



## It's about work...

Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning

**CAVTL**

Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning

# It's about work...

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Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning

The summary report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning

Published by: Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

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LSIS 324

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## Foreword



*Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.*

Theodore Roosevelt

A central strand of the government's reform plan for FE and skills, *New Challenges, New Chances*, was the establishment of an independent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning to identify and promote outstanding practice.

It has been a great privilege to be appointed chair to this independent Commission which has drawn on expertise from all the component parts of the skills system: large and small employers, colleges, training providers, academic partners, learned societies, trade unions, the armed forces and students/apprentices/employees. To reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of our sector we have not taken evidence in Whitehall but have gone out to see the work in situ and to draw lessons from practice to theory. We have seen genuinely world-class provision in a whole range of settings, much of which challenged the initial assumptions of commissioners. What we have consistently found is that the best provision is collaborative in nature, what we are calling the **two-way street** between providers and employers, and has a **clear line of sight to work**. It is about relationships not structures, joint responsibility not just vertical accountability.

Our report also makes a contribution to a more fundamental debate as to what we value and hold in high esteem in the world of work. The continuing recession brings a new urgency to this debate. We must ensure that our skills system produces a home-grown pipeline of skilled individuals, who can design, develop and deliver the sophisticated technology and high quality products and services which will enable the UK to compete at the highest level. Such productive work helps build identity and self-esteem, and promotes the wellbeing of communities.

A single report of this kind cannot do justice to the over 250 items of evidence we have received, and the many contributions through our seminars and other events. This report is therefore not the end but the beginning of a process. We have made a series of recommendations which we believe will significantly strengthen our system into the next decade and beyond. Rather than select case studies to illustrate certain points, we intend to share with you – in a supplementary paper to follow – the rich and powerful submissions we have received that have influenced the key recommendations in this report.

I would like to thank all the commissioners who have freely given of their time and energy to support the work of the Commission as we moved between Preston, Bridgwater, Derby, London and Salisbury Plain. I am particularly grateful for the leadership and support given by our Vice Chairs, Graham Schuhmacher MBE, Head of Development Services at Rolls-Royce, and Fiona McMillan OBE, former Principal, Bridgwater College and President of the Association of Colleges (2011–2012).

My thanks go to Lorna Unwin, Professor of Vocational Education at the Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies at the Institute of Education, University of London, who has played an invaluable role as the Commission's academic adviser in ensuring our conclusions are intellectually rigorous and compelling, and to Geoff Stanton, Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London, for his specialist advice and experience. I am also grateful to the Institute for Learning for their preparatory work and ongoing support for the Commission.

Finally, I would like to thank Jenny Williams and her team from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service who through a combination of expertise and passion have overseen and delivered this exciting project.



**Frank McLoughlin CBE**  
**Chair, Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning**  
**Principal, City and Islington College**  
**March 2013**

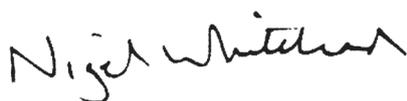
## Introductory message



As the title says – ‘it’s all about work’! I welcome the emphasis this report puts on vocational education and training being about work – and providers and employers sharing responsibility for delivering high quality vocational education and training. As an employer, I am in the skills business. I bring in new talent through our apprenticeship scheme and graduate development programme, and continue to develop this talent through ongoing development opportunities in the business.

For me, it is not about qualifications. It is about working with providers to develop learning programmes that address skills needs and wider learning for the sector. The providers that do this best are those with governance and leadership that focuses on employers as customers, and teaching staff able to work closely with employers and who have benefitted from relevant work placements with employer partners. This way employers and providers have the joint benefits of working together to design, develop and deliver good quality learning programmes both to up-skill employees and make sure a strong talent pipeline is in place for their businesses and sector. There are really good examples of where this is happening, and I hope these examples will inspire other providers and employers to collaborate.

I’ll do my part, as a Commissioner at the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, to tackle the issues raised in this report as I take forward the adult vocational qualifications review. So well done to Frank and team for your clear articulation of the issues.



**Nigel Whitehead**  
Group Managing Director, BAE Systems plc  
UK Commissioner

## Overview

*The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.*

McKinsey and Company (2007)<sup>1</sup>

This principle was the starting point for our Commission, charged with exploring adult vocational teaching and learning. A focus on excellent teaching and learning lies at the heart of *New Challenges, New Chances*<sup>2</sup> and our work has reinforced its importance – that is why we start with the principles, characteristics and distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning. But what became clear as we went about our work is that the context within which vocational teaching and learning sits cannot be ignored and so our report also considers the key enabling factors that must be in place for excellent vocational teaching and learning to flourish.

This is a report about the future, not about the past, and the role of vocational teaching and learning in supporting individuals, businesses and communities to grow and succeed. A return to prosperity will depend on being much more ambitious about the capacity of individuals, large and small employers, and vocational teachers and trainers to raise their game. Strong advanced economies need high quality vocational education and training (VET) that can respond to and prepare us all for changes in work, advances in knowledge and technology, and the increasing demand for people with higher levels of skill. And it is important to stress that there is evidence to show individuals also derive wider social benefits from participating in good quality vocational programmes.<sup>3</sup>

Our vision is of a first-class VET system, which develops the ability to perform in a job, and provides a platform for occupational, personal and educational progression. It must provide learners with both initial routes into work and through-career development, including opportunities to change career. And it should be based on an ambition to expand vocational provision at levels 3, 4 and 5, as the basis for progression and economic growth. Vocational teaching and learning must be characterised by a **clear line of sight to work**, and the VET system should operate as a **two-way street**.

A **clear line of sight to work** is critical because vocational learners must be able to see why they are learning what they are learning, understand what the development of occupational expertise is all about, and experience the job in its context. The real work context should inform the practice of vocational teaching and learning for learners, teachers and trainers.

The key enabling factor is the VET system working as a **two-way street**, not further education and skills operating as a separate 'sector'. The **two-way street** is about genuine collaboration between colleges and training providers, and employers. In the best examples the Commission has seen, employers are not just customers of vocational teaching and

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey&Company (2007) *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top*, McKinsey&Company.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances, Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System*, London: BIS.

<sup>3</sup> Cedefop (2011) *Vocational education and training is good for you: The social benefits of VET for individuals*, Cedefop Research Paper 17, Luxembourg: Publications of the European Union.

learning, but are engaged at every level in helping to create and deliver excellent vocational programmes. Collaboration is based on the recognition that there is added value in working together. Providers and employers make distinctive contributions for mutual benefit. This may seem an obvious statement, but it is fundamental to good vocational teaching and learning.

The Commission has seen excellent examples of adult vocational teaching and learning across all sectors of the economy. We know how to do this well and have considerable expertise to draw on. Commissioners have also been learning more about and building on ideas from other countries. What is clear is that the best vocational teaching and learning is a sophisticated process; it demands 'dual professionals' – teachers and trainers with occupational expertise and experience, who can combine this with excellent teaching and learning practice.

Paradoxically, however, what has also become clear is that practice is inconsistent because of the requirement to work within a system which continues to seek to specify so much from the centre. The challenge is to combine the need for quality standards with a locally responsive system and build on the expertise we have, to make it more visible, and replicate it more widely.

After a brief introduction (chapter 1), our report therefore explores the Commission's conclusions on:

- the principles, characteristics and distinctive features of excellent adult vocational teaching and learning, and the implications for the education and training of vocational teachers and trainers (chapter 2);
- the enabling factors necessary for excellent adult vocational teaching and learning to flourish (chapter 3).

Finally, we bring together our recommendations (chapter 4), setting out what we need to do next, and who should take the lead. Our recommendations are intended to build on the excellent examples of practice the Commission has seen, in order to create a consistently strong system of vocational teaching and learning across the country.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### A: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning

The principles of curriculum development and pedagogy, as set out in chapter 2 of our report, must underpin excellent vocational teaching and learning. They also provide the basis for revising and enhancing the education and training of vocational professionals.

The Commission is very clear that qualifications play an important role in the English system, for employers, individuals and society more generally. But we need to turn the current way of doing things on its head and return qualifications to being the kite-mark of a learning programme, rather than the definition of a curriculum. This means putting the focus back on curriculum and programme design, and the development and updating of occupational and pedagogical expertise.

### Four characteristics

Reflecting on our visits, seminars, and evidence submitted to the Commission, we believe there are four characteristics on which excellent programmes of adult vocational teaching and learning depend:

1. a **clear line of sight to work** on all vocational programmes;
2. 'dual professional' teachers and trainers who combine occupational and pedagogical expertise, and are trusted and given the time to develop partnerships and curricula with employers;
3. access to industry-standard facilities and resources reflecting the ways in which technology is transforming work;
4. clear escalators to higher level vocational learning, developing and combining deep knowledge and skills.

Provision that demonstrates these characteristics stands a good chance of being vocational and effective. But if these characteristics are missing or weak, then, in the Commission's view it will not be vocational, and is unlikely to be good.

