be fair to say, that on the whole, students tended to see the production of the NRA as something quite distinct from the business of the mainstream curriculum. If this was a direct result of their close identification of the NRA with tutorial sessions and the pastoral programme, then clearly the school has to address the issue of how this artificial and potentially damaging situation can be rectified. If the NRA is perceived as a distinct entity and if the organisational structure of the programme supports this perception, the danger exists that the functional aspects of the National Record of Achievement will be promoted at the expense of the more humanistic ones.

PART SIX

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research Findings

Any study of this nature is necessarily limited; those limitations should be acknowledged at the outset and extreme caution exercised in drawing general conclusions. Any conclusions drawn are at best tentative. In many ways, however, this study has met its aim in that it has provided an insight into the experience of one cohort of students in one particular institution at one particular time. It has given some indication of the problems this group of students encountered and some insight into the pleasures experienced and the perceived benefits gained. It has provided some insight into what the group of students included in their summative record of achievement and has thrown up a number of issues that would repay consideration at institutional level. Any universal significance the study might have, resides in the extent to which it complements the work of previous commentators in the field, particularly where student views and opinion have been sought.

If the study has shown anything at all, it has shown that the National Record of Achievement has a welcome and legitimate place in the lives of young people. It has shown that the benefits most palpably felt and valued by them are those which lead to a sense of personal or self development. Even divorced from other record of achievement practices in school, the beneficial effects brought about by ownership of such a document are so profound that they cannot be easily dismissed.

It has been suggested that the student experience would be enhanced if the value of this element was more universally recognised and given greater prominence within schools by those responsible for guiding young people in the production of the document. It has been further suggested that student perception of the benefits which the NRA brings are more sophisticated than is often recognised by teachers. It appears to be the case that the elements of the record of achievement which are valued by the student are different from those given emphasis by teachers. Whilst students are prepared to acknowledge the positive benefits which the NRA brings in terms of personal development and confirm their importance to them, they merely acknowledge the possibility that they will be of practical benefit in the employment market. Real commitment to that

belief, tends to be held in abeyance, pending further hard evidence. Whilst teachers can be forgiven for emphasising the functional and transactional value of the record, it would appear that students respond most strongly to the personal and developmental dimension. Clearly the call is for a record which recognises, values and contributes to the development of an individual's identity.

Goacher (1983) observed how, of those students involved in his survey, 'many pleaded for more personal documents where their individuality would be recognised'. It is perhaps worthy of comment that over a decade later, in spite of all the initiatives, developments and legislation in the intervening years, many students in this survey expressed the same need and made the same plea. One possible reason for the apparent failure to respond to this legitimate plea, is perhaps indicated by Goacher himself when he warns that

Schools...need to recognise the political intervention which leads to their being the focus for activity such as the development of records of achievement. It is as much because economic survival will be determined by the skills and attitudes of present-day pupils as because of purely educational reasons.

(Goacher 1983: 55)

Interestingly, Stansbury, the champion of personal recording, a system which in many ways would have answered the students' calls for a personal document which recognised their individuality, sees a political hand at work in the introduction of the National Record of Achievement; a development which effectively wiped out personal recording when he argues,

Those who insisted that it should be national rather than personal and of achievement rather than experience knew perfectly well what they were doing. In times of rapid change people panic. They introduce a national curriculum which makes everyone learn the same things and develop the same skills. That way lies unemployment, economic decline and social disorder.

(Stansbury 1992a: 77)

Stansbury (1992a) may well be right, however, when he suggests that 'the idea of personal recording need not be lost'. His contention is that the more teachers know about what was lost with the demise of personal recording, the more certain its eventual return will be. In the light of some of the evidence from this study, perhaps there is a case to be made that it will be pupils that will bring teachers to an understanding of the opportunities presented by personal recording which may well have been lost in the move towards a national system. The pupils are already aware of the immense benefits, in human terms, which recording experiences can bring. Equally they are aware of the limitations imposed by a standard format and a prescribed content. However, in practical terms, the first step in assuring a meaningful future for the National Record of Achievement, it would seem, is to cultivate an understanding of the true nature of the benefits

that it brings to students.

6.2 Evaluation of the study

From the outset, it had been the intention to explore the issue of student perceptions of the National Record of Achievement by means of a questionnaire and a series of interviews. In the initial stages it had been assumed that the questionnaire would be the main instrument in the enquiry and that the interviews would play a secondary role. Whilst the wish that the issues raised in interview would complement those explored through the questionnaire was fulfilled, it is fair to say, that by the end of the study, I had been compelled to re-evaluate the relative importance of each method of enquiry to the study as a whole. The reasons for this re-appraisal are many and varied and will, it is hoped, emerge during the course of this evaluation.

The decision to actively involve students in the early stages of the research by soliciting their help in the preparation of the questionnaire proved to be a useful one. It served to indicate at an early stage the depth of concern about the NRA and its administration; that this was indeed an area worthy of study and one with which many were keen to involve themselves. Not only did it reveal depth of concern, it also indicated areas of student interest and provided a clear indication of the issues which they wanted to talk about. Thus it was possible to generate a questionnaire and an interview schedule which students would find interesting and towards which they would feel positively disposed. It is perhaps for this reason that the administration of the questionnaire went smoothly; the impression was that students had responded sensibly and honestly. The fact that no 'spoilt papers' were returned is perhaps indicative of this. Similarly, the willingness of students to be interviewed and the maturity and openness of their responses appeared to indicate that the enquiry had struck the right kind of note with them. Initial worries that this willingness to participate might spring from a desire to 'knock the system' were dispelled once the responses from the questionnaires were analysed and the interviews with students commenced.

Openness about the nature and purpose of the research and the ultimate destination of the findings, generated a degree of student interest, which was evidenced both during and after the period of research. Involving the students in the research itself, created a useful sense of ownership and created the impression that this was not something which was being done to them but something that was being done for them, or those like them, in collaboration with them. The motivational benefits of this are not to be underestimated.

This approach, however, was not without its drawbacks. The collation and cataloguing of in excess of one hundred questions generated by students in this preparatory stage, whilst interesting and illuminating, was also time consuming. This was by no means the only occasion during the course of this study when I was compelled to weigh the benefits of a particular approach or avenue of enquiry against the time spent on it. This approach also proved somewhat diversionary because of the temptation to follow somewhat fruitless areas of enquiry. Attempts, for example, to categorise the questions according to their assumed tone, ie. positive, negative and neutral, proved to be impossible and were eventually abandoned.

There is a sense in which the final categorisation of students questions into main areas of concern may well, in any case, have been somewhat distorted. The very act of grouping the questions in this way meant that they were filtered through the perceptions of the researcher and almost inevitably shaped by them. Whilst this is difficult to avoid, the potential influence of inherent researcher bias must be recognised.

Indeed one of the major tensions that was felt throughout this study was that between my desire, on the one hand, to conduct an entirely student-centred survey and my own 'researcher's agenda' on the other. The initial desire to create a questionnaire using student generated questions in their 'raw' or original form, proved to be both naive and impractical. Although many student questions did appear in a slightly re-worded form, and would have been recognisable to students, this represented a shift away from my original intention to have a purely student generated questionnaire. The necessity to include in the questionnaire elements which did not reflect student concerns but my own, was a further inevitable compromise.

As a direct consequence of this, the questionnaire itself proved difficult and time-consuming to compile. Combining all the issues raised by the students with those issues on my own agenda, proved problematic. The result, was a document, which I felt was in tension with itself and was pulling in several different ways at once. The coherence I had striven to find was lacking. In the final analysis, I was unhappy with both the length and the complexity of the finished document but I felt it should stand because it did, at least, include elements which those students involved in its creation would have expected as well as those which I felt were important.

The preoccupation at this stage with issues raised by students and my own areas of interest resulted, I now feel, in a lost opportunity. It has been stated elsewhere that the value of such a study resides in the extent to which it supports or challenges existing research in a similar field. At the end of the study, such comparisons were not as easy to make as I had hoped they

would be. This process would have been facilitated had I consciously built into the questionnaire issues which had been raised by other similar studies. This omission, I feel, may well have reduced the impact of this study as it remains more isolated than I would have liked from other bodies of research in this field. Having said this, the study did provide some useful information of a type which I did not encounter in any of the other studies reviewed. I was unable to find any information, for example, relating to the information included in the final documents or the frequency of inclusion of certain elements across a whole group of students.

