

**ISSN 1466-1535**

**IN SEARCH OF THE HIGH SKILLS SOCIETY: SOME REFLECTIONS  
ON CURRENT VISIONS**

**SKOPE Research Paper No.32 Summer 2002**

By Caroline Lloyd and Jonathan Payne, SKOPE, University of Warwick

**ESRC funded Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance  
Oxford and Warwick Universities**

## **Editor's Foreword**

### **SKOPE Publications**

This series publishes the work of the members and associates of SKOPE. A formal editorial process ensures that standards of quality and objectivity are maintained.

---

Orders for publications should be addressed to the SKOPE Secretary, SKOPE, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.

# **In Search of the High Skills Society: some reflections on current visions**

**Caroline Lloyd and Jonathan Payne**

ESRC Research Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance,  
(SKOPE)

University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL  
email: skopejp@wbs.warwick.ac.uk  
tel: 44 (0) 24 7652 4694

## **Abstract**

The UK government has committed itself to building a high skills future for the UK. However, despite widespread use of terms such as the ‘knowledge economy’, ‘the high skills society’ and ‘the learning society’, there remains much confusion as to the kind of economy or society different commentators are actually aiming at. The terms may be in common but closer analysis reveals substantive disagreement as to where the UK ought to be heading. The paper seeks to add a little clarity to current debates by mapping the various visions to emerge from three key groupings: i) government and ‘social actors’, ii) those writing from an educationalist background and iii) those coming from a broadly industrial relations tradition. By highlighting the confusion, tensions and contradictions that exist, it becomes clear that high skills are far from being the consensual policy option they initially appear. It is only by opening up these issues that we can appreciate the different aims that exist at the centre of the UK skills debate and begin to confront the real political choices available.

## **Introduction**

By the 1990s, the development of a high skills, high value added 'knowledge-based' economy and 'learning society' had become part of the policy rhetoric of governments across the advanced industrialised world, prompting considerable academic interest (see Ashton and Green 1996, Crouch *et al*, 1999). The current UK Labour government is no exception having committed itself to the creation of a knowledge-driven economy and culture of (lifelong) learning that is seen as holding the key to national well-being (DTI 1998a, DfEE 1998). At the level of broad aspiration, the creation of an economy and society that places learning at its very core finds few dissenters; the real question has been about whether the current policy agenda is capable of delivering on that promise (Keep and Mayhew 1999, Coffield 1999). What is far from clear, however, is what policy makers, or indeed many academics for that matter, understand by the very goals they set themselves, still less what they might actually amount to in terms of a concrete social, economic, political and educational 'project' in the UK. Green and Sakamoto (2001:56) note that 'there is often little precision in debates about what is actually meant by a 'high skills economy''. Meanwhile, the concept of 'the learning society' is accused of being abstract, myth-like, utopian and divorced from social realities (see Hughes and Tight 1998, Rikowski 1998, and for a defence Ranson 1998a).

What then does it mean to create a 'high skills society' or 'learning society' in the UK, if, indeed, it means anything at all? The question, though rarely posed, is of course fundamental, for, as Keep (2000a) argues, without a clear understanding of where it is one wishes to arrive at, the chances of actually getting there appear greatly reduced. This paper seeks, therefore, to add some clarity to current debates by mapping a number of different 'visions' of where the UK might want to be heading under the banners of the 'high skills or 'learning society' projects. Particular attention is paid to the Labour government, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), before moving on to explore the visions of a number of commentators who have explicitly engaged with such policy debates from within the fields of education and industrial relations. We then highlight a number of key problems and analytical issues that emerge from the current visions. Specifically, these relate to the 'model' of capitalism being promoted, what to do about those at the bottom end of the labour market, whether there has been a qualitative 'post-Fordist' shift in the nature of capitalist competition, and the analysis of the employment relationship and the

state. Our argument is that, if these visions of the future are to be something other than a form of elaborate policy or academic daydreaming, they will need to be articulated and concretised in relation to the development of particular economy, society and political system in the UK.

### **Visions of a high skill society**

#### *i) The Government and Social Actors*

New Labour's vision of a high skills future has been informed by the politics of the 'Third Way', which rejects both traditional social democracy and liberalism, and instead aims to reconcile economic dynamism, creativity and innovation with social justice (Blair and Schroeder 1999). As Blair (2000) has argued, it is 'how we modernise the European social model, how Europe embraces the enterprise agenda and seeks to match the dynamism of the US, whilst preserving our commitment to social justice'. For Britain, the vision is of 'a nation in work, competing in the world as a high skill economy where fear of life on the dole is a thing of the past' (Labour Party 2001), where social exclusion and poverty are removed and equality of opportunity prevails. The vision is 'not equal incomes... but true equality - equal worth, an equal choice of fulfilment, equal access to knowledge and opportunity' (Blair 1999).

Wealth creation will be supported by a 'market economy', with flexible capital and labour markets, yet with some basic social standards, such as a low level minimum wage (Blair and Schroeder 1999). In the new environment of the knowledge economy, businesses will need to compete in high value added markets on the basis of skill (DTI/DfEE 2001). Lifelong learning is, therefore, seen as having a crucial role to play in developing a successful economy and in sustaining a civilised and cohesive society, as well as providing opportunities for 'personal growth and the enrichment of communities' (DfEE 1999:13). There has certainly been elements of looking towards the US model, and an emphasis on the need to 'catch up' in economic terms (Blair and Schroeder 1999). Education policy (particularly the expansion of mass higher education), flexible labour markets, employment generation, welfare-to-work and equal opportunities have all been influenced by the US approach (Peck 1999, Arestis and Sawyer 2001). A US-style society, however, is not the vision, given the recognition that it suffers from high levels of social exclusion, poverty and crime. Minimum social standards, an active role for the state in education and training and a 'modernised'

welfare state are the key components of Blair's Third Way. However, despite the rhetoric of social partnership, there is little evidence of an enhanced role for trade unions either at the workplace or in policy-making.

Neither the CBI nor the TUC, both operating as loose representative bodies of employers and trade unions, display particularly well-worked out visions of a high skills future. Nevertheless there are clear differences in their preferred economic and social model both from each other and from New Labour. The CBI appears content with most features of the UK as it is today, although it has been stressed that more manufacturers need 'to make the internal transition to high-value added production' (CBI 2002) and that a 'highly skilled, adaptable, creative workforce is a key ingredient to the future success of the UK economy' (CBI 2000a:1). If there is a vision of a better quality of working life for a wider range of people (see CBI 2000b), this will be through firms competing in the knowledge economy and individuals participating in lifelong learning, the assumption being that a higher skilled workforce will necessarily entail a more equitable society.

Similar to New Labour, there is a critique of the 'rigid' and 'over-regulated' European social model, although the CBI insists that the UK still has too much labour and product market regulation. For them, it is not the government that can achieve 'sustainability and prosperity' but the market, with flexible labour markets and low non-wage labour costs remaining crucial to competing in the current environment. Their view is that the existing 'enterprise-led' approach to training has been effective in enabling firms to respond to the changes in the market. Improvements in the state education system's provision of basic skills, lower levels of taxation, tax incentives to help with research and innovation, and an improved transport system and infrastructure are the types of limited policy options preferred (CBI 2000a, 2000b, 2002).

