



**Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning**

**Submission on behalf of the 157 Group**

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## Introduction

The 157 Group submits this paper as our evidence to the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL). Both the 157 Group's recent work on the Leadership of Learning in Further Education, and examples of practice from our member Colleges have contributed to our thinking and recommendations. Our submission is grounded in extensive consultation with members, and represents the collective views of the Group and of the practitioners within it.

## Our members

- Barnet and Southgate College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- City of Bristol College
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Cornwall College
- Derby College
- Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College
- Highbury College Portsmouth
- Hull College
- Leeds City College
- Lewisham College
- Liverpool Community College
- New College Nottingham
- Newham College
- St Helens College
- Stoke on Trent College
- Sunderland College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Vision West Nottinghamshire College
- Warwickshire College
- York College.

The 157 Group is highly supportive of the establishment and purpose of the Commission. We agree with its Chair, Frank McLoughlin CBE, when he says, "The Commission represents a once in a generation opportunity to raise the status of adult vocational teaching and learning, to promote its nature and heritage in its own terms." We commend the Commission's considerable efforts and innovative approaches to take account of the views and experiences of learners and practitioners in its deliberations.

We work explicitly to influence policy through the experience and wisdom of practitioners in the field, and believe that the Commission report and recommendations provide an excellent opportunity to describe the good work happening in vocational contexts and to set out a vision for what vocational learning means for the future of our country. There are many examples of excellent practice within the further and adult vocational teaching and learning sector. Success in qualifications is not the only measure of good learning, but it is worth noting that vocational courses lead to much higher student success rates on average than school-based qualifications such as GCSEs. This is because vocational learning is not primarily about selection with the associated experience of failure for many: rather it is about enabling people to acquire the skills, confidence and knowledge needed to perform in an occupational context.

Further Education Colleges have much to bring to the table in terms of outstanding teaching and learning and we offer a myriad of examples of excellent practice within this submission. It is important, however, to establish an important principle from the outset – that many of the elements of good or outstanding vocational learning are simply the elements of all good or outstanding learning. Having said that, we believe also that vocational practice, at its best, has much to offer to the world of educational thought and practice more generally.

Our starting point and core focus is vocational learning. Our recent work has focused on understanding the key components of leading learning and excellent teaching and learning, and we are clear that outstanding teaching has to be defined as that which fosters and ensures outstanding learning. Practitioners will understand the principles of outstanding teaching by understanding expertly the experiences of learners.

This submission will explain why we believe the 157 Group can bring a unique perspective to the work of the Commission, but firstly we examine five key themes which we believe the Commission should focus its attention on, namely:

- Redefining explicitly and powerfully what is meant by 'vocational'
- Examining who can, and should, benefit from vocational learning
- Expressing a clear set of positive outcomes which are specific, if not unique, to vocational learning

- Clarifying what good vocational teaching and professionalisation looks like
- Outlining a model of leadership which can enable good vocational teaching and learning to flourish.

### **Our propositions for the commission**

*We believe that the Commission has an opportunity to define and raise the profile of vocational learning in terms of learner experience and outcomes and to influence and improve the view held of vocational learning by learners, parents, teachers, the government and the public at large.*

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make clear the contribution of vocational learning as preparation for any craft or profession, at all levels and at all stages, in an individual's career.*

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to enhance the perceived value of vocational education by describing the ways in which learners benefit from a curriculum which is broad, deep and effective.*

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to describe the skills of a great vocational teacher and facilitator of learning and to offer inspiring thoughts on how to ensure the best people are recruited to teach on vocational courses.*

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make explicit a vision and set of qualities of outstanding institutional leadership which will inspire and ensure excellence in vocational teaching and learning.*

As well as offering examples of outstanding practice, we will raise three key concepts for the Commission to consider for further action:

- the 'Meisterschaft'<sup>1</sup> – a specific set of values and behaviours related to a craft or profession which vocational education seeks to instil
- a curriculum description for 'studentship' which clearly articulates the broader outcomes of vocational learning for all
- a recruitment programme for teachers which is based on competencies which we know to be directly relevant to good outcomes from vocational learning.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> <http://www.dictionarist.com/Meisterschaft>, accessed on 15 October 2012, translates the word as 'mastery, masterly skill, expertise, command', but in usage, its allied meaning of 'champion' adds an implication that someone has learned not just a high level of skill, but also acts as an ambassador or advocate for a certain craft or profession – it is in this broadest sense that we use the term here.

## **Executive summary**

In focusing on vocational teaching and learning from a practitioner's perspective, we believe there are five key strands on which the Commission might focus. Within each strand, we suggest how the Commission might respond and offer thoughts on the content of that response.

### **The need to challenge how the word 'vocational' is currently perceived and used and come up with a better way of framing learning with is both applied and professional**

*We believe that the Commission has an opportunity to define and raise the profile of vocational learning in terms of learner experience and outcomes and to influence and improve the view held of vocational learning by learners, parents, teachers, the government and the public at large.*

Vocational learning is a type or a way of learning, and is not restricted to a level of learning. It involves learning information and developing the ability to apply both knowledge and skill in a direct way within the setting of a craft or profession. It is also about developing broader skills which are of direct relevance to the workplace, often learned in the workplace or a real work environment, as well as the classroom – these range from teamwork to resilience and learning to learn. There is also an element which we describe as 'Meisterschaft' – where the learning encompasses also the values, beliefs and behaviours associated with a given craft or profession.

### **The need to understand how vocational learning fits into the pathways of all learners and is a valid and beneficial route to many outcomes**

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make clear the contribution of vocational learning as preparation for any craft or profession, at all levels and at all stages, in an individual's career.*

Virtually no craft or profession can be entered into without some form of vocational learning (defined as we define it here) having taken place – theoretical knowledge with no practical skill is as useless in any job as practical skill with no underpinning knowledge. Thus it is fair to say that all of us need to benefit from vocational learning at some point in our lives. We believe it is critical to challenge the prevalent view that suggests that vocational learning is only appropriate for a certain type of individual.

### **The need to describe the outputs of vocational learning that benefit both employers and individuals as citizens in a meaningful way**

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to enhance the perceived value of vocational education by describing the ways in which learners benefit from a curriculum which is broad, deep and effective.*

Vocational learning produces individuals who not only have technical knowledge and practical skills to apply within a given craft or profession, but they are taught in such a way as to develop skills of much broader employment value. These will be behaviours, qualities, beliefs and skills which enable them to be reflective learners and resilient to change in an ever more turbulent working environment.

### **The need to recruit people to teach on vocational programmes who have the right skills and attributes themselves to bring out the best in learners**

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to describe the skills of a great vocational teacher and facilitator of learning and to offer inspiring thoughts on how to ensure the best people are recruited to teach on vocational courses.*

Our model is that teachers are first and foremost reflective practitioners and are able to establish good relationships with learners founded on respect and trust earned largely from industry expertise and currency of skill based experience. Teachers should include learners in co-creating the curriculum in a very real way and feel that they themselves are part of a professional community of learning and practice. In terms of pedagogy, they must innovate, experiment, be inclusive, be prepared to share, reflect and receive feedback on their practice; and be skilled in differentiation, thus lending a particular individual focus to vocational teaching.

**The need to describe a model of leadership which will specifically enable good vocational learning to flourish for all.**

*We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make explicit a vision and set of qualities of outstanding institutional leadership which will inspire and ensure excellence in vocational teaching and learning.*

Such leadership will place teaching and learning at the heart of the mission, values and practice of an organisation, and be rigorous in its refusal to accept that satisfactory is good enough, and in its monitoring of teacher performance and student success. However, it will also take a forward-thinking view of professional development for teachers, develop effective and expansive learning environments for all staff and ensure that all organisational leaders model the qualities and reflective practices expected of its teachers and learners.

## 1 The 157 Group and the Commission

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large, regionally influential further education colleges in England, most of which are highly successful. All our members are key strategic leaders in their locality, actively influencing policy development and improving the quality and reputation of further education.

Providing a national voice on strategy and policy for large, mostly urban colleges in England, we aim to promote change for the benefit of our members and the sector as a whole. Our members' knowledge, capability, experience and commitment brings a unique breadth and depth of expertise to bear on all aspect of further education and skills. We also work together as a peer support network, and are committed to equality and diversity.

We are actively promoting the development of a strong and world class college sector that not only has a transformative impact on individuals, employers and their local communities, but also makes a real difference to the economic and social wellbeing of the nation and its global success. Together, 157 Group colleges:

- turn over £1.6 billion a year

- serve 700,000 learners

- employ 39,000 staff

- engage with 32,000 employers.

### The voice of practitioners

We believe that policy is best influenced through the experience and wisdom of practitioners in the field, that is, through praxis<sup>2</sup>, and are producing relevant policy documents in a new format with integrated case studies of practice as referenced below. In this submission we will illustrate and evidence our points with case studies from our member Colleges. These Colleges are delivering a large and significant proportion of the vocational teaching and learning taking place in England.