### Eight distinctive features of vocational pedagogy

Flowing from the four characteristics on which excellent vocational teaching and learning depend, the Commission has identified eight distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning:

1. that through the combination of sustained practice and the understanding of theory, occupational expertise is developed;
2. that work-related attributes are central to the development of occupational expertise;
3. that practical problem solving and critical reflection on experience, including learning from mistakes in real and simulated settings, are central to effective vocational teaching and learning;
4. that vocational teaching and learning is most effective when it is collaborative and contextualised, taking place within communities of practice which involve different types of 'teacher' and capitalise on the experience and knowledge of all learners;
5. that technology plays a key role because keeping on top of technological advances is an essential part of the occupational expertise required in any workplace;
6. that it requires a range of assessment and feedback methods that involve both 'teachers' and learners, and which reflect the specific assessment cultures of different occupations and sectors;
7. that it often benefits from operating across more than one setting, including a real or simulated workplace, as well as the classroom and workshop, to develop the capacity to learn and apply that learning in different settings, just as at work;
8. that occupational standards are dynamic, evolving to reflect advances in work practices, and that through collective learning, transformation in quality and efficiency is achieved.

## B: Enabling factors

In addition, there are four enabling factors (which we describe in more detail in chapter 3) that the Commission believes must be in place for vocational teaching and learning to flourish:

1. a **two-way street** – genuine collaboration between colleges and training providers, and employers;
2. vocational qualifications that include both a national core and a locally tailored element, giving employers a direct involvement in developing vocational programmes;
3. leadership, management and governance which combines a focus on the quality of vocational teaching and learning, with an approach to leading through collaboration in order to build the **two-way street**;
4. a collaborative approach to accountability in order to empower VET professionals to maximise impact for employers and learners.

## C: Recommendations

In order to build on the excellent examples of practice the Commission has seen to create a consistently strong system of vocational teaching and learning, we make ten recommendations:

1. Adopt the **two-way street**.
2. Develop a **core and tailored approach** to vocational qualifications.
3. Revise and strengthen the education and training arrangements for vocational teachers and trainers including introducing **Teach Too**, a scheme to encourage experienced professionals to pass on their expertise.
4. Reinstate employers' presence and influence across providers of VET.
5. Establish a National VET Centre to take responsibility for research and development of VET.
6. Test the principles, key characteristics and distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning proposed in this report.
7. Develop the role of technology in VET.
8. Create a cadre of specialist English and maths tutors in every college to support learners and vocational teachers and trainers in a given locality.
9. Support the development of VET leaders and managers to enable them to both lead the process of improvement of vocational teaching and learning, and build **the two-way street**.
10. Encourage the collaborative role of government and explore the use of effective incentives to drive the demand from, and the engagement of, employers.

Our recommendations are set out in full in chapter 4, together with our proposals for who should take each one forward.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

[The challenge for vocational teaching and learning professionals is] *to build curriculum and assessments that replicate the uncertain, messy, problem-based, people intense, and time limited world of work.*

Nancy Hoffman<sup>4</sup>

We are living in a period of profound economic turbulence. Establishing a sound economic footing for future generations will require us to value and develop, as never before, people with the creative ability to combine technical, professional and personal skills. Businesses are operating in increasingly demanding and dynamic environments – their needs for skills and knowledge change with every new technology, every new product, and every significant new customer who comes along. And with job growth likely to be greatest in small companies, we need a strong VET system to support those businesses, and to recognise and nurture entrepreneurial talent.<sup>5</sup>

Changes in demography and technological advances are also impacting on the ways we work and learn. Working lives are being extended, different patterns of work are emerging, and younger people are taking longer to settle into adult careers.<sup>6</sup> Vocational learners are not passive recipients – they bring their own experiences, knowledge and expectations of life and work to the process of vocational learning. And technology increasingly enables learning to be different – personalised, collaborative, and 24/7, including across time zones.

In order for adult vocational teaching and learning to respond to and prepare us all for changes in work, advances in knowledge and technology, and the increasing demand for people with higher levels of skill, we need a VET infrastructure that combines quality standards with a locally responsive system; one that enables us to build on the expertise we have, to make it more relevant, more visible, and replicate it more widely.

That is why this independent Commission is so important. It was established as part of the *New Challenges, New Chances* strategy to enable *'the sector itself to develop, guided by its own insights and experiences rather than by impersonal instructions from a remote bureaucracy'*. Excessive control and interference have characterised developments in the last decade, to the extent that they now risk limiting people's energy, confidence and ambition. We have welcomed the opportunity to break from the culture of being 'done to', and encourage government to continue the more collaborative approach to accountability that it has started, including the move away from central policy initiatives to determine the role of the FE and skills sector.

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, N. (2011) *Schooling in the Workplace*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

<sup>5</sup> ECORYS (2013) *EU SMEs in 2012: at the crossroads, Annual report on small and medium-sized enterprises in the EU, 2011/12*, Rotterdam: ECORYS;

O'Leary, D. and Wind-Cowie, M. (2012) *Everyone's Business*, London: DEMOS.

<sup>6</sup> Furlong, A. (ed) (2009) *Youth and Young Adulthood*, London: Routledge;

UKCES (2010) *Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow – The National Strategic Skills Audit for England 2010 – Volume 1: Key Findings*, London: UKCES.

Equally, our proposal for a **core and tailored approach** to the design of vocational qualifications seeks to re-balance a nationally specified core with a tailored element to meet local demand. We need colleges, training providers and employers to have more opportunities to collaborate directly (as part of the **two-way street**) to meet the specific needs of employers and learners – giving employers a real stake in shaping vocational programmes and qualifications.

This report is the start of a process to raise the esteem of, and empower, VET professionals. Before the summer, we will publish two supplementary papers. One will draw together examples of good practice and case studies from the submissions of evidence to the Commission, connecting the practice they reflect with our developing understanding of vocational teaching and learning theory. The second will consider the international evidence, and will include a review of the research literature on vocational pedagogy. These papers will support our recommendation to VET partners (colleges, training providers, employers and trade unions) to review their own provision and arrangements against those described in this report.

We trust that government and its agencies, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, awarding bodies, Ofqual, professional bodies, Ofsted, teacher educators in higher education (HE), and the new Guild<sup>7</sup> will also play their respective roles in enabling adult vocational teaching and learning to flourish by addressing our recommendations to them.

We believe our recommendations complement those of recent reports into apprenticeships and the professionalism of staff in further education.<sup>8</sup> Our distinctive contribution has been to focus on how vocational teachers and trainers can be supported to spread and improve the practice and impact of quality adult vocational teaching and learning.

## The Commission's approach

We were tasked with developing a framework to enhance the quality, and improve the outcomes and impact, of adult vocational teaching and learning for learners and employers. This has involved:

- articulating the features of excellent adult vocational teaching and learning;
- reviewing a range of pedagogical approaches;
- investigating the role of technology;
- exploring how the best colleges and training providers work with employers.

The Commission has aimed to do things differently. Appointed through an open process, nineteen commissioners<sup>9</sup> have reflected the breadth and diversity of vocational teaching and learning. In addition, partners and advisers have extended the reach and depth of the work. The Commission has deliberately not been Westminster based. Central to its approach has been a programme of visits<sup>10</sup> to observe excellent vocational teaching and learning in action; to listen to learners, teachers and trainers, and employers and trade unions; and to reflect on the characteristics of effective practice both in the UK and overseas – working from practice to theory.

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<sup>7</sup> Plans for a new Guild for the learning and skills sector are currently being developed. See <http://www.feguild.info/index.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Holt, J. (2012) *Making Apprenticeships More Accessible to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises*, London: BIS.

Richard, D. (2012) *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships*, London: BIS.

Lingfield, R. (2012) *Professionalism in Further Education: Final Report of the Independent Review Panel*, London: BIS.

<sup>9</sup> For a full list of commissioners, see Appendix C.

<sup>10</sup> For a full list of the Commission's visits and seminars, see Appendix D.

In addition to six commissioners' meetings, the Commission's programme of work has involved:

- a range of seminars with teachers, trainers and teacher educators; and learners, employers, professional associations and learning technologists; and online discussions;
- a visit to Denmark to see and discuss that country's approach to vocational teaching and learning;
- a rigorous review and synthesis of the international and UK research and evidence base, including literature reviews; over 250 items of evidence; and commissioned research.

## A note on terminology

This is a report about adult vocational education and training (VET). It is not about the whole of further education. We recommend adopting the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street** between providers and employers, not further education and skills operating as a separate 'sector'. Our report is primarily focused on post-compulsory (18+) vocational teaching and learning, recognising that the majority of this occurs in workplaces.

The terms 'adult', 'vocational', and 'pre-vocational' are important ones for the Commission, but there are no easy definitions. We have included our interpretations for reference in Appendix A.

Reflecting the Commission's broad canvas, we use the term 'vocational learner' to include students, trainees, apprentices, and employees.

And we use the term 'vocational teachers and trainers' to include a range of 'teaching' roles including teachers, trainers, lecturers, tutors, assessors, mentors, coaches, and workplace supervisors.