If there is a TUC vision, it is probably best encapsulated by John Monks, TUC General Secretary, who has supported the European social model, demanding more regulated labour markets and greater controls on corporate power (Taylor 1999:3). This clearly contrasts with New Labour's more US-based vision and gives a key role to unions in pursuing radical change, equality, social justice and solidarity, social partnership and high ethical standards (Monks 2000). There is, however, no 'question about the basic organisation of the economy' but looking for a social democratic

approach that offers ‘good welfare states, rights for people at work and environmental protection’ (Monks 2000).

This vision is based upon a high-skill, high investment workplace, with a key emphasis on trust, productivity and partnership. Skills and learning are seen as central to competing in a knowledge economy and are argued to be a ‘pre-requisite of security, employability and prosperity and job satisfaction’ (TUC 2000a). Although this has much in common with New Labour’s rhetoric, the differences are the methods by which companies should be encouraged to pursue such an approach. Central is a longer term approach to manufacturing, viewed as the key to economic growth, which requires an active industrial policy and dialogue with the social partners (TUC 2000b:21). There should be higher levels of spending on public services and anti-poverty measures, and more legal rights for people at work (Monks 2002). In particular, the TUC has called for a higher level minimum wage, strengthened working time and information and consultation at work legislation and a key role for the unions in government policy making (TUC 2000c).

#### *ii) The View from Education*

In contrast to New Labour and the social actors where the vision is focused predominantly upon the workplace and competitive strategies of firms, educationalists have tended to place most of their attention on outlining a vision for education and the curriculum. These visions often make assumptions about the emergence of the knowledge economy providing a rationale for changes to the education system but give little indication of what a future society would actually resemble (see for example Bentley 1998; Barber 1996, 1998). Others have been more guarded about the prospects of a new ‘post-Fordist’ era, but are still keen to insist upon the potential such emerging trends carry for progressive educational reform. Young (1998a), for example, highlights the possibility of a curriculum based on ‘connective specialisation’ that overcomes the old academic/vocational divide in English 14-19 education, as well as ‘an educative or connective model’ of a learning society (1998a:149). This would be ‘a society based on more connective relationships between sectors and institutions’ with ‘an education-led economy rather than an economy-led education system’ and where ‘work in its most human sense will become ... the educational principle’ (1998b:204).

While all of this ‘involves a concept of a future society’ (1998a:6), there are few clues as to what this society would actually look like.

Brown and Lauder (1996, 2001) are perhaps the most explicit of the educationalists about the shape of a future ‘high skills society’ in the UK. They argue that the shift from Fordism to new varieties of post-Fordism from the early 1970s has created new ‘rules of wealth creation’ which afford ‘an unprecedented historical opportunity to ... build decent societies for all’ based on the principle of ‘collective intelligence’, rather than market individualism (Brown and Lauder 2001:285). This vision is not ‘old-style collectivism, nor the abolition of the capitalist economy’ (ibid:11), but about ‘improving economic performance and the quality of life for all’ (ibid:210), through ‘sharing, cooperating and building trust.’ ‘Learning, work and leisure are inseparable’ (ibid:242) as a society is envisaged of participatory democracy, lifelong learning, high trust relations, a more equitable distribution of income and wealth and a citizen’s wage. Central to their vision is a workplace based around quality, skill, teamworking, creativity, continuous innovation and collective problem solving.

In the UK context, such a project would involve an active state, ‘new forms of corporate governance, more emphasis on medium and long term investment, experimentation with various forms of corporate and business stakeholding and a re-negotiated role for trade unions to enhance productivity and innovation’ (Brown and Lauder 2001:10-11). Although part of their vision is far removed from any current existing society, other elements are drawn from the German or Rhine capitalism which ‘comes closest to our model of a high skill society’ (2001:267). In the end, however, ‘a high skills society is not an end state that is ever achieved, but rather is an ideal at the centre of debates and struggles over the production and reproduction of the societal capacity for high skills’ (Brown 2001:261).

In contrast, Ranson (1994, 1998b:107) explicitly rejects linking ‘the learning society’ to forms of production, preferring to locate his vision around a ‘new moral and political order’ based upon a ‘participative democracy’, ‘active citizenship’ and ‘deep learning’. Only through the creation of a genuine ‘discursive’ or ‘learning democracy’, will societies be able to navigate their way through a period of profound economic, social and political transition (Ranson and Stewart 1998: 258). There is a general silence, however, as to what sort of an economy would be consistent with such a vision, whether it is possible to create a political system based on ‘fair, equal and unconstrained



discussion undistorted by power' (Ranson and Stewart 1998:258), or which existing societies might currently come closest to the mark.

Several other commentators go along with Ranson in arguing that education in the UK needs to be shifted out of a narrow competitiveness-driven policy framework and re-animated by notions of democracy, active citizenship and social justice (Coffield 1999). Avis *et al* (1996:179) insist that developing a 'curriculum for earning, learning, active citizenship and economic growth for all' will require breaking with the market individualism of the New Right and tackling the problems of a low skills, low wage economy. For these writers, however, there are attempts to make links with the broader economic environment, with much of the inspiration again coming from the European 'social model' (see also Gleeson 1996). For Coffield (1999:491), 'the most important lesson we could learn from Europe is that this divided society could begin the process of healing by developing jointly agreed plans for our future through the social partners'. Workplace learning would need to be supported by a strong statutory framework and the City of London would have to learn to invest long term in British industry as part of a coherent industrial policy. Furthermore, the state would need to tackle the inequalities and structural barriers currently opposed to a more inclusive learning society in the UK by 'redistributing income and wealth via progressive taxation' (ibid:496).

Critiquing these type of approaches, Avis (1996, 2000:197) warns that by aligning itself with more 'progressive' varieties of capitalism, be it post-Fordism or the German model, the Left is apt to neglect fundamental and irreconcilable conflicts at the heart of capitalist production concerned 'with the distribution of work and the generation of surpluses'. As an alternative, he offers the vision of a 'radical democracy', to be distinguished from Ranson and Stewart's 'learning democracy', by refusing the notion that such 'differential interests could ever be harmonised through dialogue' (2000:195). For Avis, 'radical democracy' can be used to push notions such as 'lifelong learning' and 'the learning society' beyond the current competitiveness agenda so that they begin to fulfil their potential as concepts of social justice and empowerment. Ultimately, however, the 'struggle is to transcend existing economic relations and to imagine an alternative social formation characterised by social justice' as part of a 're-formed socialism' (Avis 2002). Unfortunately, what this would look like or how the UK might arrive there is left to the imagination of others!