Leadership is strong, in some cases outstanding, amongst our members, and we can therefore contribute with a confident voice to current sector debates around how best to encourage excellence in teaching and learning. Importantly, our Colleges are delivering a vast range of vocational courses alongside other forms of learning and so are already demonstrating the impact that good vocational practice can have.

We are especially pleased to have engaged with the Commission at an early stage, and have already submitted our recent work in partnership with the Institute for Learning<sup>3</sup>, in which we have set out a vision for the leadership of learning, described some of the characteristics of an environment where staff can develop their skills and, importantly, drawn on the experience of staff and learners to describe what great teaching and learning feels like.

In this submission, we expand our thought in some of these areas, and beyond.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, our recent publications on College's role in tackling unemployment and in providing apprenticeships, both available at <http://www.157group.co.uk/157-group-policy-papers>.

<sup>3</sup> This consists of three publications: *Leading Learning in Further Education* at [http://www.157group.co.uk/files/leading\\_learning\\_in\\_further\\_education\\_think\\_piece.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/leading_learning_in_further_education_think_piece.pdf), *Leading Learning and Letting Go* at [http://www.157group.co.uk/files/leading\\_learning\\_and\\_letting\\_go.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/leading_learning_and_letting_go.pdf) and *Great Teaching and Learning* at [http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great_teaching_and_learning.pdf).

## 2 Redefining ‘vocational

In the notes of its first meeting on 27 June 2012, the Commission sets out a goal “to begin to develop a new language for describing and valuing vocational learning in its own terms.” This is a critical point – a new social and economic order require a new lexicon and the terms currently employed to describe different learning settings and ways of teaching and learning are, in some cases, outmoded and unclear.

***We believe that the Commission has an opportunity to define and raise the profile of vocational learning in terms of learner experience and outcomes and to influence and improve the view held of vocational learning by learners, parents, teachers, the government and the public at large.***

The definition of the word ‘vocational’ has become muddled as successive governments have added to an already crowded marketplace of qualifications and initiatives. It can too easily be perceived as low level study, or study of subjects which are primarily ‘hands-on’, and involve little brain activity.

Many would turn to the Internet to investigate their vocational learning options, and the first result in a Google search for the term “vocational learning” would take them to a page which states,

*“Vocational education is any sort of formal training program that trains students for work in a particular trade. In most cases, training is somewhat short, usually only one to two years. Unlike most college programs, which focus on providing a broad and varied education, vocational schools are usually geared towards a specific job. Plumbing, dental hygiene, hairstyling, and mechanics are only some of the many trades that can be learned through vocational education.”<sup>4</sup>*

Although clearly written from an American perspective, and with the attendant elements of the American system, where ‘college’ is referring to what we might term HEIs, this one paragraph devalues vocational learning in several ways – it posits that vocational training does not provide breadth and, crucially, it is set against ‘college [academic] programs’, which are, by implication, some kind of ‘preferred norm’ to be aspired to.<sup>5</sup>

We believe that quite the opposite is true – vocational learning can involve the broadest possible learning, and it is often a lifelong process, not just a short course. A short course may be one component of a broader skills requirement for an individual adding during their life to a compendium of vocational skill. An offer going beyond ‘short courses’ is one thing which differentiates the broader public and social value role and offer of GFE colleges from small private training providers. We would argue that vocational learning is needed by all (see section 3), and that, if this search result is representative of a broader view, which we believe it is, it must be challenged.

In setting out a new vocabulary, we propose that ‘vocational’ has two broad meanings, both of which reflect high quality and demanding outcomes.

First, **‘vocational’ can be used to describe the application of knowledge and the development of the skill to do that** – in other words, it describes a way of learning which goes beyond the theoretical and enables knowledge to be put to a practical purpose. In this sense, there are few, if any, jobs or professions which do not require some form of ‘vocational’ learning to have taken place before people can perform them competently.

In order to be successful in any job or profession, a learner needs to be equipped with a reasonable amount of both theoretical and applied learning. A conceptual and theoretical framework can enhance practice and practical experience can enhance conceptual and theoretical knowledge.

The teaching profession provides its own example – those who have gained a degree focusing largely on theoretical knowledge of a subject will then undertake a post-graduate qualification to develop the skills needed to pass on that knowledge in the classroom. Although post-graduate, it would be hard to argue that the content of such a programme (eg a PGCE) is any more demanding than the initial degree, and so we get the ideal example of where theoretical and applied learning takes place not simultaneously but sequentially – and only when both elements have been completed are we confident that the teacher is sufficiently prepared.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-vocational-education.htm>, accessed 9 October 2012

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, a similar search for ‘academic learning’ does not provide a clear-cut definition, but rather a series of articles which refer to school-based study, or set ‘academic’ alongside ‘social and emotional’ learning – it is perhaps the simple lack of a need to define that, we would argue, implies that ‘academic’ learning is more of a ‘norm’

Second, **we use the term ‘vocational’ to describe training or formation which leads to a specific job outcome** – learning which enables a learner to become a member of a particular craft or profession. The learning outcomes are as much about a sense of belonging and a set of values and behaviours relating to employability as they are about skill and knowledge. We will outline these learning outcomes in more detail in section 3.

We are describing two axes on a snapshot of a learning experience – described eloquently in the notes of the Commission’s first meeting as the ‘vertical’ – a depth of knowledge and skill and the acquisition of the skills of learning itself – and the ‘horizontal’ – a trajectory for establishing a learner as a member of a craft or profession<sup>6</sup>.

As well as an argument for changing the vocabulary itself, there is also an argument for changing the way in which the vocabulary is used. In his recent speech to the Labour party conference, Ed Miliband ascribed vocational learning to individuals whom he described as “not academic”<sup>7</sup>. In regard to definitions, and to the potential impact on individual aspiration, we posit this is deeply unhelpful, and only serves to reinforce the idea that somehow *people* are either academic or vocational. We will discuss this further in section 3.

It is common in good practice for both theoretical and applied learning to be undertaken with the same subject matter. You can learn about medicine, and you can learn to practise medicine. We argue that vocational learning takes a much more holistic approach by combining a range of skills and attributes into a curriculum.

A vocational curriculum will typically cover

- a wealth of technical knowledge relating to a craft or profession
- the development and practice of relevant and specific skills and competences
- the application of those knowledge and skills to specific projects and challenges
- the monitoring and evaluation of the successful impact of that knowledge and skill,
- upskilling and reskilling
- reflection upon and continual improvement of knowledge and skills development

and will be delivered in such a way as to focus on behaviours such as

- team work and problem solving skills
- learning by doing and watching, as well as by reading, listening and reflecting
- individual mentoring
- the development of independent learning ability
- the ability to experiment and learn by doing, succeeding and, sometimes, failing
- inculcating aspiration and leadership ability
- fundamentally important skill areas for work and life (such as English, Maths and spatial awareness).

A key point is that at its best vocational learning takes place within a real-work context, and in partnership – FE Colleges work with many partners – employers, schools and others – to ensure that they understand each learner before arrival and can deliver the best outcome for them. Partnership with employers is critical in ensuring that learning can take place in both on and off-the-job settings, and will ensure also that the curriculum is considered as relevant and up to date by those signing up as learners.

This is hardly a programme or process that might be referred to as in any way ‘narrow’. We would argue, in fact, that it mirrors pretty closely the environment found in most workplaces, and is, therefore, a crucial part of preparation for life and work for all. Recruitment to programmes is as much based on values as on skills, and this, too mirrors the work environment.

We will return to the vocational curriculum when thinking about outcomes in section 3, but our intention, at this stage, is to have suggested a way in which the word ‘vocational’ might be better explained, and understood.

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<sup>6</sup> See paragraph 12 at <http://repository.excellencegateway.org.uk/fedora/objects/eg:4683/datastreams/DOC/content>

<sup>7</sup> “Not academic, already bored at school, maybe already starting that process of truanting, of not going to school”, quoted at [http://www.politicshome.com/uk/article/62648/ed\\_milibands\\_speech\\_to\\_labour\\_conference.html](http://www.politicshome.com/uk/article/62648/ed_milibands_speech_to_labour_conference.html), accessed 9 October 2012



The video submission from West Nottinghamshire College that accompanies this document illustrates the nature of partnership learning and curriculum planning perfectly.

West Nottinghamshire College's video submission describes two partnerships.

The first, with CQM Training and Thorntons Chocolatiers, aims to devise and deliver Higher level Apprenticeships at Thorntons. Included within the curriculum, as well as the higher level skills demanded by the employer, are elements intended to help the workforce work more collaboratively together – as the Training Manager puts it, “to avoid silo mentality” and make the company work more profitably for all concerned.

Learners describe “good intense sessions, unlike any other kind of learning, where people learn about each others' jobs and doors are opened.” Skill levels are clearly raised, especially in mathematics.

