AoC Submission: Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents and promotes the 341 Colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, including 94 Sixth Form Colleges and 247 Further Education Colleges. AoC warmly welcomes the work of the Commission.

The Further Education (FE) sector has a long history of delivering innovative pedagogical solutions to students on a variety of vocational qualifications – see case studies (appendix one) for some contemporary examples.

AoC agrees with the review of the top twenty education systems undertaken by Barber and Mourshed that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its lecturers and the only way to improve student outcomes is to improve pedagogy[1] and scholarship[2].

Key to the delivery of excellent teaching and learning is knowledge and understanding about pedagogy. Vocational lecturers however have been deprived of this as pedagogy in vocational education has historically been neglected both in terms of investment and research. There has been inadequate attention[3] paid to different vocational pedagogies and a lack of reliable data on their effectiveness.[4] This lack of attention has proved a barrier to the creation of a more practical and vocational education system.[5] Further, there has been a lack of coherent research-based teaching and learning models so these have often been dictated by the specific knowledge and technical skills necessitated by the curriculum or programme. Thus, there is a gap between the teaching and curriculum pictured by curriculum designers and what occurs, and is needed, in practice.[6]

There has also been a trend of professional training transferring from the workplace – nursing, arts and design - to degree level study which has arguably led to knowledge that is intended to be useful gradually losing close ties to practice while becoming more tightly integrated with one or other body of scientific knowledge –psychology and teaching is arguably such an example. This has probably led to some vocational teaching becoming less practice-led, and vocational pedagogy losing its distinctiveness.

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[1] Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2008) *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top.*
[http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf]
[2] Boyer E. L. (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered San Francisco CA Josey Bass
[3] Chappell (2004) *Contemporary vocational learning – changing pedagogy.*
[http://www.avetra.org.au/Conference_Archives/2004/documents/PA013Chappell.pdf]
[4] Colley,H., Gleeson, D. & Wahlberg, M. (2005) *Improving Teaching and Learning in Further Education:Towards a Genealogy.* [http://www.e-space.mmu.ac.uk/e-space/bitstream/2173/14163/2/Genealogy%20of%20improving%20T%26L%20in%20FE,%20BERA.pdf]

[5] Hayward, G. (2006) *Participation, Progression and Success in Vocational learning: A qualitative system performance.* London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
[6] Savoy, C., Hodgson, A. & Spours, K. (2003) *The advanced Vocational Certificate of Rducation (AVCE): A General or Vocational Qualification?* IOE/Nuffield series , No. 7 . Institute of Education, University of London.

Taking such voices into account, the introduction of the *Further Education Workforce Strategy (2007-2012)*; programmes and initiatives relating to teaching and learning;[7] and the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's (TLRP) *Teaching and Learning Cultures Project(TLC)*[8] have all endeavoured to meet the training and development needs of vocational lecturers. These efforts have appeared to have been successful with Ofsted in 2007 suggesting that the quality of teaching and learning in vocational education had improved from previous years.[9]

Although progress has been made, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and its lecturers and educators continue to be 'left behind' and vocational pedagogies are still underdeveloped. In 2009 the Skills Commission's inquiry into *Teacher Training in vocational education* found that the repertoire and flexibility of vocational pedagogy is often too narrow and that while the setting and context may be engaging the methods used can be too passive and uninspiring. The inquiry concluded that vocational pedagogies remain in their infancy and relatively little research has been undertaken into these pedagogies.[10]

A recent European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) Review stated: "while a lot of change is ongoing to build (and extend) pedagogical skills for a mainly Initial VET context, the evidence does not provide a clear picture of a distinctive professional knowledge base across the pedagogy of VET learning and delivery[11]."
The evidence above highlights the urgent need for policy makers to prioritise research on vocational pedagogies.[12]

All Colleges have teaching and learning, CPD policies and strategies promoting pedagogical scholarship and the support of development agencies such as the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in developing pedagogical innovation across the sector. However, LSIS tends to be practitioner-led rather than practitioner/researcher-led and the HEA is focussed on HE professional development and has recently cut its resources devoted to College HE. Both would need to be involved in any new venture; but if vocational pedagogy is to achieve an improved knowledge basis and status we would argue a new free-standing structure is necessary.

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[7]Such as: the *Vocational Learning Support Programme*, supporting delivery of vocational and work related learning in schools and colleges; the *Lecturers and Trainers in Vocational Education and Training*, a European project responding to issues relating to VET lecturers and trainers and organising Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) in different countries; and a range of courses and workshops developing the teaching and learning strategies of new vocational lecturers and lecturers and of those already in service

[8]A substantial, seminal piece of independent research which examined learning and teaching in FE colleges in England to (a) deepen understanding of the complexities of learning; (b) identify, implement and evaluate strategies for the improvement of learning opportunities; (c) build capacity among practitioners for enquiry into FE practice.