### *iii) Industrial Relations perspectives*

The other key group of academics who have been involved in the high skills debates come under a broad heading of what we refer to as the industrial relations perspective. These writers have tended to focus on the links between the economy and the workplace and to present more detailed policy proposals. Finegold and Soskice's original analysis (1988) of the UK's 'low skill equilibrium' was centred on economic arguments about the future of the UK economy, rather than any broader societal vision. The aim was to help companies produce in areas of high quality production and their ideas were strongly influenced by the Scandinavian and German models of education and training. Although focusing predominantly on the need to strengthen collective organisations and to make major changes to the UK VET system, they also indicated that this would require corresponding shifts in other institutions, such as financial markets, the industrial relations system, the state and political structure.

In a later paper, Soskice (1993) appears to reject the North European model, arguing that it is 'implausible' for the UK, given the lack of socio-economic institutions characteristic of those economies with effective company-based training. Instead, the US is perceived to be a more viable model, given its relatively similar financial and industrial relations systems to the UK and its success in achieving high levels of productivity and innovation. The high skills vision for the UK has, therefore, become a US-style model, based upon a mass higher education system, where two thirds of the population are projected to have high skills. Soskice suggests that the negative aspects of US society, in terms of an 'underclass' of unemployed, low skilled and low paid, could be dealt with in the UK through public sector employment, that was 'not well paid' but offered job security and training.

Similarly Finegold has also pursued a more limited vision of a high skills future, based upon 'high skill ecosystems' associated with California's Silicon Valley, which he argues are more suitable to the 'culture and set of free-market policies' to be found in the UK (1999:75). Networks of inter-related firms, based on knowledge, skills and innovation and research capability would provide a large quantity and quality, if not necessarily very secure, jobs. As with Soskice, he suggests income redistribution as a mechanism to create jobs in the public or service sector.

Couch *et al* (1999), take a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, they present a more idealistic vision of a learning society:

a vision of a world (or at least some individual societies) almost without unskilled, low productivity people, in which all mindless and physically damaging jobs are carried out by robots; all members of the workforce have a source of occupational pride in their skills and knowledge; income differentials are compressed through the market-compatible device of overcoming the scarcity of high skill...' (1999:1-2).

Although they admit this vision is utopian and certainly 'not easy to reach', they argue that progress has been made in the post-war period, particularly in Sweden and Germany. Despite advances being checked by restrictions in public sector expenditure and improvements in productivity making it more difficult to generate employment (1999:2), there are still possibilities for moving closer towards such a 'learning society'. The available choices open to advanced industrialised countries, however, appear to be largely based on the assumption that Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism now sets the agenda and defines the range of options. They dismiss any one model as a guide, and instead draw on practices operating in a range of countries. More specifically, they emphasise the importance of expanding high skill sectors, promoting competitiveness and growth, tackling unemployment, reducing inequality and offering a new deal to public sector workers. It is unclear as to how these types of policies then map on to, or push in the direction of, their 'utopian vision' of a world with little unskilled work.

Keep has gone further than most in spelling out a vision of a high skills society to which Scotland (and possibly the UK) might wish to aspire. His vision is of a 'prosperous, high wage, high productivity economy, where all share in the country's economic success' (Keep 2000b:7). However, the vision extends beyond the economic to include a 'country with genuine notions of citizenship... and with empowered individuals, organisations, localities and regions willing and able to play an active part in shaping their own social, economic and political destinies (2000b:8). Keep explicitly relates his vision of a democratic, egalitarian and inclusive high skills society to a 'North European, and in particularly Scandinavian tradition' (ibid). There would need to be a measure of income redistribution to 'reduce the incidence of acute poverty in the UK population' (2000a:15), with the aim of blocking-off an existing market for cheap, standardised goods and services, whilst simultaneously engineering a Scandinavian-style broad 'high-income consumer base' to support more expensive, quality-based production. Keep (2000b) also stresses the importance of providing companies with access to long-term 'patient and competent capital' and the need to spread the benefits

of 'high performance, high involvement work systems' to a much wider section of the workforce, including the lower skilled.

In contrast Ashton and Green possess a rather more limited vision of a high skills *economy*, or what they prefer to term a 'high skills route to accumulation'. This would be 'a period of relative successful economic growth and development, lasting at least a decade, based on the predominant usage of high-level skills in high-valued-added production technologies' (1996:6). Theirs is not a utopian vision but a particular form of capitalism that is unstable and contradictory and will require an important role for the state in enforcing institutional arrangements to regulate management/worker conflict and structure the process of skill acquisition. The picture is of an economy characterised by a solid educational base produced by the state, high skill-using employers, clusters of innovative firms with appropriate product market strategies, high wages, participation in the workplace and high levels of job satisfaction and job security. They have looked particularly towards Germany and Japan but have also focused on the experience of the 'Asian Tiger economies', which have been seen as successful examples of states using industrial policy to develop the supply and use of high skills (see Ashton *et al* 1999).

### **Exploring the visions**

A key issue that arises from the previous section's broad outline of the different visions is that they are almost inevitably sketchy and often implicit. We can, however, make a number of distinctions between these visions, and perhaps more importantly interrogate some of the assumptions that underlie them. There are those who have tended to focus on a high skills *economy* (for example the CBI and Finegold), where it is about more companies producing in higher value added product markets, as a means to generalised improved living standards and employment creation. In contrast, many educationalists provide detailed illustrations of what an education system might look like but make little attempt to map these onto the economic, social and political institutions that would be needed to support them. Only a few commentators have begun to join up different elements of the political, the economic and the social to form a more encompassing and integrated vision of a high skills society (eg. Brown and Lauder; Keep).

In developing a vision for the UK, a distinction can be made between those who explore and draw upon current organisational structures of existing nations and others

who engage more in futurology, preferring to let their imaginations do the running. The problem with the latter approach is the tendency to overlook the constraints imposed by a capitalist economy (and more specifically British capitalism). Most of the visions we have explored take the former approach and we turn to these in more detail for the remainder of the paper. In the next section, we distinguish between the different visions on the basis of two key aspects, first, the ‘variety of capitalism’ being promoted and, second, given the overwhelming view that high skill work will not be available to all, the solutions offered for those at the lower reaches of the labour market. The final section of the paper will move on to draw out three key analytical and theoretical issues that highlight the difficulties involved in constructing a future vision.

### *Existing models of capitalism*

Of those commentators who have grounded their vision in, or at least drawn their inspiration from, the experience of existing countries’ approaches to developing a high skills society, there is a broad division between those who favour the North European (Scandinavian or German) model and those tending to follow the US approach. The US model is portrayed as offering high levels of productivity, dynamism, innovation and success in high-value added or knowledge-based product markets. Thus it tends to be favoured by those who emphasise the performance or competitive aspects of their vision (eg. New Labour, Finegold, Soskice). In contrast, many who are searching for a high skilled route with a more equal distribution of skills and better quality of working life have focused on the examples set by social democratic countries (eg. Keep). There are others who have questioned the sustainability of the German and Scandinavian models and have begun to look for inspiration from Japan and the Pacific Rim (eg. Ashton and Green), while certain commentators have sought to combine policies from different countries, learning the best from all (eg. Crouch *et al* and Brown and Lauder).