The second partnership is one with SPS and CP Berry Groundworks to deliver level 2 Construction apprenticeships. The programme uses a mock-up street where learners can develop an understanding of a whole variety of skills and activities involved in the full extent of a construction project. In this way, the content of the programme is boosted and learners develop far wider skills than they might otherwise have done.

The College has supported the training of assessors at SPS in order to support this additional learning. Learners describe the mock set-up as “hands-on” and “bringing a lot more experience”.

The video submission is attached with this document.

### 3 The customers of vocational learning

The Commission is charged with examining vocational learning for adults. Commonly, vocational learning will take place at one of four stages of an individual's development:

- prior to having established a profession of choice
- as part of a route to entering a chosen profession
- as part of their ongoing professional formation within a profession (upskilling)
- as a means to re-skill if changing profession.

As has been noted, there is a need for vocationally relevant learning to take place for virtually any craft or profession.

***We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make clear the contribution of vocational learning as preparation for any craft or profession at all levels and at all stages in an individual's career.***

Those who have not established their choice will need to develop skills around learning itself, they will need to understand the tenets of teamwork, and of learning how to apply the knowledge they can gain elsewhere. They may do this within the context of a particular job or profession, but the skills they learn will be transferable to other vocational areas at this stage. This is the broad basis of vocational learning.

It is often argued that 'vocational' learning is appropriate for some learners and not for others, and in particular, for those learners who are not deemed to be 'academic'. If we examine the definitions talked about here, however, it becomes clear that a degree in medicine may be classed as vocational, as may the post-graduate teaching qualification already referred to. This is a powerful argument for vocational learning being appropriate, and to have parity of esteem with academic learning, at all ages and levels; and for any associated stigma to be removed.

Once a profession is decided, the content of the learning will change to include additional elements, most notably something we will describe as akin to the notion of a 'Meisterschaft' in German. For as well as learning the practical skills associated with a certain profession, learners will begin to understand the unique set of values, beliefs and behaviours which characterise that profession as a working environment. This we believe is a critical element of vocational learning, and one that needs to be better understood.

The 'Meisterschaft' idea will run through the third and fourth categories of learner as well – in more subtle ways as a learner adds to their professional competencies, where they may also begin to understand the importance of playing a role in passing on the values and beliefs to others. For the re-skinner, the process will begin from the start, but in a more condensed way, as we can assume the basics of how to work have been previously learned.

We have noted that, perhaps especially at higher levels, vocational learning often follows previous learning which may be described as academic<sup>8</sup>. Highly effective vocational teaching and learning, we argue, combines the two at the same time. In many current vocational courses this is indeed the case; most Further Education colleges will 'embed' English and Maths and make them vocationally relevant. This is one great skill of the vocational teacher – one College reports that learners who arrive with the requisite GCSE grades in English and Maths still lack basic numeracy and literacy skills when they join the College. When the English and Maths content is contextualised within a vocational setting, however, the students become more successful and employable.

A narrow, competency-based approach to an adult curriculum will be a flawed model at every stage of the formation process, because of the lack of underpinning knowledge and contextualisation. The embedding of the broadest range of employability skills is a vital keystone in the success of vocational education for adults.

The Edge Foundation proposes that vocational education is needed by all, and should sit alongside – and in parity with – more academic qualifications<sup>9</sup>. We agree. The work of Edge, the work of the

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this submission, our working definition of 'academic' is learning which is theoretical, rather than applied

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.edge.co.uk/about-edge>.

commission, and the proposed Technical Baccaulaureate offer an opportunity to broaden the debate about vocational learning in a new and expansive manner and environment.

The Manchester College's PEARL approach illustrates how the broadest skills needed for employability by all learners are incorporated into learning.

Research among employers has often seen them say that a lack of labour market contact inhibits the development of key 'employability' and 'soft' skills including self-motivation, time management and communication skills among learners.

The Manchester College has worked in a small, focused partnership to develop and deliver PEARL: Personal Employability Achievement and Reflection for Learning. That leap of curriculum planning has proved hugely successful and has helped transform the lives of many people.

PEARL is a practical, hands-on qualification that allows students to demonstrate – not write about or collect evidence about – but actually demonstrate their skills in building relationships and working with others. It is a credit to the educational regulatory establishment that PEARL is now, finally, on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and has been recognised for its reliability, integrity and authenticity.

The five themes are:

- self-awareness
- motivation
- managing feelings
- empathy
- social skills.

In themselves, these are not revolutionary issues to be tackling – the difference with PEARL comes in the way in which these are treated, and even more so, assessed. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills demonstrated through assessor, learner and peer feedback, group work and discussion. Practical demonstration is at the heart, as are behaviour skills and the importance of personal and social responsibility alongside employability skills.

The assessment framework enables reliable feedback and target-setting, focusing on areas for development. PEARL is accredited by the GQAL awarding body, which has been established in partnership between higher education, further education and the performing arts sector – here again a non-traditional, imaginative grouping that has worked very well in practice.

And Birmingham Metropolitan College describes a similarly embedded approach.

BMET deploys a range of measures across its provision to embed employability skills. As well as aligning its courses to address local skills demand, BMET provides work experience and internships, industry visits and guru lectures, as well as in some cases master classes and business networking events. Courses are often enriched with specific employability skills modules and learners have access to expert advice and guidance including CV and interview skills development. With entrepreneurial skills in mind, the BMET Enterprise Skills Academy is building on its links with over 100 of the city's businesses. Formed in 2009, the BMET Enterprise Academy supports the young business people of the future by providing internships and mentoring opportunities, as well as workshops and lectures. Students participate in a range of business and enterprise-related activities including finance and accountancy, communications and marketing and commercial awareness.

In its work with unemployed adults, Jobs Skills @ BMET provides a range of short courses for people who are looking for work which give them both a recognised qualification and a competitive edge in securing employment. Courses are targeted on those occupations where vacancies are known to exist locally, such as in business and office administration, warehouse, construction multi-skills, and cleaning. David Marsh provides a good case study of the college's approach. After 22 years David was made redundant from his career in manufacturing in 2008 and he wanted a new career in the care sector. Lacking both experience and qualifications meant David began by volunteering at a day centre for the elderly and infirm, run by St Luke's Church in Kingstanding. He assisted the centre's driver as an escort and was soon encouraged to undertake training. David progressed through Introduction to Health Care and Entry Level 3 Preparing to Work in Care courses and was offered paid employment as a driver and care support worker. He then further progressed to a Level 2 Health and Social Care award, passing in November 2011, with his next ambition to study for the Level 3 Award. In the meantime, David continues in his fulfilling role at St Luke's day centre where he is highly popular with the centre's clients and staff.

#### 4 The outcomes of vocational learning

The applied nature of the vocational context sets up and invites a different kind of learning experience, one which is more collegiate and which actively encourages teamwork. Many vocational settings make active use of peer assessment, observation and learning development which involves others, primarily as the core values of any particular job or profession are not only established but collectively shared. The teacher takes on more of the characteristics of a facilitator and sharer of skills than simply a conveyor of knowledge.

***We believe the Commission has an opportunity to enhance the perceived value of vocational education by describing the ways in which learners benefit from a curriculum which is broad, deep and effective.***

Vocational learning is not what may be referred to as a 'repository model' – in other words the focus is not simply on depositing knowledge and information into the minds of learners. The focus, as we have described, is on application and skill as well as underpinning knowledge.

Prior to admission to a vocational course in a college, the Information, Advice and Guidance process is, of necessity, thorough. Success in vocational learning will be judged by far more than the obtaining of a qualification, and so it is important to consider not only a learner's interest in the subject matter and qualifications for enrolling on a course, but also their existing skill level and aptitude and their likelihood of adapting to the specific circumstances of being employed in a given craft or profession.

Crucially, it will also include a consideration of what learners will be expected to actually do and how to behave in a work situation. For example, how prepared is someone to work unsociable hours if they want to train to be a chef? IAG in colleges for vocational programmes is very much designed to ensure that learners are placed on the 'right' programme from the start, not just in terms of qualifications but also in terms of aptitude and expectations.

Of course, this is not always a perfect fit, and the key to what then happens in the classroom, realistic work environment, workshop or workplace is about making that 'fit' ever more relevant as the programme goes on. The learning itself evolves as the application in a work context develops but it certainly includes all of the following.

- A strong focus from the outset on team work and problem solving – learners are positively encouraged to work together, and are often assessed in this way. This provides a much clearer mirror of the skills expected by employers than a programme which relies, for assessment purposes at least, on an individual performing in an exam centre.
- Individual attention which focuses not just on progress through a qualification or a learner's knowledge, but also on learning by doing and their skill development and their ability to learn autonomously.
- Developing the meta skill of learning to learn – the CBI have recognised the importance of developing the critical skill of learning to learn for employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>10</sup>, plus an ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to become resilient to change, as frenetic change and redundancy and redeployment are ever more present in our working environments.
- A heightened degree of learning by watching and practising, rather than by reading or listening. Focusing on developing applied skill, learners are encouraged to observe and draw conclusions for themselves which they can then put into practice.
- The development of a set of values which relate to the profession being learned about – we might refer to these as a sense of vocational identity, which then becomes a willingness, or obligation even, to pass on the skills being learned to a future generation. This is the 'Meisterschaft', where a learner, whether skilling or re-skilling, 'becomes' a member of a profession or a career, rather than just learns about it. There are numerous examples of how this manifests itself in practice, from chefs in whites with a certain vocabulary for talking to one another in the kitchen, to engineers, medics and scientists who develop a sense of 'belonging' to a profession and its beliefs.