[9] Ofsted (2003) *The initial teacher training of further education lecturers.*
[http://ofsted.biz/content/download/1371/9907/file/The%20initial%20training%20of%20further%20education%20lecturers%202003%20PDF%20format).pdf]
[10] Skills Commission (2009) *Teacher training in vocational education*
[http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/sc/research]
[11] Cedefop (2009) *Modernising Vocational Education and Training Fourth report on vocational training research in Europe; background report Volume 2*
[12] ibid

AoC has been working with a range of agencies –HEA, LSIS, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), OFSTED, Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), Association Collaborative Partnerships (ACP) , and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) - to explore how pedagogical scholarship can be improved across the sector, and there is general agreement that scholarship includes a range of activities, including engagement with one's profession through regular work experience, and more 'traditional' forms of research.[13] It may also be useful for the FE sector to engage with conceptions around student involvement in research and scholarship.[14] See appendix two for a list of activities that could be described as scholarship.

Some Colleges, such as Doncaster and Bradford, have over recent years supported a more 'traditional research' approach for their staff either by publishing an internal journal[15], internally peer reviewed, encouraging College HE staff to contribute and develop their research and pedagogical knowledge and skills; or by organising internal research conferences which offer opportunities for staff to present papers or workshops aimed at enhancing their subject or pedagogical research.[16] Grimsby Institute is developing a 'community of practice' approach using ICT to measure such issues as the quality of student assessment outcomes.

Many FE practitioners undertake action research projects, often using their students as the research group, to investigate questions, and use the results to improve their or the institution's pedagogy and practices. Some of this activity has grown from HE/FE Teacher Training consortia such as at Huddersfield, Christ Church Canterbury and elsewhere, and these have had a significant influence within the sector.

Several Colleges also employ professional practitioners in teaching roles such as Hull College's School of Architecture, where all the teachers work in local architectural practices.

Colleges such as Vision West Nottinghamshire, Bridgwater and Craven provide opportunities for their staff to share pedagogic practice.

In comparison to the university sector, scholarship in the College sector is often linked to the teaching role and pedagogy rather than subject or discipline.

In all these approaches the stress is on practitioners becoming scholars focussed largely on the vocations and professions they serve and driven by the imperative to evaluate the impact and pedagogical effectiveness of their scholarship on professional practice. There is

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[13] Ibid 1990

[14] Healey, M. (2005) Linking research and teaching exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning. In: Barnett, R. (ed.) *Reshaping the university: new relationships between research, scholarship and teaching.* Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press, 30–42.

[15] Journal of Research and Scholarship (2010 ongoing) University Centre Doncaster

[16] Application for TDAP (2009) Bradford College

less focus on the forms of scholarship, more typically associated with the HE sector, which are driven by the various research assessment exercises.

However, in some college-based subjects, such as hairdressing and possibly some aspects of construction, there is not an 'accepted body of knowledge and scholarship' and this creates problems for understanding what pedagogical scholarship may look like for staff teaching in these areas. There are also, of course, newer professions and vocations based on technological and social advances that have yet to develop a significant underlying knowledge base. These areas probably need different and contingent forms of scholarship and practice.

In short, scholarship – including pedagogical research - will be different in these various vocational and professional areas.

AoC believes that to achieve a credible vocational pedagogic knowledge base and develop the 'vocational pedagogic scholars and teachers' of the future will require the following:

- The establishment of a National Centre for Vocational Research and Pedagogy (an Observatory) that will:

  o Identify areas to improve practice supported by research
  o Act as repository for vocational pedagogy research with good links to Cedefop.
  o Employ a small number of eminent researchers with a remit to undertake research themselves and commission projects – possibly based in a University department.
  o Develop communities of practice around vocational pedagogy with a particular focus on the development of teaching higher vocational skills.
  o Commission and collate subject based research and practice materials.

Such an Observatory, possibly co-led by LSIS and other agencies with an appropriate sector led management structure, should have an expectation, that after two to three years of pump-priming monies, it would become self-funding

AoC would be very willing to discuss these ideas, and possible funding sources, with members of the Commission

Appendix 1

Case Studies

Cornwall College: HNC/D Engineering and BTEC Extended Diploma in Engineering – Project work: Townscape Heritage Initiative in Camborne. (Townscape Heritage Initiatives (THIs) are multi-funded grant schemes which fund traditional repairs and reinstate architectural detailing on targeted historic buildings in Conservation Areas).

Street signs were produced for a residential development scheme opposite Camborne Railway Station. The design of the signs is based on the original font used by the Holman Engineering Company. Students used CAD techniques to model the signs and transfer the data to CNC milling machines to produce patterns for the sand casting process at a local foundry, Terrill Bros in Hayle.

Students were involved in all aspects of the design and manufacturing process. They visited the foundry prior to casting and discussed constraints on the production of the patterns. They also consulted with the owner of a local engineering firm who specialises in restoration projects during the design period. After galvanisation, finishing and painting, the signs have been fixed to buildings at Trevu Road and have been highlighted by the Council as models of good practice.