There are a number of issues raised when selecting existing models as a basis for a high skills vision for the UK. As Crouch *et al* (1999:249) argue, taking a set of policies from one country neglects the question of context, and it has become standard practice to deny the possibilities of ‘institutional copying’ because of a country’s historical and cultural specificity (see also Keep 1991). This leaves a problem in searching for a way forward for the UK, as it is extremely difficult to develop policies that have never been put into practice elsewhere. The standard response appears to be

one of asserting the need for a ‘distinctive British way’ but without providing an indication of what such a way might be. Brown and Lauder (2001), for example, pick out specific features of different nations, e.g. the ‘German model of social partnership’, Italian communities and inter-firm networks, Japanese lean production and US risk-taking and innovation. These are all swept together into a high skills vision but with little consideration of whether and how they can be transferred and if they are mutually compatible. If policies cannot be ‘copied’ without the context, then the key agenda becomes one of root and branch institutional transformation.

The attraction of the US approach becomes clear, as conceded by Soskice (1993), in that it does not involve major institutional change to the UK or a fundamental challenge to the current neo-liberal growth model. Nevertheless, what is often overlooked is the specificity of US competitive success, in particular huge economies of scale, relatively protected domestic markets and large-scale state investment in high tech sectors related predominantly to the defence industry. In addition, there is a general rejection of the US model in totality, given its unpalatable levels of poverty, social exclusion and crime. However, there is no real reflection as to whether a deregulated system with short-term financial constraints can coexist with inclusive social policies, low levels of poverty and high levels of skills and training provision (see Freeman 1995; Sengenberger and Wilkinson 1995). The tendency is to assume that firms will invest in skills because this is the rationale of the new competition (see the next section) and that the state will ensure inclusiveness by improving employment opportunities (through the provision of education and training and help for children in poverty) or by expanding jobs in public services.

For those advocating a more North European approach, it is difficult to escape the conclusion, although most commentators avoid actually stating it, that this would involve major institutional changes to the current model of UK capitalism (Lloyd and Payne 2002). Reforming the City, regulating employers, strengthening the role of trade unions and developing an active state are essential elements of a more social democratic model. The questions of how these changes could be brought about in the UK, who would champion them and how resistance might be overcome are rarely, if ever, considered. At the same time, the ability to provide a convincing argument in favour of these approaches has become politically more difficult, given that both Germany and Sweden have recently experienced major economic problems (Streeck 1997; Coates

2000; Green and Sakamoto 2000). The alternative of Japan or Korea may provide examples of the benefits of an active state, yet the institutional, political and social context is even further removed from the UK. Moreover, the poor quality of working life and lack of political and labour rights in establishing these high growth models (Green and Sakamoto 2000) might suggest, as Coates (2000:239) argues, that they do not represent ‘a progressive alternative to liberal capitalism’.

### ***What to do about the low skilled***

Most commentators accept that in *any* high skills society, a substantial minority or majority of the workforce (depending upon the interpretation) will be unable to secure high skilled employment. It is striking, therefore, given the emphasis upon inclusiveness and ‘developing the talents of all’, that few have explored in any real detail the position of those who will not attain attractive, skilled employment opportunities. For the CBI and New Labour, low wages and insecure work is not so much a problem as *part of the solution* to competitiveness and, in particular to, unemployment and social exclusion. Despite the rhetoric around the pursuit of ‘a high-skills, high-value-added economy’, both accept that a ‘flexible’ labour market and a relatively low national minimum wage are essential if the UK is to attract inward investment, firms are to adapt quickly to the new competitive environment, and low productivity workers are to price themselves into jobs. To date, however, such approaches have been associated with a growth in non-participation in the labour market, growing inequalities and a range of social pathologies (Gregg and Wadsworth 1998; Cormier and Craypo, 2000).

To address these types of issues and the problems associated with the US model, Finegold (1999:79) suggests that policy makers might choose to redistribute some of the wealth generated by ‘high skill ecosystems’ in order to provide ‘living-wage jobs for lower-skilled individuals in sheltered portions of the public and private service sectors’. Similarly, Crouch *et al* (1999:399-240) and Soskice (1993) call for an expansion of public sector employment and a resurrection of the old ‘good employer’ model offering the prospect of ‘low pay combined with decent conditions’ and a measure of greater job security for those capable of only low productivity work. There is a *tacit* acknowledgement that this would require a relaxation of low-tax, low-spend priorities in order to raise levels of public funding, along with a policy commitment to improve

conditions of employment in a sector where they have often been worsened by privatisation or 'marketisation'. Beyond that, however, there is little discussion as to what form this redistribution would actually take. Instead the assumptions are clear, that job creation requires low pay and that certain workers should be content to accept these conditions, with the view that they cannot be expected to do anything more challenging. Low wages are automatically assumed to reflect the low productivity of these workers, with no questioning of the meaning of productivity in services and the valuing of skills and jobs of these workers, who are predominantly women.

For a few commentators, there is the view that if the UK is to move onto a high-skill, high-wage trajectory this would require policy levers to raise employers' demand for skill by closing-off cost-based competitive options (following Streeck 1992 and Nolan 1989). High levels of labour market regulation would put pressure on firms to move towards quality-based product strategies and to use and develop employees' skills more effectively. This is often the implicit message to be found in the work of writers such as Keep (1999, 2000b), Keep and Mayhew (1998, 1999) and Ashton and Green (1996). Ashton and Green, however, remain silent about what happens to the minority in their vision who are without high skills. In contrast, Keep argues that higher wages and a more egalitarian distribution of income and wealth are essential to the development of an inclusive high-skills society. He stresses the enormous potential that exists to enrich and broaden the skill content of jobs at the lower end of the labour market through various forms of work re-organisation and job redesign. Even in seemingly unpromising areas such as 'contract cleaning', he argues, there is scope to offer people 'higher skills and more satisfying and rewarding work', with the public sector acting as an exemplar of 'best-practice' for the private sector to emulate. This would mean ensuring that it champions 'innovative forms of work organisation and empowerment' which allow 'greater room for the use of skill, discretion and initiative by workers' (Keep 2000b:20-21).

Brown and Lauder (2001; see also Brown 2001; Lauder and Brown 2002) perhaps go furthest in insisting that a high skills society would require the state to adopt 'a core redistributive function'. In their view, developing the 'collective intelligence of all' will not be possible as long as the labour market leaves some families churning between inadequate benefits and low wage work with few real opportunities to acquire the skills and qualifications necessary to compete effectively for high skill jobs. On this



basis, they advocate the phased introduction of a carer's and a citizen's wage, set above the level of poverty, but contingent upon the recipient making a positive contribution to the community or society.