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<sup>10</sup> See the focus on self-management skills in this year's *Education and Skills Survey*, at [http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1514978/cbi\\_education\\_and\\_skills\\_survey\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1514978/cbi_education_and_skills_survey_2012.pdf)

- An emphasis on real work environments – at a recent *Great Teaching and Learning* event held with teachers and learners<sup>11</sup>, one learner spoke of the moment he entered a real work environment and said candidly, “That was the moment when I realised why I was doing what I was doing.” This is learning that replicates the real world. This environmental focus is enhanced by the fact that vocational learning is facilitated by people and in situations where recent and relevant industrial and professional experience is crucial. This knowledge is part of the perceived respect that teachers get in vocational subjects, and respect is a crucial element in fostering the good teacher/learner relationships we know to be vital for good learning to take place.
- Additional benefit comes from situations where vocational learning takes place ‘on-the-job’, whether via work experience or via a situation such as an on-the-job training programme – here, learners will be exposed not only to the need to apply their knowledge and skill in very real and relevant ways, but also to the atmosphere and environment of a particular craft or profession. They will understand truly what is required of them and further develop the ‘Meisterschaft’ capability we have already referred to.
- The embedding of critical broader skills (including literacy and numeracy, but also general employability skills such as timekeeping and planning for deadlines), within curriculum elements such as projects and set piece tasks. The added relevance that these elements then receive may explain the increased success rates of learners within a vocational context. In fact, some teachers described this the other way around when asked – they talked about embedding vocational content into the functional skills – and this may be a helpful way of viewing things.
- Embedded learner support, rather than an add-on service, which enables the curriculum to be more individualised and learner-led. The measurement of progress is done on an individual and ongoing basis of learning and, often, learners will progress in different parts of the curriculum at very different paces. This reflects closely the continuous learning cycle that we engage in as part of everyday life.
- A ‘blended’ pedagogy, using varied methodologies and technologies and, crucially, often peer-assessed and even peer-led. In many settings, vocational learning takes place in mixed-age settings where the ability to manage complex relationships is ever present and is another skill developed.

A key outcome of vocational learning is, increasingly, the nurturing of job creators as well as job consumers. This is a natural outcome from the ‘Meisterschaft’ approach we have described. We agree with the Gazelle Group that personal qualities are a key outcome of vocational learning and preparation for work<sup>12</sup>, and our Colleges have been working to drive forward the entrepreneurialism and enterprise agenda. This has centred around the mobilisation of a new generation of entrepreneurial colleges, involving founder members new college nottingham (ncn) and Warwickshire College, focused on transforming curriculum by bringing together college leaders with successful entrepreneurs to develop learners who can add value to their communities, bring innovation into existing businesses and create their own employment with confidence and ambition. Examples of such enterprise throughout our Colleges include but are by no means limited to:

- New College Nottingham (ncn) and Chichester College becoming part of the Peter Jones Enterprise Academy – providing an opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs to develop their enterprise skills and to realise their ambitions by turning their business dreams into reality.
- Lewisham College students using their Easter break to gain confidence, knowledge and experience in a three-day seminar with Entrepreneurs In Action (EIA). Business students learned how to pitch to investors, how to construct a business plan, the importance of reputation and branding by EIA instructors. Students then competed in a trading fair, selling their products to Lewisham College managers for prizes.

Enterprise activity such as the Pantrepreneurship Challenge (where students work with a social enterprise to set up their own business having designed and had manufactured a product) and the Market Maker Competition (where students use a virtual enterprise simulation programme to design and

<sup>11</sup> See *Great Teaching and Learning* at [http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great_teaching_and_learning.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> *Enterprising Futures*, page 7, available at <http://www.thegazellegroup.com/downloads/Gazelle-Enterprising-Futures.pdf>

develop a full business idea) expose students to a different, and very real, work environment outside their normal learning environment, with the aim of developing resilience and drive to succeed.

Vocational curricula are, by their very nature, ever evolving. While the core values of a profession or career may not change, many of its practices will do, and the curriculum must keep up with that. The currency of vocational teaching and learning comes under much scrutiny.

We have described a situation where vocational learning is designed to lead to a job in a particular craft or profession, but it is important to note that most of the benefits we describe here are transferable. In an age where individuals are likely to change career up to ten times within a working life, the ability of vocational curricula to prepare learners for such potential turbulence should surely not be underestimated.

The settings in which vocational learning takes place allow for far greater benefits than just the outcomes of qualifications. In Colleges, for example, professional support services can use their expertise to enhance the curriculum (such as HR departments offering advice in delivering and undergoing interviews). Mentoring is a characteristic of vocational learning – whether directly from an employer, from peers or from others within an institution.

Work experience is clearly an important element of vocational learning, and is one that has transferred very successfully to other spheres of learning. In one College, it was reported that, spurred on by colleagues teaching purely vocational subjects, A-level teachers had included for the first time some work experience as part of their curriculum. Success rates improved, with many learners saying that the work experience had added a real relevance to what they were doing and helped them to achieve more. Much vocational learning also has a community element to it – construction students, for example, painting a community venue.

All of these distinctive elements of vocational learning broadly achieve two outputs:

- i. the development of the skills of learning, of research and independent thought and skill, and the ability to understand the workplace more thoroughly and be successful within it
- ii. specific skill development relevant to one particular career, craft or profession, and the equipping of a learner to take their place or continue their progression within that area of work.

Vocational learning is therefore a valid pathway to any number of potential endpoints, and the adult learner engaged on a vocational course can be proud of achievement in either context. If they are re-skilling and are clear about the area of work they want to go into they will be successful. If more general skills are the focus then someone may choose to do that within the context of hairdressing but then move on to a completely different profession, safe in the knowledge that they have some broad-based skills on which to build.

Sussex Downs College has developed a model for what it believes the outcomes of a vocational curriculum should be – and frames this model around the term ‘studentship’. This embodies the sense that vocational learning is about much more than subject knowledge, or even skill related to one particular career.

### **Sussex Downs College model of Studentship**

The four dimensions of studentship are given equal weight in curriculum design – which focuses on behaviours, qualities, beliefs and skills. A curriculum will be fit for purpose if it can demonstrate both input and, more importantly, student achievement in all four areas.

- Behaviours include such things as engaging in learning activities, contributing and working with others, doing preparatory study and doing consolidation and extension work.
- Qualities include resilience, resourcefulness, reflection and readiness to take risks as well as confidence, creativity, curiosity and collaboration.
- Beliefs focus on learners’ perceptions of themselves as learners – who do they believe is responsible for their learning and do they believe they will not be able to learn something if it is difficult?
- Skills include listening, reading and watching, as well as asking questions, teamwork and independent research.

By focusing curriculum planning on these tenets, the College can ensure that the ultimate aim of vocational education – that is, to secure a place within a profession – is more likely. The full model is illustrated on the following page.

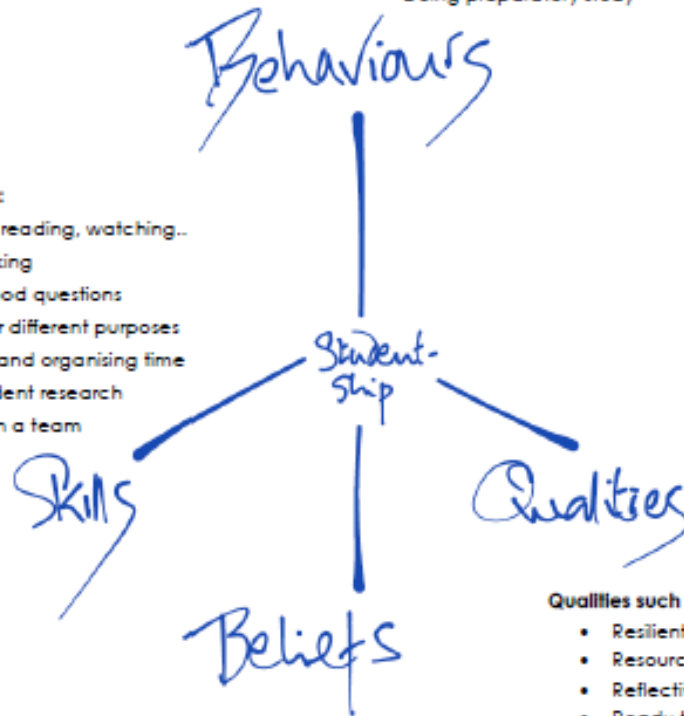
## The four dimensions of studentship

### Behaviours such as:

- Coming to class ready to learn
- Engaging in learning activities
- Contributing and working with others
- Making notes
- Doing consolidation and extension work
- Doing preparatory study

### Skills such as:

- Listening, reading, watching...
- Note-making
- Asking good questions
- Writing for different purposes
- Planning and organising time
- Independent research
- Working in a team



### Responses to questions such as:

- Is intelligence and ability fixed?
- Does finding something difficult mean that I am not able to learn it?
- Who is responsible for my learning?
- What is the point of my learning this?