Given the length and the structural complexity of the questionnaire and, indeed, the large number of students surveyed, my decision to limit student responses to Yes or No in most cases and ticked boxes in others, was vindicated because it did facilitate the collation of data. Here again the complexity of the questionnaire necessitated the use of a complex grid system for the collation of data. This combination made the process of collating the data itself more complex and time consuming than might otherwise have been the case. This was exacerbated by my desire to operate a system in which individual responses could be traced and cross-referenced at a later date. A clearer vision at the outset as to how the data would be ultimately used and presented might well have saved time at this stage. Indeed, the structural complexity of the questionnaire did in fact, pose problems for the final presentation of the data, precluding, in effect, the customary presentation of data in tabular form.

Initial concerns that students might find the tick box and the Yes / No responses too limiting proved unfounded. The pretest was instrumental in allaying these fears, although in the questionnaire itself, the occasional student indicated that they were unable to respond adequately to a particular question but were so few in number as to be of little significance. No attempt was made to identify whether a particular question caused a particular problem because the instances were too few in number to reveal any meaningful pattern. A further reservation about the response structure relates to the speed with which some students were able to complete the questionnaire. Whilst it was reported that no student took more than fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire, others were reported to have finished in under five. This raises some doubts about the level of thought that went into the responses of some students and consequently about whether their true feelings were accurately recorded; it is difficult to speculate about whether speed of completion detracted from the accuracy or validity of those responses but it is important to acknowledge this as a possibility.

Although a section had been provided for students to elaborate upon their responses in

more open-ended way, the way in which this section was used was a little disappointing. Many students chose not to comment at all; others merely repeated information which could have been obtained from the responses given in the main body of the questionnaire. The number of open-ended responses which furthered the enquiry into student perception and experience of the NRA was disappointingly small and this section did not prove to be the rich vein of illustrative quotation that I had assumed it would. The unconfirmed suspicion remains that the length of the main body of the questionnaire was a contributory factor in the failure of this section to perform its intended function. The relative ease of completion may have resulted in an uncritical completion of the questionnaire by some which may, in turn, have militated against any real engagement with the final, optional element. In addition, the length of the document and the diversity of areas covered, might have proved overwhelming for some whilst for others it might have produced the illusion of being totally comprehensive in its coverage, leaving no room or need for further comment. Whatever the reality of the situation was, the fact remains that this section of the questionnaire proved less useful to the overall enquiry than had been initially envisaged.

The very fact that an open ended section, in which students were required to reflect more expansively on their experience of the NRA, was deemed important to the survey not only highlights a central problem within the questionnaire itself but also raises some questions about its effectiveness as a research instrument in this context. It became apparent at an early stage, that perhaps too much was being expected of the questionnaire. On the one hand it was being used to provide quantative data (how many different activities, for example, had been included in an individual's record or how many items were common to a number of students) but on the other, it was being required to reveal information of a more qualitative nature; information, for example, about levels of enjoyment and about levels of satisfaction with the help received. Whilst the questionnaire proved successful in providing purely quantative data, it proved less so in providing precise information about the quality of student experience which had been a key aim of the study.

Whilst the questionnaire was able to provide information about how many students enjoyed the experience and how many were satisfied with the help received, for example, it tells us little about the nature of the enjoyment or what constitutes satisfaction. The terms of far too many of the questions were open to subjective interpretation by the respondents and consequently, any resulting data should be treated with caution as, at best, it provides indications of rather generalised trends rather than definitive truths. The questionnaire yielded stark figures where what was really sought was an insight into student experience and therefore, even in its most open-

ended sections, did not do justice to the nuances of student experience and attitudes or to the sophistication of their analyses of them.

It was the interviews which were to provide the most meaningful insight into this and it was with this realisation that the relative emphasis placed on the information revealed by both interviews and questionnaire changed. In retrospect, it would have been more useful to have conducted the interviews prior to the compilation of the questionnaire. Unexpected issues were raised in the free-flow of interview which had not been raised in the more mechanical exercise of generating questions and which would have proved fruitful areas of enquiry on a larger scale through the medium of a questionnaire. A case in point is the strong feelings expressed by one of the students interviewed about ownership and the negative effects of the censorship function performed by supervising tutors; the opportunity to explore how widespread this feeling actually was, had been lost.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews was useful in ensuring that common areas were covered in all interviews whilst allowing for the 'conversation' to flow naturally. The consequence of this, of course, was that the views expressed in the different interviews were more difficult to analyse, categorise and cross-compare than they would have been had the issues been addressed in the same order in all interviews. In addition to the one interview that was transcribed in full, it became necessary to breakdown each tape recorded interview and to summarise the main points raised in order to identify areas of commonality. Again the whole process, though rewarding, proved extremely time-consuming. Certainly the benefits of more tightly structured, sharply focussed interviews became more apparent. As an inexperienced researcher, I found the taping of interviews invaluable for extracting accurate quotations for illustrative purposes but when one weighs the proportion of overall discussion generated by the interview against the proportion of 'usable' quotation, other methods of recording what was said; written notes taken during or shortly after interviews, become increasingly attractive. However, the value of using the respondents own words in a study of this nature where authenticity and the accuracy of interpretation are of paramount importance, became equally apparent when writing up the findings.

In the final analysis, I am satisfied that the data yielded by the questionnaire and the views expressed in interview were complementary in many respects; the one illuminating the other in interesting and sometimes unexpected ways. However, as stated at the outset, in a study of this kind, where the nature and quality of student experience is the prime focus, of the two, carefully conceived and structured interviews may well be the more revealing method of enquiry.

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APPENDIX 1

The School Context

Kindsor School is the name given, for the purposes of this study, to an 11-18 Service Children's School situated in Germany as part of the Service Children's Education Authority. Records of Achievement are well established in Kindsor School, with many years of developmental work having taken place in both the Authority and the school. In 1993, the school was given accreditation by the Southern Partnership for Assessment and Records of Achievement (SPARA) and is therefore, committed to the SPARA principles.

All aspects of the schools marking, assessing, recording and reporting come under the 'umbrella' of Records of Achievement. Frequent review sessions and individual counselling with a tutor are central features of the school's tutorial programme in all years. Group tutors have the opportunity to discuss with each individual their progress and are required to record these interviews in order that the information might be used constructively as the student progresses through school. The processes are intended to enrich and enhance the students' ability to analyse and evaluate individual situations, talents and expectations. One to one reviews are scheduled to occur twice in each academic year for all students in all years. Reviews are required to target area for attention which are to be revisited during future discussion. Half-year self reviews recorded in the students' diaries are seen as important features and an integral part of the of the school's tutorial programme. In lessons, students of all years are encouraged to record their achievements in student diaries and on the specially developed annotation sheets relevant to the different areas of the curriculum.

Since 1992, at the end of year eleven, it has been the practice to present all students with a completed NRA and consequently much of the tutorial work in years ten and eleven is devoted to the production of that summative record. Thus it can be seen that, in theory at any rate, those year eleven students who would participate in the research study had a broad experience of a range of Records of Achievement practices in a wide variety of contexts.

APPENDIX 2

ii

NATIONAL RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire completed by

Female

Male

1. Have you completed your R.o.A. document?

☐ ☐

2. Are you pleased with the document (or parts of the document) you have produced?

☐ ☐

3. When you were gathering material for your R.o.A. did you collect any of the following ?

a) Certificates

a ☐ ☐

b) Documents showing membership of clubs or societies

b ☐ ☐

c) Record cards of achievements and experiences (signed and validated)

c ☐ ☐

d) Record cards of achievements (not signed or validated)

d ☐ ☐

e) A piece of work to demonstrate your achievement

e ☐ ☐

4. Do you think it is important to collect this kind of material before writing your R.o.A.?

☐ ☐

5. Which **ONE** of the four sections of your R.o.A. do you think is the most important ?

a) Your personal statement

b) Your employment history

c) Your record of experiences

d) Your Core Skills

☐

Put the appropriate letter in the box.

6. Which **ONE** of these four sections, if any, did you find the easiest to complete?

☐

7. Which **ONE** of these four sections, if any, did you find the hardest to complete?

☐

8. Which **ONE** of these four sections, in your opinion, will be of most interest to colleges or future employers?

☐

9. Did you get your ideas about what to write from any of the following?

- a) examples of completed R.o.A. statements given as models
- b) any previous experience of writing about yourself
- c) any previous experience of working on R.o.A.s
- d) the 'one to one' interview with your tutor
- e) talking to your tutor in R.o.A. sessions
- f) talking to subject teachers about your skills and experiences
- g) talking to other students

Yes No

a	☐	☐
b	☐	☐
c	☐	☐
d	☐	☐
e	☐	☐
f	☐	☐
g	☐	☐

10. Here is a list of items which might appear in an R.o.A.

Tick any of these which appear in your own R.o.A.