Of those who stress the need to do something about low waged work, there is an acceptance that some form of redistribution is required either to create employment in the public sector or to enhance the pay and opportunities of the low waged. The differences relate to the extent of that redistribution and the potential to improve the type of jobs that are at the lower end of the labour market. The key question is how feasible are any of these ambitions for the UK, given a political climate and a Labour government that, first, is extremely reluctant to pursue policies of income redistribution and second, along with employers, is wedded to a weakly regulated labour market and relatively low tax economy.

In the next section, we highlight three *analytical* issues to emerge from attempts to outline a vision of a high skills future for the UK. These relate to the question of whether there has been a paradigm shift in contemporary capitalism and to the approaches adopted towards the employment relationship and the state. As we shall argue, clarity on each of these issues is essential if progress is to be made in the UK high skills debate.

### **Analytical Issues**

#### *i) A paradigm shift?*

There is a division between those commentators who construct their vision of high skills on the basis of a clear economic imperative, linked to an alleged shift out of Fordism to new varieties of post-Fordism, and those who remain deeply suspicious of such claims. Much ink has been spilled on the question of whether changes in global capitalism since the 1970s are *favouring* the emergence of a new post-Fordist production process dependent upon teams of highly skilled, autonomous and polyvalent workers and looser forms of managerial control. For some groups, like New Labour and the CBI, such transformations in the nature of work now appear under the rubric of 'the knowledge economy' and are said to flow almost inexorably from the combined forces of global competition, technological advance and changes in consumer demand (see DTI 1998a, CBI 2000a, Bentley 1998).

Sceptics, on the other hand, have stressed the uneven nature of capitalist development, the availability of both high and low skill routes to competitive success, and the persistence of neo-Fordist and neo-Taylorist forms of production across the advanced industrial world. Beyond a general agreement that a high skills growth path may be *preferable* to a low skills one, they have variously hinted that the transition to the former in a country like the UK would require major institutional reform, together with an active role for the state in stimulating both the supply and demand for skills (see Ashton and Green 1996; Green 1998; Keep and Mayhew 1998, 1999; Keep 1999, 2000b; Avis *et al* 1996; Avis 2000).

Other commentators, however, have tended to occupy an uncomfortable and contradictory middle space, somewhere between the two aforementioned positions. In doing so, some have moved away from a more optimistic post-Fordist position, as evidence presented by the sceptics has mounted (see for example Brown and Lauder 1992, 1996, 2001). Others have gradually shifted from a more staunchly sceptical stance, claiming that we are witnessing a slow drift towards high skill, high performance forms of work organisation, albeit in the context of continuing uneven development both within and between countries (see Ashton *et al* 2001). Those who occupy this middle ground tend to enjoy the best of both worlds. Thus, they can resist the simple competitive and technological determinism of the optimists, whilst also retaining a relatively sanguine view that we are now in a new competitive environment which promises greater long-term economic success for those who take the ‘high skills, high quality, high trust’ road.

In many ways, these commentators throw into sharpest relief some of the many problems and contradictions associated with the notion that there is some deep underlying transition taking place in contemporary capitalism. Crouch *et al* (1999:2-3), for example, claim that global competitive pressures and technological advance are causing ‘an *increasing shift* to high skills production in advanced countries’ together with a ‘constant upward shift in the skill profile of the working population’. Then, in almost the same breath, we are informed that neo-liberal policies in the UK and US have massively swollen the numbers of those engaged in low skill, low wage and insecure service sector work.

Similar tensions can be seen to run throughout the work of Brown and Lauder (1992, 1996, 2001). Their recent work accepts many of the sceptics’ arguments about

the continued viability of neo-Fordist low skill, low wage routes. Nevertheless, they cling tenaciously to the belief that with ‘the collapse of Fordism’ in the 1970s, ‘new rules of wealth creation’ have emerged such that ‘economic prosperity *depends* on nations being able to create large numbers of high-skilled jobs which can no longer be delivered according to Fordist principles’ (2001:116 emphasis added). Their high skills vision, however, eschews any *simple* evolutionary logic, remaining but an historic ‘post-industrial’ opportunity, contingent upon a break with the current neo-liberal growth paradigm and an active ‘developmental’ state, which will necessarily involve a degree of political conflict and consensus building. In searching for an economic rationale that can underpin such a project, Brown and Lauder are forced to juggle two seemingly contradictory positions, asserting simultaneously that capitalism *has* and *has not* undergone a fundamental shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. For the obvious question is, if firms can happily continue to profit from neo-Fordist approaches, then what sense does it make to talk of new ‘rules of wealth creation’? As we have argued elsewhere (see Lloyd and Payne 2001a), it seems incumbent, therefore, upon those who remain wedded to ‘post-Fordist’ theoretical perspectives to marshal at least some evidence that new forms of ‘high performance’ working really are becoming more significant in the present era. And, moreover, that they do deliver for employees the kind of beneficial capitalist labour process that is so frequently promised.

Finally, the analysis of the changes taking place in the economy also links to issues about the *sustainability* of a high skills project. For sceptics, such as Ashton and Green (1996), the contradictions inherent in *any* capitalist route to accumulation, whether high or low skills, mean that ‘nothing is permanent’. By contrast, post-Fordist optimists and middle ground equivocators often tend to imply there is a more perennial or durable end-state to be reached, provided countries grasp the nettle of capitalist modernisation and reap the long-term rewards that await those willing to conform to the new rules of wealth generation. Yet, as Coates (2000:119) notes, ‘what is it about newly emerging proletariats in far away places that must oblige them to stay in low-skilled, low value-added production’? If high skill, high value-added approaches are vulnerable to competition from lower waged developing economies, then the issue is whether a UK high skills society could hope to escape indefinitely the ‘crises of competitiveness, unemployment and social retrenchment’ (Coates 2000:254)? To what extent are we presented with a new historic opportunity to create ‘decent societies for

all' (Brown and Lauder 2001), that can withstand capitalism's inherent tendency to instability and crisis?

*ii) The Employment Relationship*

A second analytical issue concerns the conceptualisation of the employment relationship. Drawing on the industrial relations tradition, perspectives have tended to be located along a line drawn from a radical/Marxist position, that sees the capitalist labour process as fundamentally conflictual, to 'pluralist' accounts which accept that conflict is inevitable, albeit in the sense of competing interest groups rather than inherent inequalities of power (see Hyman 1989, Edwards 1995). What is observable within the high skills literature is the failure to be explicit about how employment relations are being conceptualised, coupled with a steady drift towards more unitarist-type assumptions, where the economic environment is said to have changed so substantially as to push the old conflicts to one side in favour of common values and interests.

In the more extreme cases, the world of work seems to have disappeared altogether. The tendency is perhaps most evident among evangelical converts to the new 'networked' or 'knowledge-based' economy, where the impression created is of a workplace in which management and employees coexist as one big happy family (see Leadbetter 1999, Giddens 2000, Bentley 1998). In similar fashion, the Labour government's *Fairness at Work* legislation was introduced with the explicit aim of replacing 'the notion of conflict between employers and employees with the promotion of partnership' (DTI 1998b) and 'a spirit of community and solidarity' (Blair and Schroeder 1999).