### Qualities such as the 4Rs:

- Resilient
- Resourceful
- Reflective
- Ready to take risks

### and the 4Cs:

- Confident
- Creative
- Curious
- Collaborative

*For more information about this model please contact John Webber, Professional Learning and Development Manager at Sussex Downs College. Email: john.webber@sussexdowns.ac.uk*

At Barnet and Southgate College, the concept of mechatronics aptly illustrates the real-work and real-world environment in which vocational learning at its best takes place, and the resultant benefits to learners and to all in the College community.

Barnet and Southgate College has pioneered a new way of delivering multi discipline, higher technical vocational skills using a unique “working factory” showcasing advanced manufacturing techniques in a cool and profitable manner.

When the College decided to refresh its curriculum design to meet employer requirements and provide learners with the very latest engineering facilities, they explored how to bring the learning journey alive and inspire learners to greater levels of interaction. Feedback from employers suggested that many qualifications never (in their view) took the concept of quality control and profitability seriously enough. Such skills and awareness were important knowledge issues. We wanted to go further than deliver traditional vocational theory and so devised a plan to create a “working factory” within the College to demonstrate an innovative approach to pedagogy.

From a simple idea evolved a unique facility and student enterprise which now draws students from different disciplines to work within the factory and be part of a quasi company.

The core of the idea was mechatronics – technically speaking the combined study of mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, software engineering, control engineering and systems design engineering in order to manufacture products. This specialist field is seen in every automated company from automotive to medicine. Jobs in this field command salaries in excess of £40,000 and reflect a growing higher technician need within STEM related professions.

Having identified the core resource the College needed a product to manufacture and the product chosen was Plastic Cards (plain and chipset).

A bespoke factory was constructed and installed within one classroom. It is the only one of its kind in the world, though every component is industry standard, from the programmable logic controller which moves the robotic arms to the conveyor belt which carries the product to the distribution point. Connected to the web to allow for remote card design, the unit manufactures a commercial product and enables real time fault identification.

The learner experience is enhanced as the factory enables IT students to study and carry out Programming Code and actually witness the success or failure of their learning. Loyalty Point card solutions are also taught. Web design and graphic design students can display their design skills on the card layout and business students can learn about the profitability of the working factory and costs of production etc. All students learn about marketing and product placement and how to pitch for business – using real casework and local employers interested in purchasing card systems. Finally, engineering students can study robotics and pneumatics and experience how all components need to operate in order to fabricate and manufacture product. All this is achieved from one classroom asset. Learners are the “employees” and participate in every stage of the process.

To enhance the learning still further each student entering the factory is allocated a job role/job description, from MD to logistics. This raises awareness of what to expect in the world of work and teaches the importance of teamwork, as well as identifying valuable employment skills such as leadership traits, instruction giving, problem solving and coping with unplanned system glitches (and attendance!).

An unintended consequence, over and above the innovative learning and professional working environment, was the stimulation of enterprise. A group of students approached the tutors with an idea to create a social enterprise. The College supported this venture (called SMC Card Solutions) and the group now operates a service to local business. This has entailed negotiating with local business to sell the concept, closing the deal, dealing with post-sales issues and delivering a product on time and to budget.

This success has been used to encourage other students to develop their own ideas and possible business ventures.

For the students operating SMC Card Solutions, the initial concept of being taught advanced manufacturing and automation skills has spawned an enterprise culture which has created lasting friendships and team ethic plus a strong sense of enterprise.

The functionality of the working factory also means that primary school pupils visit a safe and secure environment and enjoy inspirational “show and tell” sessions – and they get to take home their very own personal card design.

Staff produced a video clip for youtube viewers showcasing the unique features of the working factory. It can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Zn30IZli4k>.



Birmingham Metropolitan College student Jessica Beeson's experiences describe in many ways what we are referring to as 'Meisterschaft'. These experiences, which are not atypical, enabled Jessica to experience internship and mentoring as an integral part of her programme and gave her exposure to the real world of business in action, where, as she says herself, she learned about how to behave, and what language to talk.

When I joined my Business Studies Advanced Diploma, I also joined BMET Enterprise Academy which would take me directly from the classroom into Birmingham meeting rooms and boardrooms.

As a Business Studies student and Enterprise Academy member, I pretty much gained every skill I possibly could. While my course taught me business principles, the Academy taught me how to execute business strategies.

I took part in everything on offer at the Academy from guru lectures to corporate events, workshops and meetings. This soon led to further opportunities, such as attending Academy board meetings where I played a role in steering the Academy's future progress. I was also able to go to Birmingham Chamber of Commerce breakfast meetings alongside city leaders and prominent businesspeople where we discussed some of the key issues affecting Birmingham including youth unemployment, high speed rail and the role of an elected city mayor.

The BMET Enterprise Academy also provided me with an internship at a marketing company. This was meant to last four weeks, but my employer extended this to six weeks as she was so pleased with my progress.

I enjoyed being treated as a member of staff and not an intern. I have high capabilities and was pleased that these were acknowledged and that I was pushed even further.

The company were extremely pleased with my performance and after my studies, offered me a full time position in the company as an account and sales executive which I went on to accept. My lecturers at the college noticed my skills grow as a result of my internship and were pleased I was using these in college assignments and debates.

From the start of my Diploma, I recognised that communication skills are vital to success. I developed these skills and strongly believe that to work with people (or to work in business) I need to be able to liaise with people at all levels in an organisation, to adapt business language to different environments and have to have the confidence to express my own opinions.

I now act as a business mentor for a student in the Academy. When I was asked to do this, I accepted immediately. Although business is what I want to do in life, sharing what I have learnt is my new passion. I have a great mentee who I love passing knowledge on to and from who I also learn from.

This example of work with the unemployed from Liverpool Community College demonstrates the flexibility of a good vocational curriculum and the way in which it can be moulded to respond to individual employment needs.

Since August 2008, Liverpool Community College has trained over 4,000 residents who were unemployed or under notice of redundancy, as a result of which more than 1,100 of them obtained employment. The college has worked closely with Jobcentre Plus, partners and local employers to achieve this, and is successfully delivering sector-based work academies, one of the government's measures to "Get Britain working".

A typical academy, which should be completed over a single six-week period, consists of:

- Up to two weeks' full time pre-employment training
- Accredited elements
- Content designed by the college with employer input
- A minimum of one day's work experience
- Guaranteed interviews for real vacancies for all candidates upon completion of all the sections.

The wide range of programmes includes security and CCTV; NHS skills academy programmes; employability programmes; construction; warehouse and distribution; working in hotel, leisure and tourism; care; retail, office skills for businesses; and many more skills areas.

Although specific skills are addressed within the training programme, other elements can be added, such as health and safety in the workplace; first aid; motivation and attitudes in the workplace; intensive interview preparation; and coaching.

The employer advises the number of vacancies available and gives dates for guaranteed interviews. The job centre and college plan the programme, aiming to recruit two people on to the academy for each available job.

The employer also provides an outline of what they consider to be the essential skills, knowledge and experience (if any) the candidates need as a starting point to get on to the programme, and a job description.

Jobcentre Plus advertises the opportunity, screens eligible candidates and refers them to a recruitment day. The college manages the recruitment process from start to finish, using a dedicated hotline number. The service is completely free to the employer.

## 5 Vocational teaching

Recent work by the 157 Group, in partnership with the Institute for Learning (IfL) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), posits that great teaching and learning has four elements:

Good teacher/learner relationships, based on mutual respect

Learner involvement in the planning and delivery of the curriculum

A genuinely professional teaching community, where people share practice and experiences and learn from one another

Excellent pedagogy in the classroom or workshop<sup>13</sup>.

These conclusions summed up the collective experience of over 70 people from the sector (including learners, teachers, managers and senior leaders) who gathered at a workshop in May 2012 – the complete findings are set out in the report *Great Teaching and Learning*, which has already been supplied to the Commission.

***We believe the Commission has an opportunity to describe the skills of a great vocational teacher and facilitator of learning and to offer thoughts on how to ensure the best people are recruited to teach on vocational courses.***

Mutual respect and trust, learners and staff tell us, is grounded in whether or not a teacher is seen to have a deep understanding of the subject matter being taught and the requisite skills base, and also the ability to apply those knowledge and skills successfully themselves. Crucially in vocational education, though, the evidence of this can be seen in strong and current links to the industry, craft or profession itself. Practitioners describe how they maintain links, either by secondments, work shadowing, maintaining contact with their own businesses or by forging and keeping excellent employer and industry links and exchanges.