- a) involvement in after school activities
- b) membership of a team, club or society in school
- c) membership of a team, club or society out of school
- d) school trips and visits
- e) unusual sports, hobbies or interests
- f) more usual sports, hobbies or interests (eg. swimming, reading)
- g) regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job, holiday job)
- h) casual paid employment (eg. occasional babysitting)
- i) achievements connected with school (eg. post of responsibility / awards)
- j) achievements not connected with school
- k) travel to different countries (including holidays with parents)
- l) living abroad (ie. not in the UK)

a	☐
b	☐
c	☐
d	☐
e	☐
f	☐
g	☐
h	☐
i	☐
j	☐
k	☐
l	☐

11. From this list which THREE items do you think are most important for your R.o.A.?

☐
☐
☐

12. Is there anything which you deliberately chose not to include in your R.o.A.?

☐ ☐

13. Did you receive the help you needed to produce your R.o.A.?

☐ ☐

14. Would you have liked more help with any of the following?

- a) understanding why you were doing an R.o.A.
- b) deciding which skills and experiences to include
- c) writing about yourself in a positive way
- d) organising your time
- e) typing out your final document
- f) explaining what you had gained from your experiences

a	☐	☐
b	☐	☐
c	☐	☐
d	☐	☐
e	☐	☐
f	☐	☐

15. Did you feel the time spent on producing the R.o.A. was :

- a) about right
- b) too little
- c) too much

(enter a,b or c)

☐

16.a) Have you used your R.o.A. to apply for a job or a college place?

Yes No

a ☐ ☐

b) Do you know of anyone who has?

b ☐ ☐

17. Do you think :

- a) R.o.A.s **should** be considered as part of your application for a job / college
- b) R.o.A.s can improve your your chances of getting a job or college place
- c) R.o.A.s will help you **get** an interview
- d) R.o.A.s will help you **in** an interview

a	☐	☐
b	☐	☐
c	☐	☐
d	☐	☐

18. Tick the **ONE** statement you agree with most (read all the statements before you choose!)

- a) R.o.A.s are of most use to the applicant
- b) R.o.A.s are of most use to the employer
- c) R.o.A.s are EQUALLY useful to both applicant and employer
- d) R.o.A.s are not useful at all

a	☐
b	☐
c	☐
d	☐

19. Tick the **ONE** statement you agree with the most (*read all the statements before you choose!*)

- a) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of person I am
- b) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of worker I will be
- c) Employers/colleges want to know both these things
- d) Employers/colleges do not want to know either of these things

a ☐

b ☐

c ☐

d ☐

Yes No

20. Will you use your R.o.A. to help you apply for a job / college place?

☐ ☐

21. Do you intend to up-date your R.o.A. regularly after you leave school?

☐ ☐

22. Are you clear about how you can keep your R.o.A. updated?

☐ ☐

23. Have you enjoyed putting together your R.o.A.?

☐ ☐

24. Overall, has the experience of putting together an R.o.A. been worthwhile?

☐ ☐

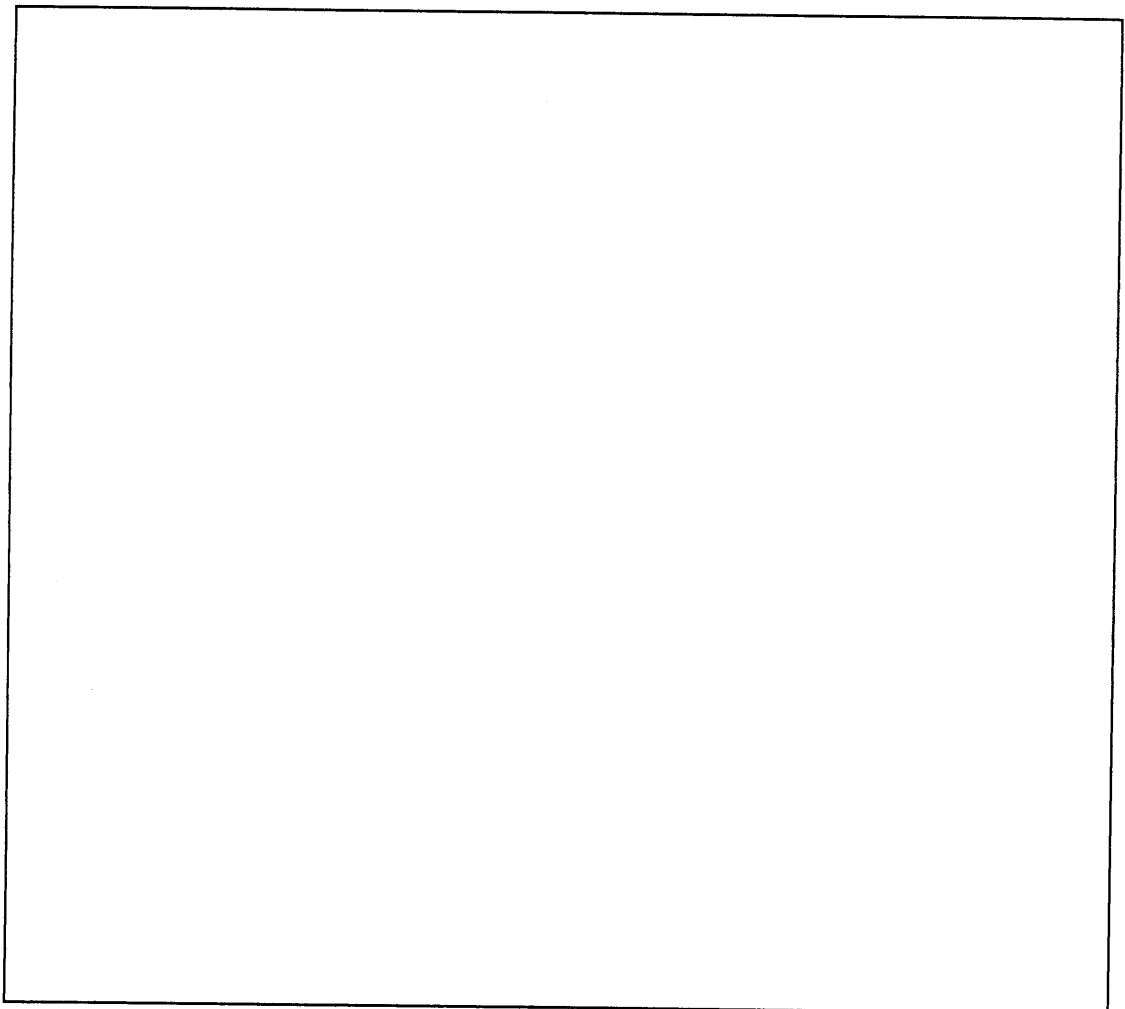
RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT - WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what you, the students, really think about Records of Achievement and what it has been like for you working on your N.R.A. document.

This is your chance to say what you really think and feel.

Use this space to write about your thoughts, feelings and experiences (both positive and negative)

Consider only those issues which are important to you. Remember, **be honest!**



P.T.O. (use an additional sheet if necessary).

Thank you for your time, your effort and your help in completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 3

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES - Expressed as number of respondents

The figure in **bold print** represents the total respondents.

The figure in plain print represents the number of boy respondents.

The figure in *italic print* represents the number of girl respondents.