Others have looked to the German or Japanese system or to the 'new models' of the high performance work organisation to read off a high skills workplace almost purged of conflict. Brown, for example, argues that 'competition and conflict are an inherent feature of post-industrial societies', yet in the same breath insists that reaping the rewards of the new competitive environment will require a 'model of human cooperation' that is 'premised on high trust relations for the simple reason that the more people cooperate, communicate, and share common goals the more they are able to learn and achieve' (Brown 2001: 48). Similarly, Brown and Lauder (2001: 264) speak of a model of collective intelligence where the 'expenditure of physical and mental

effort in work is as natural as play or rest' and 'people will exercise self-direction and self-control to fulfil aims to which they are committed'. It appears that trust and cooperation require institutional support to be established, but it is almost as if once this is in place, conflict evaporates. As a result, the assertion that conflict is inherent becomes lost amid an analysis that emphasises common goals and a rose-tinted picture of working life that is a universe away from current realities (see Dench *et al* 1998, Cully *et al* 1998).

Ambiguity can also be found in the work of Coffield (1998:54-55) who argues that there is a need for 'generous, far-sighted and capable employers', thus questioning the existing structure and outlook of UK capital, while also reminding us of the 'stubborn relations of class and power'. Crouch *et al* (1999), although generally adopting a pluralist perspective, which recognises the existence of a wide range of different interest groups, suggest that 'a long-term goal of a high-skill economy offers a resolution to a number of conflicts and problems' (1999:19). However, they leave unanswered the question as to which conflicts in the workplace are resolved and which will remain. Keep and Mayhew (1998, 1999, also Keep 1999, 2000a) focus predominantly on the workplace level, but hardly address the employment relationship in any explicit sense. Moreover, in using the OECD's high performance workplace model as a measure of how much progress the UK is making towards becoming a high skills economy, there is a tendency to buy into that model somewhat uncritically without interrogating its *a priori* assumptions about the consensual nature of employment relations.

Ashton and Green take a more radical approach to analysing the employment relationship, although it similarly lacks clarity. Their view appears to be that the organisation of production is essentially a conflictual process (1996:35), although they assert that 'there is always a *potential* for conflict' (ibid:36, emphasis added), rather than it necessarily being endemic. In contrast to other commentators, the development of more cooperative and consensual employee relations can be read as being about managing conflictual interests, rather than seeing differences wither away. These relationships could be developed from the involvement of a strong state and strict regulation of labour market and employee relations institutions - a German-type model, rather than a result of any economic imperative and acceptance of common interests. Avis (2000, 2002) is perhaps the only author who takes the view that the employment

relationship is fundamental conflictual, reflecting class antagonisms both at the point of production and within wider capitalist society. Although some varieties of capitalism may be preferable to others, he argues the real struggle is not to prop up capitalism by mitigating its excesses but to imagine a genuine alternative or ‘reformed socialism’.

The problem is that such perspectives inhabit a political and intellectual climate dominated by neo-liberalism in which alternatives to capitalism are no longer considered credible (see Crouch 1997, Andersen 1994, Hutton 1995). Avis flounders with the issue of how to conceptualise an alternative, whilst many of those with a vision of a high skills capitalist society some how hope to transcend the conflict and inequalities of the capitalist system itself. There is a danger that in seeking a ‘better’ form of capitalism, contributors either fail to provide a full account of the constraints that a capitalist system imposes or, worse still, rely on a text-book transformation in work relations based around vague notions of ‘trust’ and ‘cooperation’. If commentators reject an analysis that considers the employment relationship to be uncertain, contradictory and antagonistic, then they need to be clear in defining their own position. If, however, they do view the employment relationship in this way, it becomes imperative that they explain what is meant by trust and cooperation and how they can be created and sustained under capitalist employment relations.

### *iii) The State*

A third issue to emerge concerns the role ascribed to the state in the development of a viable high skills strategy. Amongst most commentators, the state or government (largely seen as indistinguishable), are presented as *the* central vehicle for such a project. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, to find that ‘the state’ is rarely theorised within the skills literature (for a discussion, see Lloyd and Payne 2002). In some accounts, the state appears to be an embodiment of the ‘common interest’ which can be persuaded to pursue a high skills approach (see Brown 1999, Crouch *et al* 1999); in most it is simply used instrumentally by the government to pursue the required policies.

Ashton and Green are almost alone in attempting to explicitly theorise the state. Here the state is seen as ‘an arena where different class interests are *struggled* over ... with capitalist interests normally dominant’ (1996:39), a perspective which highlights the political issues and conflicts surrounding the development of a viable high skills strategy. Their view is that such a strategy must be contingent upon the prior

construction of a supportive national ‘consensus’ involving the state, capital and labour. Similar conclusions have also been reached by Coffield (1999) and Brown and Lauder (2001), yet there is a failure to take the next logical step of exploring the *possibilities* for such a settlement emerging in specific national contexts, such as the UK. The problem, as these authors would no doubt agree, is that such a settlement would have to be constructed around radical changes to the current model of British capitalism. If we delve deeper into what it means to pursue a more social-democratic approach, then the agenda cannot exclude reforming ‘the City’, corporate governance structures, industrial relations, the labour market and social welfare provision. This type of major institutional restructuring is currently ruled ‘off limits’ by the prevailing neo-liberal consensus in the UK. Not surprisingly, most have drawn a line under ‘the need for consensus’ and left well alone (see Lloyd and Payne 2002).

Brown and Lauder’s recent work (2001; Lauder and Brown unpublished) is something of an exception in that it attempts to explore issues of conflict in relation to the state and to address the question of how a viable high skills strategy might enter the political mainstream. They highlight the ‘class strategy’ pursued by the British Conservative government after 1979, its devastating consequences for both skill formation and social equity, and how much of its legacy has been continued under the Blair government. At the same time, they contend that ‘new rules of wealth creation’, coupled with the internal contradictions of the neo-liberal growth model, are creating the basis for a new centre-left ‘cross-class political alliance’ between middle and working class voters, capable of advancing ‘the struggle for collective intelligence’. In particular, they draw attention to the high levels of insecurity and social risk experienced by ‘the new middle classes’ and the problems that they are now experiencing in terms of social and cultural reproduction.