## Can we use the term pedagogy?

A robust vocational teaching and learning system must be underpinned by a serious focus on vocational pedagogy. And yet, as we have gone round the country visiting sites of vocational teaching and learning and in our seminars, of all the terms we have discussed the one that gets people most agitated is 'pedagogy'.

For too long, the sophisticated and connected process of teaching, training and learning has been undervalued. The Commission therefore agrees with Lucas, Spencer and Claxton (2012)<sup>11</sup> about the importance of codifying, recognising and valuing the sophisticated practice of vocational pedagogy. We acknowledge those who argue for an educational distinction between 'pedagogy' (for children) and 'andragogy' (for adults), but in the interests of engaging employers and the wider public in discussion about vocational education and training, we use the term pedagogy in a general sense in this report.

But we do not see vocational pedagogy as a set of rules and procedures that are set in stone. Many of the teachers and trainers we have met want to debate ideas about what works in different settings and they want permission and support to be more innovative.

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<sup>11</sup> Lucas, B., Spencer, E. and Claxton, G. (2012) *How to teach vocational education: A theory of vocational pedagogy*, London: City and Guilds.

## Chapter 2: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning

*I could learn about veterinary somewhere else, but it wouldn't come across as well as hearing it from a vet with his hand up the cow's backside.*

Land-based student

*... for me coming straight from industry, it's being able to pass on that knowledge that it's taken me 25 years to get.*

Construction tutor

In this chapter, we explore how the principles of curriculum development and pedagogy apply to excellent adult vocational teaching and learning<sup>12</sup> and the role played by technology. Flowing from this, we consider the implications for the education and training of vocational teachers and trainers.

### Curriculum development

We need to put curriculum development and programme design back at the heart of vocational teaching and learning. Over the last 30 years, the emphasis has shifted from curriculum development to qualifications design, which has wrongly been equated with programme design. Together with a funding regime based on qualifications, this has exacerbated a focus on 'assessment as learning' and qualifications.<sup>13</sup>

The Commission is very clear that qualifications play an important role in the English system, for employers, individuals and society more generally. But we need to turn the current way of doing things on its head and return qualifications to being the kite-mark of a learning programme, rather than the definition of a curriculum.

The process of curriculum development and design should be at the centre of the **two-way street** so that colleges, training providers and employers are directly involved, shaping programmes that reflect the up-to-date needs of occupations and workplaces, and which are based on a broader, more aspirational concept of competence.

In particular, this will involve reinstating employers' presence and influence, for example by ensuring that every curriculum area in a college or training provider should have at least one employer sponsor, and preferably an employer panel also involving trade unions.

For employers, this should be recognised as a key way of ensuring they get the skills they need, strengthening the links between on and off the job elements of vocational programmes, investing in the pipeline for future skills, and enabling closer working with occupationally expert teachers and trainers. But it should also be part of the deal for receiving employer ownership funding or other incentives.

<sup>12</sup> The Commission's supplementary papers will explore the principles, characteristics and distinctive features of excellent adult vocational teaching and learning in more depth, with reference to examples of good practice and case studies from the evidence submitted to the Commission, and also in relation to the international research literature on vocational pedagogy. This will inform more detailed proposals for the work of the proposed National VET Centre.

<sup>13</sup> Ecclestone, K. et al (2010) *Transforming Formative Assessment in Lifelong Learning*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

For learners, employers and providers, this approach is more likely to ensure provision that demonstrates our four characteristics of excellent adult vocational teaching and learning:

1. a **clear line of sight to work** on all vocational programmes;
2. 'dual professional' teachers and trainers who combine occupational and pedagogical expertise, and are trusted and given the time to develop partnerships and curricula with employers;
3. access to industry-standard facilities and resources reflecting the ways in which technology is transforming work;
4. clear escalators to higher level vocational learning, developing and combining deep knowledge and skills.

A key factor in enabling this re-focusing on curriculum development and programme design is our recommendation for a **core and tailored approach** to vocational qualifications, which we consider in chapter 3.

## Vocational pedagogies

We need to strengthen and make more visible the distinctive pedagogies of vocational teaching and learning. At its best, vocational teaching and learning exhibits the characteristics of good and outstanding general teaching and learning practice. Ofsted has been supportive of the Commission, and in their evidence summarised the thirteen characteristics of outstanding provision of all kinds from the new Common Inspection Framework.<sup>14</sup> We accept all of these, but in addition, define some distinctive features of excellent adult vocational teaching and learning.

Crucially, vocational teaching and learning is dependent on the real work context. Tests may be assessed, exams passed, but the ultimate goal is the ability to perform in the workplace, and to continuously raise standards by deepening and connecting knowledge and skill. This can be helped or hindered by the way the workplace is organised, as well as the classroom, and by workplace supervisors as well as teachers and trainers.

In the best examples we have seen, teachers and trainers situate theory in practical examples. They embrace and put to use the 'live' knowledge that apprentices and trainees bring from their workplaces into the classroom and workshop. The best vocational teaching and learning combines theoretical knowledge from the underpinning disciplines (for example, maths, psychology, human sciences, economics) with the occupational knowledge of practice (for example, how to cut hair, build circuit boards, administer medicines).<sup>15</sup> To do this, teachers, trainers and learners have to recontextualise theoretical and occupational knowledge to suit specific situations.<sup>16</sup> Both types of knowledge are highly dynamic. So individuals need to carry on learning through being exposed to new forms of knowledge and practice in order to make real the **line of sight to work**.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>15</sup> Young, M. (2008) *Bringing Knowledge Back In*, London: Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> Guile, D. (2010) *The Learning Challenge of the Knowledge Economy*, Rotterdam: Sense.

Vocational teachers and trainers have to try and replicate in the learning environment the way people are assessed and given feedback on their performance in the workplace, so that their learners build the resilience they will need to cope and move on. This means enabling their learners to cope with tough criticism of the sort you might receive in a busy kitchen, performing arts venue or hairdressing salon. It also means learning how to evaluate your own work and developing strategies for improvement. And it means learning to judge your colleagues' performance through peer assessment, give constructive feedback, and to be assessed as part of a team, not just as an individual.

The Commission has identified eight distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning:

1. that through the combination of sustained practice and the understanding of theory, occupational expertise is developed;
2. that work-related attributes<sup>17</sup> are central to the development of occupational expertise;
3. that practical problem solving and critical reflection on experience, including learning from mistakes in real and simulated settings, are central to effective vocational teaching and learning;
4. that vocational teaching and learning is most effective when it is collaborative and contextualised, taking place within communities of practice which involve different types of 'teacher' and capitalise on the experience and knowledge of all learners;
5. that technology plays a key role because keeping on top of technological advances is an essential part of the occupational expertise required in any workplace;
6. that it often requires a range of assessment and feedback methods that involve both 'teachers' and learners, and which reflect the specific assessment cultures of different occupations and sectors;
7. that it benefits from operating across more than one setting, including a real or simulated workplace, to develop the capacity to learn and apply that learning in different settings just as at work;
8. that occupational standards are dynamic, reflecting advances in work practices and that through collective learning, transformation in quality and efficiency is achieved.

At its best, vocational teaching and learning also results in multiple outcomes including the building of identity – people learn to 'become' (occupational name) and to grow (as responsible adults/citizens).

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<sup>17</sup> Many lists of these attributes have been produced. They can appear as common sense in a contemporary world – for example, the ability to communicate, good interpersonal skills, reliability, the capacity to take initiative, adaptability and resilience. But in good vocational teaching and learning they are also situated – interpreted in different ways for different occupations. The Commission has been particularly interested in future-looking attributes, such as those described by: the Institute for the Future (2011) *Future Work Skills 2020*, Palo Alto: University of Phoenix Research Institute. Their analysis relates to what we have learned about the attributes for higher level vocational learning – for example, the importance of people being able to do problem solving, to make connections between ideas (interdisciplinary working), and to be culturally sensitive.

## Sectors, stages and levels

All occupations (even within sectors) have their own vocabulary, rules, histories and traditions. Apprenticeship is the classic model of vocational learning, which is why it is understood around the world and transcends occupational boundaries and hierarchies (for example, doctors, lawyers, artists, musicians are trained in this way).<sup>18</sup>

Other forms of vocational teaching and learning use some of the elements of apprenticeship, but vary according to circumstance. In the best provision, the features described above combine in different ways in each stage and level of vocational learning:

- Initial vocational formation (full-time college/workshop) – includes ‘situating’ the curriculum in its occupational context, the use of simulated environments to create work conditions, access to up-to-date equipment, and keeping teachers/trainers’ vocational expertise up-to-date.
- Apprenticeship – combines job-specific training, vocational education and everyday work experience – challenges include: establishing an effective relationship between on and off-the-job components (does the off-the-job curriculum map onto the workplace curriculum?); the quality of the workplace environment; and the capacity of the workplace to provide exposure to a sufficient range of tasks.
- Continuing vocational formation and the further refinement of expertise – key factors include: the quality of the workplace environment; the pressures of work; and access to off-the-job opportunities.
- Reformation of vocational expertise when changing occupation – this can require the reshaping of existing expertise in order to adapt to a new or changed occupational area and is particularly challenging for adults with poor basic skills.