With adult learners, this respect increases when the teacher embodies also the qualities and values expected within a given craft or profession. The notion of ‘behaving like an engineer’, even when teaching in a classroom or a real-work environment, is a powerful one – not one which is easy to describe exactly, but one which carries enormous weight for vocational learning. It would be valuable if the Commission could capture and describe exactly what this entails.

One of the key aspects of embodying a set of values is the ability to be critically self-evaluative. This is an expectation of many professions, and we agree with Ofsted when they say that a key element of College improvement, and therefore an improvement in vocational teaching, is when, “classroom teachers, as well as support staff, understand the value of assessing their own performance objectively.”<sup>14</sup>

A major strength of vocational provision in Colleges is the very fact that staff are ‘dual professionals’ - professional teachers but also professional and experienced in their vocational areas, as described. The number of coaches and judges in the skills Olympics from Colleges is large and this is because they bring a professional expertise and still practice their skills in a wide range of practical and vocational areas. This ‘dual professional’ status enhances the respect so crucial to excellent learning.

Many Colleges use the skills of their learners to enhance the way in which the curriculum is delivered. For example, a number have recently engaged in e-Ambassador or Digital Leader projects, where learners use their knowledge of technology to mentor staff and enable them to find more innovative ways of using technology for learning. Such leadership from learners is not uncommon and reflects courage and creativity on the part of a teacher.

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College is one such College, which took the idea of an e-Ambassador and extended it with remarkable effects on both the learning and the learners.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning.pdf](http://www.157group.co.uk/files/great_teaching_and_learning.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Page 6 of *How Colleges Improve*, available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/how-colleges-improve>

The project consisted of two strands - IT e-Ambassadors and Maths e-Ambassadors - the "e" becoming Educational Ambassador so not solely e-learning. The IT e-Ambassadors were involved in projects that supported teaching staff such as producing Prezi/Powerpoint presentations for open evenings, career fairs and a student award ceremony. The IT e-Ambassadors also provided training for teaching staff in how to use software that the teacher was not familiar with. This was especially useful in helping staff become familiar with Googledocs and Gmail.

The maths e-Ambassadors were involved in a peer teaching programme to support learners in using the MyMaths website as a homework tool. The maths e-Ambassadors micro taught in the lesson alongside the teacher as well as supporting the learner outside of their timetabled lessons, teaching them maths up to Entry level 3.

Here was a group of learners instigating change in how they learnt by becoming teachers themselves. The IT students were able to use their newly acquired IT skills from their core subject in real life scenarios. Their confidence grew especially when they received positive feedback from the member of staff that they had helped. One learner commented on how this role could be added to his CV as he regarded it as valuable work experience.

The maths e-Ambassadors are already planning to continue their roles from September and one learner is about to embark on a teaching career, signing up to do the PETLLS course.

Increasingly, though, teachers delivering vocational courses are really putting learners in the driving seat – by allowing them to plan what and how they learn, albeit within a clear and closely monitored framework. There are examples of learners contributing to schemes of work and lesson plans. Increased engagement is a natural consequence of this approach, but it is also symptomatic of the fact that vocational teaching is, by nature, very individualised and differentiated.

Great vocational teachers must be capable of working in close proximity with every individual learner in order to deliver this individualised curriculum. Judgements of progress are necessarily based on more complex methods of assessment than in what we have described as 'repository' models of learning. If you are to assess whether an individual is capable of applying knowledge, you must devise a test which follows through the whole process of learning. Similarly, individuals will make progress in the application of knowledge and the development of skill in a far from uniform way. Thus, the vocational teacher must be able to cope with the unpredictability of a much more individualised approach to teaching.

We offer some suggestions here about the qualities that professionalism might embody:

- Role modelling the values of a particular craft or profession
- Keeping up to date with their specific craft or profession by maintaining close links with it, perhaps through membership of a professional body (this is what the IfL refers to as 'dual professionalism')
- Innovating in terms of curriculum and pedagogy – taking risks with technology and how learners are involved in planning what is learned
- Sharing practice with others in an honest and open way
- Reflecting on their own capabilities and delivery and constantly evolving practice
- Wanting to contribute to a growing body of thought and research around what is experienced on the ground a good learning in a vocational context.

In addition, our own research<sup>15</sup> describes elements of great vocational teaching that are appreciated by learners and bring success:

- Flexible delivery which cover all learning styles
- Cross-curricular projects
- Individual goal setting
- Enabling learners to teach others
- Using technology.

There is a current focus on the qualification and experience required of teachers and the 157 Group is pleased to play an important and active role in this debate. The question of prescription and prior qualifications is being reflected in developments such as Chartered status. However, there are already

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

examples of good practice among our membership which should influence and inform policy development.

Newham College describes how they undertook their own version of a 'milk round' exercise to encourage bright graduates to teach within FE – the scheme attracted hundreds of applicants and ten are now employed by the College and are doing well. We could expand this notion so that it is not just about qualifications – as we have noted, they key to good teaching lies in many skills, and so we could devise criteria for selection for such a scheme that reflected those broader qualities.

In recent years *Teach First* has been successful in recruiting high quality teachers to the school classroom. A similar initiative could be developed for the FE sector, as we set out and establish the values and skills we believe are key for professional success. The learners being served in a vocational setting also deserve the best people to teach them.

The argument partially rests on what we take 'vocational' to be. The perception of vocational as remedial will lend itself to a value set in teaching that is particular. The perception of vocational as high quality, special and demanding will more properly inform the calibre of teacher we need to attract.

Three examples of how teachers are being encouraged to form their own communities of learning are included here.

**Derby College** has introduced a new initiative across the college called "Teach to Learn" which will support the development of teaching and learning. One branch of the project is "Teach to Learn Action Sessions". These sessions take place across all college sites on a monthly basis and aim to provide the opportunity for CPD to take place where otherwise it may not.

Each month there is a different focus, which is derived from the previous round of observation data where development areas have been identified. Staff members are encouraged to attend the sessions, but they are not mandatory and staff can choose which sessions they attend based on their own CPD needs.

The format of the sessions is based loosely around that of Action Learning Sets, in that they are broken up into three individual sections. The first section is spent discussing the monthly topic, the understanding of it and what it means to the group. The second section spent discussing barriers, enablers and good practice related to the topic. With the final section spent developing action(s) to enable change, either in the team or in individual practice. Through the sessions, staff receive the support of their peers and Senior Learning Directors, as well as the challenge of implementing change in their areas.

The lesson planner, used for **Leeds City College's** 16-18 vocational programmes, enables staff to view how colleagues have used technology in their lessons, and enables tutors to incorporate the planning tools into their own delivery.

The College set up the three month project using an LSIS Curriculum Development Grant and hopes it will lead to personalised and more effective learning, resulting in programmes which engage and respond to students' needs.

The College is continuing to invest and further develop the planner by adding to the bank of quality Technology Enhanced Learning activities for staff to 'drag and drop' into their lesson plans.

Learning Innovation Projects Manager Gail Knowles said: "The interactive planner will help staff develop sessions which incorporate appropriately blended activities to meet the needs of our students. It also enables sharing good professional practice, peer support and development, and improving staff awareness of a range of user-rated TEL activities, while ultimately improving teaching and the learning experience for our students."

## Teaching and Learning Team Leaders

**City of Bristol College** had to develop a role, convince staff it was real and recruit strong and credible staff, who, were foremost still teachers but who could become team leaders - investing at this new level and de-investing at management level.

The expectation was that:

- they be of, and from their teams – still professional teachers who taught
- they must share responsibility and be accountable for learner success, retention, attendance and achievement, and not for that to be someone else's problem
- they would manage their teaching programmes with their team taking local decisions
- they were answerable for the quality of teaching and learning with their team
- they were empowered to act to improve

During meetings, consultations and negotiations the College generated a clear message that this was about changing and transforming the ground it had laid down for years. The message was that teaching was being given back to the teachers. Create good teachers, you then create good students was the concept. They accepted that in many ways the College can be managed but the question was whether teaching and learning had been managed and who was being held to account?

The example below from Chichester College demonstrates how a strong focus on teaching, as well as partnership working, can turn around a failing curriculum area.

**Chichester College's** provision in Furniture Making and Design was on the verge of being phased out. A new curriculum manager was appointed and together with a senior lecturer, a new vision for furniture making was drawn up.