Students also worked with property owners to design personalised door furniture for use on grant aided properties. Students met and discussed design options with property owners, designed door furniture (letter boxes, door knockers, house names, boot scrapers) using 3D computer modelling, produced moulds using 3D printing techniques and commissioned production at the local foundry where possible using recycled metal.

The project work was written up by students in a portfolio format forming evidence for the assessed project module.

Bradford College: Vocational Science: BTEC Professional Diplomas in Aseptic Services and in Pharmacy Clinical Services.

The Vocational Science team at Bradford College have been successfully delivering pharmacy qualifications for over 50 years. The work of pharmacy technicians is changing and, in common with many para-professional roles, the profession is taking on more complex and challenging roles requiring higher level knowledge and skills, and many NHS Trusts are seeking tailored programmes of CPD.

Bradford's professional diplomas are delivered entirely through a distance learning model using web-based software, Ecordia. Induction is carried out through the use of a Jing video (free screenshot and screencast software) sent as a web-link in an email to all students. This allows the students to gain access to their Ecordia e-portfolio. Automatic induction tasks covering all Ecordia activities are set up by the tutor ensuring learner proficiency. There is then periodic release of teaching and learning resources and e-assessments. All resources are interactive, containing embedded weblinks and specific tasks to be completed. E-assessments marked as either 'complete' or 'active with actions' are sent back via Ecordia to the student with feedback. The tutor and student are able to check the build-up of the portfolio and therefore jointly monitor progress.

This delivery model allows continual roll-on roll-off enrolment of students and has proven extremely attractive to large employers such as the NHS in up-skilling their workforce without the need to send employees offsite.

Newcastle College: FdA Contemporary Dance Students: The use of video in the dance studio - an experiment using the camera

The use of the camera is not new to the dance studio. Its many uses as a creative tool, such as developing mediated imagery to perform alongside or to replace the live performer, have given rise to a range of experiments with dance and technology.

There is much discussion in dance teaching and somatic practice centred on training the body physically. This is an important part of the FdA Contemporary Dance programme at Newcastle College and the course team were interested in how they could use the camera and technology to support this teaching and learning process.

In fine arts and design education a key skill is 'eye training' and the team were acutely aware in their own artistic studies that one hurdle in teaching dance technique was in synthesising physical and eye training.

The team's answer came in the form of a microcam - a tiny camera usually utilised on a cyclist helmet to provide video footage of the road whilst driving. The team introduced the tiny microcam into sessions in 2011, to record individual exercises performed by the student. Attached to the teacher's collar line the teacher experimented with shots one would naturally capture from a class whilst teaching, with as little interference to the camera other than switching on and off.

Once recorded, each piece of footage - each exercise - was named for easy recognition then downloaded to YouTube with a limit placed on audience accessibility, grouped to the FdA Contemporary Dance students with links placed directly onto Newcastle College Group on-line.

Student feedback was positive. They enjoyed being able to view their performance in class, and the process seemed to objectify both the verbal correction and the physical image, taking away any negative connotation. This depersonalising process seemed to make it easier for the student to accept the correction without denial, even when the correction had initially seemed to contradict their own proprioceptive (individual) image of their performance.

Although in its initial roll-out phase there is early evidence of improved assessment outcomes.

Leeds City College: Whole College use of Technology

Over the past few years, Leeds City College has grown in size as the result of a series of mergers. With 45,000 students distributed over 8 campuses, the College has sought to innovate in its use of technology to meet student expectations with regard to teaching and learning and reduce the costs of technical provision. The College has undertaken a project to deliver a 'Classroom Cloud Project' to develop a learning platform for educational provision.

The aim of the project is to provide, flexible 'any time', 'any place' and 'any device' services, while at the same time reducing the cost of providing fixed desktop provision with its attendant energy costs and inflexible use of space.

As part of a College wide strategy, it has reviewed its teaching and learning resources to ensure they support complex learning and social environments. Working with IBM, and in collaboration with Leeds University and Leeds Metropolitan University, it has created a 'virtual desktop' , available to students on a variety of mobile devices, that includes: web conferencing, social networking communities, blogs, forums, access to all appropriate College systems, 5GB online storage per user and the full suite of Microsoft Office applications. The desktop is not platform dependent and is underpinned by secure and robust wireless connectivity.

Initial surveys of students have been extremely positive.

Appendix 2

Examples of scholarship[17]

- keeping up to date with the subject
- curriculum development, particularly foundation degrees, often with HEIs
- curriculum development that involves research
- updating ICT skills
- taking higher qualifications – masters, doctorates and teaching qualifications
- consultancy to industry and other agencies
- industrial secondments or work shadowing
- involvement with Sector Skills Councils
- research and publications
- practitioner/applied research
- personal development – action research and reading
- attending staff development events within the college
- attending conferences and workshops externally.

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[17] HEFCE *Higher education in further education colleges – Consultation on HEFCE policy*, (2006). November 2006/48