While this analysis raises many interesting issues that cannot be dealt with here, the analysis of the state remains problematic. In particular, there is an assumption that the state is somehow divorced from economic and social structures, in that it can first be captured by a reactionary Right and led into a frontal assault on organised labour and the poor, and then can be taken by the Left and used to pursue a programme of radical social reform and capitalist modernisation. In other words, the state can be both a coercive instrument of class domination as well as (potentially) a servant of ‘the national interest’ skilfully balancing ‘the interests of individuals and social groups’

(Brown and Lauder 2001:201). This raises key analytical questions about the autonomy of the state, whether it is possible to define, let alone operationalise, a ‘national interest’ and the role of social forces in pressuring the state to pursue a particular agenda. In the UK context, amongst other criticisms, this approach neglects the sources of class-based *power*, for example British employers, multinationals and the City of London, that would oppose and resist any move towards a more active or regulatory British state (see Lloyd and Payne 2001b). It also overlooks the internal opposition that would arise *from within* a UK state that is conditioned by a long history of *laissez-faire* approaches to employers, is dominated by a class elite and where active industrial policy, let alone widespread redistribution, is simply an anathema.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to map the various *visions* of a ‘knowledge economy’, ‘a high skills society’ or a ‘learning society’ currently held by New Labour, social actors and a selection of academics in the UK. While the list is certainly not exhaustive, it suffices to reflect something of the vagueness and sheer confusion that currently surrounds such terminology. Part of the problem is that constructing a vision of the future is after all relatively easy, and concepts such as the knowledge economy and the learning society offer ideal empty boxes for those who would fill them with their wishes, hopes and fantasies. Once born, the dream then takes on a life of its own as if the very act of re-describing the world is itself sufficient to transform it, even in the absence of any corroborating evidence. The modern myth of the ‘knowledge economy’ that emblazons textbook and policy documents requires little solid evidence and has already proved markedly adept at resisting any facts it doesn’t like. Thankfully, there are others prepared to keep two feet firmly planted on *terra firma* and to pull debates back to current economic and social realities.

In this paper we have concentrated mainly upon those small minority of commentators who have sought to rescue such concepts from the watery ‘whirlpool’ of Idealism (Rikowski 1998) and who have tried to think more carefully about what it would actually mean to *construct* a ‘high skills’ or ‘learning society’ in the UK. Where most progress has occurred it has usually been because of attempts to go beyond the boundaries of a particular subject discipline and to view such a project as involving fundamental and ‘joined-up’ change on a variety of fronts – the economic, the political



and the social. Although the vision is often vague and authors are not always able to avoid a splattering of ‘utopia’, they at least begin from a more grounded analysis of the *actually existing* economy and society in the UK.

If more contributors were prepared to clarify their own vision, this would certainly bring to the forefront the *political* nature of the high skills project. Rather than giving the impression that everyone is striving for the same thing, it would open up the real divisions and choices that exist over the future direction of the UK. This, however, is only the first stage. A vision divorced from current economic, political and social realities, with no route map to find the way there, is of little value. Even for those who base their vision on an existing model of capitalism, be it the USA or Germany, have to recognise the degree of ‘systemic’ institutional, economic and social change this would require and, thereby, face up to the thorny questions of ‘is it possible’ and ‘how would you get there?’ If the economy or the state/government are to be the impetus or driver for moving in the ‘right direction’, then what signs are there that the economy displays any of the requisite features or that the government would actively pursue such an approach. The promises offered by the knowledge economy or consensus politics, have been based upon major assumptions about the nature of economic change, the functioning of the employment relationship and the operation of the state. Until these are directly opened up to scrutiny, then vagueness and contradiction will remain the order of the day. Facing up to these issues may simply spell out more starkly the Herculean task that faces a high skills project in the UK, but at least it will reveal the choices that are available and allow a more systematic discussion of the social and political forces that might be capable of delivering real change.

## References

- Anderson, P. (1994) 'Power, politics and the Enlightenment' in D. Miliband (ed) *Reinventing the Left*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Arestis, P. and Sawyer, M. (2001) 'The economic analysis underlying the 'third way'' *New Political Economy* 6,2, 255-278.
- Ashton, D. and Green, F. (1996) *Education, Training and the Global Economy*, London: Edward Elgar.
- Ashton, D., Green, F., James D., and Sung, J. (1999) *Education and Training for Development in East Asia: The Political Economy of Skill Formation in Newly Industrialised Economies*, London: Routledge.
- Ashton, D., Sung, J., Raddon, A. and Powell, M. (2001) 'National frameworks for workplace learning' *Workplace learning in Europe* London: ECLO/ ETDF-FEFD/SKOPE/CIPD.
- Avis, J. (1996) 'The myth of the post-fordist society' in J. Avis *et al* (eds) *Knowledge and Nationhood*, pp71-82, London: Cassell.
- Avis, J. (2000) 'Policy talk: reflexive modernization and the construction of teaching and learning within post-compulsory education and lifelong learning in England' *Journal of Education Policy* 15,2, 185-199.
- Avis, J. (2002) 'Social Capital, collective intelligence and expansive learning' *British Journal of Education Studies*, forthcoming.
- Avis, J., Bloomer, M., Esland, G., Gleeson, D. and Hodkinson, P. (1996) *Knowledge and Nationhood*, London: Cassell.
- Barber, M. (1996) *The Learning Game: arguments for an education revolution* London: Victor Gollancz.
- Barber, M. (1998) 'No more Marx: Future success is in your imagination', *Times Educational Supplement*, 3 April, 1998, p. 20.
- Bentley, T. (1998) *Learning beyond the classroom: education for a changing world* London: Routledge.
- Blair, T. (1999) Tony Blair's speech to the Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth, 28 September.
- Blair, T. (2000) 'Summary of the achievements of the Lisbon summit' Statement to the House of Commons, 27 March.
- Blair, T. and Schroeder, G. (1999) *Europe: The Third Way/ Die Neue Mitte*.
- Brown, P. (1999) 'Globalisation and the political economy of high skills' *Journal of Education and Work*, 12, 3, 233-251.
- Brown, P. (2001) 'Globalization and the political economy of high skills' in Brown, P. Green, A. and Lauder H. (eds) *High Skills: Globalization, Competitiveness and Skill Formation*, pp.235-262, Oxford: OUP.
- Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (1992) 'Education, economy and society: an introduction to a new agenda' in P. Brown and H. Lauder (eds.), *Education for Economic Survival: From Fordism to Post-Fordism?* London: Routledge.

- Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (1996) 'Education, Globalization and Economic Development', *Journal of Education Policy*, 11,1, 1-25.
- Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (2001) *Capitalism and Social Progress* Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Coates, D. (2000) *Models of Capitalism: Growth and Stagnation in the Modern Era*, London: Polity Press.
- Coffield, F. (1998) 'A tale of three little pigs: building the learning society with straw' *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 12,1, 44-58.
- Coffield, F. (1999) 'Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control', *British Educational Research Journal*, 25,4, 479-499.
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2000a) 'Fact not fiction: UK training performance' *Human Resources Brief*, July.
- CBI (2000b) *Europe at Work*, London: CBI.
- CBI (2002) 'Britain needs a manufacturing strategy, CBI chief tells East of England Business Leaders' CBI News Release, 6 March.
- Cormier, D. and Craypo, C. (2000) 'The working poor and the working of American labour markets' *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24, 691-708.
- Crouch, C. (1997) 'The terms of the neo-liberal consensus', *The Political Quarterly*, 68, 4, 352-360.
- Crouch, C. Finegold, D. and Sako, M. (1999), *Are Skills the Answer? The Political Economy of Skill Creation in Advanced Industrial Societies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cully, M., Woodward, S., O'Reilly, A. and Dix, A. (1999) *Britain at Work* Routledge: London.
- Dench, S. Perryman, S. and Giles, L. (1998) *Employers' Perceptions of Key Skills*, Report 349, Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1998) *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*, Sheffield: DfEE.
- DfEE (1999) *Learning to Succeed: Raising Standards in post-16 education*, Sheffield: DfEE.
- DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) (1998a) *Our Competitive Future: Building the Knowledge-Driven Economy* Cm 4176, London: HMSO.
- DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) (1998b) *Fairness at Work White Paper: Foreword by the Prime Minister*, London: HMSO.
- DTI/DfEE (2001) *Opportunity for all in a world of change: A white paper on enterprise, skills and innovation* Cm 5052, London: HMSO.
- Edwards, P (1995) 'The employment relationship' in P. Edwards (ed) *Industrial Relations*, pp 3- 26, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Finegold, D. (1999) 'Creating Self-sustaining, High-Skill Ecosystems', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 15, 1, 60-81.