The figures in brackets represent the number of respondents - (total - boy - girl)

1. Have you completed your R.o.A. document?

YES	76	1	75	NO	1	1	0	(77 37 + 40)
-----	-----------	---	----	----	----------	---	---	--------------

2. Are you pleased with the document (or parts of the document) you have produced?

YES	76	1	75	NO	1	1	0	(77 37 + 40)
-----	-----------	---	----	----	----------	---	---	--------------

3. When you were gathering material for your R.o.A. did you collect any of the following ?

a) Certificates

YES	46	24	22	NO	31	13	18	(77 37 + 40)
-----	-----------	----	----	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

b) Documents showing membership of clubs or societies

YES	7	5	2	NO	69	31	38	(76 36 + 40)
-----	----------	---	---	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

c) Record cards of achievements and experiences (signed and validated)

YES	26	16	10	NO	50	20	30	(76 36 + 40)
-----	-----------	----	----	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

d) Record cards of achievements (not signed or validated)

YES	21	8	13	NO	55	28	27	(76 36 + 40)
-----	-----------	---	----	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

e) A piece of work to demonstrate your achievement

YES	19	9	10	NO	56	27	29	(75 36 + 39)
-----	-----------	---	----	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

4. Do you think it is important to collect this kind of material before writing your R.o.A.?

YES	53	24	29	NO	23	12	11	(76 36 + 40)
-----	-----------	----	----	----	-----------	----	----	--------------

5. Which ONE of the four sections of your R.o.A. do you think is the most important ?

a) Your personal statement	51	23	28	(76 36 + 40)
----------------------------	-----------	----	----	--------------

b) Your employment history	3	1	2
----------------------------	----------	---	---

c) Your record of experiences	5	3	2
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d) Your Core Skills	17	9	8
---------------------	-----------	---	---

6. Which ONE of these four sections, if any, did you find the easiest to complete?

a) Your personal statement	2 3	7	16	
b) Your employment history	3 1	18	13	(76 36 + 40)
c) Your record of experiences	1 0	5	5	
d) Your Core Skills	1 2	6	6	

7. Which ONE of these four sections, if any, did you find the hardest to complete?

a) Your personal statement	1 6	8	8	
b) Your employment history	4	2	2	(75 35 + 40)
c) Your record of experiences	1 0	5	5	
d) Your Core Skills	4 5	20	25	

8. Which ONE of these four sections, in your opinion, will be of most interest to colleges or future employers?

a) Your personal statement	3 9	20	19	
b) Your employment history	1 5	6	9	(75 36 + 39)
c) Your record of experiences	6	2	4	
d) Your Core Skills	1 5	8	7	

9. Did you get your ideas about what to write from any of the following?

a) examples of completed R.o.A. statements given as models	YES 5 4	19	35	NO 2 0	15	5	(74 34 + 40)
b) any previous experience of writing about yourself	YES 3 6	17	19	NO 3 8	17	21	(74 34 + 40)
c) any previous experience of working on R.o.A.s	YES 9	4	5	NO 6 4	29	35	(73 33 + 40)
d) the 'one to one' interview with your tutor	YES 3 4	19	15	NO 3 9	14	25	(73 33 + 40)
e) talking to your tutor in R.o.A. sessions	YES 4 2	18	24	NO 3 1	16	15	(73 34 + 39)
f) talking to subject teachers about your skills and experiences	YES 2 9	13	16	NO 4 5	21	24	(74 34 + 40)
g) talking to other students	YES 5 9	26	33	NO 1 4	8	6	(73 34 + 39)

10. Here is a list of items which might appear in an R.o.A.***Tick any of these which appear in your own R.o.A.***

(72 32+ 40)

a) involvement in after school activities	4 1	22	19
b) membership of a team, club or society in school	5 1	27	24
c) membership of a team, club or society out of school	4 6	27	19
d) school trips and visits	4 9	29	20
e) unusual sports, hobbies or interests	4 7	28	19
f) more usual sports, hobbies or interests (eg. swimming, reading)	5 9	27	32
g) regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job, holiday job)	3 8	17	21
h) casual paid employment (eg. occasional babysitting)	5 7	26	31
i) achievements connected with school (post of responsibility / awards	5 9	28	31
j) achievements not connected with school	5 0	27	23
k) travel to different countries (including holidays with parents)	4 0	19	21
l) living abroad (ie. not in the UK)	5 1	21	30

11. From this list which THREE items do you think are most important for your R.o.A.?

(72 32+ 40)

a) involvement in after school activities	1 4	4	10
b) membership of a team, club or society in school	1 6	8	8
c) membership of a team, club or society out of school	1 5	7	8
d) school trips and visits	9	5	4
e) unusual sports, hobbies or interests	1 7	12	5
f) more usual sports, hobbies or interests (eg. swimming, reading)	1 4	5	9
g) regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job, holiday job)	3 5	16	19
h) casual paid employment (eg. occasional babysitting)	8	1	7
i) achievements connected with school (post of responsibility / awards)	3 8	17	21
j) achievements not connected with school	2 6	10	16
k) travel to different countries (including holidays with parents)	7	3	4
l) living abroad (ie. not in the UK)	1 1	5	6

12. Is there anything which you deliberately chose not to include in your R.o.A.?YES **1 7** 10 7 NO **6 0** 27 33 (77 37+ 40)**13. Did you receive the help you needed to produce your R.o.A.?**YES **5 9** 29 30 NO **1 7** 7 10 (76 36+ 40)

14. Would you have liked more help with any of the following?

a) understanding why you were doing an R.o.A.

YES **2 1** 7 14 NO **5 6** 30 26 (77 37+ 40)

b) deciding which skills and experiences to include

YES **3 5** 13 22 NO **4 1** 23 18 (76 36+ 40)

c) writing about yourself in a positive way

YES **2 8** 9 19 NO **4 9** 28 21 (77 37+ 40)

d) organising your time

YES **3 1** 15 16 NO **4 6** 22 24 (77 37+ 40)

e) typing out your final document

YES **2 3** 9 14 NO **5 4** 28 26 (77 37+ 40)

f) explaining what you had gained from your experiences

YES **3 4** 16 18 NO **4 3** 21 22 (77 37+ 40)

15. Did you feel the time spent on producing the R.o.A. was :

a) about right **4 4** 21 23

b) too little **1 4** 8 6 (75 35+ 40)

c) too much **1 7** 6 11

16a) Have you used your R.o.A. to apply for a job or a college place?

YES **1 5** 8 7 NO **6 2** 29 33 (77 37+ 40)

b) Do you know of anyone who has?

YES **5 5** 28 27 NO **2 2** 9 13 (77 37+ 40)

17. Do you think :

a) R.o.A.s should be considered as part of your application for a job / college

YES **6 9** 34 35 NO **8** 3 5 (77 37+ 40)

b) R.o.A.s can improve your chances of getting a job or college place

YES **6 5** 31 34 NO **1 2** 6 6 (77 37+ 40)

c) R.o.A.s will help you **get** an interview

YES **4 0** 22 18 NO **3 6** 15 21 (76 37+ 39)

d) R.o.A.s will help you **in** an interview

YES **6 6** 30 36 NO **9** 5 4 (75 35+ 40)

18. Tick the ONE statement you agree with most.

(75 35+ 40)

- | | | | |
|--|------------|----|----|
| a) R.o.A.s are of most use to the applicant | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| b) R.o.A.s are of most use to the employer | 1 7 | 9 | 8 |
| c) R.o.A.s are EQUALLY useful to both applicant and employer | 5 3 | 22 | 31 |
| d) R.o.A.s are not useful at all | 3 | 3 | 0 |

19. Tick the ONE statement you agree with the most.

(77 37+ 40)

- | | | | |
|--|------------|----|----|
| a) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of person I am | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| b) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of worker I will be | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| c) Employers/colleges want to know both these things | 7 0 | 34 | 36 |
| d) Employers/colleges do not want to know either of these things | 1 | 0 | 1 |

20. Will you use your R.o.A. to help you apply for a job / college place?

YES **7 3** 34 39 NO **3** 2 1 (76 36+ 40)

21. Do you intend to up-date your R.o.A. regularly after you leave school?

YES **6 2** 32 30 NO **1 5** 5 10 (77 37+ 40)

22. Are you clear about how you can keep your R.o.A. updated?

YES **2 5** 15 10 NO **5 2** 22 30 (77 37+ 40)

23. Have you enjoyed putting together your R.o.A.?

YES **3 8** 16 22 NO **3 9** 21 18 (77 37+ 40)

24. Overall, has the experience of putting together an R.o.A. been worthwhile?

YES **6 5** 31 34 NO **9** 3 6 (74 34+ 40)

APPENDIX 4

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES - Expressed as percentage of respondents.

All figures are expressed as percentages.

The figure in **bold print** represents the percentage of all respondents.

The figure in plain print represents the percentage of all boy respondents.

The figure in *italic print* represents the percentage of all girl respondents.