Key elements of that vision were that:

- the experience of the students would be of the highest quality, with an approach to teaching and learning which excited and motivated students, and led not only to qualification achievement, but to the acquisition of exceptionally high quality practical skills
- the skill level of students would come to be seen by all parties, including employers, as world class, on a par with what was being achieved by the best students, not only nationally, but internationally
- the College would become a proactive and energetic partner, primarily with relevant qualification awarding bodies, but also with other providers, in the redesign of the qualifications for Furniture Making, to ensure their appeal to employers and appropriateness and relevance for students' employability
- there would be the development of new teaching and learning approaches, particularly in the area of skill development, which would provide a source of significant good practice, which would be used in other areas of the College's work, to further enhance levels of practical skills acquired by students, and directed towards developing students to their full potential
- the College would be seen as having a significant role in the development of a high level skills base in the labour market for this industry, and as a valuable contributor to the growth of the industry, particularly, but not only, with small and medium sized enterprises.

So far, the results of the refocusing of furniture making at Chichester College are:

- Student numbers have grown from 30 to over 125 including 20 apprentices
- a high profile and reputation nationally and internationally has been achieved
- there has been significant impact on the skills level of the local labour market
- There is significant support for the development of the employers in the industry towards bespoke, high quality, high value added products
- high impact partnership work has grown with:
  - other notable employers in other industries which need similar skills e.g. Rolls Royce Motor Cars, and Bowes and Wilkins (manufacturer of high quality audio speakers)
  - high prestige bodies and agencies e.g. Kew Gardens
  - relevant awarding bodies, but primarily City and Guilds
- There has been development of innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery, with lessons to be learnt and good practice to be disseminated within the College and beyond
- Furniture restoration courses are also now part of the provision and growing in demand.

Lewisham College recently undertook a significant project within their ESOL department which took the key elements of using proven research to isolate and improve classroom techniques and combined them with the intention to create a genuine community of practice. A broader summary of the project is attached to this submission.

Staff development in the ESOL department at **Lewisham College** since January 2011 has been based on clear evidence of what works for learners and stems from John Hattie's international research into the effect sizes of a range of teaching interventions. The aims of this initiative were to:

- increase the range and frequency of use of the ten most demonstrably effective classroom techniques
- raise awareness of Assessment for Learning as a powerful tool for increasing attainment
- develop a whole-team approach to using AfL with ESOL learners. The particular emphasis on Assessment for Learning was to bring together all the elements of feedback identified as contributing to the greatest impact on attainment: an effect size of 1.13, equivalent to accelerating a student's learning by more than one year.

Learning walks and departmental observations conducted between January and April 2011 identified strengths in:

- tutorial support,
- high levels of learner-talk-time
- learner engagement

but a need to develop:

- clear links between individual targets and lesson objectives,
- effective presentation and review of learning objectives
- effective peer and self evaluation
- stretch and challenge
- clear recapping of prior learning and progress

The objectives of the initiative were therefore to:

- significantly increase usage by all staff of active learning approaches identified as having a demonstrable impact on attainment
- establish a whole-department approach to presenting and reviewing lesson objectives
- strengthen the link between individual learners' personal targets and lesson content
- develop individual confidence and competence in using Assessment for Learning to increase learner attainment

There have been a number of positive outcomes from the initiative, which is still ongoing, but chief among them have been:

- a judgement of outstanding for teaching and learning
- very positive feedback from PGCE observers of the AfL skills demonstrated by trainees working in the department
- wholesale change in observed teaching practices.

This was achieved in four phases, beginning with formal CPD sessions, then a sharing of lesson observation findings and personal and individual mentoring. Teachers reflected individually and collectively on their practice in the light of research and continued to do so over a long period. Now the team are formed into self-selected learning sets, sharing best practice through discussions, shared planning, team teaching and peer-observations.

## 6 The role of institutional leadership

The culture and leadership of an organisation will determine the extent to which its people are encouraged and able to deliver to the highest of standards. In *Leading Learning in Further Education*, we argued that teaching and learning must be central and critical to everything that a College does and says.

The report built on relevant literature and research already available, the views of 157 college Principals and the work of IfL in surveying members and concluded that there are four important areas of activity for leaders to focus on:

- investing time and resources to promote the professional development of staff
- having a close involvement in the management of the teaching programme
- setting clear directions for the organisation, including the centrality of teaching and learning
- establishing a culture that respects the professionalism of teachers and empowers them to innovate.

***We believe the Commission has an opportunity to make explicit a vision and set of qualities of outstanding institutional leadership which will inspire and ensure excellence in vocational teaching and learning.***

Of course, many of the conditions that will bring about excellence in vocational teaching and learning would bring about excellence in any form of teaching and learning in any environment. Senior leaders placing the understanding, fostering and monitoring of student success and of outstanding teaching and learning at the heart of their focus, mission, strategy, self assessment, behaviours and values is paramount. Fostering a leadership, organisational and teaching culture that enables innovation and experimentation to flourish and that co-creates an expansive learning environment for all and reflective community of teaching professionals seeped in openness about taking risks and sharing challenges and shortcomings is crucial to enable truly great teaching to take place.

To ensure that UK college leadership remains at the leading edge of vocational education, the 157 Group is working with the Gazelle group to develop a leadership programme to support Principals, and college leaders at every level, to develop an entrepreneurial college with new forms of vocational learning and delivery.

Critically important also is an institution-wide approach to leaders at all levels ascertaining, monitoring, evaluating and intervening where and when necessary on the critical components of

- how, and if, effective student learning and achievement is actually occurring
- the quality of teaching and performance of every teacher
- the nature and quality of the student experience, in and outside the learning environment
- student progress and success rates
- student employability
- student progression
- student satisfaction.

This work is assisted by a range of processes and elements, including

- honest and rigorous lesson observation and open feedback with appropriate reward and challenge and motivation to continually improve
- the use of advanced practitioners to bring about peer improvement in teaching
- focusing on literacy, numeracy and the broader curriculum
- rigorous use of data as valuable and usable information to support improvement and excellence
- refusal to accept that satisfactory is good enough
- a focus on 'doing the right things' rather than 'doing things right'
- motivation of staff through monitoring, reward and pride
- providing an excellent environment for meaningful CPD.
- job roles that include the accountability to deliver outstanding teaching and learning
- clear expectations of excellence alongside trust and autonomy that allows outstanding practitioners to do their job effectively



- effective appraisal systems linked to outstanding teaching and learning for all college staff, including business support
- offering outstanding guidance and support for learners in all aspects of their college experience
- senior leaders with direct and current knowledge and experience of the reality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in their college.

It is important to ensure that professional relevance is included in development as well, and many Colleges have schemes that enable teaching staff to take sabbaticals to experience industry at work.

The College itself must role model precisely those qualities which it would expect its teachers to have – individual links with business and industry will be only as good as the links maintained by the College as a whole, and teachers' ability to innovate will be limited in an institution that itself is not forward-thinking and creative.

Lesson observation, for example, must be a learning process – not a hurdle that must be overcome once or twice a year. Similarly to the approach we have taken in this submission, it must take as its starting point the learning of learners and not the teaching of teachers.

One element of practice highlighted in the recent Ofsted report *How Colleges Improve* is one we would lay emphasis on. The nature of vocational teaching and learning is such that its success is measured not just by qualifications but also by student progress. Ofsted recommend that leaders ensure staff “record and analyse the progression and destinations of learners systematically in order to measure outcomes and improve the curriculum further.” This is a natural outcome from everything we have described.<sup>16</sup>

The same report makes clear that open communication based on shared and agreed values and a relationship of respect and sharing among the leadership team will bring about swifter change than an atmosphere where any form of control is felt. This mirrors our own findings about the facets of outstanding teaching – where respect and teacher-learner relationships are key.

We offer here a summary of our previous work in this area, as well as some examples of how Colleges have approached leadership issues in this area.

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/how-colleges-improve>

## Leading Learning

In 2011, the 157 Group published *Leading Learning in Further Education*, in conjunction with CfBT Education Trust. The report aimed to highlight the things that College leaders can and do do that have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. It was backed up by a survey of Fellows of the Institute for Learning.

The report built on relevant literature and research already available, the views of 157 college Principals and the work of IfL in surveying members and concluded that there are four important areas of activity for leaders to focus on:

- investing time and resources to promote the professional development of staff
- having a close involvement in the management of the teaching programme
- setting clear directions for the organisation, including the centrality of teaching and learning
- establishing a culture that respects the professionalism of teachers and empowers them to innovate.

The practical examples already cited are manifestations of these principal areas of focus. Conveying the importance of the central activity of teaching and learning and maintaining an involvement in its management must go alongside the culture and climate that is created for staff. We have suggested in this submission that the nature of vocational teaching and learning is ever changing and it goes without saying that staff development must be ongoing in order to maintain outstanding practice.

The crucial element is that that development will be all the more effective if staff are allowed to own and develop it themselves, and are working in a climate where risk taking is seen as acceptable. The 157 Group, along with IfL, decided to explore this further with a seminar in early 2012, hosted by the Institute of Education.

The resultant report from that seminar, *Leading Learning and Letting Go*, touched on five key themes.