- Finegold, D. and Soskice, D. (1988) 'The Failure of Training in Britain: Analysis and Prescription', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 4, 3, 21-53.
- Freeman, R (1995) 'The Limits of Wage Flexibility to Cure Unemployment' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 11, 1, 63-72.
- Giddens, A. (2000) *The Third Way and its Critics*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gleeson, D. (1996) 'Post-compulsory education in a post-industrial and post-modern age' in J. Avis, M. Bloomer, G. Esland, D. Gleeson and P. Hodgkinson (eds) *Knowledge and Nationhood: Education, Politics and Work*, pp82-104, London: Cassell.
- Green, A. and Sakamoto, A. (2000) 'The place of skills in national competition: strategies in Germany, Japan, Singapore and the UK' *The High Skills Project Working Paper*, London: Institute of Education.
- Green, A. and Sakamoto, A. (2001) 'Models of High Skills in National Competition Strategies' in Brown, P. Green, A. and Lauder H. (2001) *High Skills: Globalization, Competitiveness and Skill Formation*, pp56-160, Oxford: OUP.
- Green, F. (1998) 'Securing commitment to skill formation policies', *New Political Economy*, 3,1, 134-8.
- Gregg, P and Wadsworth, J. (1998) *Unemployment and non-employment: Unpacking economic inactivity* London: Employment Policy Institute.
- Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (1998) 'The Myth of the Learning Society' in Ranson, S. (Ed) *Inside the Learning Society*, pp.179-188, London: Cassell.
- Hutton, W. (1995) *The State We're In*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hyman, R. (1989) *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations*, London: MacMillan.
- Keep, E. (1991) 'The grass looked greener - some thoughts on the influence of comparative vocational training research on the UK policy debate' in P. Ryan (ed) *International Comparisons of Vocational Education and Training for Intermediate Skills*, pp23-46, London: Falmer Press.
- Keep, E. (1999) 'UK's VET policy and the 'Third Way': following a high skills trajectory or running up a dead end street?' *Journal of Education and Work* 12, 3, 323-346.
- Keep, E (2000a) 'Creating a knowledge-driven economy - definitions, challenges and opportunities' *SKOPE Policy Paper 2*, Coventry: SKOPE, University of Warwick.
- Keep, E (2000b) *Upskilling Scotland: New Horizon Report* Edinburgh: Centre for Scottish Public Policy.
- Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (1998) 'Was Ratner Right?' *Economic Report* 12,3 Employment Policy Institute.
- Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (1999) 'The Assessment: Knowledge, Skills and Competitiveness', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 15(1), pp.1-15.
- Labour Party (2001) 'Employment' Labour Party website ([www.labour.org.uk](http://www.labour.org.uk) - accessed 5.6.01).

- Lauder, H. and Brown, P. (2002) 'Education, Class and Economic Competitiveness' unpublished
- Leadbeater, C. (1999) *Living on Thin Air*, Penguin: Harmondsworth.
- Lloyd, C. and Payne, J. (2001a) 'The political economy of skill and the limits of educational policy' British Institute of Educational Research, Leeds, September.
- Lloyd, C. and Payne, J. (2001b) 'On 'the political economy of skill': assessing the possibilities for a viable high skills project in the UK' 16th Annual Employment Relations Unit Conference, Cardiff Business School, September.
- Lloyd, C. and Payne, J. (2002) 'Towards a political economy of skill?' *Journal of Education and Work*, forthcoming.
- Monks, J. (2000) 'Speech to the Liberal Democratic Assembly' 21 September, London: TUC.
- Monks, J. (2002) 'Monks warns Labour that union support could haemorrhage' Press Release 9 March, London: TUC.
- Nolan, P. (1989) 'Walking on water? Performance and industrial relations under Thatcher', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 20, 2, pp. 81-92
- Peck, J. (1999) 'New labourers? Making a New Deal for the 'workless class' *Environment and planning C*, 17,3, 345-372.
- Ranson, S. (1994) *Towards the Learning Society*, London: Cassell.
- Ranson, S. (1998a) 'A Reply to the Critics', in S. Ranson (ed) *Inside the Learning Society*, pp. 241-250, London: Cassell.
- Ranson, S. (1998b) 'Towards the Learning Society' in S. Ranson (ed) *Inside the Learning Society*, pp91-108, London: Cassell.
- Ranson, S. and Stewart, J. (1998) 'The Learning Democracy', in S. Ranson (ed) *Inside the Learning Society*, pp.253-270 London: Cassell.
- Rikowski, G. (1998) 'Only Charybdis: The Learning Society Through Idealism', in Ranson, S. (Ed.) *Inside the Learning Society*, pp. 214-229, London: Cassell.
- Sengenberger, W. and Wilkinson, F. (1995) 'Globalization and Labour Standards' in J Michie and J. Grieve Smith (eds) *Managing the Global Economy*, pp111-134, Oxford, OUP.
- Soskice, D. (1993) 'Social skills from mass higher education: rethinking the company-based initial training paradigm' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 9,3,101-113.
- Streeck, W. (1992) *Social Institutions and Economic Performance*, London: Sage.
- Streeck, W. (1997) 'German capitalism: does it exist? Can it survive?' *New Political Economy*, 2, 20, 237-56.
- Taylor, R (1999) 'Blair draws TUC attack over works councils' *Financial Times* 29 October, p3
- Trades Union Congress (TUC) (2000a) *The TUC and Skills and Learning*, TUC website www.tuc.org.uk, accessed 19/6/02.
- TUC (2000b) *Britain Can make it: a strategy for modern manufacturing* London: TUC.

- TUC (2000c) *The Next Five years: promoting fairness and competitiveness* London: TUC.
- Young, M. (1998a) *The Curriculum of the Future: From the 'new sociology of education' to a critical theory of learning* London: Routledge.
- Young, M. (1998b) 'Post-Compulsory Education for a Learning Society', in S. Ranson (ed) *Inside The Learning Society*, pp. 189-204, London: Cassell.