Occupational Training for Young People in the United Kingdom

September 1995

OTA-BP-EHR-175
The problems of high unemployment among young people ages 16 through 19, and widespread impressions by employers of inadequate work-related skills among young jobseekers, are not unique to the United States. On the premise that nations can often learn from each other by studying each other’s efforts to resolve similar problems, this background paper examines the youth training experiences of the United Kingdom over the last 30 years.

Both Britain and the United States have faced similar issues when it comes to youth job training: rapid changes in governments, policies, and programs, all of which helps to produce “initiative fatigue”; program overlap and competition between education and labor bureaucracies; reluctance among employers to participate in youth training initiatives; concerns among guidance counselors, parents, and teachers about programs’ potential to track students into low-earning careers; and lack of good program evaluations. Both countries are investing heavily in public-private endeavors to develop skills standards. Future information on the effectiveness of current British initiatives could be informative to U.S. policymakers. These efforts involve the government’s provision of training vouchers to students, a selection mechanism that guides goals students of differing levels of academic achievement into different training paths, and the use of a national system for certifying occupational readiness.

The background paper was prepared for the assessment, Learning to Work: Making the Transition from School to Work, which was requested by the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee (Senator Edward M. Kennedy, then-Chairman of the Committee, now Ranking Minority Member), and endorsed by the House Committee on Education and Labor (now the House Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities).

OTA thanks an advisory panel headed by Edward Donley, Chairman (ret.) of Air Products and Chemicals Co., Allentown, Pennsylvania, and other individuals who reviewed an earlier draft of the background paper, but accepts full responsibility for its contents.

Roger C. Herdman
Director
Project Staff

Clyde Behney
Assistant Director

Denise Dougherty
Program Director
Education and Human Resource

PRINCIPAL STAFF
Denise Dougherty

Helima Croft
Research Analyst¹

OTHER CONTRIBUTING STAFF
John Wirt
Senior Analyst

Christine Ho
Summer Intern

Mark Cunningham
Summer Intern

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
Cecile Parker
Office Administrator²

Rebecca Erickson
Office Administration³

Nanette Rushing
Secretary

Linda Rayford
PC Specialist

¹ Until June 1995.
² Until July 1995.
³ Since July 1995