Additionally, in the most effective provision we have seen, teachers and trainers recognise and incorporate the expertise and experience of vocational learners. In some cases, vocational learners will be learning new techniques on the job, and then bring that knowledge into the classroom or workshop. Teachers and trainers need to be open to this and embrace the knowledge that the learners bring – another dimension of the **two-way street**. In other cases, skills learned in the classroom or workshop may be ahead of the workplace. Learners will take new skills to their jobs and then the challenge is for employers to incorporate off-the-job learning in the work context, perhaps as a catalyst for looking at how work might be done differently.

## The role of technology

Technology is transforming the way we work and learn. More and more it is shaping our working practices in production, communication and business development. It is changing our working patterns – with less time for release, shift work supporting 24/7 operations, and businesses increasingly acting – and learning – globally. It is also changing the ways we communicate and share ideas, giving us access to a wide range of unmediated content, and offering us new ways to learn. And investment in our own phones, tablets and laptops is potentially an investment in our learning.

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<sup>18</sup> Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (eds) (2013) *Contemporary Apprenticeship: International Perspectives on an Evolving Model of Learning*, London: Routledge.

Vocational learning has always involved technologies – some are age old, some are being invented as this report is written. The challenge for vocational teachers and trainers is that the speed at which businesses and learners will adapt to and adopt new technologies is outstripping the way that teaching and learning changes. And this is happening on three fronts: in information technology, which is increasingly used to communicate across time and space; in learning technologies, for instance supporting blended learning and digital simulations; and in workplace technology, which supports and transforms vocational practice.

We need to bring together technological advances in the workplace with those in teaching and learning to drive forward leading edge vocational practice. The best vocational provision the Commission has seen has been up-to-date with, and had access to, new technologies and equipment being used in the workplace. This is a further dimension of the **two-way street** – sometimes employers will be leading the use of new technologies, other times colleges and training providers will be ahead. As part of their professional updating, vocational teachers and trainers need opportunities to keep up-to-date with the changes in technology in their occupations.

But vocational teachers and trainers also have the opportunity to harness technology for pedagogical purposes, particularly because many of their learners are distributed, at different workplaces, at home or on the move – reflecting changing spatial and temporal patterns of work. And vocational teachers and trainers need to embrace the fact that their learners will be using technology as part of their every day and working lives, and will have things to teach their teacher.

On its own, the use of technology is not a guarantee of excellence. Like all tools, teachers and trainers need to understand how to shape it and make use of its current and future potential to support effective blended teaching and learning. In the best examples the Commission has seen, technology has supported the distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning by enabling:

- access to personalised content and support, including occupationally expert tutors via remote online learning;
- peer to peer support within communities of practice that capitalise on the knowledge and experience of adult learners, transforming working practices;
- digital simulations of practice and safe opportunities for practical problem solving and learning from mistakes;
- English and maths to be embedded within vocational delivery;
- real time feedback and assessment, and analysis of learners' progress which can be shared across sites and between VET partners.

In order to realise the benefits of blended vocational teaching and learning, we need a model that enables teachers to know how to select, design, develop, share and review different types of digital teaching and learning activities. The London Knowledge Lab at the Institute of Education is developing a framework for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches.<sup>19</sup> We therefore recommend collaboration with the London

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<sup>19</sup> The Commission has drawn on the work of Professor Diana Laurillard, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education: Laurillard, D. (2012) *Technology as a driver and enabler of adult vocational teaching and learning*, <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26515>

Knowledge Lab to further support the continuing professional development of vocational teachers and trainers in order to build their pedagogical knowledge of the optimal use of learning technologies. We also propose the further exploration of approaches to organising and sharing digital content for vocational teaching and learning.<sup>20</sup>

We have been particularly struck by the potential of digital simulations to complement real work experience and to offer a pedagogically valuable way for vocational learners to practise and be assessed safely. They require significant initial investment and ongoing resources if they are to keep pace with changes in work, learning programmes and technologies. But they provide a powerful interactive and adaptive pedagogy and once developed, require less teacher time. However, the time and expertise needed for designing and testing such resources is considerable – greater than the time teachers and trainers spend on preparation for classes. This has implications for the way VET professionals' work is organised, which we consider in chapter 3.

But it also has implications for the **two-way street**, and, potentially, for the supportive role of government. The investment needed to develop effective powerful digital simulations is beyond the reach of most single VET providers. However, the Commission believes there could be significant advantages and economies of scale to joint investment in, and co-ordination of, the development of shared resources across the VET system. It would enable us to harness what employers are already doing to extend leading edge vocational practice through the application of technology. This might be the VET equivalent of massive open online courses (MOOCs) in academic learning. And the development of digital simulation (or haptics) resources and software to support vocational teaching and learning could become an export earner for us too – as part of the government's education sector industry strategy.

## English and maths

The Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Education<sup>21</sup> highlighted the importance of English and maths for individual life chances and for the country's prosperity. It also questioned the concept of Functional Skills and raised serious doubts about the effectiveness of embedding the teaching of these skills within vocational subjects. Unlike many other European countries, we have never maintained a core component of general education in vocational programmes. At one end of the spectrum, we have apprentices at companies such as Rolls-Royce and BAE Systems who need high GCSE grades to get a place. At the other end, we have young people and mature adults who struggle to progress in work and also to gain access to higher level skills development because their basic skills are holding them back.

The Commission has received evidence from teachers and trainers about innovative ways to embed English and maths in vocational programmes. Often this involves having a specialist English or maths teacher as part of a vocational course team. We agree with the Wolf Review's concern, however, that we cannot rely on these ad hoc examples. Vocational teachers and trainers can certainly play a major role in helping individuals see the relevance of English and maths and in building their confidence to enable them to improve. But many of the vocational teachers and trainers we have spoken to, including those in the workplace, say they do not have the skills they know are required to teach literacy and numeracy, and they want to spend the precious time they have focusing on their vocational specialism.

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<sup>20</sup> Building on the resources available on the Excellence Gateway.

<sup>21</sup> Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, London: Department for Education (DFE).

The Commission regards this as a very serious problem. It is time for a concerted effort to ensure everyone involved in publicly-funded VET programmes can achieve the level of English and maths they need to progress within their occupational fields and to change jobs in the future. In order to achieve this, we need to create a cadre of specialist English and maths tutors in every college to be available as a resource shared between all vocational education and training providers within a given locality. This is one aspect of the role that colleges play as a public resource, available to, and serving, their wider community – we consider this further in chapter 3.

## Education and training for VET professionals

The evidence we have received makes a strong case for well-trained and well-qualified teachers and trainers.<sup>22</sup> Vocational teaching, learning and assessment is a sophisticated professional occupation and demands, therefore, robust initial and continuous development of expertise. It has always been sophisticated, but in the contemporary world, with greater complexity in the workplace, increasing use of technology for teaching and learning, and the need for teachers and trainers to be externally facing to keep their occupational expertise up-to-date, we need a broader concept of what a vocational teaching and learning professional is, whether they work in industry, a college, or with a training provider.

Leaders and managers in colleges, training providers and businesses need to ensure that the continuing professional development of teachers and trainers can be incorporated into programmes. It should not be left to chance or the individual vocational professional to make this happen. This has consequences for how vocational teachers and trainers are recruited, trained, managed and led, and how their work is organised. It also has consequences for their status and conditions of employment.<sup>23</sup> And it has implications for how they manage their own development, modelling the behaviours of effective vocational learners. We make proposals about the role of leaders and managers in supporting vocational teachers and trainers in chapter 3.

The best vocational teachers and learners have dual identities, as occupational specialists and pedagogical experts. The Commission has seen first-hand how both using and teaching occupational skills and knowledge helps develop expertise in both. This 'dual professionalism' has long been recognised,<sup>24</sup> but evidence to the Commission has shown that it takes time for teachers and trainers to realise their dual identities. Dual professionals are not born, they need support to develop.

What is clear, however, is that occupational expertise is the defining characteristic for effective vocational teachers and trainers. There should be a stronger emphasis on professional updating within continuing professional development plans. Vocational teachers and trainers need to spend time in relevant workplaces, since both contexts and technologies may change. We recognise the challenge this presents to VET providers, particularly those providing full-time programmes with full-time staff. There can be no standard approach. But if this is not done VET staff start to lose credibility with both their students and the companies with which they need to liaise, and become unable to provide the necessary **clear line of sight to work**.

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<sup>22</sup> The importance of initial qualification and continuing training of VET teachers and trainers has been stressed in recent reports by the OECD and European Commission. OECD (2011) *OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, Learning for Jobs*, Paris: OECD;

European Commission (2012) *Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs, Commission Staff Working Document*, Strasbourg: European Commission.

<sup>23</sup> We support Lord Lingfield's call for further consideration of the terms and conditions of teachers and trainers in further education.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Robson, J. (ed) (1996) *The Professional FE Teacher*, Aldershot: Avebury.