1. Have you completed your R.o.A. document?

YES **98.7** 97.3 100 NO **1.30** 2.7 0

2. Are you pleased with the document (or parts of the document) you have produced?

YES **98.7** 97.3 100 NO **1.30** 2.7 0

3. When you were gathering material for your R.o.A. did you collect any of the following ?

a) Certificates

YES **59.7** 64.9 55.0 NO **40.3** 35.1 45.3

b) Documents showing membership of clubs or societies

YES **9.2** 13.9 5.0 NO **90.8** 86.0 95.0

c) Record cards of achievements and experiences (signed and validated)

YES **34.2** 44.4 25.0 NO **65.8** 55.5 75.0

d) Record cards of achievements (not signed or validated)

YES **27.6** 22.2 32.5 NO **72.4** 77.8 67.5

e) A piece of work to demonstrate your achievement

YES **25.3** 25.0 25.6 NO **74.6** 75.0 74.4

4. Do you think it is important to collect this kind of material before writing your R.o.A.?

YES **69.7** 66.6 72.5 NO **30.3** 33.3 27.5

5. Which **ONE** of the four sections of your R.o.A. do you think is the most important ?

a) Your personal statement **67.1** 63.9 70.0

b) Your employment history **3.9** 2.8 5.0

c) Your record of experiences **6.6** 8.3 5.0

d) Your Core Skills **22.4** 25.0 20.0

6. Which **ONE** of these four sections, if any, did you find the easiest to complete?

a) Your personal statement	30.3	19.4	40.0
b) Your employment history	40.8	50.0	32.0
c) Your record of experiences	13.2	13.9	12.5
d) Your Core Skills	15.8	16.7	15.0

7. Which **ONE** of these four sections, if any, did you find the hardest to complete?

a) Your personal statement	21.3	22.8	20.0
b) Your employment history	5.3	5.7	5.0
c) Your record of experiences	13.3	14.3	12.5
d) Your Core Skills	60.0	57.1	62.5

8. Which **ONE** of these four sections, in your opinion, will be of most interest to colleges or future employers?

a) Your personal statement	52.0	55.5	48.7
b) Your employment history	20.0	16.7	23.1
c) Your record of experiences	8.0	5.5	10.3
d) Your Core Skills	20.0	22.2	17.9

9. Did you get your ideas about what to write from any of the following?

a) examples of completed R.o.A. statements given as models	YES	73.0	55.9	87.5	NO	27.0	44.1	12.5
b) any previous experience of writing about yourself	YES	48.6	50.0	47.5	NO	51.4	50.0	52.5
c) any previous experience of working on R.o.A.s	YES	12.3	12.0	12.5	NO	87.7	87.9	87.5
d) the 'one to one' interview with your tutor	YES	46.6	57.6	37.5	NO	53.4	42.4	62.5
e) talking to your tutor in R.o.A. sessions	YES	57.5	52.9	61.5	NO	42.5	47.1	38.5
f) talking to subject teachers about your skills and experiences	YES	39.2	38.2	40.0	NO	60.8	61.7	60.0
g) talking to other students	YES	80.8	76.5	84.6	NO	19.2	23.5	15.7

10. Here is a list of items which might appear in an R.o.A.

a) involvement in after school activities	52.2	59.5	47.5
b) membership of a team, club or society in school	66.2	73.0	60.0
c) membership of a team, club or society out of school	59.7	73.0	47.5
d) school trips and visits	63.6	78.4	50.0
e) unusual sports, hobbies or interests	61.0	75.7	47.5
f) more usual sports, hobbies or interests (eg. swimming, reading)	76.6	73.3	80.0
g) regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job, holiday job)	49.4	45.9	52.5
h) casual paid employment (eg. occasional babysitting)	74.0	70.3	77.5
i) achievements connected with school	76.6	75.7	77.5
j) achievements not connected with school	64.9	73.0	57.5
k) travel to different countries (including holidays with parents)	51.9	51.4	52.5
l) living abroad (ie. not in the UK)	66.2	56.8	75.0

11. From this list which THREE items do you think are most important for your R.o.A.?

a) involvement in after school activities	19.4	12.5	25.0
b) membership of a team, club or society in school	22.2	25.0	20.0
c) membership of a team, club or society out of school	20.8	21.9	20.0
d) school trips and visits	12.5	15.6	10.0
e) unusual sports, hobbies or interests	23.6	37.5	12.5
f) more usual sports, hobbies or interests (eg. swimming, reading)	19.4	15.6	22.5
g) regular paid employment (eg. Saturday job, holiday job)	48.6	50.0	47.5
h) casual paid employment (eg. occasional babysitting)	11.1	3.0	17.5
i) achievements connected with school	52.8	53.1	51.2
j) achievements not connected with school	36.1	31.3	40.0
k) travel to different countries (including holidays with parents)	9.7	9.4	10.0
l) living abroad (ie. not in the UK)	15.3	15.6	15.0

12. Is there anything which you deliberately chose not to include in your R.o.A.?

YES **22.0** 27.0 17.5 NO **77.9** 72.9 82.5

13. Did you receive the help you needed to produce your R.o.A.?

YES **77.6** 80.5 75.0 NO **22.4** 19.4 25.0

14. Would you have liked more help with any of the following?

a) understanding why you were doing an R.o.A.

YES **27.3** 18.9 35.0 NO **72.7** 81.1 65.0

b) deciding which skills and experiences to include

YES **46.1** 36.1 55.0 NO **53.9** 63.9 45.0

c) writing about yourself in a positive way

YES **36.4** 24.3 47.5 NO **63.6** 75.7 52.5

d) organising your time

YES **40.3** 40.5 40.0 NO **59.7** 59.9 60.0

e) typing out your final document

YES **29.9** 24.3 35.0 NO **70.1** 75.7 65.0

f) explaining what you had gained from your experiences

YES **44.2** 43.2 45.0 NO **55.8** 56.8 55.0

15. Did you feel the time spent on producing the R.o.A. was :

a) about right **58.6** 60.0 57.5b) too little **18.7** 22.9 15.0c) too much **22.7** 17.1 27.5

16. a) Have you used your R.o.A. to apply for a job or a college place?

YES **19.5** 21.6 17.5 NO **80.5** 78.4 82.5

b) Do you know of anyone who has?

YES **74.4** 75.7 67.5 NO **28.6** 24.3 32.5

17. Do you think :

a) R.o.A.s **should** be considered as part of your application for a job / collegeYES **89.6** 91.9 87.5 NO **10.4** 8.1 12.5

b) R.o.A.s can improve your your chances of getting a job or college place

YES **84.4** 83.8 85.0 NO **15.6** 16.2 15.0c) R.o.A.s will help you **get** an interviewYES **52.6** 59.5 46.2 NO **47.4** 40.5 53.8d) R.o.A.s will help you **in** an interviewYES **88.0** 85.7 90.0 NO **12.0** 14.3 10.0

18. Tick the **ONE** statement you agree with most.

a) R.o.A.s are of most use to the applicant	2.7	2.8	2.5
b) R.o.A.s are of most use to the employer	22.7	25.7	20.0
c) R.o.A.s are EQUALLY useful to both applicant and employer	70.6	62.9	77.5
d) R.o.A.s are not useful at all	4.0	8.6	00.0

19. Tick the **ONE** statement you agree with the most.

a) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of person I am	6.5	5.4	7.5
b) Employers/colleges want to know what sort of worker I will be	1.3	2.7	0.0
c) Employers/colleges want to know both these things	90.9	91.9	90.0
d) Employers/colleges do not want to know either of these things	1.3	0.0	1.3

20. Will you use your R.o.A. to help you apply for a job / college place?

YES **96.0** 94.4 97.5 NO **4.0** 5.5 2.5

21. Do you intend to up-date your R.o.A. regularly after you leave school?

YES **80.5** 86.5 75.0 NO **19.5** 13.5 25.0

22. Are you clear about how you can keep your R.o.A. updated?

YES **32.5** 40.5 25.0 NO **67.5** 59.5 75.0

23. Have you enjoyed putting together your R.o.A.?

YES **49.4** 43.2 55.0 NO **50.6** 56.8 45.0

24. Overall, has the experience of putting together an R.o.A. been worthwhile?

YES **87.8** 91.2 85.0 NO **12.2** 8.8 15.0

APPENDIX 5

Interview Prompt Questions

The following are the pre-prepared questions taken into the interview with students to aid discussion.