- The further education and skills system requires a cultural shift to enable it to improve further the quality of teaching and learning.
- Leaders in further education should make the leading of learning for staff and learners their top strategic priority.
- Good teaching is born of innovation, and this involves a degree of experimentation that is unlikely to happen if an organisation is highly controlling or risk-averse.
- Expansive workplaces encourage teachers and trainers to work creatively as teams taking responsibility for their own professional development, and they facilitate and reward innovation and experimentation in teaching and learning.
- Leadership support for research-informed professional practice and development provides a strong basis for the type of step-change required in teaching and learning.

This goes further than the first report, in that it begins to posit the kind of organisation where good professional development will flourish. Building upon Professor Lorna Unwin and Professor Alison Fuller's concept of a workplace as an 'expansive learning environment', discussions made clear that key to successful professional development are the levels of discretion and trust that organisational managers show in their staff.

One example of such a learning environment was cited at the seminar. Birmingham Metropolitan College had committed to what it described as a 'total learning environment'. Considerable time and financial resource was dedicated to staff development, and the agenda for that development was fed as much from the bottom up as from the College's own strategic and developmental needs.

Professional development centres enable those teaching in different areas of the College's work to meet and share practice, and time is being devoted to establishing how teaching staff can be enabled to focus on this activity more. While this activity is clearly managed and monitored for impact, staff report that they have a lot more control over their own development, and teaching has improved as a result.

Of key importance is also the need to keep high quality teaching and learning high on the national agenda, and the 157 Group, along with IfL, intends to do that. Our next seminar will focus on effective

### **Leading Learning – the learner and practitioner view**

In May 2012, the 157 Group and IfL brought together over 70 people from the sector to consider 'What makes for great teaching and learning'. As well as leaders from Colleges, the audience crucially consisted of teachers and learners and so provided an excellent opportunity to gauge whether our earlier findings, detailed above, resonated with those delivering and experiencing teaching and learning.

Four key themes emerged:

- that teachers should be part of a professional community – which mirrors the conclusions of earlier work
- that learners should be involved in planning and delivering the curriculum (and there are examples of this elsewhere in this submission)
- that teacher-learner relationships are crucial – and will be successful if based on respect and trust
- that classroom practice is better experienced when it
  - was innovative and creative
  - was cross-curricular
  - included rigorous monitoring of learning actually taking place
  - included an element of learner input
  - used technology
  - focused on personal development.

We intend to explore some of these themes in future activity, but have developed from the workshop a methodology to enable any College or institution to challenge its own staff and learners with the same questions. We believe this is a powerful proposition that the Commission may wish to explore further.

At **Highbury College's** last inspection in 2011, the standard of teaching and learning was commended: "The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good with much that is outstanding. Teachers use a variety of activities to engage and motivate students. Learning resources are excellent." (see report, available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/130697>).

Since the inspection, the College has run a conference with workshops for other Colleges, using the key themes of:

- Delivering Outstanding Care, Guidance and Support
- Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Lesson Observation, Action Planning and Managing Underperformance
- Narrowing the Gap: Outstanding Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL
- Achieving High Success Rates and Outstanding Teaching and Learning through a Personalised Approach
- Improving Information and Learning Technologies Practices: Highbury's Approach
- Using College Data to Improve Success Rates and Sustain Excellence
- Business Support: A Focus on Student Success
- A Whole College Approach to Equality and Diversity

The college is now preparing a book on the significant factors that enabled them, through their leadership interventions, to foster and embed outstanding teaching and learning throughout the college. We believe this work will be invaluable for the Commission in identifying the leadership qualities necessary.

Plans are in place for an innovative new approach to develop a 'classroom without walls' at **Leeds City College**. The intention is for teaching/assessing staff to be made comfortable enough to share their good practice and become accustomed to other teaching colleagues dropping into sessions.

At the beginning of term, the Quality Assurance team will undertake a series of developmental 'walkthroughs' that will enable staff to receive positive and developmental feedback to improve both the impact of their teaching on the learning that is taking place and also any specific techniques needed e.g. behaviour management.

In the autumn term, a team of external subject specialist observers will undertake a sample of formal observations based on the new CIF framework to deliver a baseline grade profile but also to highlight strengths in learning, teaching and assessment activity to enhance the sharing of best practice.

Any themes emerging as areas for development will be picked up and driven through the planned staff development days and through individual support of advanced practitioners in the College.

**The Manchester College** has made significant and continued investment in managers and staff to ensure that they have the skills, knowledge and understanding to deliver high quality vocational training in custodial settings. This investment has been recognised by Ofsted who identified that *"Managers have taken time to understand the specific needs of learners in custodial settings and the challenges in delivering this provision"* TMC Ofsted May 2011.

Key to this strategy is the Effective Leader course aimed at equipping managers with strategies to operate effectively in a unique environment. Feedback from those attending has been very positive.

The College recognises that prisoners who subsequently gain employment make a positive contribution to their community, local economy and in doing so reduce the risk of their re-offending. Accordingly, the College has worked collaboratively with partners to develop an employability and vocational learning offer which responds to labour market needs and addresses specialist skills shortages. From August 2009 to July 2012 the College, working across five regions, delivered 215,595 employability and vocational learning aims with year-on-year improvements in the volume of achievements.

**Blackpool and The Fylde College** has seen a major investment in learning, teaching and assessment since 2009/10. This has been through the development of a dedicated Learning and Teaching centre for staff to use to share good practice, develop and practise using new technology, discuss and debate learning, teaching and assessment etc. A revised induction programme ensures that teaching staff new to the College are better equipped and more confident to take on their role in the learning environment. This induction programme includes a two full day Teaching Essentials Programme (which must be undertaken prior to commencing any teaching at Blackpool and The Fylde College).

To support continuous professional development there is also an extensive programme of CPD through which academic staff take part in short "Teaching Innovation Programmes" covering a range of topics, which have been identified through observation processes, requested by staff, identified underperforming aspects of curriculum/practice new technology, assessment tools etc.

One of the significant factors in the success of these programmes has been that these are delivered by practitioners, for practitioners and are seen as CPD for the delivery staff, as well as a method of sharing good practice and engaging in education, debate and discussion. Secondly, the high level support and drive from the Principal and Vice Principal (Curriculum and Standards) has provided a clear steer and confirmation that the core business of the College and biggest influence on students is the learning, teaching and assessment they experience.

The impact of these initiatives is seen not only in success rates but in staff and student satisfaction surveys. Success rates have increased by 8% points in the two years since these were introduced. More recently we have continued to develop the CPD programme with the Teaching Enhancement Programme. This is a more intense programme of four days designed to support individual staff to improve classroom practice. This model is well regarded as a successful model which focuses on effective learner and teacher behaviours. Staff cascade their learning and experience throughout colleagues in the curriculum to help develop new ways of engaging and enthusing students.

## Summary and further questions

This is a crucial time for the work of the Commission to raise the profile of vocational education - with a new skills Minister in post, a number of top level reviews and a challenging comprehensive spending review for 2013/14 expected.

157 Group members have taken this opportunity very seriously and we have, in this submission, used the voice of practitioners from among our membership to propose five key propositions, with an accompanying underpinning discourse, to which we believe the Commission should give attention:

- challenging and redefining how the word 'vocational' is currently perceived and used and proposing a better way of framing vocational learning which delivers successful outcomes for progression into employment and for learning throughout life
- understanding how vocational learning fits into the pathways of **all** learners and can be a valid and preferred route to many outcomes, and one which has parity of esteem with academic routes of learning.
- describing the outputs of vocational learning that benefit both employers and individuals as citizens in a meaningful and customer friendly way
- suggesting how to recruit people to teach on vocational programmes who have the right skills and attributes themselves to bring out the maximum potential of all learners
- describing a model of leadership which will specifically enable good vocational learning to flourish for all.

We argue that vocational learning is primarily about applied skill and broad employability skills, as well as about knowledge of and preparation for one particular career and that it is necessary for all crafts or professions at all levels and at all ages. With regard to outcomes for learners, high quality vocational learning demonstrates a broad, rather than a narrow, experience and develops lifelong learning skills that will be critical in the ever changing world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To deliver great and outstanding vocational learning requires teachers and leaders with a particular skillset, and we suggest there is a strong need for the Commission to support Colleges to recruit the best, and most inspirational, people for the job, and to emphasise the core elements of responsibility and accountability to lead, at all levels, in such a way that outstanding vocational learning can flourish and be embedded in all aspects of a college.

Three key notions that we have raised in this submission are

- the 'Meisterschaft' – a specific set of values and behaviours related to a craft or profession which vocational education seeks to instil
- a curriculum description for 'studentship' which clearly articulates the broader outcomes of vocational learning for all
- a recruitment programme for teachers which is based on competencies which we know to be directly relevant to good outcomes from vocational learning.

We are very keen to discuss our ideas or examples further with the Commission as deliberations continue and to contribute to the development of a powerful vision and sector wide discourse on vocational education and pedagogy into the future.

*The 157 Group  
October 2012*