University lecturers have a requirement for ongoing 'scholarly activity' to support the quality of their teaching. The equivalent for vocational professionals to maintain and develop their occupational expertise might be about working in collaboration with employers. This could include work experience or job shadowing for a period, or working on projects that add value to employers' businesses: developing new products, processes or markets. We have seen examples which show that various kinds of 'consultancy' can be mutually beneficial, both earning income and keeping staff up-to-date, by organising work so that vocational teachers and trainers can combine teaching duties with, for example, offering technical support on a flexible basis to small firms – another dimension of the **two-way street**.

The Commission also recognises the potential of skills competitions, not only to raise the ambition and skill level of learners and offer opportunities for professional updating for vocational teachers and trainers, but also to contribute to the process of raising standards and improving the quality and efficiency of work overall.

Another way of securing occupational expertise within vocational teaching and learning, suggested to the Commission, is to encourage working people to teach their occupation for a few hours a week. Again, this would require the active support of employers but could act as a catalyst for adopting the **two-way street**. The Commission is aware of interest from a range of organisations in the potential for what might be called a **Teach Too** scheme. We propose a feasibility study and pilots to explore the potential to encourage occupational experts from industry to become involved in vocational teaching and learning.<sup>25</sup>

Whilst we argue that occupational expertise is the leading characteristic for vocational teachers and trainers, most newly recruited staff will have recent experience of the occupation for which they are about to prepare others. We have heard from them that their focus is on learning how to teach, assess and plan curricula. We have, however, been told<sup>26</sup> that it can be a challenge to provide sufficient good quality specialist mentors, usually college-based, who can work with new recruits in order to apply generic teaching and planning techniques to a specific occupational area. These can vary from catering to community care to accountancy. Collaboration between providers, including universities, may be necessary to improve this situation. This is an area for development that we propose the Guild should consider.

## Recommendations

In order to support excellent adult vocational teaching and learning, we make the following recommendations:

- Reinstate employers' presence and influence across VET providers starting with curricula panels.
- Test the key characteristics and distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning – VET partners to collaborate to review their current practice and arrangements against those described in the Commission's report and include systematic plans for further improvement within their self-assessment processes.

<sup>25</sup> Learning also from the experience of the LLUK's CATALYST programmes.

<sup>26</sup> Nasta, T. et al (2009) *The knowledge that you do every day – easing the transition of those who enter teaching from vocational backgrounds*, London: LONCETT.

- Establish a National VET Centre that includes a new research and development capacity focused on vocational pedagogy and the development of VET more widely. The VET Centre would also take responsibility for the development of a regional 'Network of Centres' to showcase and experiment with new ideas for excellent vocational teaching and learning, and to act as focal points for employers and other partners to evaluate its impact.
- Collaborate with the London Knowledge Lab to further support the continuing professional development of vocational teachers and trainers in order to build their pedagogical knowledge of the optimal use of learning technologies.
- Develop the role of technology in VET by exploring the feasibility of national investment in, and co-ordination of digital simulation (or haptics) resources and software to maximise the potential for UK-wide VET gain, but also as a potential export.
- Create a cadre of specialist English and maths tutors in every college. An intensive programme of training must be funded and organised to develop specialist tutors with the specialist pedagogies required to support young people and adults and to support vocational teachers and trainers. Each cadre would then be available as a resource shared between all VET providers within a specified locality.
- Revise and strengthen the education and training arrangements for VET teachers and trainers – from initial teacher training through to continuing professional development, to develop 'dual professionals' – with a new priority on professional updating.
- With specific reference to the **Teach Too** scheme, the Guild is asked to work with teacher educators in HE and employers to establish a feasibility study and pilots to explore the potential to encourage occupational experts from industry to become involved in vocational teaching and learning.

## Chapter 3: Enabling factors

*[Qualifications have] to have an impact on the learner, and also on the service and on the individual receiving the service. I like to see people having become interested and... enthused: That they're going to take their knowledge into the workplace and use their learning and make a difference to somebody's life.*

Health and social care employer

*Our mission is to be recognised as outstanding by the local community – word on the street is important to us.*

College principal

The Commission's enquiries have highlighted the importance of understanding, valuing and supporting the sophisticated practice of vocational teaching and learning. But it became clear as we went about our work that the context within which vocational teaching and learning sits cannot be ignored. There are four key enabling factors that must be in place for excellent vocational teaching and learning to flourish.

This chapter therefore explores how adopting the **two-way street** and a **core and tailored approach** to the design of vocational qualifications; and supporting strong leadership, management and governance of VET, and a collaborative approach to accountability would create a cultural and systems shift to strengthen our VET arrangements.

### The two-way street

The **two-way street** is about the relationship between colleges and training providers, and employers. In the best examples the Commission has seen, employers are not just customers of vocational teaching and learning, but are engaged at every level in helping to create and deliver excellent vocational programmes.

This may seem an obvious statement, but it is fundamental to good vocational teaching and learning. There was a time when every curriculum area in a college would have industry representation from employers and sometimes unions too. The importance of the **two-way street** is that it is meaningful, based on providers' and employers' recognition that there is added value in working together. Each makes a distinctive contribution for mutual benefit and to nurture individuals' talents. The best colleges and training providers demonstrate clearly to employers the added value of working with them. And fully engaged employers recognise the value of investing in partnerships with colleges and training providers to develop their own people, rather than feeling that they are doing some community service by turning up.

But we need to be much more ambitious about spreading this best **two-way street** practice across the VET system. Employers need to see partnerships as the means to get the skills they need for their businesses, and to shape the content of programmes and qualifications. For colleges and training providers it is about making a reality of a vocational mission to serve communities. For employers, trade unions and professional bodies it is also about taking responsibility for raising the standards and ambition in their industry, as much as it is about colleges and training providers raising their standards – occupational and pedagogical improvement is the purpose of the **two-way street**.

We have already made recommendations to: reinstate employers' involvement in vocational curriculum development; support opportunities for vocational teachers and trainers to regularly update their occupational expertise; and to introduce **Teach Too** – a new scheme to encourage working people to teach their occupation for a few hours a week.

We also ask government to consider the levers it has available to drive employer demand and engagement, including investigating how public funding for vocational teaching and learning can be made dependent on (a) employers acting as sponsors for vocational learning programmes; and (b) colleges and providers demonstrating a **clear line of sight to work** on their vocational programmes.

However, the diversity of employers, colleges and training providers – large and small, means that **two-way street** approaches will vary, depending on a whole range of factors. Commissioners have seen a spectrum of the ways in which the **two-way street** can operate in practice:

- employer representation on groups responsible for the governance of VET, in colleges and training providers, as the basis for understanding how strategic partnerships can drive skills development and growth in communities;
- through joint vocational course teams that are responsible for curriculum development, programme design, review and evaluation, in order to ensure there is **clear line of sight to work**;
- wherever possible, ensuring that vocational programmes include a substantial, meaningful work placement;
- a range of other activities through which employers can contribute to the **two-way street** and provide **line of sight to work**, including mentoring, running workshops, seminars, demonstrations, and through alumni networks. The key is to make it meaningful so that the mutual benefit is clear and valued;
- through local arrangements (which may link to the **Teach Too** scheme) to encourage working people with vocational expertise to go into their local college or training provider and teach their trade or profession for a few hours a week;
- vocational teachers and trainers working in collaboration with employers on projects that add value to their organisations: developing new products, processes or markets, or providing technical support to small or start-up firms;
- joint investment in research and development centres, and leading edge technology, to support the development and application of deep vocational knowledge and skills, and encourage entrepreneurial ambition;
- through the development of new financing models in which colleges, training providers and employers are clear about the core level of vocational learning service that can be provided with state funding, and what enhancements are available and at what cost, encouraging employers to opt for the enhancements.

The Commission's supplementary paper will explore this spectrum in more detail with reference to examples from our visits and seminars, and the evidence submissions. We recommend that employers, colleges and training providers test this spectrum against their current arrangements for collaboration and include systematic plans to adopt the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street** within their future arrangements.

## A core and tailored approach to vocational qualifications

We need a **core and tailored approach** to the design of vocational qualifications and curricula – a nationally specified core with a tailored element to meet local demand. This approach would be underpinned by the **two-way street**, with colleges, training providers and employers working together to develop local elements of qualifications and curricula to meet the specific needs of employers and learners – giving employers a direct influence in shaping skills programmes and qualifications.

Without this involvement employers could potentially grow further apart from colleges and training providers. This means that there needs to be a limit to what is defined at the centre. Arrangements would need to be calibrated in order to best meet the needs of different learners, on different programmes (for example apprenticeship or college/workshop based), at different levels (intermediate or higher) and in different occupations. But we note with interest the development of the 16-19 study programme approach which has recognised the over-specification of vocational qualifications. The Commission believes it is time to correct the over-emphasis on qualification attainment as the main measure of a quality adult vocational teaching and learning system, which has led to unintended consequences in our current arrangements.