A. Introductory Questions.

1. If you had your time again and your teacher said, "It's up to you whether you do an NRA or not," knowing what you know now would you complete one or not? Why? Why not?
2. Did you find completing the NRA worthwhile?
What things have convinced you that doing an NRA has been worthwhile?
What would it have taken to have convinced you that the NRA was worthwhile?
3. What have been the best things for you about working on your NRA? What have been the worst things?
What things have you enjoyed most about working on your NRA? What have you enjoyed least?
4. What could have been done to improve your experience of working on your NRA?

B Motivation

1. Was there ever a time you felt like giving up on your NRA? When? Why?
2. What things kept you going?
3. What problems / difficulties / obstacles did you encounter while you were doing your NRA? How did you overcome any problems that you had?
4. Did you keep positive about your NRA? What would have made keeping positive about your NRA easier?

C Starting Out

1. Did you find the work you did on R.o.A.s lower down the school useful? In what ways?
2. When did you first begin work on your NRA? Was the early work useful?
3. At the beginning did you understand clearly what the NRA was for? Why you were doing it? What all the sections were about?
4. Were you told about the importance of the NRA?

D Getting help

1. How did your teachers help you? What sort of help and advice were you given? Was the help / advice you were given useful?
2. Was your tutor helpful?
3. Did you understand what you had to do when it was explained to you?

4. How did the teachers in your subject areas help you with your NRA?
5. Was your tutor the best person to help you produce your NRA or would someone else have been better? Who? Why?
6. Did you get chance to work on your NRA in the way you wanted?
What ways of working did you find suited you best?
7. Did your tutor ever tell you what sort of things you could or could not write ?
Did your tutor have much influence on your NRA? Has your NRA turned out the way you wanted it?

E Changes

1. Has completing the NRA changed the way you look at yourself or your experiences?
2. Do you think it has changed how teachers think about you? Do they know you better?
How do you feel about this?
3. Has it changed the way your parents think about you or your achievements?

F Benefits

1. What have been the benefits of producing the NRA so far? How has it benefited you so far?
2. Has the NRA benefited you in the way you thought it would? In the way teachers said it would?
3. Have there been any benefits that you weren't expecting?
4. Apart from yourself, do you think anyone else will benefit from your NRA? Who? How?
5. Are there any benefits in leaving school with an NRA? Would you feel at a disadvantage if you did not have one?

G Using the NRA

1. Have you used your NRA? How did you use it? What exactly did you do with it?
2. What did the interviewers do with it? How did they use it?
3. What did they pay most attention to?
4. Did they use the NRA at interview in the way you expected? What did you expect?
5. Was the NRA as important / useful as you expected it to be?

H Equality of opportunity

1. Do you think you had the same chance as everyone else to produce a good NRA?
2. Do you think everyone has the same chance to produce a good NRA?
3. Do you think that boys and girls have an equal chance of completing a good NRA?
4. Is there any way boys or girls might be at an advantage?
5. Is there anything you wished you could have included in your NRA but could not because

you hadn't experienced it ? What was it?

6. Is there anything about a person that makes you know that they are just going to produce a good / bad NRA? What would it be?

APPENDIX 6

An Interview Transcribed.

Interview with Richard, Y12 (BTEC Student) Conducted July 1994

- T You've had two years on your R.o.A. How do you feel about that ?
- R It's o.k. The first year was... everyone was really enthusiastic about it because it was a new thing. Then at the start of the sixth form we were made to like continue it; we had no choice. Because of this everybody did find it a bit hard. I think it was just because we were made to do it... but everyone knows how important it is so it's all right really
- T Right, cos as I was going to say; question one is, " You know if you did have your time again and your teacher said, 'Right ok, it's up to you to do your R.o.A or not, I'm really not bothered.' would you have done one
- [yeah] knowing what you know now. "Why?
- R Because in the fifth year we were told how important it was and everything and I've had friends that have already taken their R.o.A.s to college for their interview and they said it helped them a lot. It was just the case that the teachers in the second year of doing it, in the sixth form, the teachers told us to do it... hadn't asked us. I still think if they'd said it was up to us, 99% of pupils would have continued with it anyway.
- T So do you think that would actually be a good way of going about it in the future, not telling the students but actually asking them?
- R In the sixth form, yeah. after the second year.
- T Right, you're implying there that what's kept you going partly is the fact that you've heard good reports of people using them, is that true?
- R Yeah, I've had a few friends that have gone to college already and they came back and they said how important their R.o.A.s were and they thanked all the teachers about it.
- T Did they actually tell you why it was important and how they'd used them?
- R They said they walked in and the interviewer who was .. he saw them... the employer or what ever you call it... and they were really impressed with it.. the actual.. and they'd already had, I think it was about three people from K..... that went to the same college and they said that's the best standard of R.o.A.s that they'd seen throughout the schools.
- T So..?
- R It holds a lot of information about everything... them, how they acted, what they've done in school, achievements. It gives you an up to date kind of thing on what the actual person's like.
- T And who does it benefit most would you say the employer or the student?
- R I'd say mostly the student but also the interviewer and the employer because it gives them a lot of detail about yourself which you might not be able to say. But also with the student, like once you start off and you think, "Agh I'll never get it done." but once it's finished it it proves to the student that.. how much they've actually achieved. And it's like... it's like a remembering book or something.
- T I was going to say, you've not used yours yet, so what have been the benefits of producing an R.o.A. for you so far?
- R Because I haven't used it?
- T Yeah.
- R Well there's more... in the fifth year.. I'm not saying it's too early but.. if the pupils are coming back to sixth form, I don't really think they should try and get their R.o.A. completed at the end of the fifth year. Cos once you're in the sixth form and you get more stuff and look back on it, you find out miles more things which you could have wrote... and I've dated all the pages in mine .. started all over again.
- T Would you have known early enough that you were coming back to the sixth form? Or would that be a problem.?
- R Well I decided that I was coming back to the sixth form in the fifth year so I was o.k. I knew we'd get made to carry it on but for other people they'd find it hard trying keep it updated at home. So as soon as they've completed it once and they're leaving school that's it
- T I was going to say to you would you know how to go about updating that once you leave Kings?
- R Yeah. We've been told that we can... well not walk in to any school but phone up another school, any school and ask them if it would be o.k. to use their computer things... just on the R.o.A.s and they'd provide the paper and everything because it's a national thing.
- T And do you feel happier knowing that ... you've got that knowledge that that's what you can actually do?
- R Yeah, cos I wouldn't have known where to start on my computer at home. But once you've got

all the school computers there with all the information on, it's really easy.

T Imagine you got to use your R.o.A. How... do you know how you can actually set about using it and what you'd have to do with it?

R Well... how I'd hand it over?

T Mmm.

R Well I'd walk into the interview room and I'd just probably say "I've got a completed record of achievement about myself and would you like to look at it?"

T And how would you expect them to use it?

R Hopefully they'd ... I'd hope they'd look at the most important stuff... that which is more important to me, which helps me a lot.

T Which is that? What is that?

R Well the actual... all the actual achievements and the like the personal statement. I'd hope they'd take an interest in what I do cos if they'd employ me I think they need to take an interest in what you're actually like yourself, outside of the work area.

T And is it a bit one-sided then. They get information about you but you don't get information about them?

R Yeah I suppose it is a little but once you're in the... once you're in the interview room or whatever, you can... you're expected to really ask some questions about them at the end so... I suppose you could find out even earlier when you've not had your interview. You should... well I would write to the company and ask about if they've got any information they could send me anyway so I could have the questions ready in my head for when the interview happened.

T So you're not worried that these Records of Achievement will benefit an employer but not you?

R No not really I think it's ... cos it gives them a more wider look on you yourself. You can always ask... you can always find the information say if you were going to a work company because there's bound to be some. But I suppose it would be helpful if they had a little book like this about the company or about the college so...

T I think a lot of places actually do that, don't they?

R Yeah.

T What if an employer's never heard of a National Record of Achievement? How would you explain it to them? To your interviewer?

R I'd explain to them how it's a... nationally recognised throughout the U.K. and the service schools over in Germany, the actual... how it helps the employer themselves to have a wider look on us. And they... I think the school's already thought of that because they've got loads of information inside for the actual interviewers to read. So I think you could hand it over and let him have a read of this page and they'd be able to understand it... or you could just memorise this few paragraphs and explain.

T Do you think an employer that hasn't heard of this scheme ought to pay some attention..

R Yeah, cos now R.o.A.s are being more pushed out, more people are going to start getting them for themselves and they'll become more common and every employer needs to know if they can spot how good or how bad they are.

T Is that the only advantage of an R.o.A. do you think, to actually get yourself a college place or a job? Or are there other advantages to them?

R It gives you the... it helps you remember the achievements and the stuff you have done; you can look at it, say if you're updating it you can read back and you can compare on how well you're doing. It's like a diary on your progress... it's good to keep with you. I often look through it just to see if there's anything more I can do and there often is.

T I was going to ask, has completing an R.o.A. had any effect on the way you... the way you think about yourself or the way you think about your experiences that you've had?

R Yes because in... without... earlier when we didn't have the R.o.A. ... you'd get the same amount of achievements and everything but cos they were spread out it wouldn't be as... you wouldn't remember some... but now it's all to... all in one booklet, it adds up to quite a lot and it shows that you can actually do something worthwhile. Cos I wouldn't... at the start of the fifth year, I couldn't think I'd be able to complete anything like this and didn't think I'd have anything to fill in it.

T So has it made you a bit more positive about yourself? More confident?

R Yes especially as the more times you keep looking at it and update you think of more and you can see yourself getting a more wider...

T Do you find yourself doing things that you wouldn't have done before just so you can add them to your R.o.A.s like taking on new challenges or taking on new experiences?

R Not really but I always find out that if I'm doing something I always know that it'll be put in my R.o.A. so I'd better do it to my best standard. But I wouldn't just do something to put in the R.o.A. itself it's something... if you're not interested in it but you just want it in your R.o.A.

T But it might improve the extent to which you do it?

R Yeah but then it's not really... if you're not really interested in something and you take it just to

put in your R.o.A, it's not really... it won't really [tape ends and is turned over]

T OK lets recap on that in case I missed something. You were just saying if you put something deliberately for the purpose of making yourself look good in your R.o.A. it actually wouldn't be as valid because it's a bit false,a bit artificial.

R I suppose it's still invalid ..it's still valid for the actual person that you're handing it over to but if they...if your not interested in what you've done and you've just put in to impress them and start asking the questions on it,you're going to trip up somewhere.

T Yeah so you're actually saying this has to be true personal record for it to be..

R You wouldn't put all the negative things;you should put all the positive things in about yourself ..in it ...which are true

T How do you feel about that,only writing positive things about yourself?

R It's hard at first because I didn't think I had any.The teachers in the fifth year help you out, they point things out and when you start to get the achievements in ...like you've got one on your computer screens at first and then you add another...then it's really good.it's just a bit weird writing about yourself because you're trying to..it's like boasting in a way about yourself but you have to to impress.

T And is that something..have you got over that obstacle of appearing to boast about yourself now.

R Mostly yeah but I still don't .. I couldn't write how..I can write things Oh I'm really great at this ..I give myself credit for what I've done but I couldn't really boast about it still.

T I don't think boasting's quite the right word,is it?You're just been positive about yourself.So you still find that hard.Did you get any help in writing about yourself in a positive way?

R In the fifth year we did we were told that we would be starting on our R.o.A.s and it was a new thing and nobody had done it but we were given sheets and they told us the whole aspects of it what we'd have to do and they gave us a few months to get all sorted out and that.

T Do you think you could go on now and continue a record of achievement without any help from anyone else?

R Yeah.That's what ... basically at the start of the sixth year they told us we have to do it and they'll keep checking up on you to do it but you don't ...unless you ask now..you don't get any help which you might need.I mean I haven't needed any help so far because what you learn from the fifth year ..you've learned it all it's just exactly the same but updated and adding bits in.

T And what comment would you make about the quality of learning..or the help that you got in your fifth year or your year eleven?

R Eleven.

T How did your tutors help you and what help was most useful?

R It was the actual .. they.. Mr Mc.. our tutor ..he ..they printed us loads of the actual pages which would be presented in the R.o.A. and we had practices on them and he'd tell us if he thought we were doing it right or wrong or if it was o.k.And then he actually made a replica one up for him and showed us to show us what it was like. It really helped a lot but when...because you're doing your R.o.A.s in Tutor,there's not actually enough teachers to help everyone out so some people do get missed and then they think,"Ah, leave it then.I can't be bothered."

T Interesting you should say that,because another thing I was going to ask was,was your tutor the best person to help you produce your R.o.A. or would someone else have been better.Or was it Good idea to produce your R.o.A in tutor time?

R Yeah I think the tutor's probably the best person to help you cos we were with our tutor for so many years so he's the person you really tell all your problems to - I did anyway and if he's there helping us,it's just like a tutor lesson which you participate in.

T When you were doing it in year eleven and this year,did you get a chance to work on your R.o.A.s in the way you wanted to work on it or was it the teacher who said ,"You do it this way." and you had to do it that way?

R Well we..I'd say about fifty-fifty.We were..The teachers wouldn't ask us if we'd done it right or if we needed any help.We'd..we'd get on with it,print it out ourselves and everything and the only time like they'd have a comment about it was at the end when it was to be printed up on the proper paper.If they read it through and didn't like it - say you hadn't spell-checked it or paragraphed it right,they'd send you away and say,"Look,ah,we're not printing that because it'd be a waste of paper.Just try to make it how it's meant to be."So really at the end you're told to keep it in the same style and not to try and go too far putting it in your own way.

T How did you feel about that?

R I'd have liked to have seen what it was like to have our own choices about it because everyone is...they're not the same..so if we could have set it up ourselves on our own it would have given more information about the actual person,whose it is.You could be able to see if they'd enjoyed it,taken pride in it or if they'd just been throwing it in together as a last minute thing.Cos now everyone's is virtually the

same in context so it's really you are being classed with other people, like at a competition.

T And in terms of that competition, do you think you had the same chance as everybody else to produce a good R.o.A. or do you think everybody gets the same kind of chance?

R I've had the same chance as everyone else... well not everybody else... cos there are a few people that they hear about their R.o.A and they're starting it and then say the tutor can't meet then and then they'll think, "Ah well, I'm not doing it." And then the actual tutors will think, "Ah well if he's not interested, we're not interested," so some people actually come out of the end of it with just this red book without anything in it... not printed up or anything and perhaps... I don't know about sixth form but perhaps in the fifth form, say if they got pushed a bit more because it's... I think everyone should be told how important it is... and if they got pushed a bit more, everyone would complete it. It helps everyone no matter who it is... or job you're going for or college.

T I was going to say are there any types of people that you look at and you think, "Ooh they're not going to produce a good R.o.A.?"

R You can tell that the people with the most the most interests hobbies and stuff... you can spot the people off who are going to be enthusiastic about it... and at the start of it I wasn't really bothered and I started off really slow and it was a rush at the end of the fifth year but now once I'm in sixth form there's... everyone's working together. I mean other people even help each other now... it's not as much of a competition. Everyone wants everyone to achieve it really good, to the best standard.

T Is that... did the teachers deliberately encourage that or it just happened?

R It's just happened. I think it's because in the fifth year there was so much competition, everyone just got fed up with it. Because everyone came out with the same thing in the end if it was poor or good. So this year everyone's helped each other if they've got problems and don't know what to do about their R.o.A. now. So everyone's pointing things out for each other.

T So it's really students helping students through.

R Yeah it's more students helping than there are teachers cos the teachers... not being like horrible teachers... I think the teachers are doing it well because they're seeing if we can get on with it on our own without having to look back at them all the time.

T Is that important do you think that teachers do that?

R Yeah because once you leave school you still have to be up dated further and so when we have to go and update it and ask... phone up a school you won't be able to rely on all the teachers there who you don't know to come and help you whenever you need it.

T So it really is helping you to be able to do it for yourself.

R Yeah

T I'm just thinking though, are there some people who clearly have an advantage in producing R.o.A.s and you look... you read through your R.o.A.s and you think, "Agh, I wish I'd done that." Does that happen?

R Not really, you can always compare your R.o.A. with another person and you'll always find something which you wish you'd put into yours which they have but you'll always spot something that they haven't got which you've got as well. So you can either... the students 'I'll help each other as I said earlier, they'll both work together...' or you just leave it and think, "Well it's my R.o.A and I can't really..." if you see something in their R.o.A which you wish you had and you copy that, then it might not even involve you but you just think it's good and it'll help so you just put it in. You have to really be sure. I've seen people's R.o.A.s which I think are brilliant but there's nothing in there that's relevant to me to put in mine. But I've seen other people's that are really low and not very good and I'm glad, I've been pleased it's mine. It's a little bit of both.

T Are there some things though, that you think an employer might rate more highly than others. Say you've got a whole lot of different things in your R.o.A.s.