A **core and tailored approach** to qualifications would complement our call to put curriculum development and programme design back at the heart of vocational teaching and learning. Colleges, training providers and employers would be directly involved in shaping programmes, curricula and qualifications that reflect the up-to-date needs of occupations and workplaces. This approach would also enable further exploration of the application of the innovation code, recommended by Baroness Sharp.<sup>27</sup>

We ask that the new review of Adult Vocational Qualifications for England considers a **core and tailored approach**,<sup>28</sup> alongside other options, to enable vocational qualifications to meet the shared aims of employers and individual learners.

We also acknowledge the importance for individuals of conferring, on an independent basis, recognition of expertise that not only meets the needs of employers, but ensures the knowledge and skills required over the longer term of their careers are also valued. We support the work of the Gatsby Foundation<sup>29</sup> and the proposal in the Richard Review<sup>30</sup> to encourage greater engagement of professional bodies in securing this recognition, including the registration of technicians.

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<sup>27</sup> Sharp, M. (2011) *A dynamic nucleus: Colleges at the heart of local communities*, Leicester: NIACE.

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Whitehead, UK Commissioner, has been asked to advise the Skills Minister on a vision and strategy for adult vocational qualifications in England.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/Education/Projects/Technician-Registration-An-Introduction.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> Richard, D. (2012) *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships*, London: BIS.

## Strong leadership, management and governance of VET

Whatever the purpose of an organisation (for example whether it is a college, a training provider, a care home, an aerospace manufacturer or a jewellery maker), workforce development is central to the functioning and development of its business. Leading and managing high quality workforce development requires some understanding of how people learn and awareness that there are ways to organise what people are doing (whether students in a college, or employees in a biscuit factory) in such a way that maximises the learning potential of the environment. By implication, leaders and managers need to know how people learn and so it follows that their professional development should include some understanding of vocational pedagogy. Equally, there is a case for encouraging and supporting more VET professionals into leading roles.

Crucially, we need to find ways to support leaders of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop VET opportunities for their workforces. This might be done partly through supply chains, but there is also a role for colleges and training providers who, understanding and acting on this for their own organisations, can offer it as a service to an employer partner as a further dimension of the **two-way street**. Likewise, colleges and training providers can learn from other high quality workplaces about how to do this well.

In the best provision we have seen, leaders and managers (in colleges, training providers and companies) develop strong collaborative arrangements as the basis for the **two-way street**. They demonstrate an 'external disposition' – facing outwards from their own organisations to develop productive strategic partnerships in order to ensure that vocational programmes meet employers' skills needs, now and in the future. This in turn creates the context in which teachers and trainers are trusted to apply the **two-way street** approach, working collaboratively across organisations to design and deliver innovative and responsive curricula. And strong VET leaders actively engage in joint evaluation of the business impact and added value of programmes, rather than simply accounting for numbers of learners and qualifications.

We agree with Ofsted's analysis that *'it is leadership that drives improvement by creating the culture and ethos needed in order to push up standards'*.<sup>31</sup> But in vocational education and training strong leaders need to combine a 'relentless focus on improving teaching and learning' with an externally facing role to build the **two-way street**. This additional dimension of leadership is critical in ensuring excellent adult vocational teaching and learning.

Creating the optimum conditions for vocational learning is a further dimension of strong leadership of VET. We have, for example, been struck by the importance, for vocational teachers and trainers, of being able to creatively arrange their teaching and learning spaces to reflect as closely as possible the workplace environment. More broadly, we have seen how strong leaders continuously review the balance between empowerment and accountability within their institutions to create expansive learning environments that reflect the best workplace practice.<sup>32</sup> They organise work in ways which enable and encourage people to learn and share their ideas, and so that they are trusted to make decisions.

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<sup>31</sup> Ofsted (2012) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills*, London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>32</sup> Fuller, A and Unwin, L. (2004) *Expansive Learning Environments: Integrating Personal and Organisational Development*, Chapter 7 in *Workplace Learning in Context*, edited by Rainbird et al, London: Routledge.

One consequence of the increasing sophistication of VET professionals' roles is the need to rethink the way their work is organised. The time needed to develop curricula, talk to employers, review learners' progress in personalised ways, and develop digital resources and blended pedagogies means that the traditional model of class contact hours as the basis of work organisation is no longer sufficient on its own. Modelling the way work is organised in other workplaces, would suggest a stronger emphasis on team working for vocational teachers and trainers. This could include for example, having English and maths experts within vocational teams, rotating a lead employer engagement person for the team on an annual basis, or the development of learning programmes based on multi-disciplinary projects for which multi-disciplinary teaching teams are needed. This wouldn't always be appropriate, but could be a way to encourage innovation. We need to support the role of leaders and managers in rethinking how work is organised so that vocational teachers and trainers can maximise their impact with learners and employers.

Strong leaders of colleges and training providers also have a clear sense of the overall role and purpose of their organisations to serve employers and the local community.<sup>33</sup> For college leaders and governors in particular this focus on service to the community is underpinned by a tradition of responsible stewardship of public assets for the benefit of businesses and local people. Our proposal in chapter 2 to develop a cadre of specialist English and maths tutors in every college to be available as a shared resource within a given locality is one example of the role that colleges can play as public assets. Others include opening up access to specialised resources and equipment, and encouraging community use of college libraries and IT facilities.

However, there is not always an easy fit between being a genuine community partner and responding to the latest policy directives or funding and regulatory requirements. The Commission has witnessed how strong leaders, with their boards and governors, provide anchorage against the continuous buffeting from the policy environment, but a clear message to the Commission from employers, leaders of colleges and training providers, and teachers and trainers has been the need for fewer policy initiatives and a framework of collaborative accountability, in which institutions demonstrate they have the partnerships and the capacity to innovate and improve.

## A collaborative approach to accountability

We need to build a framework for a collaborative approach to accountability to deliver the very best VET that we have described. As we said earlier in our report, excessive control and interference have characterised developments in VET, to the extent that the Commission has heard they now risk limiting people's energy, confidence and ambition. We welcome the more collaborative approach to accountability introduced in *New Challenges, New Chances*, including the move away from central policy initiatives to determine the role of the further education and skills sector.

### Levers and incentives

All countries with strong VET systems use a range of levers and incentives to stimulate both the demand for and supply of skills. These include training levies, tax credits for firms that train, licences to practise, and entitlement to paid leave to attend training. In Nordic countries, effort is placed on strengthening the overall capacity of workplaces and providing funds for SMEs to participate in learning networks and for workplace skills audits. In countries such as Germany and Denmark, apprentices accept low wages whilst training because they know their skills

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<sup>33</sup> Sharp, M. (2011) *A dynamic nucleus: Colleges at the heart of local communities*, Leicester: NIACE.

will be valued in the labour market. Ian Stone argues that governments need to deploy a range of levers and incentives, particularly with micro businesses and SMEs, but there is no magic bullet.<sup>34</sup>

In our section on the **two-way street**, we have asked government to consider the levers it has available to drive employer demand for, and engagement with, adult vocational teaching and learning. We also recognise the UK Commission for Employment and Skills' ongoing work to identify and develop levers and incentives that most effectively stimulate greater employer ambition and investment, including the Employer Ownership Pilots.<sup>35</sup> We believe raising employers' ambition for, and expectations of, a strong and responsive VET system is essential to securing their contribution to a collaborative approach to accountability.

### Direct accountability to the local economic community

All organisations in receipt of public funds must be properly accountable for them. The Commission believes that accountability for excellent adult vocational teaching and learning should, in the first instance, be to the local economic community. We need to shift from the old model of vertical accountability to funding bodies, awarding bodies and inspectorates, to a framework based on horizontal accountability, directly to employer and community partners within frameworks of local economic development currently supported by local enterprise partnerships. The same is true for provision supported through the Employer Ownership Pilots. Whatever way the public money flows, the issues are the same.

Robust governance is critically important here. If accountability is not considered sufficiently robust, or colleges and training providers are not seen to be responding effectively to priority VET needs, the primary focus should be on strengthening direct governance arrangements including, as we have suggested, through employer representation on groups responsible for the governance of VET. The Commission has heard how too many intermediate bodies inhibit the effectiveness of the direct **two-way street** approach and, thereby, risk limiting the effectiveness and impact of adult vocational teaching and learning.

Alongside strengthening approaches for collaborative accountability, therefore, we need to review the arrangements for intermediation in VET, and ask whether they enable or restrict the concept of a VET system operating as a **two-way street**.

### Regulation

We recognise the earned autonomy that is already built into the system, and acknowledge the need for further improvement in order for more colleges and training providers to be able to take advantage of this. In relation to inspecting adult VET, we ask Ofsted to consider the distinctive features of vocational teaching and learning identified in our report as an additional lens through which to review vocational provision. Over time, the Commission also asks Ofsted to consider giving VET partners a role within future inspection frameworks, in order to support Ofsted inspectors to develop their understanding of the distinctive features of vocational pedagogy.

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<sup>34</sup> Stone, I. (2010) *Encouraging small firms to invest in training: learning from overseas*, PRAXIS No.5, London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

<sup>35</sup> The Employer Ownership of Skills pilot is a competitive fund open to employers to invest in their current and future workforce in England. Employers are invited to develop proposals that raise skills, create jobs, and drive enterprise and economic growth. Government will invest in projects in which employers are also prepared to commit their own funds in order to make better use of combined resources. It is run by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

## Recommendations

In order to enable excellent adult vocational teaching and learning to flourish, we make the following recommendations:

- Adopt the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street**, not further education and skills operating as a separate 'sector'.
- Test the spectrum of ways the **two-way street** can operate in practice – VET partners to collaborate to review their current arrangements for collaboration and include systematic plans to adopt the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street** within their future arrangements.
- Consideration by the Adult Vocational Qualifications for England review of a **core and tailored approach**, alongside other options, to enable vocational qualifications to meet the shared aims of employers and individual learners.
- Support the development of VET leaders and managers to enable them to both lead the process of improvement of vocational teaching and learning, and build the **two-way street**.
- Encourage government and its agencies to continue the more collaborative approach to accountability introduced in *New Challenges, New Chances*. In particular to:
  - consider how government can use the levers it has available to drive employer demand and engagement, including investigate how public funding for vocational teaching and learning can be made dependent on (a) employers acting as sponsors for vocational learning programmes; and (b) colleges and providers demonstrating a **clear line of sight to work** on their vocational programmes;
  - support VET partners to develop stronger arrangements for evaluating the impact of vocational teaching and learning with employers, individuals and community partners;
  - review the role of intermediaries and where they add value or create barriers;
  - ask Ofsted to consider the distinctive features of vocational teaching and learning identified in our report as an additional lens through which to review vocational provision;
  - encourage Ofsted to consider giving VET partners a role within future inspection frameworks, in order to support Ofsted inspectors to develop their understanding of the distinctive features of vocational pedagogy.

## Chapter 4: Recommendations

This final chapter draws together all our recommendations from chapters 2 and 3, and makes proposals about who should take each of them forward.

### 1. Adopt the two-way street

Adopt the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street**, not further education and skills operating as a separate 'sector'. The **two-way street** is about genuine collaboration between college and training providers, and employers.

Test the spectrum of ways the **two-way street** can operate in practice – VET partners to review their current practice and include systematic plans to adopt the concept of a VET system working as a **two-way street** within their future arrangements.

**Who should take this forward?** This is a recommendation for everyone – individual colleges and training providers, the new Guild, employers, trade unions supporting workforce development, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills through its work on stimulating demand, and government by supporting other recommendations such as **Teach Too**.

### 2. Develop a core and tailored approach to vocational qualifications

Consider the development of a **core and tailored approach** to enable vocational qualifications to meet the shared aims of employers and individual learners. There should be a nationally specified core and a tailored element to meet local demand.

**Who should take this forward?** We ask that the Adult Vocational Qualifications for England review considers this recommendation as part of its work.

### 3. Revise the education and training arrangements for VET teachers and trainers including introducing Teach Too

Revise and strengthen the education and training arrangements for VET teachers and trainers – from initial teacher training through to continuing professional development, to develop 'dual professionals' – with a new priority on professional updating.

With specific reference to the **Teach Too** scheme, establish a feasibility study and pilots to explore the potential to encourage occupational experts from industry to become involved in vocational teaching and learning.

**Who should take this forward?** A role for the new Guild, working with teacher educators in HE and employers in taking forward **Teach Too**, as part of its overall proposed remit to define, develop and enhance the professionalism of the FE and skills sector workforce and its providers.

Leaders and managers should have a lead role in supporting the development of vocational teachers and trainers with a particular emphasis on ensuring that occupational expertise is the leading characteristic for recruitment, continuing professional development and reward.

For teacher educators in HE, a role to review their programmes against the characteristics and distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning.

#### 4. Reinstate employers' presence and influence across VET providers starting with curricula panels

This is very much about the **two-way street** and ensuring a **clear line of sight to work**, for example ensuring that every curriculum area in a college or a training provider should have at least one employer sponsor, and preferably an employer panel involving trade unions.

**Who should take this forward?** This will involve individual VET providers, employers and trade unions working together.

#### 5. Establish a National VET Centre to take responsibility for research and development of VET

Establish a National VET Centre that includes a new research and development capacity focused on vocational pedagogy and the development of VET more widely. The VET Centre would also take responsibility for the development of a regional 'Network of Centres' to showcase and experiment with new ideas for excellent vocational teaching and learning, and to act as focal points for employers and other partners to evaluate its impact.

**Who should take this forward?** This will require a shared commitment from colleges and training providers, cutting-edge employers, the new Guild, and the government to work with leading research experts, universities, and international partners to find the most appropriate way forward.

#### 6. Test the key characteristics and distinctive features of adult vocational teaching and learning

VET partners to collaborate to review their current practice and arrangements against those described in the Commission's report and include systematic plans for further improvement within their self-assessment processes.

**Who should take this forward?** VET partners working with the new Guild and the VET Centre, and with the support of Ofsted to determine how best to evaluate the improvements brought about by this approach.

#### 7. Develop the role of technology in VET

Further support the continuing professional development of vocational teachers and trainers in order to build their pedagogical knowledge of the optimal use of learning technologies, in collaboration with the London Knowledge Lab at the Institute of Education.

Explore the feasibility of national investment in, and co-ordination of digital simulation (or haptics) resources and software to maximise the potential for UK-wide VET gain, but also as a potential export.

**Who should take this forward?** This is a recommendation primarily for colleges, training providers and government. Support for vocational teachers and trainers to build their pedagogical knowledge of the optimal use of learning technologies will sit with the Guild and the VET Centre, working with the London Knowledge Lab.

The exploration of the feasibility of national investment in, and co-ordination of, the development of digital simulations to support vocational teaching and learning requires government support.

## 8. Create a cadre of specialist English and maths tutors in every college

An intensive programme of training must be funded and organised to develop specialist tutors with the specialist pedagogies required to support young people and adults and to support vocational teachers and trainers. Each cadre would then be available as a resource shared between all vocational education and training providers within a specified locality.

**Who should take this forward?** A role for government, the new Guild, teacher educators in HE, working with VET partners.

## 9. Strengthen the leadership and management of VET

Support the development of VET leaders and managers to enable them to both lead the process of improvement of vocational teaching and learning, and build the **two-way street**.

**Who should take this forward?** Colleges and training providers with support from the Guild and the work of the VET Centre.

## 10. Encourage the collaborative role of government and explore the use of effective incentives to drive demand and the engagement of employers

Encourage government and its agencies to continue the more collaborative approach to accountability introduced in *New Challenges, New Chances*. In particular to:

- consider how government can use the levers it has available to drive employer demand and engagement, including investigate how public funding for vocational teaching and learning can be made dependent on (a) employers acting as sponsors for vocational learning programmes; and (b) colleges and providers demonstrating a **clear line of sight to work** on their vocational programmes;
- support VET partners to develop stronger arrangements for evaluating the impact of vocational teaching and learning for employers, individuals and community partners;
- review the role of intermediaries and where they add value or create barriers;
- ask Ofsted to consider the distinctive features of vocational teaching and learning identified in our report as an additional lens through which to review vocational provision;
- encourage Ofsted to consider giving VET partners a role within future inspection frameworks, in order to support Ofsted inspectors to develop their understanding of the distinctive features of vocational pedagogy.

**Who should take this forward?** Government and its agencies, working collaboratively with all VET partners.

## Appendix A: A note on terminology

*In my classes you've got 16 year olds and you've got 50 year olds, so it's a really big difference.*

Painting and decorating lecturer

### Adult

The use of the term 'adult' is tricky. It is at the same time: (a) a classification that determines the nature and extent of government funding; (b) in cultural terms, the way in which colleges and training providers have traditionally viewed all learners; and (c) a term now challenged by the extended transitions that young people across Europe and beyond are navigating towards 'adult and working' life. In 2013, you can be 'young' until you are 30; whereas 40 years ago, if you left school at 15, you were likely to think of yourself as, and be considered, an 'adult'.

We have not ignored developments in vocational education and training (VET) pre-19:<sup>36</sup> they provide a platform for progression, and prior educational experience profoundly shapes adults' attitudes to learning. Rather, we believe that a strong vocational teaching and learning system should start with people, rather than structures or administrative delineations, and should offer progression opportunities for people when they are ready to take them up.

### Vocational

Very early on in its work, the Commission identified a **clear line of sight to work** as a significant factor in vocational teaching and learning, for both vocational learners, and teachers and trainers. But understanding the term 'vocational' is no less tricky than understanding 'adult' as its meaning has evolved over time. In England, there is the additional problem that just as 'vocational' is often juxtaposed with 'academic', it is also juxtaposed with 'professional'. Hence, 'professional education and training' tends to be used in reference to 'the professions' (medicine, the law, accountancy), and connected to higher education (degree level and above).

VET has traditionally been associated with the development of skills for trades and crafts (for example, catering, plumbing, hairdressing, carpentry and joinery) and connected to the intermediate level or below. Some occupational areas such as engineering, business administration, and information technology cross these boundaries, whilst others such as nursing have only recently been elevated to professional status. In today's world of work, these boundaries are much more fluid as more and more jobs demand what once were seen as 'professional' attributes (for example, making judgements, liaising with customers and clients, being flexible and adaptable, problem-solving, using higher levels of literacy and numeracy).