R Obviously the examination results come first... they're meant to be put in your R.o.A. ... and then you've got the other things like 'other achievements' you've gained without... which aren't in the like the exam progress: other things in school and then your work experiences. I suppose that are the main points they look for and some people might not have great examination results you have to try and make that up with other stuff on your R.o.A. and try maybe resit your GCSEs and get it better. You have... if you're low on one thing you have to build up the other to try and still keep it to a good level.

T What about all the other skills and experiences, nothing to do with the examination results. Remember the questionnaire with that huge list of things, are some of those more important than others?

R Well, I think they are all as important as each other cos it's still all information about you and what you can actually do. So if you go to a... if you go for an interview to say as a job and it says you've got loads of... you've got a column in your R.o.A. on information technology and then you say what you can use and everything, and the grade is still there, but say if you got a D in... well not in Information technology... say you didn't take information technology but you got all Ds and Es in you GCSEs... but you've got certificates and awards about the computer thing itself and you can work everything on it, I

think it's still the same,adequate.I mean the GCSEs are important but most of the stuff in there gives details about what you can do ,how you've done ,how you think you've done it,any problems.Like languages .. it's got Foreign Languages in there and you could've got say if you take a separate language and then but you still gained courses and awards from it from another language you put it in and..I'd say it's classed as a result itself.It's still a good ..not GCSEs but it's still there as a good mark.

T So it's actually better to leave school with an R.o.A. rather than just a string of qualifications and a reference from here?Or would that do the same job?

R You need your qualifications but you also need your R.o.A. it's just the same.If you haven't got the qualifications you just have to try and impress with your R.o.A.s as much as you can.Cos once you haven't got those qualifications you can either take them or you don't.So you have to try and make..fill as much in as you can to help you out in there.

T Do you think being a male has put you at an advantage in completing your R.o.A.s ...rather than female?

R No.I think it's the same really.

T Have you noticed any difference in the way that girls approach their R.o.A.s and the way in which the lads approach theirs?

R Girls can.. they seem to be more patient about it .I mean we get ..most of the lads get more bored with it over a while because it's dragged on with us for two years that makes us..I mean I walk into the computer room and the rooms upstairs on a lunch time and there'll be about five or six females in there and about one male.It's obvious that the girls have got more patience or maybe just more..

T Take it more seriously?

R Take it more seriously.They know how useful it is.And the males don't really appreciate it as much.

T Have you any evidence of that or is that just the impression you get?

R No evidence it's just that impression,

T So if I said to you ..if I asked you this question "is the Records of Achievement system fair?"what would you say to that?

R Yeah it is fair.it's an advantage for everyone.All that's in there is the actual good stuff to help you.I mean .say in other things you'll have to have both sides.Say if you've done something bad,it gets put on a report.But in the R.o.A. you're trying to make yourself look as good as you possibly can.So it's fair to everyone Everyone gets the same ..how to ..what's put in there,the same amount and then..I mean not everyone gets the same awards and everything but that's themselves..everyone can do exactly the same as everyone else - awards or at least try to.But then maybe not everyone wants to succeed.

T I was just thinking,how do you work on R.o.A.s in other subjects areas?Has that helped you with producing this.

R The only subject lessons I ..where we were given time to do our R.o.A.s was in the actual tutor period and that's when we were told,"Right,this is R.o.A.s"But we get the chance to do it at lunchtime;break times if we want to .which helped a lot, as we only get one tutor period a week.

T Have any of your other teachers had much of an input into your R.o.A.work?

R All your subject teachers from last year and this year have a great input because they know what you were like last year and what...they can tell you if you've improved or not and help you out when say the Technology teacher is in,like Mr R.....He helps a lot as well because he'll see you through it;he won't let you fail it...or not complete it.He'll make you complete it.And at the end of it you're grateful to him ..well all the teachers and anyone else.

T So does..has that fed into this thing or is that something separate,what would you say?The kind of help..with target setting perhaps.That kind of thing,has that helped you or not?

R Yeah I think it has cos I've got a little bit of details in my R.o.A. now still about what jobs done in the fifth year and what I gained,and what I enjoyed.I wouldn't have been able to do that say without a certain teacher there in the lesson.Cos you can see them when you get back from the holidays and are in the sixth form and you might have them and you might see them for a bit,they'll tell you,"Oh,do you remember you were,like ..." you can talk..because you're in the sixth form you can talk to teachers more openly. I had teachers last year who ..which I haven't got this year and they'd say ,"Ah,do you remember last year when you did this you were like really good at this?"And you can ask them,you can even take notes from them just to help you ..it backs you up.

T Does it operate in that informal way or does it operate at all more formally, where you have to sit down with your tutor and officially discuss progress,or fill in reports together ?Does that help you do this kind of thing?

R It's a bit of both really informal and formal because you can...with some of the official things in the R.o.A.you have to sit down with a tutor or a teacher and talk to them and fill in forms,tick boxes.But with others you can ..like ask them,"Can you help me remember anything from last year which I can fit in

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my R.o.A. ?Which would be an advantage for me."

T Has it changed the way that you've worked with teachers and how teachers see you and how you see teachers?

R Yeah,because before the R.o.A. ...during the period of the R.o.A. you realise how much your teacher has helped you and everything ..It's not like most people like to say thank you to teachers or anything but you can see,without the teachers I had last year it would be about half full now.Teachers helped a lot . You have to appreciate it and be grateful to them now.

T So that's actually helped you kind of clarify that kind of thought.

R Yeah.

T Was there ever a time when you felt like packing up on your R.o.A. ?Giving up?Not bothering with it any more?

R Yeah.The fifth year.cos you were .. in the fifth year they pushed you more to do it and you got really fed up and you just wanted to throw it in the bin and say,"Ah well,it's my R.o.A.It'll affect me.What's it to you?"And then the teachers say,"Well ,.."

They point it out to you that if you don't want an R.o.A.you don't have to have one but they tell you all the disadvantages of it and happens all year through ...not constantly,but on and off...the teachers always get you back on to it and into it.They'll say something like."Oh,well that's really good what you've done there,continue with that." Because you've been praised about it you'll keep on doing it.

T So it's the praise element which you need to go for.When you first started did you know what it was all about ;why you were doing it?

R No.I didn't have a clue.

T Did that affect the way you performed with it?

R It did because I used.. at first I used to think it was just a little book for me to take home and throw in a cupboard and never be seen again.So I used to write in garbage about how I'm a number one basketball player or something like that ..and that I don't get on with some teachers and get on with others.And then it ..as you go through the year you get more..you look at the other people and they're building up to it and everyone's learning about it..cos you get talks on it..and then you realise."Oh well I'd better start being serious on it ."

T So you see it now more than a "This is your life" book?[Yeah] In what way is it different for you?How do you see it now then?

R It gives the person who will be reading it in future...it's got your whole..near enough your whole school career in it from start to finish and then outside school as well.It goes into more detail...it's more like a business form or something.It goes into detail about you ..because you've written it yourself ,it's not like reports from other teachers in the fifth year;it gives you chance to actually talk about it and express yourself in it as well at the same time.

T As a system of reporting, ..you mentioned reports,do you think it's better than the old system; when you'd get your teacher to write your subject report?

R Well,not really.It's more..better for the actual person whose R.o.A.it is but you still need your reports to see what isn't being an advantage to you and if there is anything you need more practice on,which then you can gain and put into your R.o.A.so really you need your reports...you couldn't just count this as a report because you've written 90% of it yourself,so it's bound to be one way, saying how well it is for you and everything.

T So you need your teachers or your tutors to back it up,do you [yeah] think?Just one, well obviously,the bell's gone,..one last thing,what advice would you give to any year elevens doing this, advice as to what they should do?Or what advice would you give a year eleven tutor working on R.o.A.s with a group?

R I'd tell the students to like,stick it out .All of the sixth formers have been in year eleven and we've been through exactly the same thing and once they leave the actual fifth form they will appreciate it and be really glad they've had it.And everyone knows it does get boring at times and you get fed up and you can't be bothered but it really does help you for your future and It helps yourself as well thinking about yourself.What you've got in you and how you can do it.And you end up with a really good piece of work at the end.

T Well,thanks for that .There is loads more I could talk to you about.It's been really useful;interesting as well to see the change from year eleven to twelve..

R It's different.

T Well from what you've said there's a difference between ..you know ..in the way you view your R.o.A.s really. [Taped switched off at this point]