The emergence of Higher Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees illustrates the need workplaces have for people who combine technical and practical skills with deeper levels of occupational knowledge. They also illustrate a strength of the English system for innovative pedagogy and curriculum design, and the ability of universities, FE colleges, training providers and employers to collaborate in order to respond quickly and pragmatically to the demand for new types of skills and knowledge at and for work.

<sup>36</sup> A selection of the evidence received by the Commission was about this phase.

The Commission's remit has led it to focus on 'vocational' teaching and learning at the boundary around intermediate level (in order to include Level 4 and 5, but also Level 3 and below) rather than higher level VET which is taught largely in universities (for example, medicine, architecture or law). But we acknowledge that in calling for serious attention to be given to further developing a strong VET system, there is more work to do to understand the role of HE within that system, and to learn from both well established and innovative practice.

### Pre-vocational

There is at present, understandable concern about youth unemployment. Alongside the move to raise the participation age, it has provided a focus for a great deal of work to consider the role that vocational education should be playing in a landscape where young people are going to be required to participate to age 18, including the development of traineeships. There has, over the last 30 years, been a succession of pre-vocational programmes and initiatives, for both young people and adults – the latest for adults being the Work Programme.

A strong vocational teaching and learning system supports pre-vocational provision. The Commission acknowledges there is a connection between pre-vocational and vocational programmes but believes that the former demands a particular set of considerations about design and content which need specific attention and which are outside the scope of this report. The Commission would argue that as far as practically possible, pre-vocational programmes should be connected to the ways in which work is changing so that they enable pre-vocational learners to expand their horizons for action. We also believe that strengthening vocational teaching and learning will support pre-vocational provision too, giving it a clearer sense of purpose, linked to a **line of sight to work**.

### Other slippery language

In recent years, the terms 'learning' and 'learner' have replaced the age-old terms of 'education', 'training' and 'student' in policy and practice in Britain (and in some other countries and partly as a result of their use by bodies such as the EU and OECD) partly in recognition that a great deal of learning takes place outside formal education and training settings and that individuals continue to learn throughout life. Whilst welcoming the inclusive concept of 'learning', there are some risks associated with this linguistic turn:

- substituting the term 'learning' for 'education' may overly focus attention on process and ignore content and assessment;
- 'learning' downplays the role of the 'teacher' expert (however defined) – this is problematic as 'teachers' are vital in helping and pushing people to go beyond their immediate comfort zones;
- substituting the term 'learning' for 'training' downplays the importance of individuals needing to work through systematic procedures in order to become expert in their vocational practice;
- phrases such as 'learning by doing', 'hands on learning' and 'practical learning' can perpetuate the unhelpful dualism of mind as separate from body and suggest that vocational learning needn't bother itself with the acquisition of underpinning knowledge (a problem that some NVQs still wrestle with).

Reflecting the Commission's broad canvas, we use the term 'vocational learner' to include students, trainees, apprentices, and employees.

And we use the term 'vocational teachers and trainers' to include a range of 'teaching' roles *including teachers, trainers, lecturers, tutors, assessors, mentors, coaches, and workplace supervisors*.

## Appendix B: Ofsted Common Inspection Framework

### Thirteen characteristics of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment

- The very large majority of learners consistently make very good and sustained progress in learning sessions.
- All staff are highly adept at working with and developing skills and knowledge in learners from different backgrounds.
- Staff have consistently high expectations of all learners.
- Drawing on excellent subject knowledge and/or industry experience, teachers, trainers, assessors and coaches plan astutely and set challenging tasks based on systematic, accurate assessment of learners' prior skills, knowledge and understanding.
- They use well-judged and often imaginative teaching strategies that, together with sharply focused and timely support and intervention, match individual needs accurately. Consequently, the development of learners' skills and understanding is exceptional.
- Staff generate high levels of enthusiasm for participation in, and commitment to, learning.
- Teaching and learning develop high levels of resilience, confidence and independence in learners when they tackle challenging activities.
- Teachers, trainers, and assessors check learners' understanding effectively throughout learning sessions. Time is used very well and every opportunity is taken to develop crucial skills successfully, including being able to use their literacy and numeracy skills on other courses and at work.
- High quality learning materials and resources including information and communication technology (ICT) are available and are used by staff and learners during and between learning and assessment sessions.
- Marking and constructive feedback from staff are frequent and of a consistent quality, leading to high levels of engagement and interest.
- The teaching of English, mathematics and functional skills is consistently good with much outstanding. Teachers and other staff enthuse and motivate most learners to participate in a wide range of learning activities.
- Equality and diversity are integrated fully into the learning experience. Staff manage learners' behaviour skilfully; they show great awareness of equality and diversity in teaching sessions.
- Advice, guidance and support motivate learners to secure the best possible opportunities for success in their learning and progression.

## Appendix C: Commissioners

**Frank McLoughlin CBE**

Chair, and Principal, City and Islington College

**Fiona McMillan OBE**

Vice Chair, formerly Principal, Bridgwater College, and former President of the Association of Colleges

**Graham Schuhmacher MBE**

Vice Chair, and Head of Development Services, Rolls-Royce

**Bill Alexander**

Head of Training and Skills, National Skills Academy – Railway Engineering

**Richard Atkins**

Principal, Exeter College

**Professor Mariane Cavalli**

Principal, Warwickshire College

**Rob Hammond**

Managing Director, Direct Training Solutions Ltd

**Professor Matthew Harrison**

Director of Education, The Royal Academy of Engineering

**Sue Hill**

Head of Teaching and Learning, West Herts College

**Gary Hughes**

Director of Curriculum and Developments (Adults), Hull College

**Colonel Carolyn Johnstone**

Ministry of Defence

**Roshni Joshi**

National Union of Students

**Martina Milburn CBE**

Chief Executive, The Prince's Trust

**Shauni O'Neill**

National Apprentice of the Year 2011, Transport for London

**Jacqui Ramus**

Practice Development Manager, St Monica Trust

**Mike Smith**

Curriculum Development Manager, Eagit Training

**Alastair Taylor**

Quality Advisor, Landex

**Tom Wilson**

Director, unionlearn

**Dereth Wood**

Director of Operations, learndirect

**Observers****Lisa Capper/Mark Kaczmarek**

Assistant Directors, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

**Toni Fazaeli**

Chief Executive, Institute for Learning

**Rob Wye**

Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

**Advisers****Geoff Stanton**

Specialist Adviser, Visiting Fellow of the Institute of Education, University of London

**Professor Lorna Unwin**

Academic Adviser, Professor of Vocational Education at the LLAKES Centre, Institute of Education, University of London

**Secretariat****Eleanor Jackson**

Secretariat Manager, LSIS

**Jenny Williams**

Head of Commission Secretariat and report author, LSIS

**Rebecca Woods**

Senior Administrative Officer, LSIS

Thanks also go to Mike Smith, CEO, Nucleus Training Limited, for advice and contributions on adult vocational teaching and learning on behalf of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers. And to Janice Shiner CB, former Director-General of Lifelong Learning at the Department for Education and Skills, and David Sherlock CBE, former Chief Inspector with the Adult Learning Inspectorate, for their advice on drafting the report.

## Appendix D: Commissioners' meetings/visits

**June 2012** – BAE Systems, Lancashire – an opportunity to meet apprentices, their tutors, graduate trainees, union learning reps, and senior managers many of whom themselves had started as apprentices.

**September 2012** – Bridgwater College, Somerset – to enable commissioners to explore a range of different vocational areas, and effective partnership working with employers and to meet full and part-time vocational students and their teachers.

**November 2012** – Rolls-Royce, Derby – to hear about Rolls-Royce's approach to developing highly skilled technicians through apprenticeships and planned progression, and explore the key features of vocational training leading to progression to higher level skills development.

**December 2012** – with the Princes Trust, Hackney and Kennington – to consider the key features of vocational programmes that support young adults to re-engage in education, training and the world of work; and explore the roles of the third sector, offender learning and support for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

**January 2013** – with the Royal School of Artillery, Wiltshire – to explore the end-to-end approaches to training and education in the Royal Artillery, in the military context, from initial recruitment to ongoing and next career development.

**February 2013** – visit to a residential care home, to gain an overview of work-based learning in the care sector focusing on mandatory training and continuing professional development, an opportunity to see some workplace learning in action with an emphasis on supporting all staff, not only care staff, to learn about how to look after residents, and to meet apprentices and trainers.

### Seven seminars on cross-cutting themes

Feedback and assessment in learning and role of curricula and qualifications (Oct 2012);

The role of technology as both a driver and enabler of vocational teaching and learning (Oct 2012);

Leading learning (Oct 2012);

The re-emergence of technicians, with a focus on STEM (Nov 2012);

Initial teacher training and continuing professional development (Jan 2013);

Embedding English and maths in vocational programmes – led by Institute for Learning (Jan 2013);

Higher level vocational learning (Feb 2013).



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